Willa Cather REVIEW

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The National Willa Cather Center

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Dreaming of the Distant Tracks

Red Cloud's Burlington Depot in its new location, based on an undated photograph in the Yost Leak Postcard Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections and Archives, PHO-264-1010.

Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

A heartfelt thank you to all who responded to our request in the last issue to help unlock a challenge grant. Together, we met that challenge, and your generosity is already fueling our work to ensure that Willa Cather continues to be read and studied. I'm delighted to share several opportunities that invite each of us to engage more deeply with Cather's literature—and with one another.

This June, we gather at the historic Ritz Theater in Minneapolis for the world premiere of *My Ántonia*, a new musical inspired by one of Cather's most beloved novels. I warmly invite you to join us June 12–14 for a thoughtfully curated weekend of programs. A members' reception before the Friday evening performance provides an opportunity to celebrate this remarkable adaptation together, while a "Reading Willa Cather" program ahead of the Sunday matinee offers a glimpse into Cather's fascinating life through dramatic readings from her fiction and letters.

Closer to home, our upcoming conference, "Memory, Myth, and Meaning: Cather in Dialogue with America 250," promises a rich exploration of Cather's place within the broader American story. We are especially honored to welcome author and rare book specialist Rebecca Romney as our keynote speaker. Her address will consider the effects of archival collections on the writing of literary history. Romney's keynote will be livestreamed and freely accessible, ensuring that it can reach you, wherever you may be.

We are proud to soon debut *All-Aboard: West-Bound Trains in American Culture*, a new permanent exhibition made possible through the generous support of the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Housed in our restored Burlington Depot, the exhibition invites visitors of all ages to explore the railroad's intersections with Cather's life and art—and with the broader American story—through artifacts, evocative imagery, historical context, and hands-on experiences.

This year also marks a literary milestone. One hundred years ago, Cather experienced yet another career achievement with the publication of *My Mortal Enemy*. Writing for the *Chicago Tribune*, Fanny Butcher observed that the novel "has not only the whole of two lives in it, but perhaps the whole of life itself." It is a work that continues to reward close reading, and we look forward to revisiting it this fall in our virtual author series alongside historian Richard Norton Smith, who will guide us in a thoughtful exploration of its themes and significance.

Taken together, these programs reflect our ongoing commitment to bringing Cather into dialogue with expanded audiences, preserved spaces, and new artistic forms. Whether you join us in person or from afar, I hope you will find inspiration in the experiences and conversations ahead.

Letter from the President

Peter Cipkowski

It is a genuine pleasure to write a few words for this issue of the *Willa Cather Review*, and an even greater privilege to serve on the board of an organization devoted to the life and work of Willa Cather. I first visited Red Cloud in 1992, drawn—as so many are—by the landscapes and stories that shaped Cather's imagination. Since joining the board in 2021, I have come to appreciate more deeply how her legacy is not only literary but communal. It lives in the conversations her work inspires, in the landscapes she helped us see more clearly, and in the shared commitment of those who continue to sustain her memory.

As president of the Willa Cather Foundation, I have had the opportunity to witness that commitment up close. I have the good fortune to work alongside board members who bring both deep affection for Cather's work and a thoughtful sense of responsibility to the organization that bears her name. Their engagement is not abstract. It is expressed in long conversations about stewardship, in careful attention to programs and partnerships, and in a willingness to imagine how we can bring more readers to Cather in the years ahead. It is a privilege to serve with colleagues who approach this work with such seriousness and generosity of spirit.

I am equally grateful to collaborate with our executive director and the remarkable team whose daily efforts sustain the Cather Center's vitality. Their dedication is visible in every aspect of our work—from preserving the physical spaces that connect us to Cather's world to creating programs that invite new readers into it. Institutions endure not simply because they honor the past, but because they are led by people who believe that the past informs the present. I see that conviction at work every day in the staff and volunteers who carry forward the Center's mission.

Willa Cather once wrote that the end of all true learning is to make things beautiful. That insight feels especially relevant to the work of a literary center. Our task is not only to preserve manuscripts or maintain historic buildings, but to invite encounters—with language, with history, and with one another—that deepen our understanding of what it means to live fully and thoughtfully.

As we look ahead, I remain inspired by the community that gathers around Cather's work: scholars, students, readers, and neighbors who find in her writing both clarity and courage. To serve this community is an honor.

