Willa Cather REVIEW

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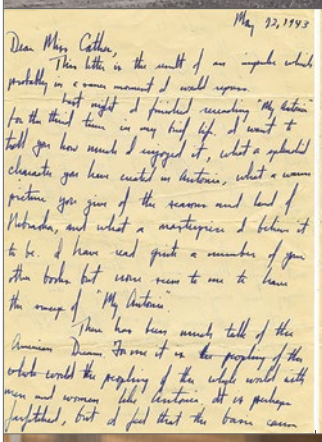
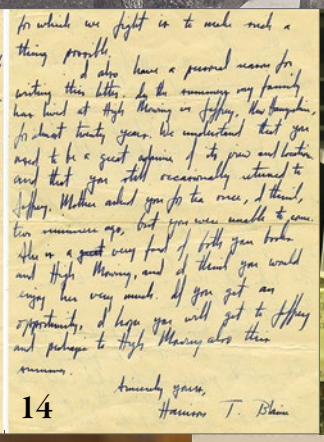
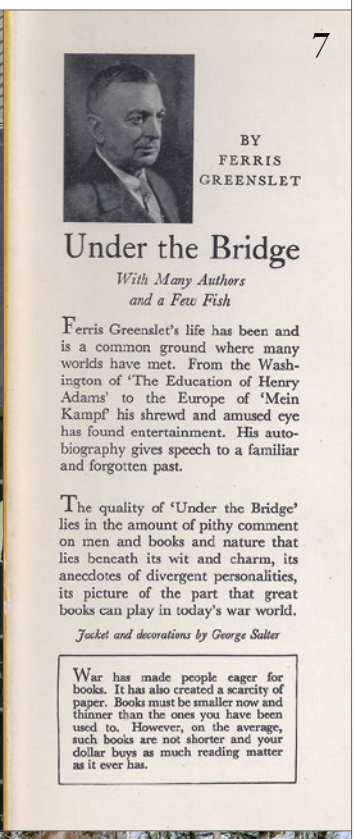
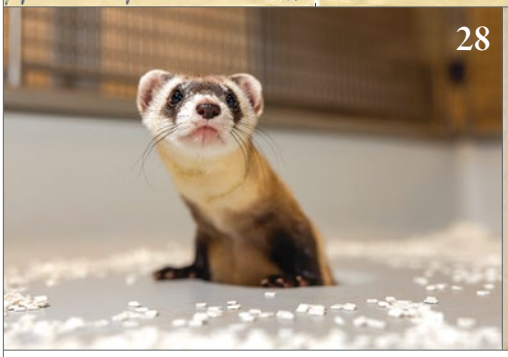
The National Willa Cather Center









CONTENTS

On the cover: *Harvesting Wheat, Nebraska.* Photograph by B. F. Ray.

Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

The stack of books on my nightstand is embarrassingly tall. Outside of my home, I read in the car, on flights, and occasionally at my desk at work—Cather titles in the latter instance. My mother read to me as a child, and when I was old enough to read on my own, the nightstand book stacking habit began. As a supporter of the National Willa Cather Center, chances are you may relate. Sadly, survey results released by the National Endowment for the Arts in recent years show that the percent of adults who read novels, short stories, or poetry has declined sharply over the course of a decade—45.2% in 2012 down to 37.6% in 2022. Additional studies indicate that the number of thirteen-year-olds who reported reading for fun "almost every day" decreased from 27% in 2012 to 17% in 2023.

Despite these sobering numbers, I don't have to look too far beyond our staff book club to be in the company of fellow readers. It was enriching to see hundreds of patrons in attendance this year as we welcomed authors Karen Russell and Jane Smiley to the Cather Center. The lively discussions about their work and how Cather's literature has inspired them contributed to long lines at the post-event book-signing tables. Our virtual author series, now in its fifth year, also has a dedicated following and has made the facilitator, our Director of Education and Engagement, Rachel Olsen, a familiar face to many in the Cather community.

Every bit as inspiring was a recent letter of gratitude we received from Christopher Kite, an English educator who encountered Cather's *My Ántonia* as a high school student. Through our Big Read initiative, he was supplied with seventy copies of the novel for his eleventh grade AP Language and Composition class. He shared that he felt anxious about how his students would respond to a century-old novel, but they devoured it and had lively discussions about it—both in class and out. He described witnessing "the power of great literature and its effect on young people." Several students approached Mr. Kite after concluding their exploration of the novel with a request to retain the book for their own personal libraries.

We are so grateful to educators like Mr. Kite who partner with us to foster an appreciation for Cather's literature, and more broadly, a love of reading. Heartfelt stories like this one are extremely uplifting as we compete with television and social media to capture the attention of young people. All it took in this instance was a supply of books and an enthusiastic teacher. Your support as members and donors helps ensure Cather titles are freely available and never in short supply, so thank you! I wish you could read each of the handwritten thank you notes we received from students in Mr. Kite's class. Their gratitude was resounding.

Letter from the President

Mark Bostock

Hello again. I hope you have had a great summer. It was much too short for me—it seems like I was just writing my last letter for the *Review* and we were getting ready for the 70th Spring Conference. Our awesome Executive Director Ashley Olson and her team did a great job of putting on another fine conference. Everyone really enjoyed having Jane Smiley as keynote speaker.

Wow, seventy years of the Spring Conference. That is amazing and crazy when you think about it. That is a good long run. I'm curious who has attended the most Spring Conferences and will have to ask if we keep track of such things. If we don't determine each year who has been to the most conferences and who has attended the one farthest back, it seems like we should. I like goofy little trivia like that.

My summer went by so fast because I went to Africa and the Middle East for a month, Jordan, Egypt, Tanzania, and Kenya. I've wanted to see Petra and the Egyptian pyramids my whole life, so it was quite thrilling to see them finally. It is also exciting to go on safari. It felt like Red Cloud, except I was seeing a herd of elephants instead of cattle. And so now it is hard to believe that, as I write this, summer is nearly over. It has been the first summer of business for the Hotel Garber in Red Cloud. We had good visitations and overnight stays and are looking forward to more like that.

If you haven't been to Red Cloud to stay in the new hotel, try to make a visit this fall. It is a wonderful time to visit the Cather Center and see the restorations of our historic properties. I have fond memories of growing up in Red Cloud during the fall, playing football on Friday nights, listening to Nebraska football on Saturdays while working. The smell of harvest, cruising main street with friends. Good times.

We still have naming opportunities for various areas of the Hotel Garber. The donor wall is a chance for you or someone you care about to be memorialized in a cool way. If you would like to discuss the possibilities, please contact Ashley Olson before year end for more information. Until next time, friends, have a great fall.

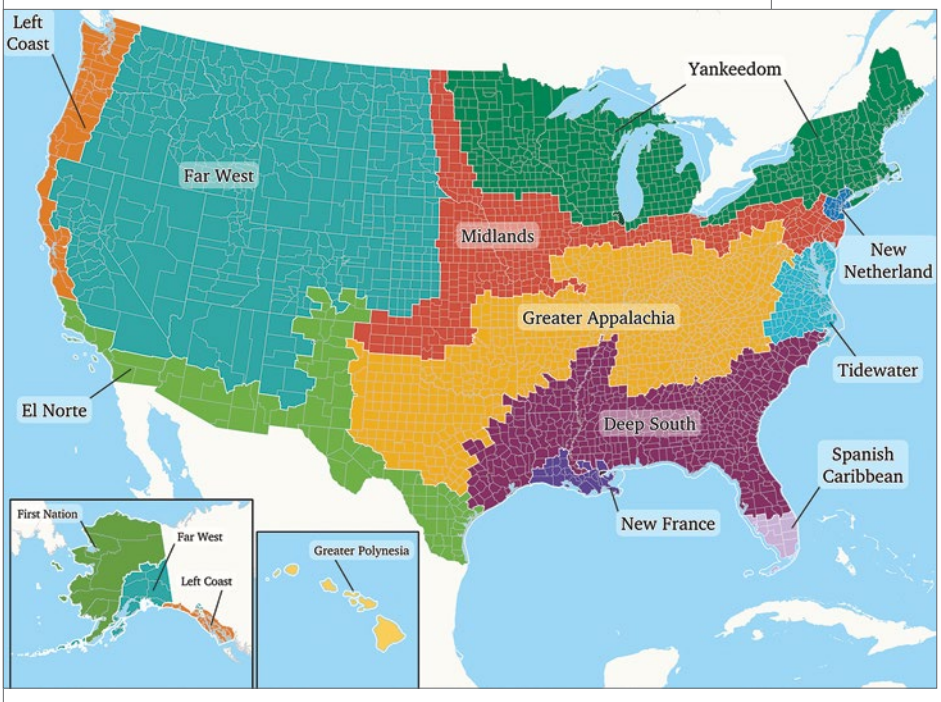
Destiny's Dance: *My Ántonia* as Revelation

Tom Phillips

Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* is often read as a lyrical meditation on America's frontier past. However, Cather defended herself stoutly against charges of escapism, or "supine Romanticism" (Taylor 134). She believed in Art as Revelation.[1] Alongside her paean to the prairie is a sharp critique of middle-American society and a vision of the conflicts that would roil this country to this day, over issues of ancestry, color, gender, language, and class.

The story of the Shimerdas illustrates the paradox of immigration—America's xenophobic openness, a "nation of immigrants" that fears and shuns foreigners. This is the context of Ántonia's father's suicide, and her own hard-won independence. In the end she builds a little Bohemia, a burgeoning family farm at a distance from town. Speaking her native language with her children, she is worn down but not defeated by her struggles with the English-speaking establishment of Black Hawk, Nebraska. Meanwhile, Jim Burden's retreat to the East—to Harvard Law and moneyed Manhattan—conveys the chasm between coastal elites and the agricultural heartland. The legacy of slavery also makes a central appearance in the plot. And the whole is shadowed by an Indigenous civilization all but erased by America's "manifest destiny."

At the same time, the long, loopy romance between Jim and Ántonia—unconsummated but never abandoned—suggests the potential for reconciliation. And Cather's constant evocation of the landscape places all her characters on common ground. As Lena Lingard says, "it ain't my prairie" (164). The beauty and mystery of the land belongs to all; sun and wind diffuse the strains of a pluralist culture where change is rapid and trust often fleeting.



Colin Woodward, *American Nations* (2011); John Liberty/Motivf for Nationhood Lab.

Cather's fictional Black Hawk, Nebraska, lies at the western edge of what historian Colin Woodard has called the American Midlands, where the fertile plains fade into dry grasslands and desert. Jim perceives something like this on his first walk out to his grandmother's garden: "The light air about me told me that the world ended here: only the ground and sun and sky were left, and if one went a little farther there would be only sun and sky" (16).

In his provocative remapping of North America into eleven regional cultures, Woodard calls the Midlands "arguably the most 'American'" of his *American Nations* (6). A vast T-formation from Pennsylvania to the Great Plains, flanking out to Texas and Canada (see illustration), the Midlands was the destination for a middle class that migrated *en masse* from Germany, Scandinavia, and central Europe, seeking peace and freedom from tyrannical regimes. They followed a trail to the Midwest laid down by peace-seeking Quakers beginning in the seventeenth century (Fischer 419ff).[2] Politically moderate, ethnically diverse, focused on community and prosperity rather than ideology, the region has been a key swing vote in national debates ever since the Civil War (Woodard 183ff).[3]

Renaming her hometown of Red Cloud, Nebraska, as Black Hawk, Cather traded the name of one Indigenous leader for another—Red Cloud with glowing, celestial connotations, Black Hawk a fearsome predator. In so doing, she begins to reveal the dark side of what Jim first perceives as Eden.

In Book II of *My Ántonia*, "The Hired Girls," Cather anatomizes the social structure of Black Hawk through the eyes of Jim, now a high-school

valedictorian who can't wait to get out of town. Jim roams the darkened streets, "scowling at the little, sleeping houses" and their owners' "guarded mode of existence." Social standing in Black Hawk was based not on what you did, but what people said about you. Whispers and rumors shaped your image, and guilt by association was assumed. The result, to Jim, was a "like living under a tyranny. People's speech, their voices, their very glances became furtive and repressed. Every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution." He says the citizens of Black Hawk "tried to live like the mice in their own kitchens; to make no noise, to leave no trace, to slip over the surface of things in the dark" (212).

The business of agriculture is the town's *raison d'être*; bankers and financiers top the social ladder, with the loan-shark Wick Cutter lurking in their shadows. Merchants hawk farm implements on credit; men's conversation is dominated by markets—and debts.[4] As Ántonia laments to her younger friend Jim, in this country there is no "beautiful talk"—about art, nature, God, or life (228).

In public school, Jim learns to fight, curse, and tease the little girls. He is saved from "utter savagery" by his neighbor Mrs. Harling, a Norwegian-born matron who becomes Ántonia's employer. Industrious and efficient, Mrs. Harling still manages to practice her piano daily and can narrate the plots of great operas as she goes. Mrs. Harling, her four children, and Ántonia are Jim's main companions, except when Mr. Harling is at home. An enterprising grain merchant, he demands a quiet house and his wife's total attention, so Mrs. Harling drops everything to wait on him, day and night.

The "hired girls" are the most nearly respectable of the lower classes. Moving to town from the farm to earn money for their families, these immigrant housemaids are expected to live up to the standards of their hosts and employers. Below them are the working poor—railroad men, deliverymen, farmhands, and "ragged little boys" from the depot. Finally come the tramps and derelicts—wanderers and lunatics, physically or mentally defective.

Jim marvels at the durability of this structure—the "respect for respectability" that allows bankers' sons to lust after the hired girls, but not to be seen with them (195). He also notes the absence of nobility—perhaps recalling a notion of aristocracy from his early days in Virginia. The only nobles he hears of now are in the stories Ántonia tells of old Bohemia. Jim thinks Mr. Harling bears a faint resemblance to them, with his caped overcoat and diamond pinky ring. Yet there is also something thuggish about this proud businessman, "autocratic and imperial in his ways" (153).

Dead center in the novel, at the dead end of a midwestern winter, another kind of nobility appears. And for one night, the social structure of Black Hawk is overthrown.

The hero is named Samson, professionally known as Blind d'Arnault. Born and raised a ragged little boy—a "hideous little pickaninny" on a plantation in the Deep South, he is now a world-renowned musician and guest at Black Hawk's chief hotel (175–80). Mrs. Harling has known him for years, and she lets Ántonia know there will surely be music in the hotel parlor that Saturday night. Ántonia goes to visit her waitress friend Tiny Soderball, and Jim goes along to watch.

He immediately notices an air of "unusual freedom." Mrs. Gardener, the proprietor, is off in Omaha for a week, leaving her husband Johnnie in charge. Mrs. Gardener—aka Molly Bawn—is described as "tall, dark, severe, with something Indian-like in the rigid immobility of her face" (176–77). Like Mr. Harling, she wears diamonds.[5]

When Jim arrives, Anson Kirkpatrick from Chicago—"Marshall Field's man"—is warming up the grand piano. Jim calls him "a dapper little Irishman, very vain, homely as a monkey" (177). Jim's unflattering description hints at the status of Irish Americans, who collaborated, competed and battled with African Americans on the bottom rungs of the social ladder.[6] Also in the party is Willy O'Reilly from Kansas City, a salesman of musical instruments. These Irishmen step up to choreograph the revelry that ensues.

Johnnie Gardener comes in directing d'Arnault—who would "never consent to be led." A "heavy, bulky mulatto," he enters tapping the floor with a gold-headed cane, sporting a gold watch and a topaz ring, a gift from "some Russian nobleman" (177–78, 186).

He speaks, and Jim hears "the soft, amiable negro voice . . . with the note of docile subservience." The narration slips into a heavily stereotyped vision of d'Arnault as a pin-headed idiot savant, a "kindly and happy" son of slavery. Jim declares, "It was the happiest face I had seen since I left Virginia" (178).

This is a grotesque caricature, and some critics have blamed it on "Cather's racism" (Ammons 57). However, that ignores the key distinction between author and narrator—as well as clear signs, beginning with his pride and his gold, that d'Arnault's "subservience" is a pose, designed to put white audiences at ease.

"Seems like we might have some good old plantation songs tonight," croons d'Arnault as he launches into Stephen Foster's

"My Old Kentucky Home" (179). Jim might not know, but Cather certainly does, that Stephen Foster was from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and his songs were composed not for the plantation but the music hall. This was minstrelsy, America's first popular music—evoking an idyllic South, an antebellum Eden invented for the stage by Irishmen in blackface and Blacks themselves (Murphy 12ff).

"Little, sleeping houses on either side. . . ." Private collection.

Jim listens raptly as they sing "one Negro melody after another." Then, amid a "crashing waltz," Kirkpatrick peeps over the transom and spots Ántonia and three more "hired girls" waltzing in the dining room. O'Reilly piles chairs on tables, and the two Irishmen coax the girls to come and dance with "a roomful of lonesome men on the other side of the partition." Johnnie Gardener protests, saying his wife will find out. But the Irish laugh and tell him they'll make it all right (183–85).

At a word from Kirkpatrick, d'Arnault "spread himself out over the piano," shining with perspiration. Jim is awestruck: "He looked like some glistening African god of pleasure, full of strong, savage blood." As for the hired girls: "They were handsome girls, had the fresh color of their country up-bringing, and in their eyes . . . 'the light of youth.'" Afterward, Jim remembers lingering at the Harlings' gate with Ántonia, "until the restlessness was slowly chilled out of us" (185–87).

Jim is mute, perhaps clueless, on the cause of this restlessness—d'Arnault's unleashing of sexual energy and upending of the social order. For one night only, a "colored aristocracy" has called the shots, in concert with Irish revelers, while immigrant serving-girls stooped to dance with a roomful of lonely businessmen. The owner is gone but acknowledged by all as the supreme authority—the diamond-flashing, "Indian-like" Molly Bawn.

D'Arnault is the only African American in the book, and he disappears as quickly as he crashed into the story. So do the Irish, along with Molly and her suggestion of noble Indigenous blood. But critics beginning with Elizabeth Ammons have argued that d'Arnault's "strong, savage blood" haunts the entire plot—embodying the African American cultural presence that has been there all along. Toni Morrison called it the "ghost in the machine" of American literature—a "dark and abiding presence" full of "fear and longing" (Morrison 33).

With the d'Arnault episode as its "pulsating center," *My Ántonia* can be read as revelation (Giannone 120–21). Its upending of the social ladder foretells a series of earthquakes—convulsive shocks to the patriarchy, beginning as Cather wrote her book in the years around World War I. They include women's suffrage, Prohibition, the market crash of 1929, the Great Depression and the New Deal—plus a social and cultural revolution in the Great Migration, the Harlem Renaissance, and the development of popular music and dance from minstrelsy to ragtime, to jazz, rock, and today's rap and hip-hop.

Dancing drives the narrative through the rest of "The Hired Girls." A troupe of Italians arrives with a summer dance pavilion; Mrs. Vanni, the teacher, is a "dark, stout woman," with a long gold watch-chain on her bosom. Dressed in lavender and black lace, her black hair piled up with red combs, she smiles with "strong, crooked yellow teeth." Like d'Arnault she is a contradiction in colors: black, red and yellow mark her social inferiority, while gold sets her above the pallid crowd of "little girls in white dresses," their partners, and their parents (188–89).

On the dancing floor, Ántonia is discovered by respectable young men, and the hired girls become "a menace to the social order." As Jim observes, "their beauty stood out too boldly against a conventional background" (195). One summer night Mr. Harling hears "scuffling on the back

porch, and then the sound of a vigorous slap" (199). Ántonia has fought off one of the town's leading young men—one engaged to marry his employer's daughter the next week—as he forced a kiss on her.

Mr. Harling cares only about what people will say. "You've been going with girls who have a reputation for being free and easy, and now you've got the same reputation," he tells Ántonia, with an ultimatum—quit dancing or quit his house (200). Ántonia's banishment is the beginning of her downfall. She goes off to marry a railroad conductor and comes back unmarried, abandoned, and pregnant with his child.

Book II ends with social order restored in Black Hawk, but the energy unleashed by d'Arnault and the Vannis cannot be contained. The hired girls take it with them, back to the farm or to points West. Tiny Soderball and Lena Lingard eventually wind up in San Francisco, each single, free, and rich.

Ántonia survives, returns to the farm to raise her daughter, and eventually marries a Bohemian friend. With Anton Cuzak she raises a large family and cultivates a burgeoning farm—a pastoral work of art, composed over time of all she loves: people and animals, trees and gardens, music, love itself.

As a pioneer, Jim is a bust. He goes to the new University of Nebraska in Lincoln, where he falls into a sleepy affair with Lena Lingard, who is learning the fashion trade in the state capital. Lena distracts him from his studies. After his sophomore year, he is hauled off to Harvard by his literary mentor, a dying poet named Gaston Cleric. Jim ends up a corporate lawyer in New York, married without children to a socialite who "has her own fortune and lives her own life" (xi). In middle age, Jim is animated mainly by his work for a western railroad, and a renewed connection with Ántonia. This desexualized friendship may be the best he can do for himself, suggests Anne Goodwyn Jones, given his childhood traumas and the "oppressive forms of manhood" he encountered in the South and West (108). Blanche Gelfant, an earlier feminist critic, was harsher. In a landmark 1971 essay she "outed" him as an unreliable narrator, afraid of sex, afraid of women, afraid of growing up, in love with his own memories of boyhood (Gelfant 61ff).

Jim's failings reflect his coming of age in Black Hawk, where "every individual taste, every natural appetite, was bridled by caution" (212). Though contemptuous of this way of life, Jim is not immune from it. Compared with d'Arnault, with his "strong, savage blood," or the leprechaun-like Kirkpatrick; the dancing Italians, or the "free and easy" hired girls, Jim is a mouse in the kitchen. Watching d'Arnault, he sees "a negro enjoying himself as only a negro can" (183). Watching Ántonia, he sees "a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races" (342).

Jim lives through others. He is transported by d'Arnault's "barbarous and wonderful" music-making, by Ántonia's leaping into life and love, even by an "infirm old actress" on tour in Dumas's *Camille*—"a woman who could not be taught," who communicated though "a crude natural force" (266, 269). Jim's own force is repressed beyond reach. Unable to mourn his dead parents or change his privileged, outcast state, he grows up alone, amid social tyranny in a cultural wasteland, cut off from both the Old World and the New.

Still, Jim retains his air of superiority, the notion that he is more civilized than others. If d'Arnault embodies the Blackness hidden in American literature, Jim is the whiteness that hides it—the educated elite class that creates "races" for others, patronizes them, and experiences its passions through them.