Recognizing Cather at Cos Cob

Robert Thacker

For some years I have pursued a line of biographical inquiry regarding Willa Cather's relation to the Cos Cob art colony, a gathering that thrived during the 1890s and later along Long Island Sound, just inside Connecticut northeast of New York City. There artists came and painted, taught their art, and often stayed at a guest home called the Holley House. The best-known among them included Childe Hassam, John Twachtman, and Julian Alden Weir; two of their number, Elmer MacRae and Henry Fitch Taylor, figured in the organization of the famous 1913 Armory Show. Along with painters, New York editors and writers also frequented Holley House, where they all talked, debated, and enjoyed one another amid a casual atmosphere and one of shared artistic and intellectual ambitions. Willa Cather went there to be among them.

Just when, why, and how often she was there has never been absolutely clear, yet Cather's being at Cos Cob is incontrovertible. What is more, the longtime presence at the Holley House of Viola Roseboro'—a writer, one who counseled aspiring authors, fiction editor first at the McClure's syndicate and then *McClure's Magazine* and, later, Cather's friend and neighbor on Bank Street—suggests that Cather's presence there may have been effected to move her from teaching in Pittsburgh into publishing work in New York. In 1903, just as she had published her first book, *April Twilights*, Cather was beckoned to meet S. S. McClure in New York. Telling her Pittsburgh friend George Seibel of the invitation, Cather refers to the editor's letter as "that long deferred call," suggesting that it was one she had been seeking for some time (*Complete Letters* no. 0083). That meeting led to the publication of her first book of fiction, *The Troll Garden,* by McClure, Phillips & Company in 1905 just after one of its stories, "The Sculptor's Funeral," was first published in *McClure's*. Thus Cather's connection to the magazine and its work was established. In 1906, of course, McClure brought her to New York to work on the magazine's staff.

Pastel drawing of Viola Roseboro' as a young woman. From *Viola, the Duchess of New Dorp.*

Building upon Merrill Maguire Skaggs's research into Cather's presence at Cos Cob, this essay proposes to synthesize what is known. Most of the evidence is circumstantial; some of it, especially that from Roseboro's biographer, is muddled, but there is little doubt that Cather was at Holley House during the time of *April Twilights*, perhaps even earlier.

But there is more than that: actions that suggest deliberate intentionality on Cather's part. In April 1924, she went to Cos Cob and dedicated a fine-art copy of *April Twilights and Other Poems* (1923) to Constant MacRae, the proprietor of the Holley House, describing her as "one of my 'public' when it was very small indeed." The volume is now in the collection of the Greenwich [Connecticut] Historical Society.[1] Such a comment acknowledges her early presence at Cos Cob certainly, and it is one that Skaggs used to good effect in her "Young Willa Cather and the Road to Cos Cob" (2000), but there is another reason that Cather's early but vague presence there matters now, in ways significant but consistent throughout her career: her time at Cos Cob is a first major instance of Cather's biographical revisionism.

Let me address what I mean by her revisionism. In early 1999, when I had first read Skaggs's essay in manuscript and when I was deep in my initial analyses of Cather and McClure, I wrote to Merrill, telling her that its analysis made more sense than the conventional story of how Cather got to *McClure's* and New York—that is, that McClure sent a cousin of his out into the country to scout for talent, and that fellow talked to Will Owen Jones in Lincoln about Cather. Through that fishing expedition, James Woodress holds, she was discovered (Woodress 170–71).[2] Skaggs's analysis made more sense to me because, as I wrote then in a private exchange with Merrill (February 27, 1999):

> It's quite in keeping with the Cather who was then driven to succeed above all else, the Cather of the controversy surrounding the "The Profile," the genius who rose to the top of *McClure's* and then American letters. It also fits with Roseboro'. I particularly like your notion as to why the 1923 edition of *April Twilights* is there, and just what's going on in "The Garden Lodge." Isn't the suppression of the poems, the stories from *The Troll Garden*, and even the absence of Cather's very presence at Cos Cob in the biographies, explained by "My First Novels [There Were Two]"?—that is, the artist colony—its people, conditions, and so forth—was important to Cather between 1902 and through the time at *McClure's*, but once she embarked on the work leading to *O Pioneers!*, it was time for Catherian revisionism. (Thacker to Skaggs February 27, 1999; see also Lavin)

What I was asserting then still holds: Cather's trajectory in the first years of the twentieth century was all about intent, activity, and ambition through her writing (see my "She's Not a Puzzle So Arbitrarily Solved"). And contacts. In Pittsburgh she had come to know Ethelbert Nevin and his vexed personal situation well; she wrote about him and published a commentary on his art in the *Ladies' Home Journal* ("The Man Who Wrote 'Narcissus,'" 1900); when he died young in 1901, she eulogized him and wrote seven elegiac poems occasioned by his death. About the same time she published too on Ernest Thompson Seton, a Cos Cob presence, and there is evidence that Cather met Roseboro' about then through her dialect poem "'Grandmither, Think Not I Forget,'" which Cather finished in 1899 and first published in April 1900.[3] Writing about Cather once she got to New York City, John J. Murphy has seen her imaginative processes as "an alembic"—that is, she "experienced the arts wherever she traveled (and traveled to many places to experience the arts)" so that "the alembic in Cather's case involved literature of other writers (both canonical and contemporary), theater, music, and painting" (32). And while the facts of Cather's travel to Cos Cob—when, how frequently, and for how long—are circumstantial, it is nevertheless clear that something happened to Cather in Cos Cob that contributed significantly to what Murphy calls her "alembic of art."

The revisionism seen in Cather is found throughout her life and work. Continuing, and in keeping with Murphy's description of Cather's legacy in fin de siècle Pittsburgh and heading ultimately to New York City, Cather was an artist growing imaginatively. More than that, over time she showed herself to be one prone to revise her own story: in *Youth and Bright Medusa* (1920)—which opens with her new revisionary story, "Coming, Aphrodite!" (1920)—she revised herself as a story writer, keeping four stories from *The Troll Garden* (1905) while adding four newer ones; with *April Twilights and Other Poems* (1923), she offered a major revision of herself as a poet, dropping thirteen poems from her first book, *April Twilights*, and adding a dozen newer ones; and with "My First Novels [There were Two]" (1931), she radically revises the whole story of herself as a novelist, writing and publishing it at the pinnacle of her career as the leading American novelist of the 1920s. Key to this revisionary process is the dedicated copy of *April Twilights and Others Poems* Cather traveled to Cos Cob to present to Constant MacRae in 1924 and, before that, the writing of "Coming, Aphrodite!," her great New York City story. That volume and that story were emblems of Cather's imaginative look back to the person she had been, the aspiring artist she was when she first came to Cos Cob around the turn of century, when she was writing her first book, *April Twilights*. In the words of Joseph C. Murphy, with both the book and with the story "Cather was tacitly acknowledging her debt to Cos Cob but also moving beyond it, in gestures that are at once nostalgic and valedictory" (email to the author, August 31, 2023). This in sum is the argument offered here.

Merrill Skaggs

The primary historian of the Cos Cob art colony is Susan G. Larkin, whose 2001 book by that title and several articles contextualize its being and participants. In that book she has Cather at Cos Cob "before 1915" but then cites a 1978 letter by Katherine Livingston Seymour Lowell (1895–1990), who grew up in Cos Cob near the Holley House and recalled Cather and also Lincoln Steffens from *McClure's* in the same memory:

> Tucked away in the little rooms in the rambling Holley House were the writers: Willa Cather in her cape, passing the house, extending a courteous "good morning." Lincoln Steffens, starting his career as muckraker, asked permission to open the gate and sit on the small porch and talk with Mother. I, sitting on the steps, learned for the first time, I think, that the world was not the serene, happy world I knew, that there was want and evil in it. (Lounsbury and Lowell 81; see Larkin *Cos Cob* 218–19)[4]

Given Lowell's 1895 birth date and her comment here that when listening to Steffens, she was realizing a different world "for the first time," the inference is that she is remembering the early 1900s. That Cather is mentioned in connection to Steffens—the two never worked together at *McClure's*, and its muckraking phase really began about 1900—suggests an early presence for her there.

Introducing her subject, Larkin asserts that "In Cos Cob, the Holley House provided an aspiring and affordable gathering place, allowing innovative, cosmopolitan artists to work within a traditional waterfront village," and she writes also of the "concentric circles of community, exposing the often uneasy relations between the Cos Cob Impressionists and the diverse groups beyond the Holley House" (*Cos Cob Art Colony 3*). Throughout, Larkin focuses on the compelling personalities of the artists—Twachtman and Hassam in particular—and recreates the strongly bohemian social living space at Holley House that attracted a wide array of intellectuals. Characterizing that space, Larkin in another piece writes that "the front porch of the Holley House resembled a humanities seminar" ("Cos Cob Clapboard School" 93). She describes those who came to share its society. She cites Hassam—whose visits there "extended over two decades"—as an artist "who never stopped trying new things" and also notes that "Such novelists as Willa Cather and Irving Bacheller, like such painters as [Theodore] Robinson and Hassam, tapped a growing national self-confidence and respect for homegrown tradition, coupled with a poignant awareness of change. Nonfiction writers, most notably Steffens, raised the intellectual temperature of the art colony with their relentless challenging of received ideas." Noting the "women professionals" who went to the Holley House—Roseboro' among her examples—Larkin sees these women as "indisputable evidence of a major social shift" (*Cos Cob Art Colony* 5–6). Given all this, it is little wonder that Cather found her way there, most likely through Roseboro'. Concluding her introduction and setting off on her story, Larkin titles her first chapter "The Genteel Bohemians of Cos Cob"—little wonder again since it was to such a society Cather had aspired and, in her drive to continue farther east to New York City, was continuing to do so.