"Things will be easy for you. But they will be hard for us," Ántonia tells Jim at the close of Book I (135). In Book V, the conclusion, it is Jim who comes to pay homage to her. The scene harks back to the summer when she taught him to dance, "against and around the hard-and-fast beat of the music." When you "spun out into the floor with Tony," Jim recalls, you "set out every time upon a new adventure" (216). If his Destiny[7] is no more than to follow her, befriend her family, and take part in their abundant lives—at least he has realized it, come back to it, and found it good as gold.

NOTES

1. At 22, she wrote to a friend, "There is no God but one God and Art is his revealer; thats my creed and I'll follow it to the end, to a hotter place than Pittsburgh if need be" (*Complete Letters* no. 0028).

2. German Quakers were recruited by William Penn. They settled Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1683 (Fischer 430).

3. The Midlands may have lost its moderating powers in the Trump era, according to Woodard. In response to an email query, he writes, "Regionally speaking, an extremist has been able to come to power (and return to power after leading an insurrection) because the Midlands has not performed its historic function as the counterweight to extremism, left or right. It's essentially been evenly split—'neutral'—as if it were a 'normal' political environment" (email to the author, November 13, 2024).

4. See also Mr. Harling and his enterprising daughter Frances, "talking about grain-cars and cattle, like two men" (145).

5. We learn that Mrs. Gardener's first name is Molly, and "Molly Bawn" is painted on the hotel bus (185). It is an iconic name in Irish folklore—a lively, beautiful girl or woman. Cather encountered it as the title of a popular romance published in 1878 by Irish author Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, aka "The Duchess." (Noting Hungerford's death in 1897, Cather wrote in the *Home Monthly*, "'The Duchess' was amiable and pacific. She wrote trash pure and undefiled and made no pretentions to anything else.")

6. Irish American historian and ethnomusicologist Mick Moloney often noted that both Irish and Africans were taken across the Atlantic—Africans as slaves and Irish as indentured servants, not quite slaves but with similar conditions, and both treated as less than human (Mulraney).

7. The capital D is Cather's (*My Ántonia* 360).

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Jorn Olsen

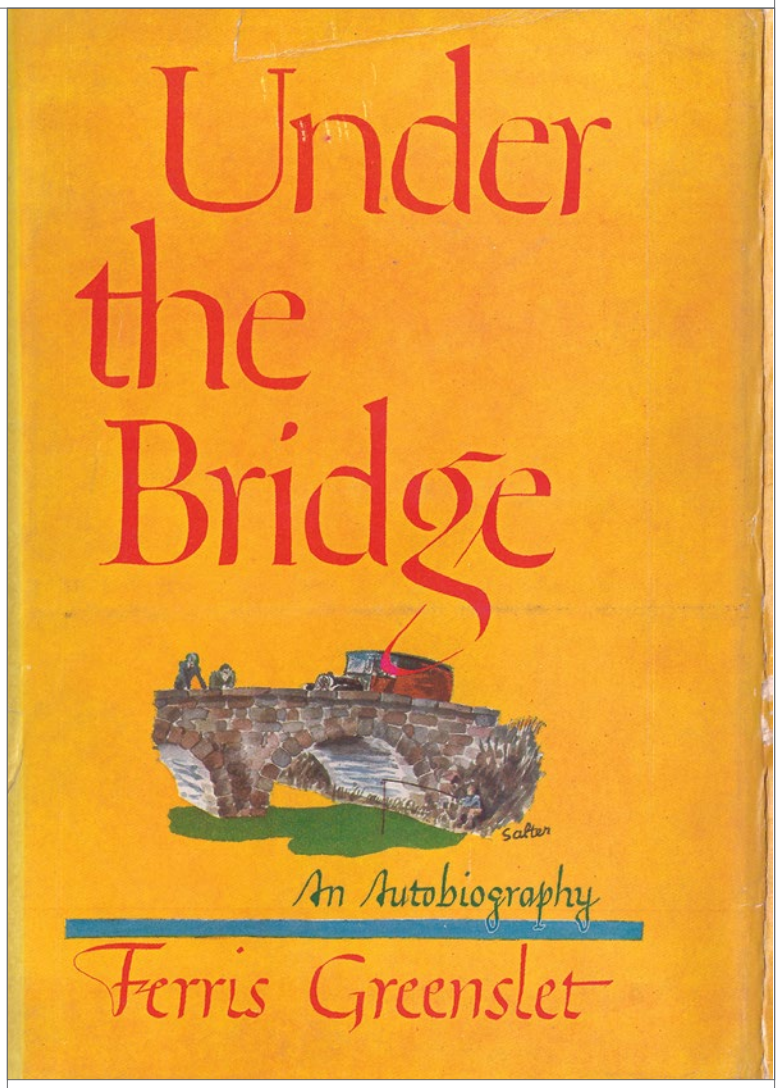
Reading *Under the Bridge*: Cather's Copy of Ferris Greenslet's Autobiography

Nathan Tye

Cather's last decade is often framed as a retreat into memory, evidenced by *Lucy Gayheart*, *Not Under Forty*, and the turn into her Virginia childhood in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Edith Lewis recalled this period as one "of deeper vision, of a more penetrating sense of human life and human destiny." She also informs us, "Willa Cather read and thought a great deal during those years" (186). That reading is well documented, both in surviving correspondence and the couple's New York Society Library charging cards. Amid Cather's late reading she made "one great literary discovery," disclosed Lewis. Cather fell into Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels after finding a set in a Maine hotel.[1] She reread them in New York and bought volumes for her library as well (194–95).

That Cather found time to read during this period is revealing. It was a time in her life when, as Melissa Homestead aptly puts it, Cather "went from medical crisis to medical crisis with little breathing room in between" (286). During this tumultuous period, she read and researched for her writing. The couple's library charging cards from this period reveal "how focused Cather and Lewis were about what they read," remarked Harriet Shapiro (23). Cather also read for pleasure and enjoyment, evidenced by Scott, as well as for companionship and connection. These latter motivations drive this essay.

In October 1943 she wrote to her former editor and longtime friend, Ferris Greenslet, concerning his recently published autobiography *Under the Bridge*. Cather offered a warm review of what she had read so far, chapters that covered people she knew, his assessments of Cather and many of her peers, and Greenslet's experiences during World War I. She commended the book's warmth and its ability to stir up memories, and she congratulated him on its publication. Cather told Greenslet she would follow up with more questions and thoughts once her secretary Sarah Bloom returned from a trip, when Cather could presumably dictate a longer letter (*Complete Letters* no. 1645). Cather did not, based on extant correspondence, follow up with further questions and thoughts on the book. But she did finish reading it. We know this because Cather's annotated copy of the book survives with her generous checkmarks and underlining. Cather received other copies of Greenslet's work, including his edited volume *The Practical Cogitator*, but *Under the Bridge* is the only known survivor.



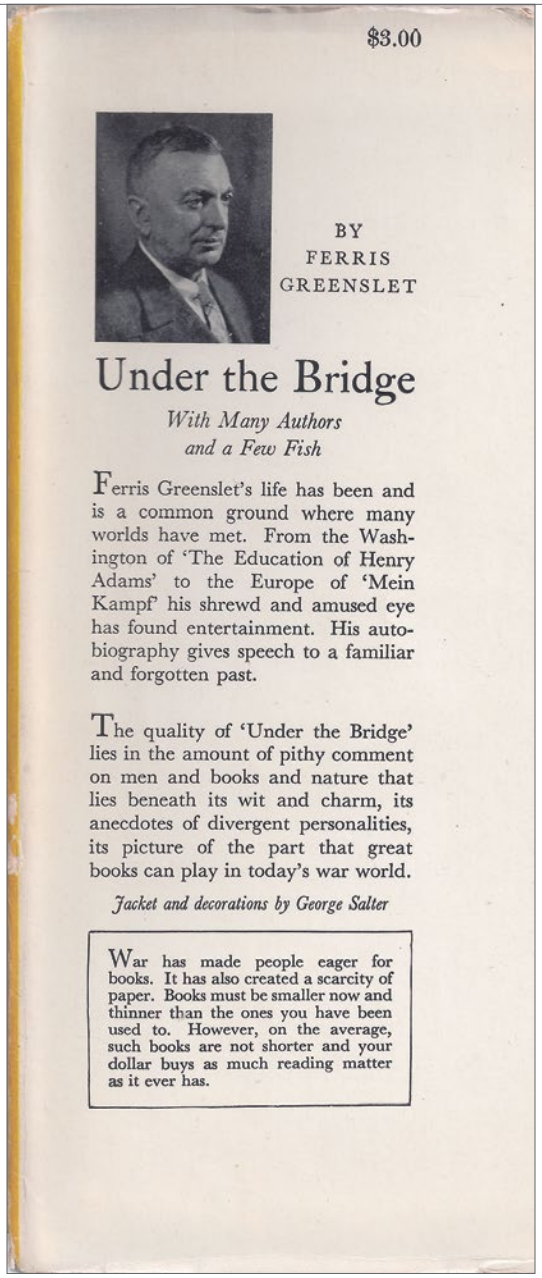
The book was assuredly among the books not authored by Cather dispersed from Cather and Lewis's library following the latter's death in 1972 (Homestead 313–14). The book's location between 1972 and October 2020, when I acquired it from a Maine rare book dealer, is unknown. It does not have any ownership marks or gift inscriptions beyond Greenslet's presentation to Cather, nor does it appear in any Cather scholarship in the intervening years. What is clear is that Cather engaged with the text, leaving bold checkmarks and underlining throughout.

What makes this text even more important for understanding Cather's last years is her place within the memoir itself. Robert Thacker observed the centrality of Cather to *Under the Bridge*: "When he wrote his autobiography, Greenslet chose Cather as his leading author, one of the associations justifying his own move

from one side of the editorial equation to the other. His association with her does justify his own shift, certainly, and as he constructs his discovery of Cather and subsequent relations with her in *Under the Bridge*, Greenslet casts the same retrospective shadings of genius and inevitability seen also in Cather's own 1931 essay, "My First Novels [There Were Two]" (371). Thus, her own engagement with this text is all the more revealing.

The present essay offers a close reading of Cather's copy of *Under the Bridge*. Although Cather is prominently featured in the memoir (116–21), she left those portions unmarked, instead focusing on Greenslet's relationship with individuals known to her. Of greater focus are the annotations that suggest links to peoples, places, events, and work central in her own memory: 148 Charles Street, World War I, and *Shadows on the Rock*.

This annotated volume expands our understanding of Cather's relationship with her longtime editor. Much of their relationship is well known to Cather scholars, with Robert Thacker's illumination of its dynamics especially informative, so I will not rehearse those particulars here. What I want to emphasize is their friendship (rather than their professional relationship) in the 1940s. As Thacker again notes, "after the break [of their professional contract] the correspondence generally reveals two old friends sharing common interests and connections, appreciating one another, watching and commenting on their shared worlds" (383). This deep friendship is reflected in the condolence letter Cather sent following the death of Greenslet's friend, the Scottish novelist and former governor general of Canada, John Buchan: "I know I am often a shrew when books or 'propositions' rub me the wrong way; but I have a heart, and I am sad when my old friends lose their friends: it makes such a difference in one's life" (*Complete Letters* no. 1472). Cather's annotated copy of *Under the Bridge* adds a material dimension to the archive of their friendship.[2] Libraries are repositories of memory, bound up in the acquisition, sharing, and reading of books. In his classic essay, "Unpacking My Library," Walter Benjamin reveled in these connections, recognizing that amid one's books, "what memories crowd in upon you!" (66). Greenslet offered similar sentiments in *Under the Bridge*: "My completest memories, those most closely interwoven with the fabric of my life, are of the reading of books" (21). Cather understood well the potential for books to contain and convey memory, as her evocation of Red Cloud and its people across her work underscores. Further still, she saw that books as material objects could revive memories. Recall how *My Ántonia* opens with the conveyance of memories through Jim Burden's manuscript (xi–xiii). This link between gifted books and memory appears too in *My Mortal Enemy*. Myra Henshawe asks Nellie Birdseye to recite a Heinrich Heine poem about "A tear that belonged to a long dead time of his life and was an anachronism." She reads from a worn volume, where Birdseye spies a faded inscription from Oswald Henshawe dating from the couple's courtship (95–96).[3]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BY
FERRIS
GREENSLET

Under the Bridge

With Many Authors and a Few Fish

Ferris Greenslet's life has been and is a common ground where many worlds have met. From the Washington of 'The Education of Henry Adams' to the Europe of 'Mein Kampf' his shrewd and amused eye has found entertainment. His autobiography gives speech to a familiar and forgotten past.

The quality of 'Under the Bridge' lies in the amount of pithy comment on men and books and nature that lies beneath its wit and charm, its anecdotes of divergent personalities, its picture of the part that great books can play in today's war world.

Jacket and decorations by George Salter

War has made people eager for books. It has also created a scarcity of paper. Books must be smaller now and thinner than the ones you have been used to. However, on the average, such books are not shorter and your dollar buys as much reading matter as it ever has.

The front jacket flap of Greenslet's *Under the Bridge*.

Cather exchanged books with friends and family throughout her life. Often given as gifts, books were also sent to friends and acquaintances as a matter of professional courtesy. She received "several books" for Christmas in 1905, she informed a cousin (*Complete Letters* no. 1933). Three years later Sarah Orne Jewett gave Cather a copy of Alice Meynell's essays, which she greatly appreciated (*Complete Letters* no. 0138). During the First World War, she sent Carrie Miner Sherwood a copy of *When the Prussians Came to Poland*, writing "I don't know anyone who would be more interested in it than you" (*Complete Letters* no. 0385). Giving and receiving books was a common practice, but not always a welcome one. In 1913 she promised to send Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant a copy of *April Twilights* but would wait until she returned from France: "I always curse anyone who sends me books when I am over there, and I throw their 'wolumes' into the street" (*Complete Letters* no. 0250). Receiving books abroad only added weight and volume to

luggage, but Cather's sentiments also suggest that books should only be gifted when and where they would be appreciated. Cather wanted Sergeant to receive *April Twilights* where she would be best placed to read and appreciate it. This consideration was an expectation she reciprocated, informing Sergeant four years later, "Your own book is the only new one I have read with any pleasure" (*Complete Letters* no. 0387).

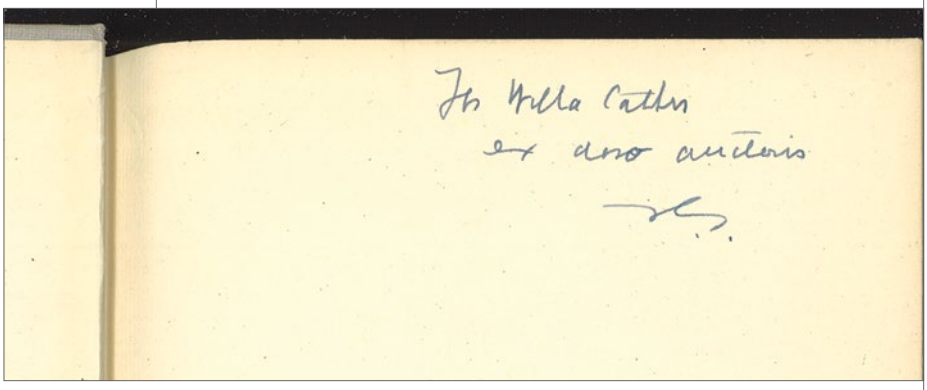
In her study of Edith Wharton's library, Sheila Liming points to the necessity of bibliographic lifelines for Wharton and her contemporaries (which include Cather and Greenslet). Liming argues that "books were often recruited to the task of constructing tenuous lifelines between a bafflingly frenetic modern present and a distant but comparatively more stable-looking past" (3). When Cather read *Under the Bridge*, the globe was aflame; the world she knew was passing away. In a 1944 letter to her longtime friend Viola Roseboro', Cather lamented these losses: "We saw one war, and there was sorrow a-plenty. But why do we have to see our world destroyed? See countries sponged off the map, as we used to erase them from the blackboard—after we had drawn them at school?" (*Complete Letters* no. 1659). Amid the turmoil of the Second World War, Cather found solace in Greenslet's autobiography. Their editorial relationship well past, the pair had long been close friends. E. K. Brown described Greenslet as "a sympathetic counselor as well as a firm friend" (212). The pair's friendship began at the beginning of the century and continued until Cather's death.

As Robert Thacker found, the earliest surviving letter from the pair dates from October 1908. Cather wrote Greenslet, commending his recently published biography, *The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich*, which she nearly finished on a five-hour train trip (*Complete Letters* no. 0141). The next surviving letter, from 1914, conveys her thanks for the copy of Henry Adams's *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, which Houghton Mifflin republished in 1913 (*Complete Letters* no. 0273). She likely drew upon that volume in *Shadows on the Rock* (Murphy and Stouck 353).

These early letters, bookended with the gift of *Under the Bridge*, point to the centrality of exchanging books within their friendship. Their relationship had evolved beyond working through her manuscript and publishing agenda. Rather, they exchanged books regularly, he gifting Cather his memoir and a later anthology, but also passing along new Houghton Mifflin titles. While their editor/author professional relationship explains earlier exchanges, as this acquaintance evolved into a friendship, gifting of books remained a central feature. In 1916 he presented Cather a "grand Boston book" at Christmas, for example, assuredly a new (but unnamed) volume from Boston-based Houghton Mifflin (*Complete Letters* no. 0346).

As documented above, Cather read Greenslet's published works, while the inverse of this exchange, Greenslet reading Cather, sustained their professional and later personal relationship. Having exchanged books for thirty years, it is hardly a surprise that Greenslet put his most personal and revealing work into Cather's hands. Making her a central figure within his autobiography, he wanted Cather to know the impact her work and friendship had on his life and career.

Greenslet's memoir appeared in the fall of 1943 to positive reviews. Organized into twenty-two chapters, grouped as five parts, the book moves through a rich series of recollections, touching on the editor's own works, relationships with writers, and fishing. Published by Literary Classics Inc. and printed by the Riverside Press, it was distributed by Greenslet's employer, Houghton Mifflin. The dustjacket and illustrations were by the German-born book designer George Salter, whose most recognizable works were the 178 covers he designed for Alfred Knopf between 1935 and 1967 (Hansen 39–40).[4] The narrative moves deftly through his life, often buoyed by his reading, and the friendships, books, and experiences that gave his life meaning. Rather than padding the story with anecdotes from a well-connected literary life, Fanny Butcher, *Chicago Tribune* reviewer and Cather's friend, found Greenslet had "with consummate skill . . . sparkle[d] his narrative with phrases from the lips of immortals, often using them as mere adornment to a picture not of themselves at all." The warmth and intimacy of the work was noted in other quarters. The *Sunday World-Herald* deemed it that rare book that made book editors "glow" ("I've Been Reading"). The *Boston Globe* reviewer suggested reading it twice, while disagreeing with some of Greenslet's literary assessments: "If it is hard to share the author's large enthusiasm for writers like [George Edward] Woodbury [sic] and [Thomas Bailey] Aldrich, we are one with his opinion of [Francis] Parkman and Willa Cather" (McCord).



Greenslet's inscription in Cather's copy, *ex dono authoris*

Given Greenslet's and Cather's history of sending each other books, it is no surprise a presentation copy of *Under the Bridge* made its way into Cather's hands. Greenslet left a short Latin inscription, *ex dono authoris* or "gift from the author" on the front free endpaper. Early in his autobiography, he acknowledges being proud of his "ready Latinity" (42). The inclusion of an apt Latin phrase was not unprecedented. Note that he opened his 1921 letter to Cather accepting her move to Knopf with the phrase, *Pax vobiscum!*, which translates to "Peace be with you" (Greenslet to Cather, January 14, 1921).

Cather offered effusive praise for the autobiography in her October 1943 letter. Greenslet's book conveyed a "happy social atmosphere…happy and unobtrusive.…It's warm and cordial in tone without being too cordial. In other words, it's well-bred" (*Complete Letters* no. 1645). Her assessment echoed the tenor of published reviews but assuredly meant more coming from a longtime friend.

Unbeknownst to Greenslet, Cather read his autobiography with pencil in hand. Her checkmarks and underlines demonstrate Cather's deep reading of the text. Her letter and comments were not empty praise; indeed, she gave the book the care and attention Greenslet had given her own work for so many years.

Others have turned to Cather's marginalia for insights into her readings. Janis Stout's reading of Cather's wildflower field book with annotations from 1917 through 1938 revealed "her distinctive hand with checkmarks or lines in the margin beside entries (for some 156 distinct varieties) and comments in the margin beside others. These annotations provide abundant demonstration that Cather was a remarkably close observer of plant life" (131). Of more immediate utility for reading *Under the Bridge* is the copy of Thomas Okey's *The Story of Avignon* Cather read in preparation for writing *Hard Punishments* while visiting San Francisco in the summer of 1941 (Woodress 493). The book's current whereabouts are unknown, but Edith Lewis granted George Kates access in the 1950s. After handling the book, he believed, "The pencil mark is proof of her admiration" (487). His further description of the annotated text is instructive for reading Cather's *Under the Bridge*:

> Here we come wonderfully close to the creative process; for not only is the book much marked with single and even double lines in the margins, and further with checks and crosses; but on the last flyleaf and the inside of the back cover, in Willa Cather's own hand we have half a dozen—seven, to be exact—notations of what became of special importance for her planning this tale. (484)

Woodress provides further context to these notations, remarking that "When she was able to remove the brace from her right hand after wearing it for eight months, she must have done the underlining, marking of passages, and annotating that were in the volume when she died" (493). *Under the Bridge* contains similar annotations, largely checkmarks, underlining, and a single page number, 123, on the back endpaper, for a total of seventy-odd marks throughout the text. The marginalia are sparse and direct, documenting the limitations imposed by her hand pain and her cursed "metal thumb" (*Complete Letters* no. 1759). They document passages, names, or phrases Cather presumably wanted to emphasize or remember as she read.

Expanding our ability to read Cather's reading of *Under the Bridge* is her response to Greenslet after receiving the book. In this letter, Cather tells Greenslet how she started the book. It was not a straightforward reading; rather she began with his recollections of a mutual acquaintance:

> I got back from Philadelphia and took up the book this afternoon. I began with the Woodberry chapter read from there on through the First War. There are many things I want to write you about, and I shall do so after I have finished the book and after my secretary returns to town. (*Complete Letters* no. 1645)

Cather began reading at Chapter 5, which is the middle of Part Two. There Greenslet recounted his doctoral studies at Columbia under George Edward Woodberry. The scholar, poet, and former University of Nebraska instructor was known to Cather. Although he departed Lincoln before Cather matriculated, the pair met in Boston through Annie Fields. In 1913 they visited Amy Lowell to view her Keats manuscripts, but their host's rude behavior offended Cather (Woodress 239). Fifteen years later, Cather complained that Greenslet was "trying to crowd on me a biography of Amy Lowell," which she categorically refused to do (*Complete Letters* no. 0934). Greenslet also alluded to another mutual acquaintance in Chapter 5, Columbia's unnamed but "obliging librarian, the father of the author of *The Bent Twig*" (59). Cather knew this librarian well. James Canfield had been Nebraska's chancellor while she was a student. Then-Chancellor Canfield opened his home to Cather, who was close friends with his daughter, Dorothy Canfield (Woodress 82–83). Although the Canfield reference was not annotated, his inclusion by Greenslet points to another mutual acquaintance that predated their own relationship.

Ever the editor, her letter to Greenslet included a postscript about the spelling of a last name of a scientist known to Cather, Woodberry, and Greenslet: "By the way on page 54 shouldn't Zinsser the scientist be Zinsner. I heard him speak of Woodberry" (*Complete Letters* no. 1645). Cather's recommendation was incorrect.

In 1942, while Greenslet was presumably working on *Under the Bridge*, he asked Cather where she first met George Woodberry. She did not meet him at Annie Fields's summer home; rather, they met at 148 Charles Street. Cather also shared the story of the pair's disappointing visit to Amy Lowell's home (*Complete Letters* no. 1595). Greenslet and Cather were both invited into the Charles Street social orbit by Annie Fields and Sarah Orne Jewett. Later, Greenslet and Cather worked together to produce *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* in 1925. Fields and Jewett's hospitality and support impacted both editor and author, evidenced in *Under the Bridge* and "148 Charles Street" in *Not Under Forty*.

Reviewers welcomed the former's contemporary evocation of the past. Fanny Butcher found *Under the Bridge* "old-fashioned in its manners but not in its manner." It was nostalgic, but not overly so. "It is the kind of book that does not prod you to keep on reading it," she continued, "but offers you such a pleasant companionship that you don't want to leave it." Cather echoed this sentiment after reading *Under the Bridge*. As she told Greenslet, "Aside from detail the book is such pleasant company and calls up so many delightful memories" (*Complete Letters* no. 1645).

Foregrounded among the pleasant company and delightful memories, as indicated by Cather's annotations, were Sarah Orne Jewett and Annie Fields. She left a checkmark beside the following passage:

> Mrs. Fields, faded, but of a still appealing beauty, carried, consciously and victoriously, the torch of an older tradition. Miss Jewett, in all her works and ways, was the living refutation of the proposition in *Expression in America*, that an artist cannot be a lady, or a lady an artist—if any refutation were needed after Jane Austen! (78)

This comment echoes her own thoughts on Charles Street. She understood the singular ability of its inhabitants to connect past to present. "Mrs. Fields is the only one left who can evoke that vanished time that was so much nobler than this," she wrote Sarah Orne Jewett in 1908; "How she does evoke it!" (*Complete Letters* no. 0140). Fields and Jewett linked visitors to a grander past. In their home, "the past lay in wait for one in all the corners," as Cather wrote in "148 Charles Street" (61). Greenslet's own reflections on his time there and his relationship with Fields and Jewett certainly brought Cather back as well. It was a place inhabited, as Cather recalled, by "the peace of the past" (63).

As noted, it was also a social space for writers, editors, critics, and other inhabitants of the literary scene. After placing a checkmark beside Greenslet's recollection of Annie Fields, Cather marked three quotes from socialite Helen Bell, known for her wit, whom Greenslet had met at Charles Street. Greenslet had published Bell's biography in 1931 and tried, unsuccessfully, to have Bell write a memoir (79).

Both Greenslet and Cather cherished the community and personal connections to the past fostered at 148 Charles Street. At the conclusion of her essay on the Fields home, Cather lamented its replacement with an eyesore of modernity: "Perhaps the garage and all it stands for represent the only real development, and have altogether taken the place of things formerly cherished on that spot" (73). Her final checkmark in *Under the Bridge* returns to this sentiment, the erasure of her world by automobility. Cather was clear in her private writings on this point, telling Dorothy Canfield Fisher in 1939, "If only gasoline had continued to slumber in depths with prehistoric remains where it belongs" (*Complete Letters* no. 1459). Greenslet included a similar point, made to his friend John Buchan, governor general of Canada, in 1938. "Had the internal combustion engine done the world more harm than good? I had always held for harm" (208). Cather's checkmark is thick and bold beside this line.

Cather's marginalia also document her interest in Greenslet's life during World War I. As she told him, she began with Woodberry and "read from there on through the First War." Part Four of the book, consisting of five chapters, covers the wartime era. She left four marks in the third chapter of this section, titled "The old war: Second half." She marked an Italian battle scene, an overview of the war from 1915 to 1916, and the brief paragraph where Greenslet decides to go to England in 1917. She also made a checkmark beside his list of the "Good books . . . coming into Park Street that had nothing to do with the war." The first two listed: *O Pioneers!* and *The Song of the Lark* (154). This is one of two notations made to sections referencing Cather herself.

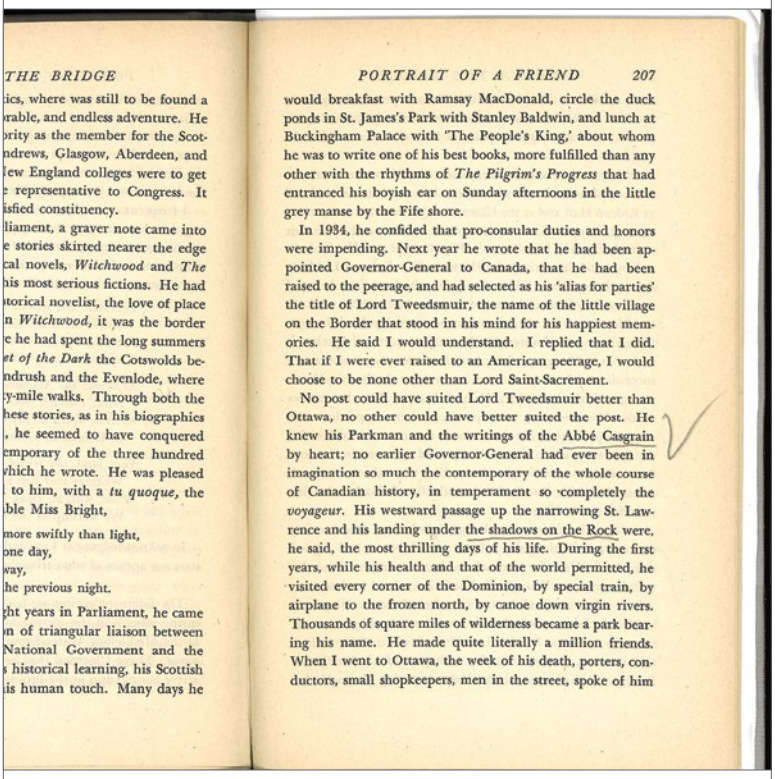
Given Greenslet's long and respected editorial career, it is no surprise that his autobiography is populated by authors and literary opinions. Cather was central among Greenslet's associations. He offers a robust assessment. Although he recognized that Cather spoke "slightingly" of her first novel, he defends the merits of *Alexander's Bridge* by drawing on her introduction to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett*. With the intimacy of an editor, insights of a critic, and warmth of a friend, he understands the totality of Cather's vision. "In re-reading the thirteen volumes of the collected edition, one perceives how all of Willa Cather's work is of a piece . . . how the sense of beauty which found its first expression in her poetry persisted and colored all her work" (117).

Her letter demurred, to a degree, with this assessment. "As for me, you've certainly done handsomely by me—really better than I deserve. I've always been a hap-hazard sort of writer. When I got interested I drove ahead without much thought of how or why,"

she confided. Rather than deflect his published praise further, she pivoted and commended Greenslet for his writing. "For close texture I'm not in it with you yourself! I've saved a number of your letters just for their close weave. Yes, I can cut out trashy adjectives or unimportant detail, but that is not the same thing as a close texture" (*Complete Letters* no. 1645). Greenslet had commended Cather's stylistic refinement, calling her corrected drafts "marvels of creative revision." Unlike most authors' rewrites, her "style is toned down rather than up" in subsequent drafts, Greenslet disclosed. Although she did not annotate the relevant section, she disagreed with his positive assessment of her "purgation of superfluities" and instead, deferred to him as the better writer of "close texture" (120).

Cather's deflection aside, she respected Greenslet's insights and opinions. More than an editor, he was an author and critic, professions Cather understood well. She also appreciated his style, as her comment above underscores. Yet, this does not mean she agreed with his opinions. "In most of your estimates of writing people I agree with you, but I differ about Sydnor Harrison. I could never see anything there but a thin journalist who wrote from the outside," she protests (*Complete Letters* no. 1645). Fittingly, she did not leave any annotations on his discussion of Harrison (126–28).

Later in *Under the Bridge*, she marked passages relating to Greenslet's time in Canada and his relationship with Governor General John Buchan. As noted above, Cather recognized the deep friendship between Greenslet and Buchan, as reflected in her condolence letter three years prior (*Complete Letters* no. 1472).



THE BRIDGE

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s historical learning, his Scottish
is human touch. Many days he

PORTRAIT OF A FRIEND 207

would breakfast with Ramsay MacDonald, circle the duck ponds in St. James's Park with Stanley Baldwin, and lunch at Buckingham Palace with 'The People's King,' about whom he was to write one of his best books, more fulfilled than any other with the rhythms of *The Pilgrim's Progress* that had entranced his boyish ear on Sunday afternoons in the little grey manse by the Fife shore.

In 1934, he confided that pro-consular duties and honors were impending. Next year he wrote that he had been appointed Governor-General to Canada, that he had been raised to the peerage, and had selected as his 'alias for parties' the title of Lord Tweedsmuir, the name of the little village on the Border that stood in his mind for his happiest memories. He said I would understand. I replied that I did. That if I were ever raised to an American peerage, I would choose to be none other than Lord Saint-Sacrement.

No post could have suited Lord Tweedsmuir better than Ottawa, no other could have better suited the post. He knew his Parkman and the writings of the Abbé Casgrain by heart; no earlier Governor-General had ever been in imagination so much the contemporary of the whole course of Canadian history, in temperament so completely the *voyageur*. His westward passage up the narrowing St. Lawrence and his landing under the shadows on the Rock were, he said, the most thrilling days of his life. During the first years, while his health and that of the world permitted, he visited every corner of the Dominion, by special train, by airplane to the frozen north, by canoe down virgin rivers. Thousands of square miles of wilderness became a park bearing his name. He made quite literally a million friends. When I went to Ottawa, the week of his death, porters, conductors, small shopkeepers, men in the street, spoke of him

Two of Cather's annotations in her copy of Greenslet's book

These annotations all relate to *Shadows on the Rock*, to varying degrees. First, she made a checkmark beside a passage where Greenslet identifies Francis Parkman as his favorite historian (198). This is an opinion Cather surely agreed with, as Parkman forms the core of her research for *Shadows on the Rock* (Murphy and Stouck 347–48). Following are two further notations: the name of the Quebec historian Abbé Henri-Raymond Casgrain is underlined, and a checkmark is placed beside it. Casgrain is not identified among the historians drawn upon for *Shadows on the Rock*, but as her source list "must remain inconclusive and somewhat speculative," admit John Murphy and David Stouck, this notation may suggest Cather's familiarity with his work (353). Casgrain published a biography of Francis Parkman and wrote extensively about 17th century Quebec, including a history of the Hôtel Dieu, which Cather may have drawn upon.

The next sentence includes her penultimate notation to the text. It is also the second and final notation to a phrase or passage referencing herself. Here Cather underlined the phrase, "the shadows on the Rock." Greenslet worked her title into John Buchan's description of his arrival in Canada. "His westward passage up the narrowing St. Lawrence and his landing under the shadows of the Rock were, he said, the most thrilling days of his life" (207). Greenslet was moved reading *Shadows on the Rock*, which may explain the allusion here. Earlier in the autobiography he praised it as his favorite among Cather's works (119–21). Privately, he told Cather in an effusive 1931 letter (it opens with a description of his tear-misted glasses) that *Shadows on the Rock* "has given me more pleasure than any of your other books,—more than any other recent works by anybody." He deemed it "a true classic" (Greenslet to Cather, August 3, 1931).

Greenslet presented Cather at least one more book. In 1945 he sent *The Practical Cogitator, or The Thinker's Anthology*, his coedited collection of short readings, quotes, and reflections. Two letters related to the work survive, but the book itself has not been located. The letters show Cather's determination to read it and honestly engage with her friend's work, despite her declining health. In October 1945 she told Greenslet she could not get to it now. "Just now my eyes are bothering me, for the first time in my life, and I am reading only books in very large type and widely-spaced" (*Complete Letters* no. 1719). She initially skimmed the book in February 1946, while recovering from her mastectomy, writing, "For a few weeks to come I shall need larger type and wider spacing than The Cogitator offers me" (*Complete Letters* no. 1728). Even in her final years, she continued to receive and engage her friend's work, despite declining health.

It was straining to read and painful to annotate, so the marks in *Under the Bridge* document Cather's commitment, despite her

illness, to engage with the remembrances of her friend and one-time editor. If the annotations document immediate engagement with a text, they also suggest rereading and further returns. In a period when Cather was grieving lost friends and family alongside the terror of the crumbling world order, she found solace in, and may have hoped to return to, her and Greenslet's shared literary and social world.

NOTES

1. Greenslet's chapter on the Scottish author and politician John Buchan includes a long quotation from Buchan describing rereading the Waverley novels while bedbound with illness during World War I. Cather placed a checkmark beside Buchan's list of the best Waverley novels (200–201).

2. Cather and Greenslet's relationship is richly documented, especially the pair's correspondence. Among the Houghton Mifflin material at Harvard are 295 letters from Cather as well as 442 letters sent to her (Thacker 370).

3. The role of the gift in *My Mortal Enemy* is explored further in Robert K. Miller, "Gloves Full of Gold: Violations of the Gift Cycle in *My Mortal Enemy*," *Willa Cather and Material Culture: Real-World Writing, Writing the Real World*, edited by Janis P. Stout, University of Alabama Press, 2005, pp. 188–206.

4. Salter did not design any of Cather's Knopf books, but did create the jacket for Angus Burrell and Bennett Cerf's *An Anthology of Famous American Stories*, Modern Library, 1953, which included "Paul's Case."

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Rereading the West in Cather's Fan Mail

Maria Kane

"I have just finished reading for the second time 'O Pioneers!'" announced Louise W. Mears in a 1921 letter to Willa Cather. A self-declared "native Nebraskan," Mears thanked Cather for retelling the history of "our state" and transporting "the reader back to simpler beginnings." Cather's accounts of the region felt "so real, so genuine" that Mears envisioned the novelist's characters as living people and was tempted to read her fiction "as biography." Rereading Cather's novel was clearly a nostalgic experience for Mears, as she reminisced on her Nebraskan roots from her present home in Milwaukee.

Mears's stated enthusiasm for rereading Cather's work was not uncommon. In fact, rereading is a commonplace in the archives of Cather's fan mail, preserved by the author and archived in large collections at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska. Among the correspondence that Cather retained are several fan letters that interweave personal accounts of rereading with narratives of regional history. Such a retrospective impulse was familiar to Cather herself, whose writing often glanced backward at the formation of American landscapes and communities while caustically regarding present-day fads. American history, for Cather, did not follow a linear timeline that culminated in the industrial advances of the twentieth century. Rather, Cather offered her audience a cyclical perspective on time, inviting her readers to reimagine the past through accumulated acts of reading. Among the many elements of Cather's work that enthralled fans, her historical focus proved particularly conducive to rereading. Cather's narratives have thus provided a model of retrospection, prompting generations of readers to revisit their own memories alongside myths of American identity.

To be sure, the extant archive of Cather's fan mail represents only a small subset of Cather's readers: those who chose to write to her and whose letters Cather saw fit to preserve. These correspondents came from varied backgrounds; some of them were already acquaintances of Cather, while others knew the author only through her writing. Cather, according to scholar Sharon O'Brien, paid special attention to the feedback of "ordinary" readers (473) who had no prior connection to her and no affiliation with the world of literary criticism. As Charles Johanningsmeier and Barbara Ryan noted in 2013, fan letters tell us less about the breadth of Cather's readership than they attest to her own priorities in keeping certain letters. For instance, Johanningsmeier and Ryan observe that the archived letters typically "reflect the opinions of more educated and confident readers" (4). Cather likewise seems—perhaps understandably so—to have favored letters that praise her work, especially from readers who inadvertently assuage her insecurities about her writing (4). In other words, the fan mail archive tends to overrepresent readers who enjoyed Cather's fiction and evinced a high degree of cultural knowledge. Both factors evidently influenced Cather's decision to retain certain fan letters and, in some cases, to compose replies. Furthermore, the frequent mentions of rereading by these correspondents indicate that repeated engagement with Cather's fiction was a particular marker of the education and confidence that she valued.

In the early 1940s, for example, Cather corresponded with a young man named Harrison Blaine, a lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. In May 1943, Blaine sent Cather a letter on "impulse" to commemorate his third reading of *My Ántonia.* Blaine attested that he had read other works in Cather's oeuvre but deemed *My Ántonia* an exceptional "masterpiece" due to its compelling characterization and its rendering of the "seasons and land of Nebraska." It is notable that weather patterns stood out to Blaine, who as an officer perhaps unwittingly mirrored these cyclical phenomena through his own cycles of reading. Blaine went on to designate Ántonia as a model for "the American Dream," which he envisioned as "the peopling of the whole world with men and women like Ántonia." Not only did the novel demand repeated personal encounters, but Blaine also interpreted it as a mold for reshaping American society at large. One of the pleasurable effects of rereading, for Blaine, was a reforged link between the nation's imagined future and its fictionalized past, as viewed through the lens of Ántonia's immigrant experiences. At the end of his letter, Blaine even sought to integrate himself into Cather's cycles of future movement, inviting the novelist to visit his family property during her periodic sojourns in Jaffrey, New Hampshire.

Blaine's confidence pleased Cather, and she responded with thanks for his impulsive communication. Referencing their shared connection to Jaffrey, Cather recalled writing a portion of *My Ántonia* amid the pastoral beauty of New Hampshire, offering details about her writing process that she was ordinarily reluctant to share (*Complete Letters* no. 1632). She disclosed,

in fact, that she had composed a portion of *My Ántonia* in a tent pitched near the Blaines' property, and she promised to visit Blaine's mother during her next visit to Jaffrey. Following this genial reply, Cather enclosed Blaine's message in a June 1943 missive to her friend Carrie Miner Sherwood, as evidence of *My Ántonia*'s resonance among young readers. While Cather acknowledged that some people deemed the novel "old-fashioned," she asserted that the book "still has the power to make the really young and really brave write me letters like the one I enclose from Lieutenant Harrison Blaine" (*Complete Letters* no. 1633). Cather invoked Blaine's military service to amplify his integrity as an exemplary young reader and hinted that Blaine was not the only "brave" fan to express admiration for her fiction. Indeed, Cather told Miner that she possessed other letters that were "equally precious," and she asked her friend to return Blaine's letter, presumably for a keepsake. Thus we see Cather's curatorial instinct at work as she sought to preserve admiring feedback on her writing. Her particular esteem for Blaine, moreover, suggests her tacit approval for his practice of rereading. In presenting him to Miner as an exemplary reader of *My Ántonia*, Cather sanctions Blaine's eagerness to revisit the novel and to intertwine dreams for America's future with visions of its past. In Blaine's retrospection, Cather may have recognized a kindred outlook on literary art. Their short correspondence must have felt all the more poignant during the following year, after Blaine was killed in action on the Mariana Islands in June 1944.

Cather's appreciation for thoughtful and historically conscious readers is consistent with her overall approach to fiction as an art form. In "The Novel Démeublé," her famous 1922 essay published in the *New Republic*, Cather upheld the novel as "a form of art" and lamented that twentieth-century commerce had largely reduced fiction to "a form of amusement," a product "manufactured to entertain great multitudes of people" (5). Cather locates signs of this commodification in the vast majority of popular novels, especially those that render human experiences as a mere catalogue of "physical sensations" and material conditions (6). Significantly, these harsh criticisms did not prevent Cather from participating in the literary marketplace as a bestselling writer. As Matthew Lavin acknowledges, Cather's "denouncement of the commercialization of literature must be placed within the context of her choices as an author and a businessperson. She verbally rejected the market while simultaneously enacting an individualized version of market engagement" (169). Cather wanted her novels to be profitable, especially in the first decades of her career; in 1915, she openly admitted to her publisher that she wished "to sell a good many copies" of *The Song of the Lark* (*Complete Letters* no. 0295).

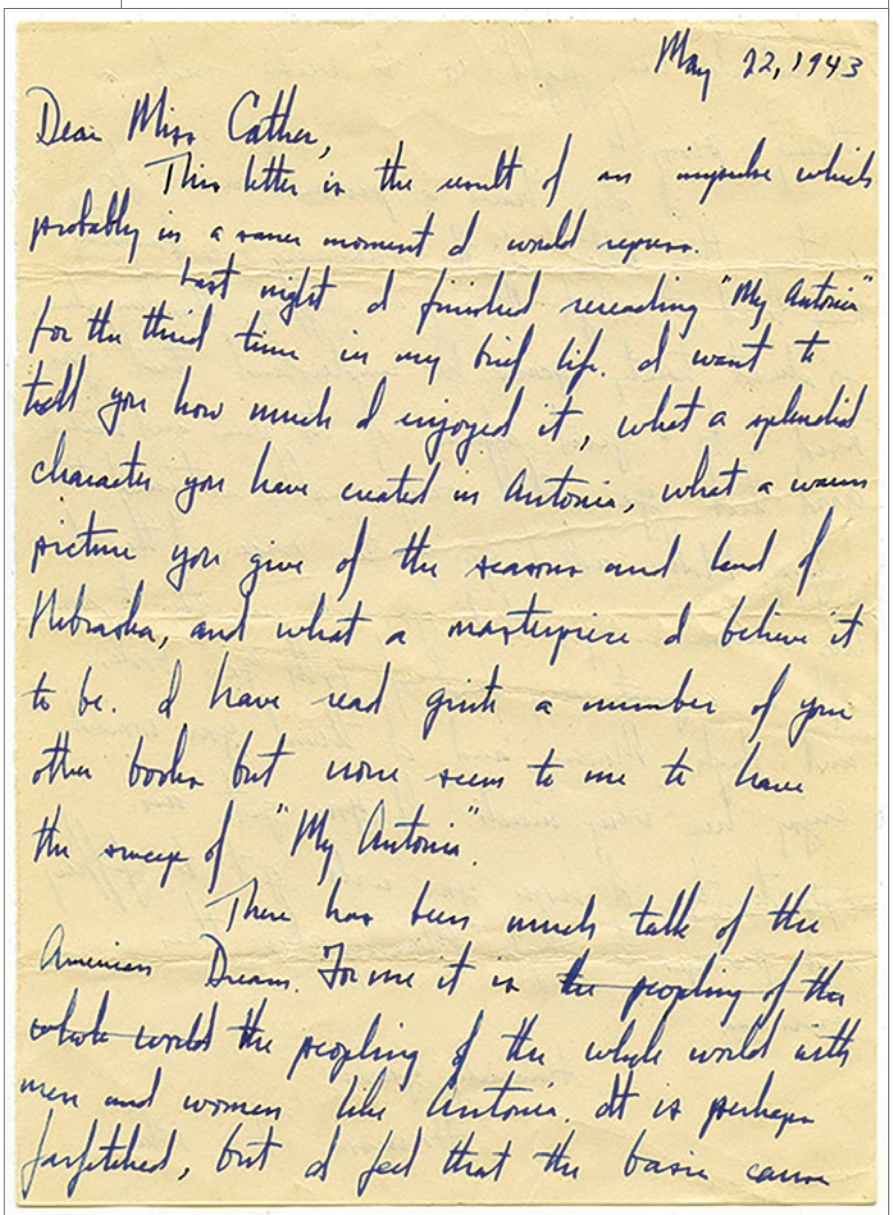
Even after she was established as a major novelist, commercial success remained an important concern for Cather, albeit tempered by artistic prerogatives. As O'Brien has identified in Cather's correspondence with her first publisher, Houghton Mifflin, Cather wanted to maximize *My Ántonia*'s "cultural capital" (468) while limiting its accessibility to "an undeserving mass public" (473). Paperback editions and film adaptations of the novel were equally antithetical to Cather's ideals. O'Brien indicates how artistically sensitive readers were crucial to Cather's intended balance between commerce and culture: "That is the niche Cather wanted for herself: to be a 'high brow' author with steady, remunerative sales, enjoyed by appreciative, knowledgeable readers, not the indiscriminate masses" (466). Cather herself said that she prioritized quality of readers over their quantity. In a 1932 letter to editor Ferris Greenslet, she explained, "My whole preference is to sell a few books and to make a dignified royalty on them; to have fewer readers and better readers" (*Complete Letters* no. 1130). Although she enjoyed corresponding with "ordinary" readers (O'Brien 473), she endeavored to curate her audience in a manner that verged on "class-based elitism" (O'Brien 466). Given these lofty aesthetic standards, it is no surprise that Cather preserved the letters of readers who, like one correspondent, distinguished themselves as "genuine lovers of books" (Stedman).