Having known the peregrine Nevin, living in Pittsburgh with Isabelle McClung—whose mother was a Mellon, it should be recalled—Cather was soon off with her on their 1902 trip to Europe (June to September). In a delicious observation drawn from Cather's published travel letter from Le Lavandou (September 10, 1902), Skaggs comments that with it she found "a place Cos Cob replicates—or that replicates Cos Cob." Fair enough, since Cather writes that from their hotel rooms on the sea "we have the whole sweep of ocean before us. There is a long veranda running the full length of the house on the side facing the sea, straw-thatched and overgrown with gourd vines, where all our meals are served to us" ("Road to Cos Cob" 49–50; *Cather in Europe* 155; see also DeSanctis). Such may be nothing more than coincidence, certainly, but the tranquil quiet of Le Lavandou was a place the two women sought out after their recent time in various urban centers.[5]

When Larkin comments that the front porch at the Holley House "resembled a humanities seminar," she continues to detail just how this was so before she turns to Cather herself, probably unintentionally but nevertheless getting at just what drew the developing author there, writing that on that porch "painters, writers, actresses, editors and journalists [were] discussing the most favorable conditions for the creation of art and the most graceful way to dive off the mill pond bridge." Larkin notes that J. Alden Weir's daughter "also cited Cather as a regular visitor to the Holley House" ("Cos Cob Clapboard School" 93) and adds that the author makes mention of Cos Cob in *The Song of the Lark* and cites the passage (*Song* 489).[6] Most startling, Larkin offers a piece of documentary evidence:

> Childe Hassam's *Couch on the Porch, Cos Cob . . .* is said to depict Miss Cather. Painted at the Holley House in the summer of 1914, when Cather was writing *The Song of the Lark*, it shows a dark-haired woman lounging on a sofa reading a book. Because the model is facing away from the viewer, the most that can be said with certainty is that her hairstyle closely resembles the writer's. ("Cos Cob Clapboard School" 94)

I will return to Hassam in due course, but this widely held conjecture is in keeping with Cather's presence at the Holley House over the years, and it suggests too that Skaggs was pursuing a line of inquiry wholly consistent with Cather's own ambitions in the 1900s. As Skaggs asserted when she introduced Joanne Woodward's reading of "Coming Aphrodite!" at the Greenwich [Connecticut] Historical Society on October 14, 1999, Cather "came to what we now call the Bush-Holley House to relax, to mingle, to observe art being made, and to make contacts."

Put another way, recognizing Cather at Cos Cob—even at rest with her reading—is important within her ultimate trajectory as an artist. That she makes mention of Cos Cob in *The Song of the Lark* is apt, for Thea Kronborg's trajectory as a singer resembles Cather's own as a writer, and points too toward Eden Bower in "Coming Aphrodite!" As Skaggs asserted, that story embodies much of what Cather herself realized and later remembered from Cos Cob about those striving years. That autobiographical third

Childe Hassam, *Couch on the Porch, Cos Cob*, 1914. Private collection.

to Josephine Holley April 19, 1906), Winfield Scott Moody of the *New York Sun* (Constant MacRae to Josephine Holley September 19, 1907), and Gilman Hall of *Ainslee's* and *Everybody's* magazines. When looking through the business correspondence associated with the Holley House, I noted numerous persons who at the turn of the century might have furthered any ambitious young high school teacher's artistic and intellectual aspirations—they clearly were people Cather would want to meet and get to know, wherever those contacts might ultimately lead her. Or summon her from Cos Cob to New York, just as Skaggs envisioned.[7]

novel was one that "had taken the wrong road, and that the full-blooded method, which told everything about everybody, was not natural to me," as Cather later wrote while explaining the negative reaction to it by her British publisher, William Heinemann, in "My First Novels [There Were Two]" (*On Writing* 96).

Larkin's list of artistic and literary types is borne out by the archives at the Greenwich Historical Society, particularly in the Holley / MacRae papers, now held in what had been the Holley House. Some examples: Roseboro' has written asking for space during "the middle of October"—she is referred to by Constant MacRae in a letter to her mother Josephine Holley as "dear Roseboro," and her presence there will help bring about a "dear household" (Constant MacRae to Josephine Holley September 19, 1907). Beyond Roseboro' and Steffens, others associated with *McClure's* at Holley House were muckraker Ida Tarbell and art editor August Jaccaci (Jaccaci to Josephine Holley October 1, 1900), who eventually bought property in Cos Cob. Other regulars included Gertrude Hall, who employed Roseboro' for writing advice and whose *Wagnerian Romances* Cather published a preface to in 1925; Hall would marry another Holley House guest, W. C. Brownell, the editor at Scribner's who handled Henry James's New York Edition (Brownell to Josephine Holley September 26, 1899). Ernest Thompson Seton has already been mentioned, but there were others: James MacArthur from Harper & Brothers (MacArthur