Cather's penchant for retrospection further influenced her artistic sensibilities and her criteria for "better readers." In "The Novel Démeublé," Cather goes on to lambaste the "meaningless reiterations" of the mass-produced descriptive style that dominated the marketplace (6). Ready-made novels ostensibly served the mass public's craving for novelty and "change," while ultimately reproducing the superficial observations and impermanent sensations of the present moment. Cather, by contrast, intended to resist commodification by venerating and creating literature that reaches beyond the "present" to grasp "the eternal material of art" (6). This deeper temporal awareness manifests itself through an aesthetic of cyclicality, as Cather states: "The novelist must learn to write, and then he must unlearn it" (6). Instead of prioritizing immediacy, Cather praises an artistic perspective that intermingles different temporalities and that cycles between past and present in a process of renegotiation. A similar cyclicality could apply to readers as well. The prominence of rereading in Cather's fan mail archive suggests that a willingness to reencounter and reevaluate a novel was a badge of artistic "enjoyment" for both Cather and her favored readers (5).

One such discerning reader was John Curran, a Catholic cleric who wrote to Cather on multiple occasions. Curran began a 1936 missive by connecting his recurring fan letters with the repetition of reading. After reminding Cather of his last communication, he announced that he had "finished 'Lucy Gayheart' for the second time." He evinced a degree of aesthetic appreciation for the novel that probably pleased Cather, as he voiced his determination to find "something more than a story in [his] reading" and to discern Cather's answers to "inescapable" philosophical queries. A similarly repetitive, though less intellectually zealous, practice of reading imbued correspondent Cornelia Otis Skinner's memories of her late mother, Maud Durbin. According to Skinner, writing to Cather in 1937, the recently deceased Durbin was such a devotee of Cather's work that she was often "re-reading her favorite passages or quoting your words that held for her as they do for all your readers such rare beauty." One facet of this "beauty" was Cather's depiction of the midwestern "landscape" where Skinner's mother had spent her early years. For both Curran and Durbin, patterns of rereading deepened appreciation of Cather's artistry.

A more elaborate example of rereading unfolds in a letter from Maud Meagher, who wrote to Cather from London in 1932. Addressing Cather as "Dear Madame," Meagher begins her letter with a lengthy description of how she reads and rereads Cather's fiction. As Meagher details in her neat penmanship, she promptly purchases each Cather novel upon its release, yet she does not read her new books immediately. Rather, she keeps her latest Cather acquisition on a table in her home but does not open it until the impulse to read becomes irresistible. At this critical juncture, Meagher unplugs her telephone, opens the novel, and savors its first page. She describes her subsequent reading as a sort of affective avalanche: "paragraph by paragraph, slowly and with delight, until I lose all self-control and find myself, heart and mind and spirit roused and breathless, plunging to the end. Then the book is to be begun again, many sentences to be read aloud—to myself, since there is no one else to know." Meagher heightens her reading experience with an initial exercise of discipline, teasing herself with the presence of the book yet resisting its siren song, at least temporarily. This self-control is only a prelude to the almost sensual extravagance of reading, when Meagher breathlessly loses herself in the text and seemingly cannot stop herself from rereading the novel. "The book is to be begun again," she writes, as if she has no say over the matter and must simply carry out the imperative to read. Meagher thus discloses to Cather her private cycle of reading—an intimate aesthetic pleasure that demands repetition.

The editor Viola Roseboro' likewise attested to the personal value of reading and rereading Cather's work. Despite her decades of acquaintance with Cather, Roseboro' expressed a reverence for Cather's writing that blurred the boundary between friend and fan. In one letter, for instance, Roseboro' mentioned that she had "lately reread *The Professor's House*."



May 22, 1943

Dear Miss Cather,

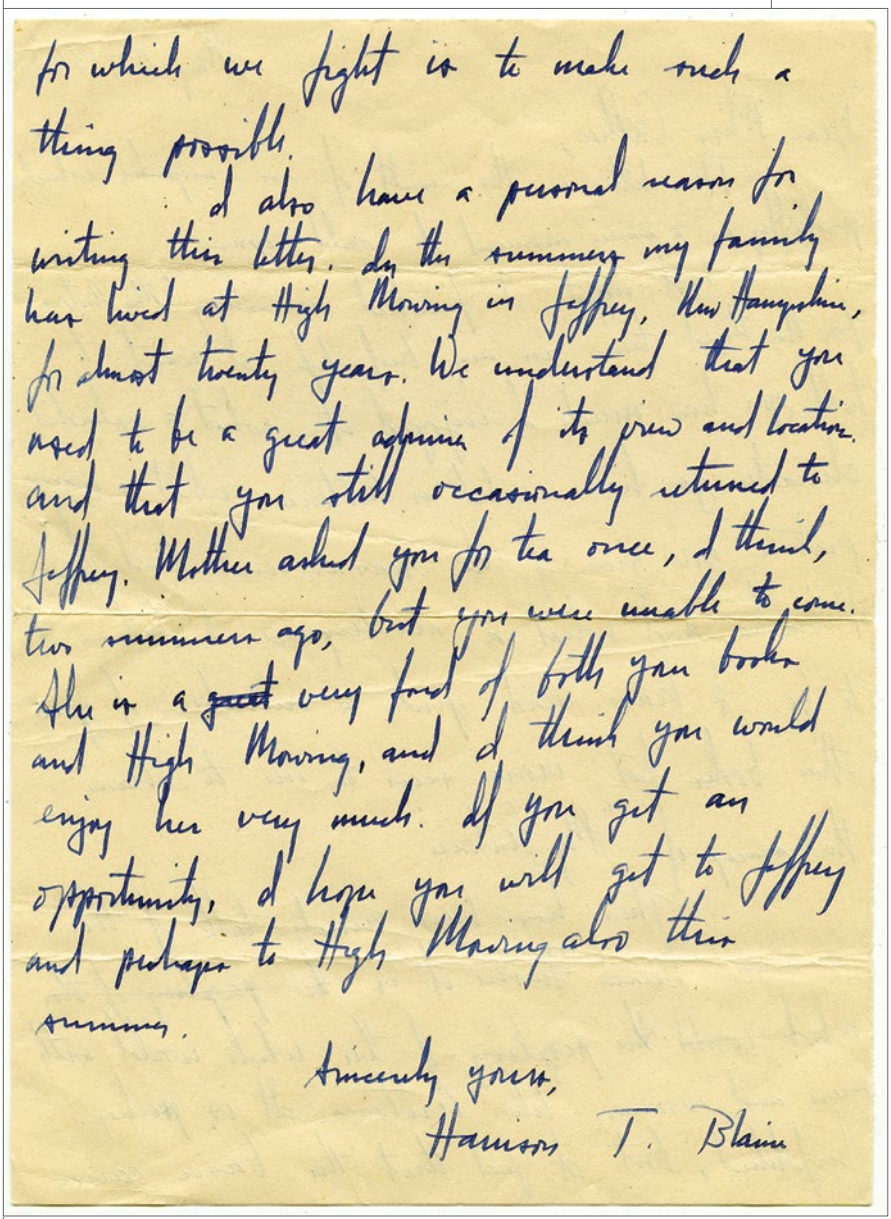
This letter is the result of an impulse which probably in a sane moment I would repress.

Last night I finished rereading "My Antonia" for the third time in my brief life. I want to tell you how much I enjoyed it, what a splendid character you have created in Antonia, what a warm picture you give of the seasons and land of Nebraska, and what a masterpiece I believe it to be. I have read quite a number of your other books but none seem to me to have the sweep of "My Antonia."

There has been much talk of the American Dream. To me it is the peopling of the whole world the peopling of the whole world with men and women like Antonia. It is perhaps farfetched, but I feel that the basic cause

Harrison Blaine's letter to Cather. WCPM Collection. Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud. TX-4-MS2639-Blaine 1943.5.22.

In a reflective mood, she went on to praise Cather's oeuvre: "I wish I could forget these books quicker, so I could reread them oftener, that degree of forgetfulness needed." For Roseboro', rereading has only a limited capacity to reenact the first thrill of Cather's stories. Her pleasure seemed to hinge, at least in part, upon novelty, so much so that her memories of reading eventually dull subsequent encounters with Cather's fiction. Roseboro' enjoyed rereading, yet she hints that there is something futile about the experience, something lost through the impossibility of approaching Cather's novels for the first time. Both Roseboro' and Meagher characterized rereading as a continual dialogue between past and present. Rereading became an endeavor to revive past bliss or to prolong present pleasures, even as they inevitably fade into memory.



for which we fight is to make such a
thing possible.
I also have a personal reason for
writing this letter. In the summers my family
has lived at High Mowing in Jaffrey, New Hampshire,
for almost twenty years. We understand that you
used to be a great admirer of its grew and location
and that you still occasionally returned to
Jaffrey. Mother asked you for tea once, I think,
two summers ago, but you were unable to come.
She is a ~~great~~ very fond of both your books
and High Mowing, and I think you would
enjoy her very much. If you get an
opportunity, I hope you will get to Jaffrey
and perhaps to High Mowing also this
summer.

Sincerely yours,
Harrison T. Blaine

For other Cather fans, the personal experience of rereading amplified their wider awareness of social changes. In 1926, for example, a sailor named Lloyd Fortune wrote to Cather from the U.S. Submarine Base in Pearl Harbor. His typewritten letter describes his almost therapeutic relationship with Cather's work:

> Dear Willa Cather,
>
> Whenever I'm lonely or the lesser values of life seem to crowd in too closely upon the fullness of my days,—I like to turn again and again to your happy volumes for resustication [sic]. I want to thank you because you so often help me in "finding my way out of a vague, easy-going world into a life of disciplined endeavor."

Fortune regards Cather's "happy volumes" as edifying influences, sharpening the self-discipline that he presumably prizes as a member of the American military. In this sense, Fortune's outlook resembles critical attitudes toward rereading that developed during the nineteenth century and persisted into the twentieth. As Claudia Stokes explicates, some American literary critics of this period reacted to the explosion of print culture by consolidating prestige around certain reading practices. To distinguish themselves from masses of readers who indiscriminately absorbed new content, these critics encouraged the "countercultural" rereading of hallowed texts as a mode of exercising "restraint and discernment" (Stokes 70, 81). Although Fortune's rereading applies to newly published literature, he still approaches Cather's work as if it will resurrect the supposedly superior aesthetics and virtues of the past. Fortune speaks of rereading not as an entirely linear form of self-improvement but as a process of "resuscitation." By rereading Cather's fiction, Fortune renews personal standards that have grown lax and, more broadly, reclaims values that he perceives American culture to have lost.

To some extent, Lloyd Fortune internalizes the retrospection that scholars have noted in Cather's portrayals of the American West. Charles Johanningsmeier, who has contributed most prolifically to scholarship on Cather's fan mail, numbers Fortune among those who "found Cather's endorsement of old-fashioned values very empowering and uplifting in helping them deal with the modern world" (44–45). These personal cycles of rereading, I argue, run parallel to Cather's retrospective rendering of the West, what Guy

Reynolds calls her "cyclical historiography" (70). Cather avoids a strictly teleological view of American culture, in which the nation progresses toward an ever more enlightened and efficient modernity. Rather, as Reynolds attests, Cather "mediate[s] sceptically on the linear, progressive, narrowly occidental ideas that had manifested themselves in American writing about race, progress and civilization" (72).

For evidence of Cather's ambivalence toward narratives of progress, we may look not only to "The Novel Démeublé" but also to Cather's 1923 essay "Nebraska: The End of the First Cycle." In the latter essay, while celebrating the settlers of Nebraska, Cather denounces the accumulation of "machine-made materialism" in the twentieth century. At the same time, she expresses hope that the honesty and "elasticity of mind" of the pioneers will "one day come out again" (237–38). Cather thus constructs her writing as a rereading of history, an endeavor to keep the regional past visible and to anticipate the possible burnishing of corroded values. Reynolds describes this temporal dialectic as a comparative exercise that allows Cather "to contrast cultures" (70) and "to value earlier stages of civilizations in themselves, not as mere stepping stones toward a supposedly 'higher' order" (72). Ironically, in memorializing the past, Cather reveals her distance from it. Her rereading of American history is not an escape from the present into the past; rather, Cather reconstructs the past through present retrospection. It is significant that Reynolds refers not to a cyclical *history*—that is, a repetition of historical phenomena—but to a cyclical *historiography*—a style of rendering historical narratives. From this retrospective viewpoint, Cather largely leaves unquestioned an overarching narrative of Western cultural dominance, a narrative that elides and subjugates Indigenous communities. At other times, though, Cather instrumentalizes remnants of Indigenous American culture in order to enact her own cyclical historiography.

As a brief example, I turn to Cather's Künstlerroman *The Song of the Lark*. In the latter half of the novel, budding singer Thea Kronborg enjoys a rejuvenating respite in Arizona, where she explores the cliff dwellings of an ancient Indigenous community. Citing Reynolds's notions of cyclicality, Ann Moseley argues that Thea's "creative renewal" in the canyon (217) is intertwined with the ecology and human geography of the place, which Cather based upon Walnut Canyon, near Flagstaff, Arizona. Cather's rendering of so-called ancient canyon dwellers accords with archaeological findings about the Sinagua people, who lived in Walnut Canyon for about a century (219–20). Moseley argues that Cather's allusions to the rise and fall of an Indigenous population reveals her intuitively cyclical view of history. This cyclicality is present on a more intimate scale as well, in Thea's artistic rekindling.

Upon nearing the canyon, Thea begins to revisit past affects: "She was getting back to the earliest sources of gladness that she could remember" (326). The resuscitation of Thea's youthful wonder and vitality meld with the history of the canyon itself, immersing Thea in a "continuity of life that reached back into the old time" (334). Surrounded by the pottery fragments of the cliff-dwellers and lulled by the flowing stream at the foot of the canyon, Thea sheds the "meaningless activity" (329) of her everyday life and escapes the worry that she is "born behind time and had been trying to catch up" (329). In short, she no longer feels that she must experience artistic growth in a linear fashion. As Moseley remarks, Thea moves beyond the sterile linearity of "clock-time" (230) to a more textured and lively temporality. Cather not only rereads the Southwest through a cyclical historiography and ecology but also mirrors this cycle in the experiences of Thea, who rereads her own past in tandem with her surroundings.

Rereading was a significant practice for Cather herself. In a letter from 1934, she tells a relative of Mark Twain that she has read *Huckleberry Finn* approximately twenty times. "I am full of my old enthusiasm for it," she writes (*Complete Letters* no. 1240). Much like her own readers, Cather speaks of her rereading as a dialogue with her personal past, a fragmentary recapturing of enthusiasm. Later, in a 1946 letter, Cather speaks of rereading her own work, namely *Death Comes for the Archbishop*:

> I read the book through last spring (when I was recuperating from an illness)—the first time I have read it through since it was published. And I was pleased with it because it reflected some of the pleasure I used to feel when I wandered about that country by railroad and spring wagon and on horseback. I never used the automobile very much because I got more pleasure out of closeness than speed. (*Complete Letters* no. 1741)

Cather even found herself rereading her own fan mail. In corresponding with Viola Roseboro' about *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, Cather admitted that she had reread her friend's letter about that novel "many times" (*Complete Letters* no. 1516), so moved was she by the letter's praise and its allusions to Cather's upbringing in Virginia. Rereading allowed Cather to renegotiate the timeline of her own life, to use language as a bridge among past, present, and future.

The act of rereading, therefore, is more than an incidental detail in Cather's fan archive. Moments of cyclicality circle

in and around Cather's books, from their inception to their reception. These cycles continue into the twenty-first century, which has produced further evidence of individuals who have read and reread Cather's novels. The website and app Goodreads, a popular resource for tracking one's reading and connecting with other bibliophiles, constitutes an expansive archive of her recent reception. The website allows users to rate books on a five-star scale, record their thoughts in writing, and react to other users' reviews. Not limited by Cather's curation, Goodreads offers a much broader range of readerly perspectives than Cather's fan mail. This pool of amateur reviews likely overrepresents readers who have strong views about a book, whether positive or negative, and are thus more motivated to air their thoughts online. Still, the Goodreads reviews for a given text, particularly by an author as widely known as Cather, will often feature ambivalent impressions alongside more polarized opinions.

As might be expected, the Cather novel that has garnered the most attention on Goodreads is *My Ántonia*. By spring 2025, the novel has accrued nearly 10,000 written reviews and over 140,000 star ratings, with an average rating of 3.84 stars out of 5. The most popular reviews, namely those that have received the most "likes" from users, tend to praise the characters and landscapes of *My Ántonia*, as well as Cather's deftness at representing immigrant experiences. Some reviewers admit their initial reluctance to read an older novel, especially one that has been required in many American classrooms. In fact, some users who reread *My Ántonia* specify that they gave the novel a second chance after struggling with it in high school or college. Searching for the term "reread" among Goodreads posts on *My Ántonia* reveals a five-star review, posted by user "zan," that begins, "A reread from high school. This book was far more wonderful than I remembered, probably made better for reading it as an adult since it is so deeply about nostalgia" (Jan. 9, 2018). Unlike Cather's twentieth-century fans, readers like zan do not have markedly positive memories of their first encounter with her books. Their motivation is not so much to revive happy memories of reading but to revisit a so-called classic and reevaluate its merits. In the end, the nostalgia imbued in Cather's writing changed zan's opinion, so that despite initial ambivalence toward the book, the passage of time between readings ultimately made the reviewer more sympathetic to Cather's retrospection.

Another user, "Terence," similarly recalls that composing a high school book report on *My Ántonia* "'scarred' my adolescence" and "was so awful that I've never cracked another Cather novel since" (Sept. 24, 2024). This resentment toward Cather's work obviously stemmed from its institutional usage. Cather herself did not think assigning her work in classrooms would cultivate artistic appreciation. In fact, Terence quotes literary critic Michael Dirda, who summarized Cather's stance:

> Willa Cather hated to see her fiction anthologized or used as a school text. She feared that instead of discovering her stories and novels on their own, children would grow up with unpleasant memories of being forced to read her work. (254)

Just as Cather desired to limit the mass consumption of her work, so she objected to educational uses that would prevent "individual readers" (O'Brien 465) from autonomously picking up her fiction. Having been a high school English teacher, she wished her fiction to maintain a fruitful, reflective space for her readers, free from "unpleasant memories" of school. Cather's scruples proved justified, as such harrowing memories eventually surfaced among Goodreads users like Terence. And yet, rereading has uniquely transformed readers' opinions on Cather's art. Terence, for one, affirms that Cather's beautiful descriptions made rereading the novel "worth it," although this reader still critiques Ántonia's characterization and settles on a three-star rating. Even among those who detested Cather's work as adolescents, some, upon rereading as adults, find an aesthetic appreciation that would have pleased Cather herself.

Contemporary narratives of rereading do not always end happily. On Amazon.com, where shoppers can also rate and review books on a five-star scale, user "alaskanchick" justifies her two-star rating of *My Ántonia* by explaining that the novel left little "impression" on her as a child and remained "not engaging" to her adult self (July 18, 2017). On the other hand, numerous reviewers on both Amazon and Goodreads speak of rereading Cather's novels as visits with old, beloved friends, guaranteed to produce comfort and pleasure. Like Maud Meagher, Amazon reviewer "Carolyn" praises *My Ántonia* as an irresistible text: "I love Willa Cather's writing style. . . . I've read this book before, but I heard it calling my name again and I could not resist rereading it" (Oct. 22, 2015). Some reviewers even anticipate the joy of future rereading, like Goodreads user "meg," who says, "i would love to reread this book and take some more time to really dissect the symbolism of all the imagery" (Oct. 8, 2024). User "Starry," moreover, suggests that Cather's books assigned in the classroom are not always antithetical to enjoyment. A biology teacher in a school that assigns *My Ántonia* to all ninth-graders, Starry recounts, "When I told one of the humanities teachers that I had read [*My Ántonia*], he said, 'Great. Now read it again.' Because every time he reads it, it seems richer. I'll look forward to a reread in a few years" (Feb. 14, 2024). Twenty-first century

fans are not just eager to revisit the past but also to anticipate the future, promising themselves and others that they will return to the novel with renewed appreciation.