"Coming, Aphrodite!" especially needs to be set as an emblem of Cather's recollection of her time and her contacts at Cos Cob. Introducing Joanne Woodward's public reading in 1999, Skaggs spoke of "the Cos Cob overture to that story, played out near Greenwich, Connecticut, [one that] introduced the later, greater story about artists living the bohemian life in Greenwich Village, New York." She also asserted that "Cos Cob still serves as prelude to the future Cather work," but Skaggs's conclusion to her introduction of Woodward best gets at the 1920 emblematic story's significance:

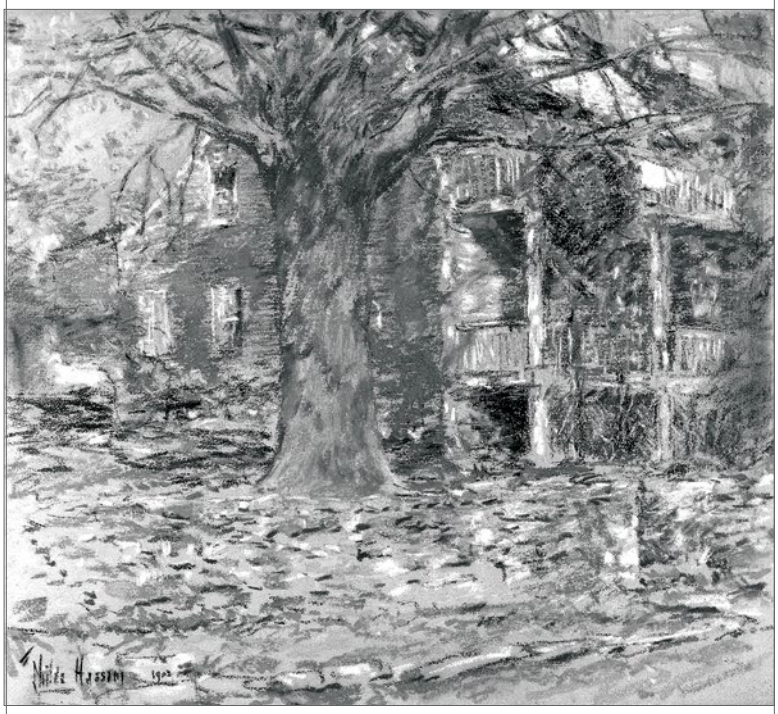
> After Willa Cather wrote a couple of masterpieces, she took a deep breath and allowed herself to write story about what it *really* feels like to be young, attractive, vigorously healthy, and ambitious to make art; and then what it feels like, in life's April, to fall in love with another artist. She took that story out of Greenwich and set it in Greenwich Village. But she charged it with an erotic power so passionate that it can still stun.

All this is most certainly so.

Key to the retrospective cast Skaggs posited then—both in these remarks and in her essay on Cather at Cos Cob—was the author's quite self-conscious placement of a copy of the expurgated *April Twilights and Other Poems* there in April 1924, the year after its publication by Knopf, first in a fine art

edition designed by Elmer Adler and then in a widely noted trade edition, with its dedicatory reference to the minuscule size of Cather's audience as she was starting out those years ago. She sees that act—and I do too—as an instance of hiding the new book in plain sight as a conscious clue, an emblem. It is an explicit recollective revisionism that recalls herself when she first came to Cos Cob when she was making the first version of that book—in the revision, as I have said, she dropped thirteen of its thirty-seven poems, most either autobiographical or derived from the 1902 trip to Europe, and added another twelve, more recently written and most published in magazines. But more than a single act, however emblematic, Skaggs rightly focused on the fundamentally, emotively true recollections Cather brought to "Coming, Aphrodite!" as she looked back to Cos Cob ca. 1924–25 and forward to her masterpieces yet to come.

What Cather was about when she went to Cos Cob was, both simply and complexly, figuring out her own direction as an artist within her culture—just how, if you will, American art was to be done within the strictures of its inherited forms and European traditions. That was what Hassam and the other painters gathered at Holley House were after too, and there is every evidence that in participating in the discussions she found there, Cather found the directions she subsequently followed. "Coming, Aphrodite!" is a map to this process, for in that story Cather tackles the very questions that she and the other artists debated on that Connecticut porch: the making of American art and its cultivation of an audience.



Childe Hassam, *The Old Holley House*, 1902. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, bequest of Kathleen Rothe.