Unlike in the fan mail archive, where extant mentions of rereading typically stem from prior enjoyment of Cather's fiction, today's ordinary readers approach rereading from a variety of emotional positions. Rereading can be a reunion with a favorite text, a chance to reconsider a confusing or irritating novel, or something in between. Rereading Cather's work thus continues to forge links between the epochs of a reader's personal history and the cycles of Cather's historiography. Yet, while sympathizing with Cather's nostalgia, readers may distance themselves from their own past, even recanting their earlier impressions of a novel. In the end, Jim Burden's sense of simultaneously losing and recovering the past finds its mirror in the experiences of Cather's readers, from the twentieth century to the twenty-first. These cycles of reading will only continue among those who find themselves compelled to revisit her narratives, in other words, to anticipate history.

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The Decline and Fall of the Children's Empire: Youth and Brightness in Four of Cather's Early Stories

Sean Lake

A lover of the classics, Willa Cather infused her works with highly meaningful allusions to Greek and Roman antiquity throughout her career.[1] Before enrolling in the University of Nebraska, she studied at the Latin prep school in Lincoln, an experience she would give Jim Burden. As an undergraduate, she took two years of Latin and three years of Greek at the university. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when classical learning was expected, her allusions to ancient words, places, and events, along with historical and mythological exempla (stories used to illustrate a moral point), would have been widely understood by her audience. Today, when a ready grasp of the classics is less common, these allusions still add significant layers of meaning to her work. The present essay focuses on four early stories published between 1897 and 1902 that rely heavily on the "felt presence" of the ancient world: "The Prodigies" (1897), "The Way of the World" (1898), "Jack-a-Boy" (1901), and "The Treasure of Far Island" (1902).[2]

The earliest of these stories was published just after she finished reading Edward Gibbon's six-volume *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in June of 1897 (*Complete Letters* no. 1996); the last came after she began teaching Latin in Pittsburgh's Central High School in 1901. The pattern of decline that she found in Gibbon she wove into these stories, and similar declensionist narratives persist throughout her career. They inscribe the "descending curve" she writes about in the preface to the 1932 edition of *The Song of the Lark* (617).

Gibbon's epic study published between 1776 and 1789 was immediately acknowledged as a masterpiece of history, praised for its style and scope as well as its lucid analysis of the causes that led to the fall of Rome. Beginning in the second century A.D. and continuing to the fifteenth, the six volumes trace complex causes that led to the dissolution of the empire, but Gibbon provides a concise overview in volume 3, chapter 38:

> [T]he decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity ripened the principle of decay; the causes of destruction multiplied with the extent of conquest; and as soon as time or accident had removed the artificial supports, the stupendous fabric yielded to the pressure of its own weight. The story of its ruin is simple and obvious; and instead of inquiring why the Roman empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long.

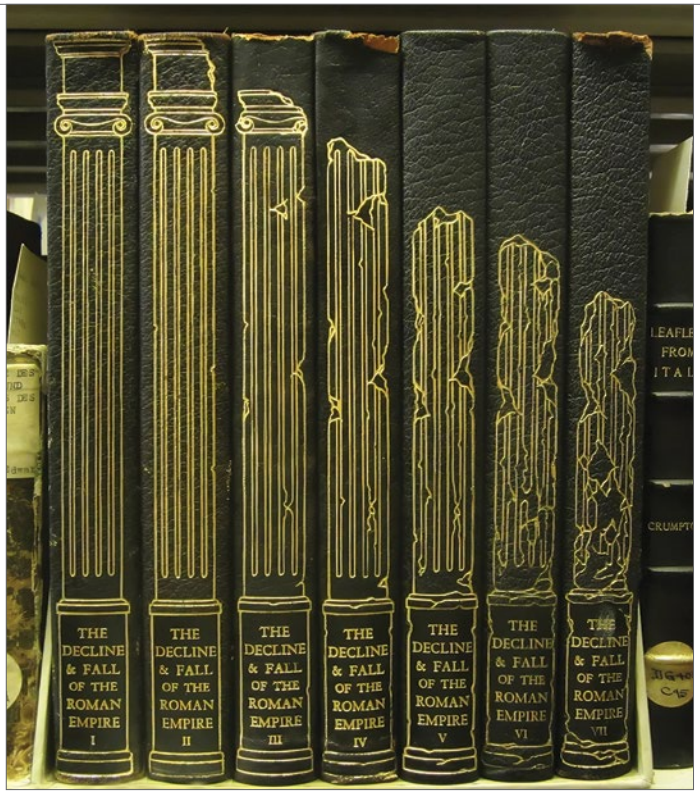
Elsewhere, Gibbon enumerates other forces leading to the fall of Rome, but Cather, writing stories in which greatness becomes a burden leading to decline, seems to have been impressed by his general conclusion in volume 3. Each of the four stories under examination tells of individuals blessed with talent and intelligence, enjoying greatness or early promise. The early lives of these gifted characters are analogous to the Roman Republic, a period before the Empire. The Republic started around 494 B.C.; many scholars and some ancient Romans mark the decline as starting between 146–31 B.C.[3] The Romans themselves considered the Republic a better time compared to the Empire. The literature of the Late Republic is still regarded as the "golden age" of Rome's intellectual achievement, and one of Cather's favorite classical authors, Virgil, in his *Fourth Eclogue* (39 B.C.) and *Aeneid* (finished in 19 B.C.) proclaims the advent of a golden age under the rule of Augustus (c. 31 B.C.–A.D. 14).

In each of the stories discussed here, Cather associates childhood with the ancient past. The child protagonists of these works have significant artistic potential, intellectual promise, or vivid imaginations. Specifics vary, but generally she writes about the gifted child in terms of "golden" days or ages, particularly in "The Treasure of Far Island" and "Jack-a-Boy." However, just as the ideals of antiquity were slowly abandoned or lost, the idealistic world of childhood and the "greatness" of individuals inevitably comes to an end.

It is worth pondering if Cather herself felt a loss of childhood inspiration. It is possible that these stories betray her own anxiety, even in her mid-twenties, that she might suffer a catastrophic collapse after a shining start. These stories offer an early glimpse into her characteristically Greco-Roman perspective in which the timeless paradigms of the past, the rise and fall of empires and individuals, inevitably repeat themselves. They are early intimations of what Cather has Carl Linstrum speak in *O Pioneers!*: "there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never

happened before; like the larks in this country, that have been singing the same five notes over for thousands of years" (110).

"The Prodigies," Bernice Slote observed, was inspired by Cather's attending a concert by the Dovey sisters in Lincoln in September 1895. Cather was impressed by the Doveys' vocal powers at age ten and twelve, but she wondered what such command of technique and execution had cost the sisters ("Prodigies: The Dovey Sisters" 145). "The Prodigies" appeared in the *Home Monthly* in July 1897, soon after Cather told the Rev. James Robert Henry she had finished reading *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In "The Prodigies," the decline is precipitous for the two young siblings pushed into a musical career by their ambitious and prideful mother. Cather evokes the original Latin meaning of "prodigy": "*prophetic sign, omen, portent*," which in Roman parlance often had a negative connotation. The Massey children are certainly ominous in appearance: Cather describes the elder, Hermann, as having "an unusually large head, all forehead, and . . . dark, tired eyes" (10). Nelson MacKenzie, the husband of the focal couple, denounces the exploitation of the Massey children by their mother, saying, "I shouldn't like to be exhibiting my children about like freaks" (9), and his musical wife Harriet agrees that seeing the children sing the parting scene from *Romeo et Juliette* "will be little short of grotesque" (11). The word *grotesque* originally referred to distorted, bizarre, and grossly exaggerated murals in ancient Roman buildings.[4] In the Roman world, "prodigy" could even refer to "a monster."[5]



A 1946 edition by the Limited Editions Club of Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, designed by Clarence P. Hornung.

The real monster of the story, of course, is Kate Massey, whose ambition "drains the life" from her children, taking their talent and exploiting it until she ruins them. Her exhibition of her progeny is far more monstrous and grotesque than the children themselves: "She demanded of every one absolute capitulation and absolute surrender to the object of her particular enthusiasm, whatever that happened to be at the moment" (9). Here Cather is evoking the literal meaning of "enthusiasm"—"being possessed by a god"—another word warning of the ambivalent blessing of inspiration by the gods and prophecy.[6]

Cather alludes to *prodigy* defined as *prophecy* when we learn that the children's teacher (modeled on the Parisian voice teacher Mathilde Marchesi) also taught "the beautiful Sybil" (11). Though ostensibly referring to American-born opera star Sybil Sanderson (1864–1903), the definite article prefacing the name links her with "the" Sibyl, prophetess of ancient Greece and Rome, who figures prominently in Book Six of Virgil's the *Aeneid*. Virgil is one of Cather's most referenced authors, and, as noted above, he wrote about Rome's artistic peak, notably in Book Six of his epic poem.[7]

Discussing the training of the Massey siblings, Cather references the myth of Bellerophon and Pegasus, another ominous prophecy. Mrs. Massey, indulging her false modesty, gushes, "I do not feel that I have any right to curb them or to stop the flight of Pegasus" (10). Cather could expect her original readers to understand the irony of this allusion: Bellerophon attempted to ride the winged horse Pegasus to Olympus to attain immortality; Pegasus arrived, but Bellerophon fell to his death. The monstrous mother does not seem to be aware of this pyrrhic victory. In fact, she is willing to accept collateral losses as long as one of her children succeeds.[8]

After the daughter's illness, Mrs. Massey laments the loss of Adrienne's voice and admonishes her son that he carries "not one destiny" in his throat, but two (11). In the story's last paragraph, Hermann smiles at his mother's remark, but Cather describes it as "the smile which might have touched the face of some Roman youth on the bloody sand, when the reversed thumb of the Empress pointed deathward" (11). Again, Cather paints Mrs. Massey as a cruel Empress without mercy for her own child. Cather illustrates her knowledge of the Roman arena by referring to the sand as bloody: the word "arena" is derived from the Latin word for "sand" because sand absorbed the blood of the violent spectacles held within the space. Here, and elsewhere in these stories, Cather punctuates her meaning at the end of a paragraph, chapter, or story with a classical allusion.[9]

In addition to being a cruel "Empress," Kate Massey is also an embodiment of the ancient Muses' demand of absolute devotion and surrender to their inspiration. Cather describes this aspect of the goddesses in a column on Edgar Allan Poe, published just two years before "The Prodigies": "For Our Lady of Genius has no care for the prayer and groans of mortals, nor for their hecatombs sweet of savor. . . . She takes one from the millions, and when she gives herself unto a man it is without his will or that of his fellows, and he pays for it, dear heaven, he pays!" ("Passing Show" 7). Cather concludes "The Prodigies" with the tragic end of the daughter's promising singing career. Nelson MacKenzie, a medical doctor as well as a sympathetic father, blames the mother for the child's debility, admonishing Kate that the unscrupulous music teachers have "drained your child's life out of her veins" (11).

In "The Way of the World," Cather again draws upon her reading of Gibbon, this time describing the decline and fall of a mock empire. With the poem that prefaces "The Way of the World," Cather evokes a golden age with a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, one of the childhood fantasies that "were done too soon" (10). Like Rome, named after its founder, Romulus, Speckleville is named after its founder, Speckle Burnham, and built almost overnight with packing boxes in his backyard. The fall of the boys' republic comes when the spell of Speckle's imagination is broken: "it was Speckle's fecund fancy more than his back yard that was the real site of that town, and his imagination was the coin current of the realm" (10).

Cather compares the imaginary town specifically to the Roman Republic (ca. 509–31 B.C.), an era revered under the later Empire as the glory days of Rome. One way Cather suggests this comparison is by giving Speckleville its own Republican Club. Cather also names two famous Roman military leaders from the Republican era, Coriolanus and Marius. Both men are negative *exempla* used to illustrate decline.

Just as Coriolanus became a traitor to the Republic, Mary Eliza demands entry to the boys' town, then departs with the New Boy, having betrayed Specklevillian values.[10] Coriolanus's betrayal of Rome stemmed from his contempt of the plebians, or lower classes. The implication is that Mary Eliza, having met the dandified New Boy from Chicago, has started to think she is too good for the plebians. Mary Eliza "thought [the New Boy's] city clothes and superior manners very impressive," Cather tells us, and his letters "vastly more dignified than the rude scrawls of the other boys" (11). As a result, she abdicates with the New Boy to set up their own town outside Speckle's plebian backyard, admittedly "the most disreputable in town" (10).

Speckleville's system of government and commerce are modeled on ancient Rome; its holidays include "feast days and circuses" (10).[11] Circuses (mentioned five times) highlight the tension between Mary Eliza and the boys because the circus games were the main attraction of Rome for the plebians, equating the boys with the contemptible lower classes. According to Juvenal 10.81, *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses) were the only things the plebeians cared about. Indeed, Mary Eliza first wins entry to the boys' town by tempting its citizens with "cookies and cream puffs" from her father's bakery (10).

Cather contrasts the temporal with the eternal when we learn that the New Boy uses the phrase SEMPER IDEM ("always the same") to sign his letters. Cather reproduces the Latin in all capitals as if it were an ancient inscription. Similar is Cather's reference to one of the boys in Speckleville running a museum. This word comes from the Greek *mouseion*, the name for any haunt of the Muses. The Muses are not only goddesses of inspiration, a crucial element in these stories, but they are also the daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, a reminder that childhood fantasies are fleeting.

Her allusion to the second military leader, Marius, comes from Plutarch's *Life of Marius* 40 and his depiction of Marius's civil war against Sulla.[12] Defeated in this civil war around 87 B.C., Marius fled to North Africa, where the local authorities forced him to remain in the nearby ruins of Carthage.[13] After Mary Eliza's departure, Cather describes the crestfallen Speckle as the forlorn general: "[Speckle] sat down with his empty [milk] pails in his deserted town, as Caius Marius once sat among the ruins of Carthage" (11).

"Jack-a-Boy" focuses on the salutary influence of the title character upon the residents of Windsor Terrace, a rooming house populated by lonely, uninspired people. The denizens of the terrace, among them a professor of classics and the narrator (a music teacher), come to adore Jack. "The Professor" introduces the boy to the works of Homer and other stories from Greek myth. Although Jack and his "Greek spirit" briefly reawaken the spark of life in everyone he meets, even rekindling the Professor's passion for his subject, upon Jack's sudden illness and death, the feeble flame of the sad people of Windsor Terrance is extinguished. Through various allusions, Cather evokes the glory of the ancient world, linking it to the brief, bright light of Jack.

Suitably, the majority of the mythological *exempla* are related to the premature death of a youth. Jack's favorite episodes from the *Iliad* are those featuring Patroklos, whose untimely death occurs in *Iliad* Book 16. In addition, Cather alludes to the encounter between Hektor and his infant son. Hektor dies not

long after this encounter, and his child is killed immediately after the fall of Troy.

The Professor is also impressed that Jack "knows the Narcissus story" (5). Narcissus, of course, dies young, undone by his juvenile self-absorption. This detail may be another autobiographical element since when this story was published, Cather was mourning the death of Ethelbert Nevin at age thirty-eight, whom she had profiled in the *Ladies' Home Journal* as "The Man Who Wrote Narcissus."

Two other myths, those of Theseus and Helen of Troy, are juxtaposed in a single paragraph of the story because they are linked. Theseus kidnapped Helen in her youth, causing her father to demand that all future suitors swear to recover Helen if this ever happened again (see Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists,* 557a and *Diodorus Siculus*, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 4.64). She is, of course, abducted to Troy by Paris; the oath demanded of her suitors leads to the siege of that city when Helen's suitors (all the great heroes of Greece) try to take her back. The Professor marvels that Jack compares two stars in the night sky to the eyes of "Golden Helen." The Professor wonders why Jack likes these ancient myths better than modern children's stories, suggesting Jack's deep and individual interest in the classical world (5).

"Jack-a-Boy" features allusions to ancient sculpture as well as literature, allusions that became more common as Cather's career progressed. Particularly, the narrator compares Jack to the sculptures located in the Borghese Gallery in Rome (Cather had not yet been to this gallery, but she must have been aware of its contents). The Borghese Gallery is replete with depictions of youths from ancient myth, like Daphne and Persephone, who die before their time. Cather's allusions to ancient sculpture evoke the past glory of Rome, long gone but carefully preserved in a museum.

The narrator compares the Professor's study to the British Museum, arguably most famous for its collection of artifacts representing the height of Classical Athens (4). Cather evokes the glory days of Athens to illustrate how Jack-a-Boy had briefly ushered in a golden age, or at least golden days, to Windsor Terrace. One of the busts the Professor has in his collection is that of Aristotle, representing Athens's achievement at its peak in the Classical Age. Other busts in his cluttered study are representative of the height of Roman achievement, namely, the leaders that Gibbon terms the "good emperors": Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius (collectively, A.D. 96–180). Theirs was the period, according to the historian, when "the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous" (Volume I: 93), another reminder of the "golden age" so common in these stories.

Cather foreshadows Jack's death with an image of the moon as Artemis's bow (4). Artemis's invisible arrow was blamed for otherwise inexplicable deaths as early as the *Odyssey*. There is no obvious or logical reason for Jack-a-Boy to be struck down. Cather may be thinking of the famous ancient sentiment, "whom the gods love, dies young," usually attributed to the comic poet Menander.[14] After Jack's death, Cather repeats the image of the bow (25). Although Artemis is sometimes, as here, characterized as a destroyer, she is also evoked because she is, like Jack, forever young and pure.[15]

The Professor alludes to the idyllic Arcadia of Virgil's *Bucolics* when Jack dies: "Jack-a-Boy must have recognized some joyous spirit with whom he had played long ago in Arcady, for he left us" (5). Virgil's poems in *Bucolics* present an idealized countryside populated by romanticized poet-shepherds, idealized remnants of an earlier time associated with the height of the Roman Republic. The fourth poem in this collection has long been famous because some early Christians believed it predicted the birth of Jesus, describing a golden age that would begin with the birth of a child. Arcady, like Cather's "childhood empire," is marked by innocence, artistic creativity, and a vision of an idealized childhood. It is also an appropriate choice for Cather because in the second half of Virgil's work, the poems show a darker side of the seemingly pristine countryside. Thomas Hubbard explains the consensus of commentators: "The first half of the [*Bucolics*] has often been seen as a positive construction of a pastoral vision, while the second half dramatizes progressive alienation from that vision, as each poem of the first half is taken up and responded to in reverse order" (46).

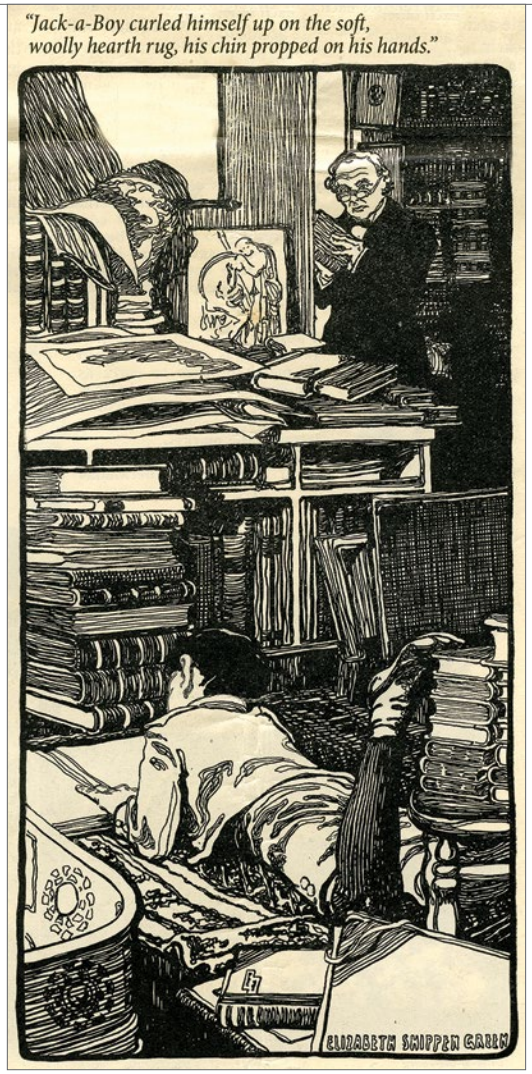
After Jack's death, the Professor reflects upon his life, using two classical allusions—to Mount Parnassus and to the myth of Cupid and Psyche—to convey the inspiration Jack has bestowed:

> Sometimes I fancied he would tarry long enough to sing a little like Keats or to draw like Beardsley, or to make music like Schubert, and confound the wiseacres and pedants of the world, like those other immortal boys from Parnassus, who were sent to us by mistake. But he had too little to hold him back; less, even, than Keats. . . . [He slipped out of this world] beautiful and still a child, like Cupid out of Psyche's arms. They could not spare him up yonder. There are not many such, even on Parnassus. (5)

Psyche is taken from the mortal world in her youth, carried away by Cupid. The allusion to Parnassus is another evocation of the Muses, who are sometimes said to dwell on this mountain. The Professor imagines Jack-a-Boy returns to Parnassus with the "other immortal boys" after briefly charming the people of Windsor Terrace.

In the fourth story of this group, "The Treasure of Far Island," Douglass Burnham returns to Empire City and reunites with a childhood companion, Margie. Douglass's art is drama, invented by the Greeks. In their childhood, Douglass and Margie had, along with other children, buried treasure on an island in the Republican River. Reunited as adults, Douglass and Margie decide to return to it and reclaim the treasure. Like the past glories of antiquity, this treasure is inspiring but difficult to reclaim. Reflecting on their golden days of childhood brings a positive nostalgia to Douglass and Margie, but with the passage of time and Douglass's success in New York, their golden age has been left behind forever. Frequent allusions to the ancient world make a clear point that one can contemplate the past but not regain its glories.

Cather calls the island on which they played "Ultima Thule"—the farthest point—in yet another allusion to a work by Virgil (*Georgics* 1.30). *Georgics*, like *Bucolics* mentioned in "Jack-a-Boy," focuses on agriculturalists and depicts a simple, idealized life associated with an earlier golden age in Roman history.



"Jack-a-Boy curled himself up on the soft, woolly hearth rug, his chin propped on his hands."

Illustration by Elizabeth Shippen Green for the *Saturday Evening Post*, March 30, 1901. Southwick Paper Collection. Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska. TX-50-4000-F21c.

As in "The Way of the World," Cather alludes to Rome's great enemy, Carthage: one of Douglass's plays is called "Regulus to the Carthaginians" (237). Marcus Atilius Regulus was a general famed for his uncompromising patriotism, most famously related in Horace *Odes* 3.5. Regulus chose death over dishonor after he was captured in the First Punic War in 255 B.C. Cather imitates the Roman Empire's idealization of long lost Republican glory as Douglass and Margie set out to recapture an idealized past themselves. Douglass even retains a kind of patriotism to the childhood fantasy world he shares with Margie.

As Douglass and Margie reminisce about the golden days of their childhood, Cather repeatedly evokes the Roman "triumph," literally a parade for successful generals after a campaign. Margie states, "It is strange how those wild imaginings of ours seem, in retrospect, realities, things that I actually lived through . . . whenever I look back on it, it is all exultation and romance,—sea fights and splendid galleys and Roman triumphs and brilliant caravans winding through the desert" (247).