When Cather got to *McClure's* in early 1906, she found the artist and critic John La Farge a looming presence in its pages, a figure who had been addressing the very matters that Cather was deliberating within herself and with associates at Cos Cob. Recently, Joseph C. Murphy has examined their relation, citing Cather's *McClure's* stories of artists from the 1900s—especially "The Namesake" (1907) and "On the Gulls' Road" (1908)—arguing that they "dramatize an obsession, similar to La Farge's, with fashioning authentic images that will secure the accumulation of memory against the diminishment of time." Murphy compellingly argues that at "*McClure's*, both La Farge and Cather sought to expand the synapses of American memory through the preservation, communication, and recombination of images" (27). Key to his discussion are the illustrated articles La Farge published in *McClure's* on art history and his authority overall; La Farge "never tired of repeating," Murphy writes, that "the artist's way of seeing is the sum total of his accumulated 'memories,' visual or otherwise, concretized in the work of art" (26). So Cather, looking back on herself on the porch of the Holley House, made and shaped "Coming, Aphrodite!"—moving from Greenwich to Greenwich Village, as Skaggs notes—and later dedicated and took a copy of *April Twilights and Other Poems* to Constant MacRae there. Readers of the story will remember when, toward the end of her tale about young artists in love, Cather has Eden Bower—returned to New York after years and a lifetime away in Paris, acclaimed for her performance in *Aphrodite* as part of an immensely successful stage career in Europe, and enveloped by a surge of remembrance brought on by her visit to Washington Square—make an impromptu visit to "M. Gaston Jules, the picture dealer" at one of the French galleries (71). Reminded of Don Hedger by her return to where they lived and loved, she wishes to gauge his present standing as a painter with Jules, an appraiser who would know Hedger professionally. This scene is crucial to "Coming, Aphrodite!" and, as Skaggs doubtless recognized, it owes wholly to the time Cather spent on the Holley House porch, participating in its debates. But more than Connecticut echoes, the scene offers the story's essence: a key discussion of the artist's imagination, focus, and accomplishment. In a word, success. There is no doubt about Bower's own success—her impromptu visit to Jules comes after a visit to her stockbroker—but she wishes to assess Hedger's standing as a contemporary painter among the moderns. Receiving her card, Jules responds quickly, knowing just who she is, and takes her into his private office. "She threw her muff on his writing table and sank into the deep chair," Cather writes, and continues with Bower's question: "I have come to you for some information that's not in my line. Do you know anything about an American painter named Hedger?" He certainly did, and

Jules starts to suggest exhibitions where she might see his work, but "She held up her hand. 'No, no. I've no time to go to exhibitions. Is he a man of any importance?'" Bower asks further. The dealer replies, "Certainly. He is one of the first men among the moderns. That is to say, among the very moderns. He is always coming up with something different. He often exhibits in Paris, you must have seen—" (72). After Jules comments that "there are many kinds of success" (something Hedger used to say, she laughs in response), Bower presses further: "And how would you define his particular kind?" The dealer then "grew thoughtful. 'He is a great name with all the young men, and he is decidedly an influence in art. But one can't definitely place a man who is original, erratic, and who is changing all the time'" (73).

With these words Cather may have been describing Childe Hassam, who changed all the time, as Larkin details—for example, Hassam set about making himself a printmaker at the age of fifty-six (31). Or she might have had Hassam's friend Frederic Remington (1861–1909) in mind; during the last decade of his life, he made himself into a significant impressionist with his powerful nocturnes. Remington is mentioned in "Coming, Aphrodite!" (10) and is to some degree implicitly caricatured there through the character of Burton Ives. I have detailed Cather's relation to Remington and to this story elsewhere and also pointed out there that each December during 1905–09, he exhibited at M. Knoedler & Co., one of the prominent French galleries in New York, during Cather's first years in the city. That gallery was on Fifth Avenue, only ten blocks from Cather's office at *McClure's* and about thirty from her apartment near Washington Square. Whether she saw his one-person shows there or not, Cather certainly knew Remington's work—who could not?, living when and where she did, doing the magazine work she was focused on—such was the ubiquity of his images then. In March 1908 she bought a print of Remington's *Caught in the Circle* (1900), among others, and had it shipped to her brother Roscoe in Wyoming. Accounting for her purchases to him, she referred to Remington as among "the real modern fellows" (*Complete Letters* no. 2057; see Thacker "'Then a Great Man'").

Following Jules's description of Hedger as a painter "who is original, erratic, and who is changing all the time," Bower interrupts:

> "Is he much talked about at home? In Paris, I mean? Thanks. That's all I want to know." She rose and began buttoning her coat. "One doesn't like to have been an utter fool, even at twenty."

A paragraph break and Jules agrees: "'*Mais, non!*' M. Jules handed her her muff with a quick, sympathetic glance" and she leaves his office (73).

The care with which Cather structures this exchange is remarkable. Clearly, too, as Joseph C. Murphy has pointed out to me, she seems to leave something out that the characters say between "In Paris, I mean" and "Thanks" (email July 11, 2023). Just what Jules said to warrant Bower's appreciation is unknowable, certainly, though it likely contextualized just how Hedger is seen in Paris, what is the strength of his reputation "among the very moderns." Clearly too again, Hedger remains committed to his art above all else, still eschewing audience and popularity for its fundamental essence. Just as he did when Bower and Hedger knew each other, were lovers, quarreled and separated to their separate careers, to their separate destinies. The "sympathetic glance" Jules shares with Bower is one of shared communion, of appreciation, of each person's knowledge of Don Hedger as an utterly committed artist wholly apart from each of them.

Returning to Washington Square, visiting Jules at his French gallery to obtain the assessment of Hedger she seeks, Eden Bower is a fictional character analogous to her creator, to Willa Cather. That person returned to Cos Cob to revisit her younger self, to see the people she still knew there from the time when she too was a striving, young artist on the Holley House porch amid them. To deliver an emblem—the dedicated fine art copy of *April Twilights and Other Poems*—as token of her success. Just as Eden Bower performs *Aphrodite* in the story for a New York audience.

Recognizing Cather at Cos Cob is an act of acknowledgement that encapsulates her ambition to get from Nebraska through Pittsburgh to New York and *McClure's*. That the daughter of Virginia farmers removed to Nebraska got herself via ambition and commitment to New York to pursue and master the imaginative and technical demands of her art—got herself from the Pittsburgh high school to the *McClure's* editorial offices on 23rd Street near to Madison Square Park and near to the brand-new Flatiron Building—is still a remarkable thing. Such a trajectory required both the ambition of an Eden Bower and the aesthetic depth of a Don Hedger, each struggling to succeed. And it also required the knowledge and contacts that Cather found in Cos Cob, where the intellectual and aesthetic ferment of her time was on daily display, where Viola Roseboro' beckoned her first to join in with that humanities seminar on the front porch of the Holley House, and where other driven makers of art—artists like Hassam—were valued presences and all about. That Cather left little evidence of her presence there—Skaggs wrote in her introduction that Cather had "obliterated her tracks"—is not surprising given the career it eventually launched, for as she knew and recorded in "Coming,

Aphrodite!" that time had passed, its lessons were digested, and she had moved on to the deeply accomplished works like her novels from *A Lost Lady* on. Truly, after the world broke in two, Cather did leave Cos Cob behind.

NOTES

1. Cather's presence is Cos Cob in late April 1924 is confirmed by two letters, one dated April 26 to Ferris Greenslet at Houghton Mifflin indicating that she was there (*Complete Letters* no. 0730) and another dated April 29 to the music critic John Pitts Sanborn in which Cather mentions that she had just been in Cos Cob (*Complete Letters* no. 1816). There is also a copy of *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* (1925) dedicated to MacRae and dated December 24, 1925; Cather selected and arranged its stories and wrote a preface.

2. Subsequent biographers have gotten Cather to *McClure's* without addressing the question of just who brought her to McClure's attention. Beyond them, there are tendrils of connection between Cather and others mentioned here, which reveal Cather's presence among the Cos Cob group. For instance, the parallel careers of Cather and Hassam in New York are explored by Kathryn H. Faber in *Willa Cather's New York*, and the Cos Cob painter Henry Fitch Taylor later married Clara Potter Davidge, a socialite widow who was among Cather's neighbors off Washington Square and whom she also visited on Staten Island. Davidge was also a significant patron of Edwin Arlington Robinson, whom Cather knew through Davidge (see Donaldson 261–62, 293–95; Lewis 75; Woodress 210, 258).

3. Just when Cather met Roseboro' is not absolutely clear, although the two certainly knew each other by the time Cather published "'Grandmither, Think Not I Forget'" in 1900. There is circumstantial evidence that Roseboro' had been aware of Cather, and probably knew her, for some time. Jane Kirkland Graham, a friend of Roseboro's who published an idiosyncratically organized and sourced two-volume biography of Roseboro', dates their meeting to about 1898. She claims that Roseboro' "said that she was the first editor who ever wrote to Willa Cather" (2: 124). Since Roseboro' read submitted manuscripts for McClure's literary syndicate and also for *McClure's Magazine* (from 1893), logically she would be aware of Cather, and perhaps earlier even than 1898 given Cather's activity. Thus Graham writes that "From the inception of *McClure's* [Cather] had submitted manuscript; it had been Viola's privilege on behalf of McClure, Phillips Co. [the book publisher] to interest Mr. McClure in Willa's first volume of short stories; later, perhaps as late as 1906, when trouble arose 'with the firm' (not the publishing house), Isabelle McClung called on Viola and appealed to her; V. R. immediately sent Willa her picture, 'a speaking likeness,' along with reassurance, dragging her out of despair" (2: 80).