When Douglass first returns to the island, he revels, "Do you know, Margie, it makes me seem fifteen again to feel this sand crunching under my feet. I wonder if I ever again shall feel such a thrill of triumph as I felt when I first leaped upon this sand bar?" (245). Like Speckle, that other Burnham, Douglass has the ability to enthrall others with his imaginings. Margie, however, responds that he should rest his imagination, still somewhat resisting his invitation to relive their childhood romance in such playful musings. Mary Ryder draws into question Margie's abjuring of romance, writing, "Both are individuals who live by the imagination" (*Willa Cather and Classical Myth* 48). Finally, Cather has Margie break her vow "never to grace another of [Douglass's] Roman triumphs" (248), and she surrenders to his idyll of their youthful exploits.

As both Douglass and Margie reenter their childhood mode of playful imagination, Douglass compares Margie to Diana. He teases, "Why did you close the tree behind you, Margie? I have always wanted to see just how Dryads keep house" (246). Some of Cather's favorite Latin texts (Virgil's *Aeneid* at 1.499–500 and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* at 15.489–490 and his *Fasti* at 2.155 and 4.761) link Diana with Dryads, nymphs who inhabited trees and forests.

"The Treasure of Far Island" can be read in counterpoint to the make-believe world created in "The Way of the World," as the two parts of the *Bucolics*. Cather makes an overt allusion to her previous story in the voice of Margie: "Ah, Douglass, you are determined to spoil it all. It is you who have grown up and taken on the ways of the world" (248). This story is set outside Empire City—the polar opposite of the lesser Burnham's Speckleville. Just as Rome grew from a small republic to a great empire, Cather first tells the story of Speckleville, then moves on to what she calls "the children's empire": "In the summer months, when the capricious stream is low, the children's empire is extended by many rods, and a long irregular beach of white sand is exposed . . . dazzling white, ripple marked, and full of possibilities for the imagination" (234).

Douglass and Margie were once content "making epics sung once and then forgotten, building empires that set with the sun" (247). Douglass compares the integrity of their creations to the works of Hellenic poets and quotes a line from Keats's "Fragment of an Ode to Maia" valorizing living in the moment, "rich in the simple worship of a day" (247). But he also must agree with Margie that the very act of burying their treasure hastened the end of their romance: "That was the end of our childhood, and there the golden days died in a blaze of glory" (247). Compounding references to the end of a golden age, Cather has Douglass reflect on the death of Orpheus, an artist who mourned the death of his young bride and who died prematurely himself (246).

Margie, for her part, compares her circumstances to Penelope's vigil for Odysseus, stating that her waiting for Douglass has been "longer than the waiting of Penelope. . . . I could not play anything alone. You took my world with you when you went" (248–49). Douglass realizes, as their lips meet, that she had "caught the spirit of the play" (249). The rest of the quotation evokes the tradition of reciting Homer: "Margie lifted her face from his shoulder, and, after the manner of women of her kind, she played her last card rhapsodically" (248). In ancient times, *rhapsodes* were actors who recited poetry for contests and other performances, perhaps starting as early as the eighth century B.C. with the recitation of Homer's works.[16]

The "children's empire" is a phrase that captures the fantasy world created by the imagination of children—but in the history of any empire, the golden age is followed by an inevitable decline. Cather based the descending curve of her early stories on her recent reading of Gibbon, along with the many and common tragic outcomes of young characters in ancient Greek and Roman myths. Cather's preoccupation with the example of the past is a very Greco-Roman way of thinking. After the Greeks Herodotus and Thucydides produced the first works of history, history was interpreted as the effort to learn valuable, practical, and timeless truths from models set in the distant past. Through myth and history, ancient Greeks and Romans did not think that the truth was something contained in the present, but to be found in stories of the past. In Cather's stories too, the really significant things, like the creative spirit of youth, are located in the golden days of the past, the glory days of the "children's empire." It is a theme she continued in other stories and in the novels *O Pioneers!*, *The Song of the Lark*, and *The Professor's House*. It is memorably evoked in *My Ántonia* with the Latin epigraph from Virgil's *Georgics* 3.66–67, "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit*" ("the best days are the first to flee"). This ancient way of thinking, or "Greek spirit," is such a clear and consistent element of her oeuvre that it is hard to imagine it was not present when she began her career as a creative artist. As she grew into adulthood and took seriously the goal of becoming a writer, she may have feared that her own bright youth might fall into inevitable decline, that her "greatness" would, as Gibbon wrote of the fall of Rome, "yield to the pressure of its own weight."

NOTES

1. Steven Trout's "Hamilton and Higher Education: Revisiting Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* as an Academic Novel" explicates Cather's thoughts about classical education. For further book-length studies on Cather's classical allusions, see Eric Ingvar Thurin's *The Humanization of Willa Cather* and Mary Ryder's *Willa Cather and Classical Myth: The Search for a New Parnassus*. John Murphy's article on Cather and Euripides's Hippolytus offers a concise summary of Cather's classical background and use of allusions (72).

2. The "Enchanted Bluff" (1909) could be included here as well, but it takes an interesting turn in that it adds Cather's interest in ancient Native American civilizations to those of classical antiquity. The themes and other elements of "The Enchanted Bluff" and the novels are still very consistent, but the impact of Cather's own travels adds an important new dimension. "The Professor's Commencement" (1902) and "Paul's Case" (1905) also have similar classical themes along with an abundance of allusions. Though written during the century's first decade, they are better discussed in relation to one another than with the four stories that are the subject of this paper.

3. See Sallust, *The Jugurthine War*, chapter 41 for a date of 146 B.C.: "Before Carthage was destroyed, the people and Senate of Rome conducted the business of the Republic with civility and in moderation, nor were there struggles for glory or dominance among citizens: fear of an enemy retained noble habits among the citizens."

4. See *Oxford English Dictionary* under "grotesque," "The etymological sense of *grottesca* would be 'painting appropriate to grottos.' The special sense is commonly explained by the statement that *grotte*, 'grottoes,' was the popular name in Rome for the chambers of ancient buildings that had been revealed by excavations, and that contained those mural paintings that were the typical examples of "grotesque."

5. See Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary* under *prōdĭgĭum*.

6. *Oxford English Dictionary* under "enthusiasm" provides the now obsolete definition, "possession by a god, supernatural inspiration, prophetic or poetic frenzy; an occasion or manifestation of these."

7. For Cather and Virgil, see Paul Olson, "*My Ántonia* as Plains Epic" (digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/154) and Nathaniel Wagner, *Vergilian Allusions in the Novels of Willa Cather* (cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/446). I have addressed Virgilian allusion in *One of Ours* in "The Scene was Ageless: Arms and a Man Driven by Fate in *One of Ours* and the *Aeneid* (*Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* vol. 59, no.1, Summer 2016, pp. 9–14).

8. See Pindar *Isthmian* 44–49 and *Olympian* 13.91–92 for early and full accounts of this myth.

9. See Levy and Lake (2007) for a discussion of this tendency in *The Professor's House*.

10. Coriolanus's life is the subject of a play by Shakespeare, but his story (perhaps more legendary than historical) is also recounted by the ancient Roman historian Livy and in Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus*.

11. See *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* under "Ludi" and "Circus."

12. Cf. Velleius Paterculus 2.19.4 where the story is told slightly differently.

13. Marius responded to the messenger who tells him he must remain among the ruins, "tell the governor, then, that you have seen Marius sitting as an exile, in the ruins of Carthage." Cather also uses Caius among the ruins of Carthage in her story "Flavia and Her Artists."

14. Menander *Dis Exapatōn* fragment 4 (Sandbach).

15. The same goddess (but under her Latin name, Diana) is evoked in the "Treasure of Far Island," discussed below.

16. See *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* under "Rhapsoden."

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For Young Readers

A Ferret Named Willa

You may have seen ferrets at a pet store or even known friends who kept them as pets. Domesticated ferrets are cute and make lively pets, but those are not the reasons their wild cousins are important.

When Willa Cather was a child in Nebraska, wild black-footed ferrets lived throughout the state. They are predators, carnivores whose primary prey are prairie dogs. Black-footed ferrets are solitary animals, while prairie dogs live in sprawling communities called dog towns. In Cather's *My Ántonia*, Jim goes to a prairie dog town "to watch the brown earth-owls fly home in the late afternoon and go down to their nests underground with the dogs." Prairie dogs are herbivores who eat grass and other vegetation. They can destroy crops, and their holes can harm livestock and farm machinery, so some farmers poisoned them. Without prairie dogs, ferrets didn't have enough to eat.

A ferret named Antonia. Roshin Patel/Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute.

Sibert and Red Cloud, soon after being weaned from their mother Antonia. Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute.

A disease called sylvatic plague also swept through prairie dog and ferret populations. A microscopic organism (bacterium) causes sylvatic plague in prairie dogs. The same bacterium causes bubonic plague, which has had a huge impact on human civilization.

In the late 1970s, black-footed ferrets were thought to be extinct, but in 1981 a small community of ferrets was discovered in Wyoming. Scientists watched this colony

closely, hoping it would expand; however, an outbreak of sylvatic plague and another disease called canine distemper (something domestic dogs are vaccinated against) meant that only eighteen ferrets survived. Scientists, fearful that black-footed ferrets would go extinct for good, caught the ferrets and made them part of something called a captive breeding program. Scientists hoped that by taking good care of the ferrets—feeding them well, protecting them from predators, and giving them medical treatment—they could help the ferrets gradually have enough offspring to release into the wild, creating new ferret populations. Only seven of the eighteen ferrets were able to reproduce and have baby ferrets, or kits. With just seven ferrets capable of being parents, all the new ferrets were very closely related to one another. Scientists knew the ferret population needed more genetic diversity. This is where a ferret named Willa comes in.

Willa the ferret, named after Willa Cather, was captured from the colony in Wyoming. Willa lived until 1988, but she never reproduced. When she died her cells were frozen and stored in the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance's Frozen Zoo. In 1988 the technology to clone animals did not exist, but the hope to do so led scientists to preserve Willa's DNA. In 1996, Dolly, a sheep, became the first animal to be cloned, and in 2020 Willa's genetic material was used to create a cloned ferret. Scientists hoped this ferret, whom they named Elizabeth Ann, would be able to reproduce, but for medical reasons she was unable to have kits. In 2023, scientists created two more clones from Willa's cells,

A black-footed ferret looks back after being released into the wild in Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota. This creature came from a breeding facility run by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. National Park Service photo.

Noreen and Antonia—the latter named after the main character in *My Ántonia*. In the spring of 2024, Antonia mated with a male named Urchin and gave birth to three kits. Sadly, one died, but two of the kits, Red Cloud (named for Red Cloud, Nebraska) and Sibert (taken from a Cather family name that Cather sometimes used as a middle name), are thriving. This marked the first time a cloned individual from an endangered species gave birth to healthy offspring in the United States. Red Cloud and Sibert are living at the Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. They will not be released into the wild, but perhaps some day their descendants will live free in big dog towns like the one Cather knew from her childhood.

Sarah Clere and Nathan Horan

For Young Readers

A Cannibal

Willa Cather's job when she first went to Pittsburgh included finding children's stories for one of the magazines she edited. Here's one of those stories, by her college friend Annie Prey. You can read more about Annie on the following page.

Her name was Matilda, but everybody called her Tilly. Tom said that "folks couldn't have picked out a better name, 'cause Tilly rhymes with silly."

Tom was Tilly's big brother; that is, he thought he was big. He was ten and Tilly was six, but he could make rhymes and that made him feel big. The only rhymes that he had ever thought of yet were "silly" and "Tilly" and "doll" and "squall." But he could read up and improve. Just now he was reading Robinson Crusoe.

He was stretched out in the hammock with his book. Tilly sat in the grass beside him and held her doll. It was lonesome sitting there holding Betsy Jane and thinking. Why wouldn't Tom talk? Tilly hugged Betsy Jane close to her. Betsy Jane was old and homely. She had been out in the rain sometimes, and her hair was all tangled up. The dirt had crept into the corners of her one blue eye. Yesterday she had been out in the sun till the wax on her face had melted so that now her lips were all mixed up with her cheeks and eyebrows.

"I jist don't see what a girl like me's goin' t' play," Tilly said disconsolately as Tom turned a page in his book. Tom apparently was not listening. Tilly went on. "Yes'day I played graveyard, but that ain't much fun. You do something and then you do it over again. You heap up a pile of dirt for a grave, 'thout anything in the grave 'tall, that makes it kind of dull, and then you put a shingle for a gravestone. Then you've got to think up a name to print on it. That's fun, only the nice names is always too hard to spell an' the easy ones ain't ever nice ones. I'm tired of graveyard and I'm tired of Betsy Jane. Tom?

Tom looked up slowly.

"What are you reading, Tom?"

"Cannibals."

"What's a cannibal?" Tom looked cross.

"It's a fellow that eats up other fellers." Now don't ask me a nuther question till supper time." Tilly hadn't heard the last part of Tom's speech.

"Goodness," she gasped, "do they really eat up folks?"

"Yes, they skin 'em and fry 'em and make gravy with 'em." Tom smacked his lips and glared ferociously.

Tilly shivered and subsided. "It's just dreadful," she whispered to Betsy Jane, "But my wouldn't it be nice to play! I'd be the cannibal, of course, though, an' you'd be the other feller."

After a pause, "Betsy Jane, I believe I will. It's better'n graveyard. I can't really eat you, of course, but I can make b'lieve."

So Tilly began. She took off her doll's dress. She found the wax on Betsy Jane's neck was nice and clean. She touched her little white teeth to the clean wax and growled as Towser did when he had a bone. Then she raised her head in surprise. The wax came off in her teeth and it was good—just like gum—she scraped off a little

more and then a little more. She forgot the make-believe cannibal and worked in earnest. All along the neck, on the forehead, then on the face she scraped off the wax. For a long time she worked busily. When the wax was all off she raised her head to chew her gum in peace. Then she thought of something—the cannibals! She felt her heart grow littler and littler.

"Tom," she said in a weak, smothered voice. And there were tears in her eyes.

"Why, Tilly," said Tom kindly, "whatever is the matter?"

Tilly gulped down a hard little sob. "I'm one of 'em," she answered, turning her pale little face away.

"One of what?" asked Tom.

"Cannibals, I've et Betsy Jane," and she held out the little ball of white wax.

Tom had the impudence to laugh. He rolled on the grass and waved what was left of Betsy Jane around his head. He fairly whooped. Tilly was hurt. "I didn't mean to," she explained, "I just started and forgot and kept on. I don't know what to do with her. She looked awful before, and now she's skinned."

Tom sobered down a little. "Bury her," he suggested promptly.

"An' I've got a graveyard now," Tilly said, much relieved. "An' Tom," she went on, "you're such an elegant writer. Do you suppose you could get time to write on the tombstone?"

"Get it," said Tom, and Tilly did. Tom wrote:

"Betsy Jane,
Beloved eleventeenth doll of Tilly North,
Et up by cannibals and skinned."

And Tilly chewed Betsy Jane's skin while she dug the grave.

Annie Prey

This little old girl is *Wax Headed Doll.* She was painted by Dorothy Brennan in 1937. She lives in the National Gallery of Art's Index of American Design.

Doll Heads, Yum?

What a thing! Whoever heard of taking a bite out of a little doll's head? Not us, that's for sure. But once upon a time it was very common that toy dolls had heads made of paraffin wax, which was once also sold as chewing gum. The doll's head might have been hollow, where the wax was poured into a mold and then hair and facial features were added after the wax was set. Or the dolls might have had heads made of something else like papier-mâché or wood, and the wax was put on top of that. Either way, there was lots of wax involved, long ago. And if some playful little person wanted to take a bite, well, we guess they could. But we wouldn't recommend it!

Annie Prey and Willa Cather

When Willa Cather traveled east to Pittsburgh in the summer of 1896, her real job was to edit the *Home Monthly* magazine. But she also agreed to edit the children's pages of the *National Stockman and Farmer*, the farm paper that had made her employer's fortune. Launching the *Home Monthly* kept her very busy. Because she didn't have a backlog of purchased material, she had to write up to a third of the first issues herself using many pen-names. Published weekly, the *Stockman* had even stricter deadlines. Every Thursday she had to fill two oversized pages of the "Our Young Folks" department. She worked late into the evenings, and her magazine work haunted her dreams, as she wrote to friends. What was she to do?

She decided to write to her friends and classmates back in Lincoln, Nebraska, for their help—and their creative writing. We know because one of her letters was preserved by a classmate, Annie Prey, who also wanted to be a writer, but whose path led to teaching (and raising a family and homesteading) in South Dakota instead. The text of this letter follows (and note that Willa Cather misspelled Annie's name).

July 11, 1896

Miss Annie Pray
University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebr.

Dear Miss Pray:
If I remember rightly you used to write some very clever children's stories. Perhaps after my day you wrote stories of other kinds, too, but I do not know as to that. In my connection with this magazine it has occurred to me that perhaps the publishers might be able to use some of your work in that line. They need some good children's stories, and of course I should be glad to give the University girls any advantage I may be able. Please send some of your work, if you should care to have us use it, and if we can make any use of it we will make you an offer for such of it as might be needed.

Very sincerely,
Willa Cather
c/o Home Monthly
East End
Pittsburgh
Penn.
(*Complete Letters* no. 2042)

Annie Prey in her university years.

Willa kept her word. In the coming months, stories, poems, and essays by her friends and former instructors at the University of Nebraska appeared in both the *Stockman* and *Home Monthly*. The lines of connection between Annie and Willa are many. They were born in 1873 and spent their early years on prairie homesteads. Annie's grandparents were the first European American settlers in the Lincoln area, while Willa's family came to Nebraska relatively late in 1883. Horrible storms like the Schoolchildren's Blizzard of 1888 marked both of their childhoods.

Annie began prep school in Lincoln the year before Willa, but she did not take her bachelor's degree until the year after her friend. Like Leslie Ferguesson of Cather's story "The Best Years," Annie had to teach in a one-room school after her eighth-grade year (1888–89) and again for a second year (1891–92), to earn money to enter the University of Nebraska.

Annie and Willa took many of the same courses (albeit a year apart) with the same professors, such as Herbert Bates, Lucius Sherman, and Fred Fling. But an introductory journalism course, taught by Will Owen Jones, the managing editor of the *Nebraska State Journal*, cemented their friendship. Jones, according to Bernice Slote, was interested in encouraging young writers. He coached a journalism club in the first semester of 1893–94 and taught a class on practical journalism the second semester. Bernice Slote determined that Willa and her friend Flora Bullock were enrolled in Jones's class (Slote 13, 456), and Annie was also in this class, as established by a diary entry for October 30, 1893, by Annie's uncle, Derrick Lehmer (who had been managing editor of the *Hesperian* newspaper before Cather): "Annie is taking up 'Reporting,' whatever that is, and Frank will attend the lectures herself. Cather has asked Annie to compete for the prize" (30). "Frank" was the family nickname of Annie's mother, Frances Lehmer Prey, who also sat in on lectures. Willa's encouragement of Annie's contest entry, noted by her uncle, suggests that the two young women were friends even then.

In addition to English, Annie was good at math, a subject Willa hated. After teaching for a year with her bachelor's degree, Annie returned to the University of Nebraska to earn dual master's degrees in English and mathematics so she could teach college. By 1898, Annie had become head of the English Department at York College in York, Nebraska, where she met her husband, Danish-born professor of modern languages Theodore Jorgensen. Soon Theodore felt called to be a minister of the gospel, which led the couple to Kansas, Iowa, and finally South Dakota, which had only been opened to homesteading in 1909. The couple eventually had five children. They attended the country high schools where their parents taught, and all five later earned degrees at the University of Nebraska. The eldest, Ted, became a professor of physics there. Annie kept writing—a lifetime of stories, poems, and many letters are preserved in her collected papers at the University of Nebraska, but she never published a book.

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Timothy W. Bintrim

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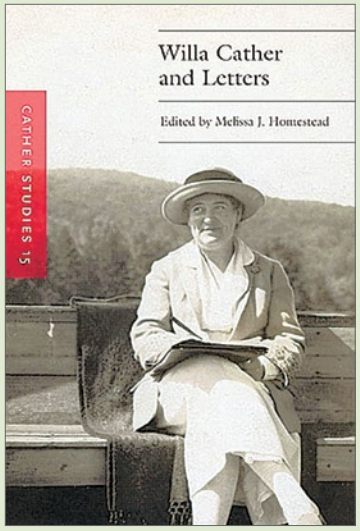

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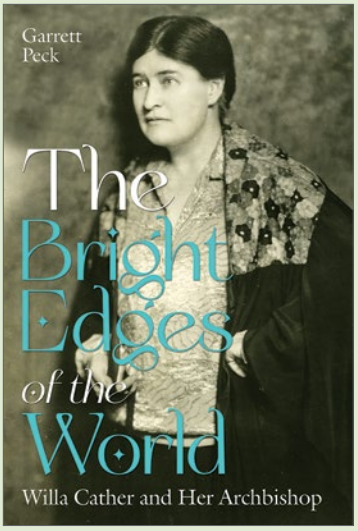

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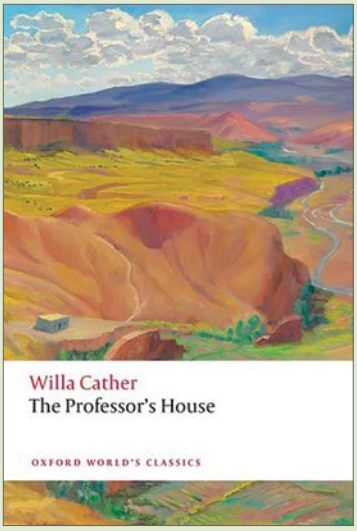

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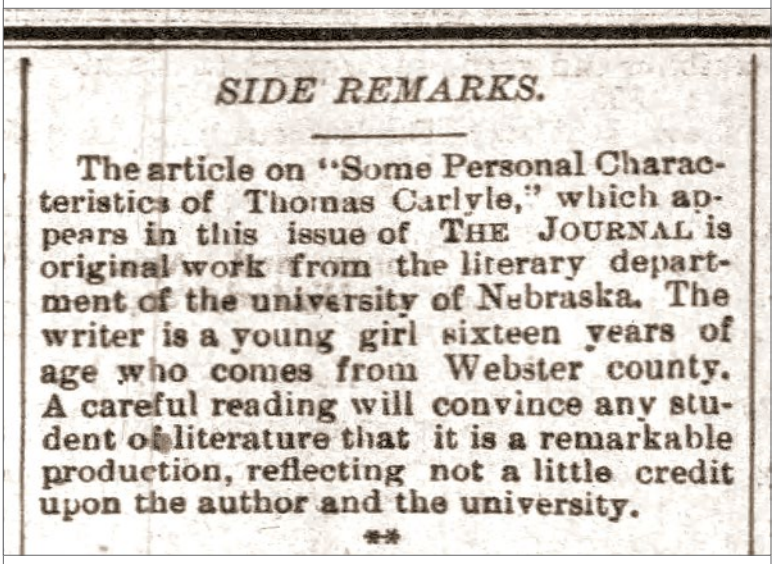
Willa Cather and the News: How the World Came to Red Cloud

Sallie Ketcham

"The past is a foreign country," novelist L. P. Hartley wrote in 1953; "they do things differently there." For postmodern readers and students of Willa Cather's works, the conventions and zeitgeist of nineteenth-century Nebraska can seem strange, quaint, or challenging—if occasionally still familiar. In *Cather Among the Moderns*, Janis Stout maintains, "if Cather's writing is to be read in resonance with the past," then her work must also "be read with reference to the works of her contemporaries" (187). Nebraska's pioneer press was among her formative contemporaries. One rich source of primary historical and cultural context is the *Red Cloud Republican*, the newspaper Charles Cather acquired as part owner in 1888 ("Articles of Incorporation").[1] Readers who immerse themselves in Nebraska's historic newspapers, particularly the *Red Cloud Republican*, can still catch intriguing glimpses of Cather's world through Cather's eyes.

Although Willa Cather long remembered the "first time I was ever confronted by myself in print" (*Complete Letters* no. 0881), in Charles Gere's *Sunday Lincoln Journal* in 1891—her precocious first-year essay on Thomas Carlyle—her interest in writing and journalism clearly predates this debut. By the time she left Red Cloud for the University of Nebraska's preparatory Latin School in 1890, she had already honed valuable writing skills as the *Red Cloud Republican*'s cub reporter and junior editor. Her early apprenticeship at the *Red Cloud Republican* molded her as a reader, just as she molded the *Red Cloud Republican*.



SIDE REMARKS.

The article on "Some Personal Characteristics of Thomas Carlyle," which appears in this issue of THE JOURNAL is original work from the literary department of the university of Nebraska. The writer is a young girl sixteen years of age who comes from Webster county. A careful reading will convince any student of literature that it is a remarkable production, reflecting not a little credit upon the author and the university.

**

This editor's note appeared on page 4 of the *Nebraska State Journal* on Sunday, March 1, 1891, the day that Cather's Carlyle essay ran on page 14.

In 1891, the year Cather entered the university, it's unlikely that any college student in the state—male or female—could compete with her real-world experience as a journalist. By 1893, she had advanced to managing editor of the *Hesperian*, the university's leading student publication. "The truth is the *Hesperian* was Willa practically," another staffer later admitted; "the rest of us looked wise and did nothing" (quoted in Brown 57). The only woman on the staff, Willa Cather took over the *Hesperian* because she could—because she knew how. She had already done her apprenticeship in Red Cloud.

Like her parents, Willa Cather was a voracious news reader. Decades after the family moved from Virginia to Nebraska, Charles Cather continued to subscribe to the Winchester, Virginia, newspaper to keep up with friends, family, and social events in the Shenandoah Valley (Romines 326). Charles Cather's brief tenure as a "newspaper man," which was a prestigious clique in Nebraska, likely brought other news editors and publishers into the family's orbit, men like Charles Gere of Lincoln, who mentored and employed Willa in 1893. Not surprisingly, the Cathers' curious daughter caught the news bug early. Even within the imaginary world of Sandy Point, her beloved childhood play town, she reserved the two most influential positions for herself: mayor and newspaper editor ("To Live Intensely" 30).

In Red Cloud, in the 1880s, books were scarce, expensive, and loaned out warily—like cash. Newspapers, on the other hand, were cheap and ubiquitous. Because a literate, well-informed electorate was considered essential to the American experiment, from 1794 Congress had mandated free or very low postage rates for newspapers, which greatly expanded the subscription market for special interest and foreign language newspapers. At the age of eleven, when Cather began delivering mail to her rural neighbors on horseback—many of whom were newly arrived, homesick farmers—her mail bag was an emotional survival kit (Goth 127). Along with letters and parcels, it would have included copies of Nebraska's polyglot press: The Danish *Stjernen*, "The Star," published in Dannebrog; the *Nebraska Staats-Anzeiger*, or "State Advertiser," published in German in Lincoln, and with a large regional circulation; and Omaha's *Pokrok Západu*, the "Progress of the West," one of several Czech weeklies. The old-world typefaces and the scrolling scripts of the foreign press must have intrigued the young mail carrier, whose interest in ancient and modern

languages developed early. If she were invited in for refreshment, she could literally read the writing on the wall because many homesteaders lined their sheds and soddies with these papers, hung plumb for future reference, to cut the relentless prairie wind. Real-time dissemination of national news was made possible due to new technology—the telegraph—which had sped west across Nebraska with the railroads, and the arrival of the Prouty Printing Press, dubbed "the Grasshopper" for its light weight, portability, and the swinging bars that activated its whirring cylinder. Linotype, the next breakthrough in printing, arrived in Nebraska around 1896, the year Cather moved to Pittsburgh.

When Willa Cather flipped through the Red Cloud papers, she regularly encountered her own name and accounts of her family's activities. Daryl Palmer suggests this social recognition was a "powerful experience" for Cather as a girl (63). Over time, these contemporary news articles have yielded a wealth of biographical detail regarding Cather and her peers. In the 1880s, however, Cather was absorbing more than local gossip. The Red Cloud newspapers exposed her to national and international events, political commentary, immigration stories, Indigenous affairs (interesting, considering the absence of Indigenous peoples in Cather's early work, a topic to which I will return in more detail), the rare professional women in the news, war coverage, theater reviews, farm reports, western humor, and the Nebraska social scene. By the time she began writing for the *Hesperian* and Gere's *Nebraska State Journal*, Cather already knew what Nebraska readers expected from their lively, freewheeling press. As a young journalist, she possessed some distinct intellectual advantages: highly literate parents who encouraged their children, especially their daughters, to read and learn; a privileged Virginia childhood where the classics, art, and culture were traditionally prized; and a new Nebraska hometown on the main Burlington rail line. In addition, after Charles Cather made over the back space of his business for her, Willa Cather had yet another room of her own—an office in town to supplement her rose-bower bedroom at home. According to Edith Lewis, who summarized an 1890 letter (afterward destroyed) from Cather to her friend and teacher Alice Goudy, fifteen-year-old Willa wrote editorials, read proofs, and managed the books of the *Red Cloud Republican* from her father's loan office (*Complete Letters* no. 3302). The *Republican* was an ideal creative space for any youngster with a free-ranging imagination, a wildly active mind, and eclectic interests. She was clearly excited about her new role at the paper, where she worked alongside friend, editor, and mentor Dr. Gilbert McKeeby. You can hear her adolescent enthusiasm in a hurried 1889 letter to family friend Helen Stowell. "Do you take the Republican?" Cather wrote. "I wish you did as I am on of the staff reporters and gaurentee it to be the newsiest paper printed in town, you know I have a natural propensity for knowing the business of the town in general . . . if you want to know all the social ins & outs, Take the Republican, only $1.00 a year and remember that I am an agent allways ready to recieve subscriptions" (*Complete Letters* no. 0003).

In the lost Goudy letter, Cather listed her interests as astronomy, botany, and scientific experiments. The *Red Cloud Republican* certainly reflects such eclectic interests, which suggests either that Cather was writing, selecting, and editing the content herself (as Edith Lewis maintained), or that her intellectual interests were being shaped by the news articles she read. Truly the *Republican* was a hodgepodge, in the manner of small local papers of the time. There were articles on the phenomenon of post-amputation "ghost limbs," phylloxera destroying the grape vines of France, beekeeping, astronomical speculation about the star of Bethlehem, scientific discussions of why the sky is blue, firsthand visitor accounts of the Paris catacombs, and descriptions of ancient Egyptian archaeological discoveries. Other great mysteries lay closer to home. "Quite a relic was found in the Platte river near Fremont, one day last week," wrote one citizen scientist; "It seems to be the thigh bone of the prehistoric mastodon from the knee up and measured eighteen inches in length. Around the knee the measure is 24½ inches" ("Quite a Relic").

Red Cloud's population grew more than 170 percent between 1880 and 1890, from 677 to 1,839 inhabitants (Drozd and Deichert). That's not a large readership, but it was enough for the town to support four newspapers at the end of the 1880s: the *Red Cloud Republican*, the *Red Cloud Chief*, the *Webster County Argus*, and the *Red Cloud Helmet*. Although the *Republican* folded after two years, the *Red Cloud Chief* is still in print today. The *Red Cloud Helmet*, a temperance newspaper published for a time in the late 1880s, sported Webster County's catchiest slogan: *No North, No South, No Saloon*.

The *Red Cloud Republican* was a typical western newspaper of its day. It followed a standard, eight-page, six-column format. State and local stories led on page one. National and international stories dominated the rest of the front page, thanks to real-time dispatches from newswire services like New York's Associated Press. By the fall of 1889, Cather would have been thoroughly familiar with newspaper production, the "printer's devils" who set copy, the "hellboxes" of broken, discarded type, and the cacophony of the press (*Complete Letters* no. 0004). It was tiring, time-consuming work for the high-school student, who later described the news business as the place "where men grind out their brains on paper until they have not one idea left—and still grind on" ("Burglar's Christmas" 8).


RED CLOUD REPUBLICAN.

OL. II. RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 1889. NUMBER 1.

The masthead of the earliest extant issue of the *Red Cloud Republican*, September 13, 1889.

The *Red Cloud Republican* was a community builder and announcer; it provided social commentary and Sunday school lessons; it distributed information on legal proceedings, land transactions, and business deals. It was a clearinghouse of state and Webster County personal information. It chronicled the weddings, births, deaths, illnesses, and the social and business trips of residents. Correspondents from small neighboring communities like Bladen and Catherton acted like stringers and provided updates on rural affairs.

Like today, however, news editors made the command decision "if it bleeds, it leads." The Red Cloud papers were awash in sensational coverage, which perhaps influenced Cather's early florid fiction. Violent crime and work, rail, or farm injuries were covered in explicit detail, even if they occurred in other counties. Suicides were of special interest—to Cather, who never forgot the story of the suicide of Francis Sadilek, and to the public. Suicide was viewed as a particular tragedy and an irredeemable sin, but the commentary could be truly laconic and insouciant, like this account: "Mrs. Eugene Easton, living three miles from Shelton, tried to commit suicide by taking poison. The act was prompted by jealousy. She will probably die" ("Over the State"). On September 13, 1889, which must have been a slow news day, the *Republican* published an account of *rattlesnakes* committing suicide ("Snakes Commit Suicide").

The breathless tone of the Red Cloud newspapers can make for interesting and entertaining reading. Apparently—in Nebraska—shark attacks were just as titillating in 1890 as they are today:

> Raymond D. O'Dell, of New York . . . had an exciting experience with sharks. While he was raking for clams an immense man-eating shark made a rush for him. It was followed by seven others of the same variety. He fought the sharks with his iron clam rake, at the same time retreating to shoal water. One shark made a dash from the rear and closed his jaws on O'Dell's arm. A man who was watching from the shore and was armed with a rifle put a ball through the shark's head and went to O'Dell's rescue in a boat just as he was fainting and about to become a victim to the rest of the monsters. ("Almost Eaten by Sharks")

Every so often, the domestic sights and sounds of Cather's childhood on the bricks of Webster Street come to life. For an untitled selection of local news for the July 4, 1890 edition, an unnamed aficionado of fairy tales and creative speller noted, "One of the sweetest sights on our streets is little Norma Richardson on her Fairy tricycle, from the appearance of the two together we should judge that the tital 'fairy' applied to the rider as well as the handsome little steed." Another item one column away noted that "Willa Cather and Margie Miner are in Superior spending the 4th" (Local news, July 4, 1890).

To prevent any show of partialism in a small town, savvy local merchants advertised in all the local papers. Mail-order companies also advertised in the *Republican*, offering the likes of patent medicines for "Fat Folks" and cures for opium addiction—which was a serious social problem, especially among wounded veterans after the Civil War. Charles Cather's recurring advertisement for his farm loan business was short and sweet: "Cheap Farm Loans. Interest straight 8 percent. Can pay part or all of principal any year and stop interest. Well secured notes bought. Insurance in good companies. Office over postoffice" ("Cheap Farm Loans"). Since the timing of a grain or livestock sale was (and remains) critical for farmers, the farm report and the Burlington train schedule were prominently listed in the paper. Any updates were displayed at the post office.

The paper poked gentle fun at prominent merchants like Charles Wiener, Cather's friend and the prototype for Mr. Rosen in "Old Mrs. Harris." Wiener was one of the most successful and well-liked merchants in town; he regularly ran bold, illustrated, two column promotions for his clothing store, detailing the quality of his New York stock. On September 13, 1889, the *Republican*'s local news column opened with this brief item: "C. Wiener clothes the naked" (Local news, September 13, 1889).

Women's suffrage received little coverage in county newspapers, although the issue was a flashpoint in Nebraska cities in the 1880s and 1890s. Apart from Indigenous writer and advocate Susette La Flesche and Elia Peattie of the *Omaha World-Herald*, women's voices and bylines were uncommon in the Nebraska press. Another notable exception was Clara Bewick Colby, who in 1883 founded the *Women's Tribune* in Beatrice; her paper went on to become a leading suffrage publication. In a larger town, Harriet S. Brooks wrote suffrage and women's rights

articles for the *Omaha Republican*. In Lincoln, Mary Baird Bryan advocated publicly for the vote. Women in Nebraska did not achieve full suffrage until 1920, with the ratification of the 19th amendment. In small-town papers like the *Red Cloud Republican*, women's issues were generally consigned to the charitable activities of club and church women, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, details of local picnics, parties, and outings, and a smattering of regional stories like the establishment of a Women's Pavilion at the World's Fair.

Right before sixteen-year-old Cather left for Lincoln and Latin School, a *Red Cloud Republican* editorial argued for equal opportunity in higher education, a controversial subject in 1890. It's tempting to hear the unfiltered, outspoken, ingenuous voice of young Willa Cather, who later dubbed the disapproving matrons of Red Cloud "the town cats" (*Complete Letters* no. 1214) and rated their conversation as mostly "babies and salads" ("Tommy"):

> The period from seventeen to twenty-one is the most critical one of life. How many bright boys have you seen at eighteen enter prematurely into some profession with little or no preparation. . . . At a college he would have had time for deliberation and found the real tendency of his talents and would have entered upon his career a mature and well-developed man. The same with girls, she who is a social queen at sixteen is at thirty-six a broken down old woman unfit for any duty, much less those of motherhood. ("A Plea for the Student")

Interestingly, the *Red Cloud Republican* rarely carried racist stories or cartoons, an absolute staple in most Nebraska newspapers of the time. The *Republican* catered to old Free-Soilers, former abolitionists, Union veterans, and their wives and families, which may account in part for this unusual omission. Or it may reflect a conscious editorial decision by Dr. McKeeby, who had served in the 1st Wisconsin Heavy Artillery Regiment during the Civil War, and his young assistant editor.

On the other hand, the removal of Nebraska's Indigenous people—arguably "the inexplicable presence of the thing not named" in Cather's prairie stories—*is* covered in the *Republican*. As in other Nebraska papers, articles on "Indian affairs" tended to be cursory and relegated to three topics (all viewed from the settler colonial perspective): the massive 1890 reservation land grab on the Nebraska–South Dakota border; agent reports on reservation conditions, rations, and annuities; and ripping tales of the wild West ("Settlement at Once"). This was the status quo until the massacre at Wounded Knee on December 29, 1890. In the words of Native historian David Treuer, Wounded Knee "became a touchstone of Indian suffering, a benchmark of American brutality, and a symbol of the end of Indian life, the end of the frontier, and the beginning of modern America" (1). At the time, however, as the story broke and its brutal reality sank in, Nebraska readers who followed official news accounts of the massacre were served up a very different, widely popular, and jingoistic assessment of the conflict by their regional press.

The horrific facts tell another story. In late December 1890, Lakota Chief Spotted Elk began moving his band of starving Miniconjou and Hunkpapa Sioux to the Pine Ridge Reservation, a small portion of which is located in northwestern Nebraska. He planned to meet and consult there with Chief Red Cloud, the legendary Oglala warrior for whom Cather's hometown had been named. On December 28, soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry commanded by Colonel James W. Forsyth intercepted Spotted

Journalist and Indigenous advocate Susette La Flesche, photographed by José María Mora ca. 1879. She was the elder sister of Susan La Flesche Picotte, the first Native American woman in the United States to earn a medical degree. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Elk's people and ordered them to set up camp beside Wounded Knee Creek. The next day, probably following an altercation over a hunting rifle, the U.S. soldiers turned their revolving, canon-mounted Hotchkiss guns on the native encampment. As many as three hundred Natives were mowed down in the snow, including dozens of women and children. Twenty-five U.S. soldiers died at the scene. Because the soldiers surrounded the Natives to prevent their escape, most of the soldiers were killed by friendly fire (Treuer 5–8).

In the wake of the massacre, journalists swarmed Rushville, Nebraska, the train station closest to the Pine Ridge site. Among them were Susette "Bright Eyes" La Flesche Tibbles, a writer and Indigenous advocate of Ponca, Iowa, and European descent, and her husband, Thomas Henry "T. H." Tibbles, Populist politician and correspondent for the *Omaha Bee* and the *Omaha Morning Herald*. T. H. Tibbles was a civil rights firebrand; he had fought with John Brown's raiders in "Bleeding Kansas," where he was captured and tortured by proslavery forces before escaping on foot (Tibbles 47–56). The couple wrote eyewitness commentary from the massacre site for the *Omaha Morning Herald*. Eschewing the "exaggeration, distortion and plain faking" of the national media, Susette La Flesche's writing differed from the pack (Reilly quoted in Pedigo 81). "Surrounded by reporters that delighted in this [sensationalism], Susette told the truth and brought to this telling an experience none of the others could have if they had tried," historian Erin Perdigo asserts (81). The mass shooting was covered by over twenty newspapers, including the *Red Cloud Chief*. (Coincidentally or not, the *Republican* had folded the previous August, one month before Cather moved to Lincoln to attend university prep school.) On January 2, The *Lincoln Journal Star* reported its version of the "battle" at Wounded Knee, including the horrific aftermath. Under headlines blaring "Indian Treachery Once More Manifest" and "One Hundred and Fifty of the Most Desperate and Treacherous Red Skins Bite the Dust," the writer recorded truthfully, albeit nonchalantly, "The Indian men, women and children then ran to the south, the battery firing rapidly as they ran. . . .To the south many took refuge in a ravine, from which it was difficult to dislodge them. . . .The soldiers are SHOOTING THEM DOWN [sic] wherever found; no quarter given by anyone" ("Full Fifty Slain").

As early as February 10, the massacre served as morbid entertainment at a masquerade ball in Lincoln. The *Courier*, Lincoln's society newspaper, described the scene: "Company D, of the National Guards, and a band of Indians impersonated by members of the Turn Verein [a German fraternal organization focused on gymnastics and vigorous athletics], gave a very graphic reproduction of the battle of Wounded Knee, and the ghost dance, the whole winding up with a magnificent tableau representing the goddess of liberty surrounded by soldiers with the dead boys in blue and Indians lying about in picturesque attitude. . . . All pronounced the ball for pure and unalloyed pleasures one of the best ever held in the city" (Local news, February 14, 1891). On April 10, 1891, an article in the *Red Cloud Chief* stated, "For gallantry in the Wounded Knee affair, the president [Benjamin Harrison] has awarded certificates of merit to Nathan Tellman, Richard Costner, and William Girdwood, privates of the Seventh cavalry. He has also directed that the pay of those men be increased $2 per month" ("News of the Week"). In all, twenty Medals of Honor were awarded to Seventh Cavalry officers and soldiers at Wounded Knee (Treuer 88). After decades of Lakota objection, the medals are currently undergoing an official review by the U.S. Department of Defense.

"Relics" and "curios" from the massacre site immediately made their way into the archives of the Nebraska State Historical Society, then housed at the university in Lincoln. In a February 15, 1891, *Hesperian* article, written just a few weeks after the massacre, an unknown student writer described them:

> This collection has been augmented by a valuable and interesting collection of relics gathered from the field of Wounded Knee, presented by the Omaha *Bee*'s press correspondent. Among the more interesting articles may be mentioned a well worn blood-stained Indian belt attached to which was several cartridges and the sheath of a scalping knife. Also a pair of Indian bracelets that Chief Big Foot's squaw took from her wrists and gave to the *Bee*'s correspondent,[2] as a "thank offering" for a drink of water that he gave her after she had been shot and carried to the rear. Another interesting relic is a psalm-book found on the body of a "good Indian." When we were examining this book three Sunday-school cards fell out, silent witness of an Indian's incongruities. All of these relics are more or less blood-stained and all have the strong and disagreeable odor that is indisputable of the genuineness of the articles.[3] (Local news, February 15, 1891)

More than two years later, during Cather's editorship of the *Hesperian*, another unnamed writer rediscovered the Wounded Knee collection and its blood-stained relics: "Among other interesting things there on exhibition are the trousers and 'ghost shirt' worn by the leader of the Indians in the battle of Wounded Knee, and a belt and scalping knife found on the body of a squaw" ("The Buildings"). Intriguingly, on the same page, Professor Herbert Bates, Cather's rhetoric professor, mentor, and lifelong friend, is mentioned: "Prof. Bates spent the summer in a characteristic way cruising about the great

lakes. He reports that Lake Michigan is good sailing and a fair substitute for the ocean" ("The Faculty Abroad").

Herbert Bates, of course, was the prototype for Professor Gaston Cleric in *My Ántonia*; his summer sailing excursions on Lake Michigan instantly recall Professor Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor's House*. But perhaps equally significantly, in 1894 Herbert Bates married Eda Tibbles—the eldest daughter of T. H. Tibbles and stepdaughter of Susette La Flesche. Surely at some point in Cather's university years, during their intense intellectual conversations, Cather and Bates might have discussed native dispossession and Wounded Knee? And yet in Cather's prairie novels, the Indigenous history of Nebraska is a cypher. Although there are several possible explanations for this omission, Cather's lack of knowledge or exposure to native issues is not among them. Perhaps she thought it was not her story to tell. Cather and Bates remained in contact for decades; if it still survives, their correspondence might throw more light on the subject, but to date it has not resurfaced.

Nebraska Newspapers, a collaborative site developed by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the Nebraska State Historical Society, outlines the history of newspaper publishing in Nebraska. The collection includes digitized newspapers from across the state, which are fully searchable and date back to Nebraska's first newspaper, the *Nebraska Palladium*, established in Bellevue in 1854, and makes the *Red Cloud Chief* and the University of Nebraska's *Hesperian* readily searchable. The Library of Congress also maintains a longstanding digital collection of national historic newspapers called *Chronicling America*, which provides access to the National Digital Newspaper Program, a partnership between the National Endowment of the Humanities and the Library of Congress. The *Red Cloud Republican*, which has not yet been digitized by the National Digital Newspaper Program, is searchable only through the subscription service *Newspapers.com* (a subsidiary of *Ancestry.com*) or on microfilm at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud and the Willa Cather Archives in Lincoln.

When I began this research, the future of *Nebraska Newspapers* seemed assured, its value and usefulness affirmed by librarians, historians, and the public. As this article goes to press, however, the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has canceled a $300,000 NEH grant that supported *Nebraska Newspapers* as well as other grants that funded Cather scholarship at the University of Nebraska. Dr. Andrew Jewell, who has done much to digitize Cather's writings and make them freely available, commented, "The Digital Newspaper Project, which has been going on for several years, has been one of our most well-used platforms. [For] people who want to know their family history, who understand the history of their communities in Nebraska, the newspapers are a critical resource" (quoted in Ozaki). It remains to be seen whether the historic newspapers that were once such a ubiquitous part of Cather's life and education will be limited in our generation to paying subscribers to *Newspapers.com*. Public archives provide valuable and sometimes startling additions to our understanding of public figures, including Willa Cather. A price cannot be placed on this knowledge. It certainly deserves modest public funding.

NOTES

1. The Articles of Incorporation of the "Red Cloud Publishing Company," publishers of the *Red Cloud Republican*, appeared in the July 27, 1888 issue of the *Red Cloud Chief* and again in several issues of the *Chief* over the following weeks. The listed "incorporators" were J. L. Miner, J. L. Miller, W. N. Richardson, J. P. Albright, G. E. McKeeby, W. S. Garber, C. F. Cather, and W. C. Picking. Although Charles Wiener's name does not appear, this list suggests the makeup of the "Big Eight" who stood on one side of the local feud during these years (Bennett 24–26). The *Republican* likely began publishing soon after the incorporation of the Red Cloud Publishing Company, but the earliest extant issue is dated September 13, 1889.

2. The relics came from Charles H. "Will" Cressey, who actually witnessed the massacre. See *Sting of the Bee: A Day-by-Day Account of Wounded Knee and the Sioux Outbreak of 1890–1891 as Recorded in the Omaha Bee*. It is important to note that Cressey did not commercialize and sell these items but instead sent them to the Nebraska Historical Society soon after the massacre.

3. Because soldiers and scavengers looted the massacre site, there was a heavy trade in Wounded Knee curios, both real and counterfeit. For additional context, see R. Eli Paul, "Wounded Knee and the 'Collector of Curios.'"

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Bruce Baker (1935–2025)

Bruce Baker, an extremely active member of the Cather community for many years, passed away on May 18 in Omaha, preceded by his wife Karen on April 24.

Bruce and Karen Baker at the Willa Cather Spring Conference in 1989. Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center. PHO-3-010.

Bruce was born on January 21, 1935, in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in the midst of the Depression, and moved onto a nearby farm when he was a young boy. Encouraged by an influential English teacher in high school, Bruce applied to—and was accepted by—Harvard College, and he headed east in 1953. Intending to eventually attend Harvard Law School and help out with his father's real estate business in Council Bluffs, Bruce was originally a history major. Gradually, though, he became more attracted to the study of literature (although he pointed out that he never read any Willa Cather while at Harvard) and in 1957 graduated with his B.A. in a combined "history and literature" program. During this time, too, he learned something that would later help him identify with Willa Cather: how it felt to be from the Midwest and live amidst the traditions and cultural offerings of a big Eastern city.

Newly married to Karen, whom he had met in high school, Bruce returned to Council Bluffs after his graduation from Harvard and for a short time did work for his father. Yet soon, wishing to try something different—and newly curious about the possibility of becoming a teacher—Bruce in 1958 enrolled at Omaha University (later the University of Nebraska at Omaha, or UNO) as a graduate student in English. For the next two years he juggled teaching composition classes as a graduate assistant, taking classes, and fulfilling his family responsibilities, completing his M.A. degree in 1960.

Recognizing that to become a tenured professor he would need to earn his doctorate, Bruce in the fall of 1963 moved with his family to Fort Worth, Texas, where he enrolled in Texas Christian University's Ph.D. program in English. After two years of taking courses, fulfilling his language requirements, and taking his comprehensive exams, Bruce returned to Omaha, where he taught a full course load and worked on his dissertation remotely. In 1967 that dissertation, entitled "Image and Symbol in Selected Works of Willa Cather," not only earned him his Ph.D. but also tenure.

From 1967 until his retirement in 1997, Bruce was an indefatigable teacher and scholar at UNO who also spent countless hours serving both his university and the Cather community. Besides acting as Chair of the Department of English numerous times, helping a colleague lead summer study trips to England, teaching courses on both American and British literature, and holding a Fulbright Fellowship in Kabul, Afghanistan, from 1975 to 1976, Bruce published fourteen different journal articles on Cather, developed and regularly offered a course on Willa Cather (at both the undergraduate and graduate level), and was a regular fixture at Cather Spring Conferences. A glance at old conference programs reveals him acting as conference organizer, introducing a panel discussion of *Lucy Gayheart*, moderating "The Passing Show," awarding the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship, and presenting many papers of his own. He also faithfully served on the Board of Governors of the Willa Cather Foundation from 1975 to 2010.

Bruce contributed to the Cather community in less tangible ways as well. His friendly, outgoing personality and love of Cather, for example, helped him forge strong connections among scholars, various members of the Cather family, townspeople in Red Cloud, and the Foundation's founder, Mildred Bennett; in fact, he served as pallbearer at her funeral in 1989. Bruce also shared with many colleagues his belief that a conversation he had with publisher Alfred Knopf in 1973 at the Cather Centennial, about how modern students would greatly benefit from inexpensive paperback editions of Cather's works, might have played a role in convincing Knopf to shortly thereafter start publishing Cather's works in paperback—something Cather had told Knopf during her lifetime she was opposed to.

Bruce's work promoting the value of reading and writing literary works did not end after his formal retirement in 1997. For many years he continued to serve as an Advisory Board member of the Foundation and attend Spring Conferences in Red Cloud. In 2007, he and Karen established the Bruce & Karen Baker

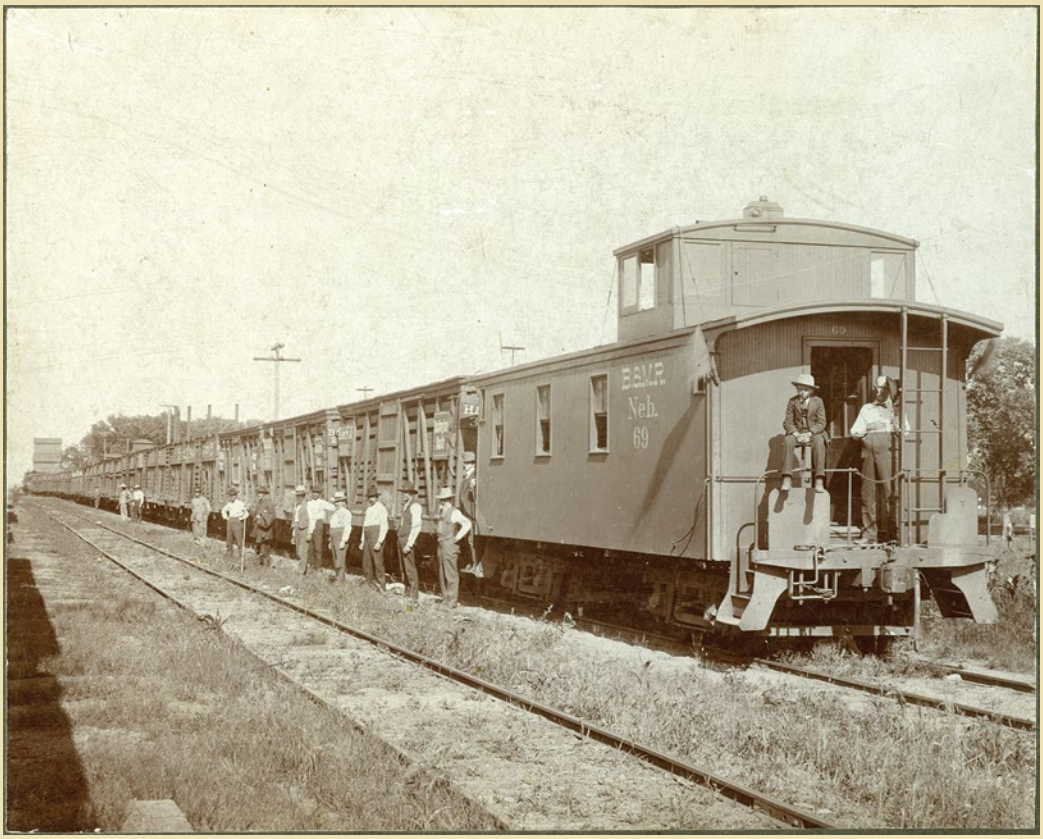
Lectureship in English Fund at UNO in order to bring one distinguished scholar each year to speak there. And at Aksarben Village Senior Living, the community in Omaha where he and Karen lived from 2014 on, Bruce could often be found organizing book clubs, poetry-writing workshops, and creative writing classes. Undoubtedly the participants in these activities were just as inspired by Bruce as many of his UNO students were. Evidence of his impact as an educator can be seen in how I have been frequently approached over the years in the Omaha area by his former students, all of whom have asked me to tell "Dr. Baker" how much his classes had meant to them. Indeed, one of those students, Linda Loftus, recently wrote to me that his "passion was contagious. His lectures captivated me—not because I was a dedicated reader or active participant at the time, but because he made the lectures come alive. It's true what they say: when a teacher loves a subject deeply, that depth can awaken a love for it in their students." Further testimony of Bruce's positive impact is seen in how, just a few months before Bruce's death, two students who had gone on one of the study trips to England he had co-led in the 1970s took the time to get in touch with him and spend an afternoon visiting with him.

Bruce accomplished so much in his life. Most important, he was a loving husband to Karen and very caring father to three sons: Greg, John, and Paul. But with his extensive knowledge, enthusiasm, and amiable personality, he also was an incredibly effective promoter of the idea that reading literature—and specifically the works of Willa Cather—could make a huge, positive impact in people's lives. I can personally attest that during numerous visits with Bruce over the years, I often felt myself so much more inspired about teaching and research when we were parting than when we had begun. In so many ways, for me and for so many other people, Bruce's legacy will endure for a long time to come.

Chuck Johanningsmeier

All Aboard: West-Bound Trains in American Culture

Opening Spring 2026!



Red Cloud businessmen stand alongside a line of Burlington & Missouri Railroad cars, east of the Red Cloud depot, circa 1905. People's Webster County Bank Collection. Willa Cather Foundation Collections & Archives at the National Willa Cather Center in Red Cloud, Nebraska. PHO-269-001-2.

The National Willa Cather Center's historic Burlington Depot will soon welcome visitors of all ages to explore the sights and sounds of the railway! When the railroad opened in Red Cloud in 1878, the fortunes of the town were forever changed. Our newest exhibit, *All Aboard: West-Bound Trains in American Culture*, will feature numerous historical photographs, railway artifacts, and hands-on activities focused around railroad history, the literary legacy of the Burlington, and the railway as a vehicle for the settlement of the West.

To learn more or to donate to this project, please visit WillaCather.org/depot-exhibit.

Contributors to this Issue

Timothy W. Bintrim, an issue editor of the *Willa Cather Review*, had the good fortune to correspond with Annie Prey's eldest son, Ted Jorgensen, and his daughter, Joanna Jorgensen Kaestner, in 2006.

Sarah Clere is an issue editor for the *Willa Cather Review* and an animal enthusiast.

Nathan Horan is a fourth grader who loves sports and is interested in lots of things.

Chuck Johanningsmeier is professor of English and Peter Kiewit Distinguished Chair at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he teaches a wide range of courses on American literature and culture. The majority of his research publications about Cather have examined the ways that she and her works interacted with editors, publishers, and readers during her lifetime. His most recent book is a new anthology, coedited with Jessica McCarthy of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, entitled *Reimagining Realism: A New Anthology of Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century American Short Fiction* (Swallow Press).

Maria Kane is a doctoral candidate in English and American literature at Washington University in St. Louis. Her dissertation examines twentieth century American fiction, with a focus on bestselling novels and histories of reading. She began researching Cather's fan mail in 2023, when she participated in "Willa Cather: Place and Archive," a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Institute for Higher Education Faculty.

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

Sean Lake lives in Florida with his wife and three daughters. A professor in the Humanities and Foreign Language Division at Valencia College, he has been occupied in recent years with NEH grants for which he has translated and staged ancient Greek and Roman tragedies in outreach programs for veterans and first responders. He is working on a book that includes some of his translations and addresses ancient and modern theories that support the therapeutic application of ancient drama. In 2023, he helped found The Hercules Project to continue these projects.

Tom Phillips is a New York writer, journalist, and critic-at-large, with a B.A. from Grinnell College and an M.A. from the New School for Social Research. He wrote for *CBS News* and the *New York Times,* and from 1979 to 1986 taught at the Columbia University School of Journalism. His literary essays have appeared in *Persuasions*, the *F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, the *Explicator*, and *ANQ*. His memoir, *A Beginner's Life*, was published in 2015.

Nathan Tye is associate professor of history at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. A labor historian by training but a literary historian in practice, he serves on the Mari Sandoz Society board and has published in the *Willa Cather Review* and *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*. He will have an essay in the forthcoming volume of *Sandoz Studies*.

Willa Cather REVIEW

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THE NATIONAL Willa Cather CENTER

The *Willa Cather Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should generally not exceed 5,000 words, although longer essays may be considered; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as email attachments and should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the *MLA Handbook*.

Direct essays and inquiries to *editor@willacather.org*.

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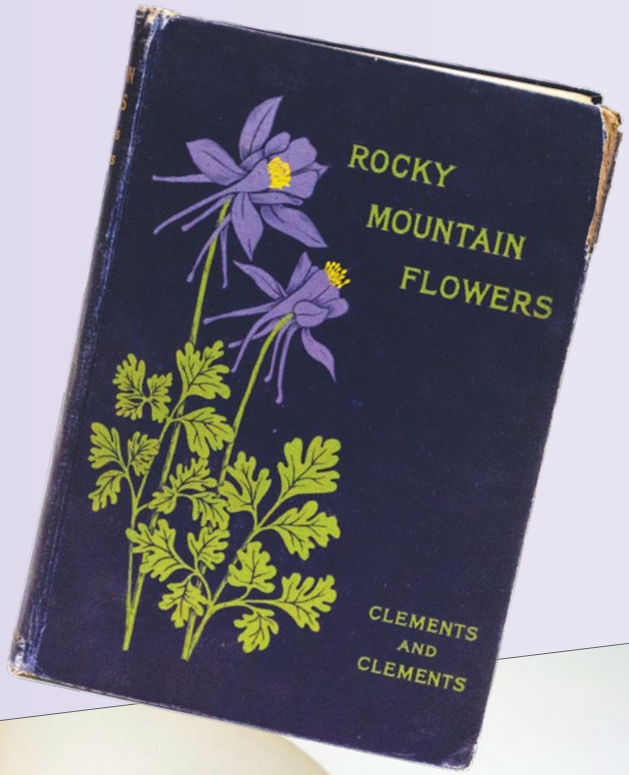
info@willacather.org

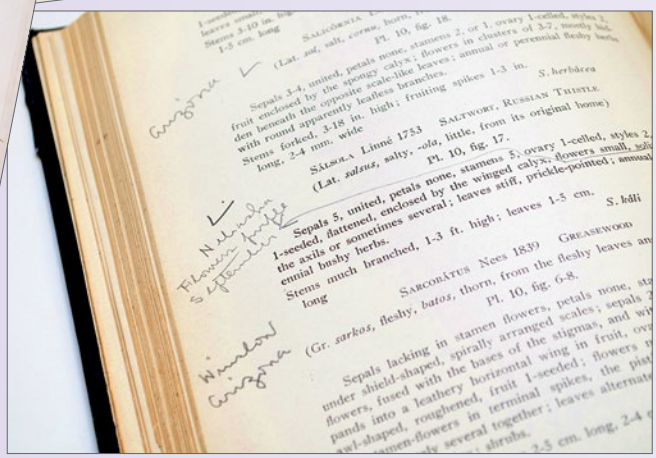
The Willa Cather Foundation

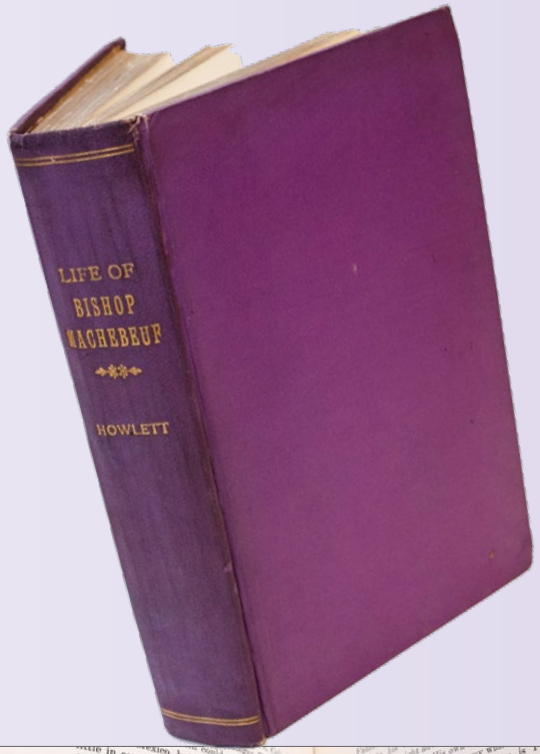
Cather-Owned Books Join Research Collection in Red Cloud

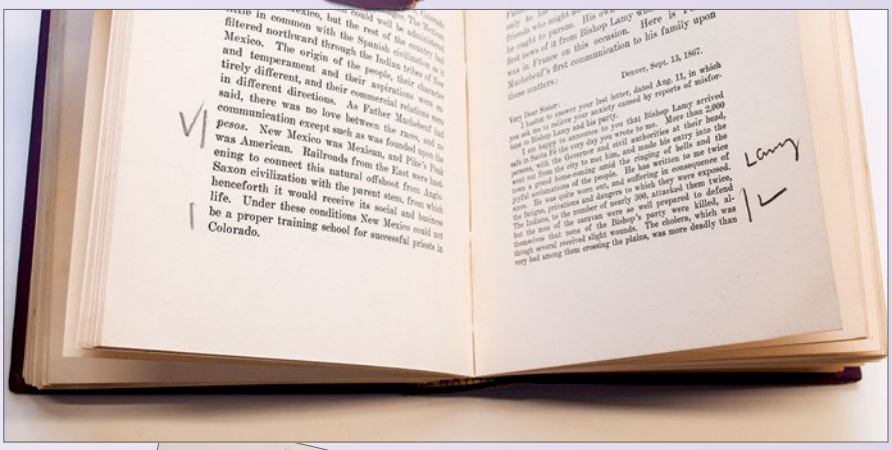
Two important volumes owned by Willa Cather joined the holdings at the National Willa Cather Center this summer. Previously held in a private collection, each book contains hundreds of Cather's handwritten notes and reference marks, offering new opportunities for research into Cather's life and writing.

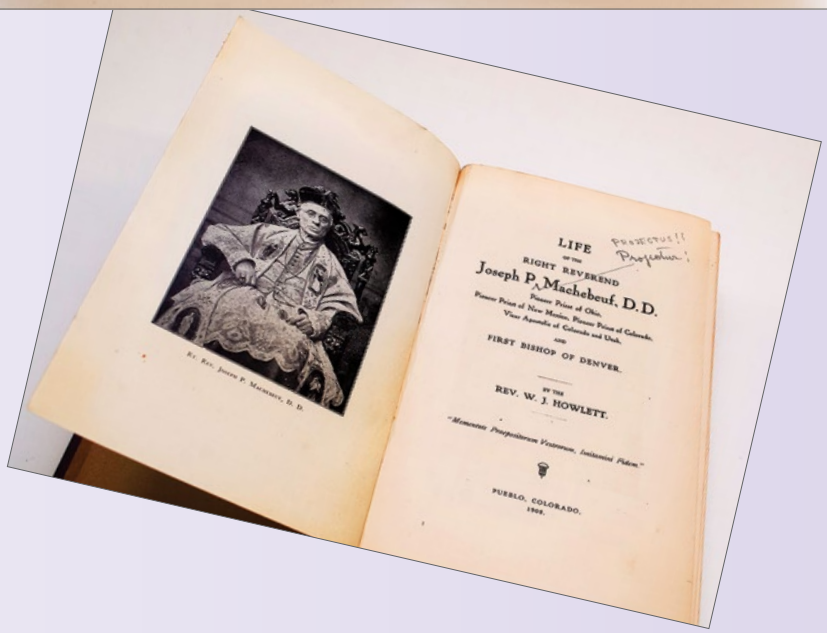
The first, *Rocky Mountain Flowers,* by Frederic E. and Edith S. Clements, demonstrates Cather's personal plant identification and collecting; a number of botanical specimens held in the University of Nebraska's Charles E. Bessey Herbarium—collected by Cather and prepared by Rev. Herbert Bates—are also noted in this book.











The second book, Rev. William J. Howlett's *Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf, D.D.*, inspired Cather's 1927 novel *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. When she discovered Howlett's book on a 1925 visit to Santa Fe, Cather told *Commonweal* readers in a letter to the magazine that she found in the translations of Machebeuf's letters "the mood, the spirit in which they accepted the accidents and hardships of a desert country, the joyful energy that kept them going." In Cather's unique style, she highlighted more than one hundred passages that detail the movements of Machebeuf and his friend, Archbishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy, as they sought to reform and regularize the Catholic Church in New Mexico.

The National Willa Cather Center welcomes research appointments and inquiries; to schedule time in the archives, please submit your preferred dates at willacather.org/collections/collections-policies or contact archivist Tracy Sanford Tucker.

Refer to page 7 for the story of another volume from Cather's library that has come into our collection.

". . . there was a seductive excitement in renewing old experiences in imagination."

— Willa Cather, *Alexander's Bridge*

Help Sustain the Story

At the National Willa Cather Center, we believe in the enduring power of literature to recall the past and inform the future. Support from readers like you enables us to preserve the sites and landscapes that figured in Willa Cather's life and literature—and to share them with new generations of readers, writers, and dreamers. With a gift to our summer appeal, you help us bridge the gap between readerly imagination and authentic places.

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