4. Steffens frequented Holley House from 1901 on, and he eventually bought property in Cos Cob, so Lowell may be remembering an instance when, like Cather, he passed by her house on his way there. Given that Lowell was born in 1895, it is logical that these memories date from her first decade.

5. While Skaggs's work on Cos Cob pioneered the crux I examine here, I do not accept her assertions wholesale. Her view that Cather's description of Le Lavandou in her travel letter was intended to recreate Cos Cob is possible, but not necessarily so. Equally, Skaggs reproduces in "Willa Cather and the Road to Cos Cob" a picture postcard of Vassar Lake at Vassar College held in the Holley-MacRae papers and attributes it to Cather. It is addressed to "The Misses MacRae." Subsequent examination has made that attribution very doubtful, and ultimately probably incorrect.

6. Dorothy Weir Young, the painter's daughter, wrote that "At Holley Farm in Cos Cob, Connecticut," her father "found country that he loved and a warm welcome which drew many artists and writers over the years to enjoy this spacious house" (142 n. 2).

7. While beyond the scope of this essay, there is also the matter of Cather's decision to settle and stay resident in Greenwich Village when she moved to New York in the spring of 1906. The list of artists, editors, and intellectuals at Holley House I just offered is massively extended by those found in the Village when Cather got there and while she lived there, until she moved uptown in 1932. Surely part of its appeal then was cheap housing, but the Village was also a hotbed of intellectual ferment. The "at homes" Cather and Edith Lewis hosted for years at their Bank Street apartment doubtless reflected that ferment in various ways. Would that we could confirm everyone who was there. Emblematic of this is the fact that, in his excellent history of the intellectual and social swirl that was Greenwich Village 1898–1918, Gerald W. McFarland highlights Cather at *McClure's*, about to break out into her own writing, as his prime example of an aspiring writer there. He details editor Cather's January 1910 meeting with Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, which the latter recounts in her memoir, over her manuscript, "a piece of investigative journalism on sweatshop conditions in New York City tenement districts." McFarland notes that Cather wondered why Sergeant was not writing fiction and continues to hold that "Though all of Cather's greatest books . . . were written during the years that she lived in the Village, their subjects were definitely not of it" (172–73). He then briefly analyzes "Coming, Aphrodite!" as the exception it is.

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Willa Cather, John Buchan, and the Ending of *A Lost Lady*

Richard C. Harris

Willa Cather's major eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scottish connections—Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, and James Barrie, principally—have been commented on in numerous places. One of the most interesting Scottish connections, however, that with the twentieth-century writer John Buchan, has not previously been explored.[1] Buchan was an almost exact contemporary of Cather; he was born in 1875 and died in 1940, she, in 1873 and in 1947. Although the two never met, they were very much aware of each other and read and admired each other's works. Their comments on each other and several interesting parallels between their works, in particular between Buchan's *A Lost Lady of Old Years* (1899) and the end of Cather's *A Lost Lady* (1923), suggest how significant this literary relationship was throughout much of Cather's career.

A brief introduction to Buchan is perhaps necessary to establish the context for Cather's interest in him and his in her. To say that he was a prolific writer is to terribly understate the case: he published twenty-seven novels; six collections of short stories; four collections of poetry; and over thirty nonfiction works, including eleven biographies, a twenty-four-volume history of World War I, and, finally, his autobiography. His most famous novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, published in 1915, has remained a popular book for over a century though it is probably best known because of Alfred Hitchcock's film adaptation in 1935. In addition to his literary works, Buchan, an Oxford graduate, served as the private secretary to the high commissioner for Southern Africa between 1901 and 1903, was assistant director of the Reuters news agency, director of the Nelson publishing company, editor of the British magazine *The Spectator*, was a British government correspondent and then director of the Office of Information during World War I, served as a member of Parliament from 1927 to 1935, was president of the Scottish Historical Society, and was a trustee of the National Library of Scotland. He was raised to the peerage by King George V with the title First Baron of Tweedsmuir and served as Governor General of Canada from 1935 to his death in 1940. In September 1940, six months after Buchan's death, Cather wrote to Ferris Greenslet to thank him for having sent her a copy of Buchan's autobiography, *Pilgrim's Way*.[2] Reporting that she had just finished reading the introduction to the work, she declared, "How could one mortal man feel so much and write so much and do so much!" (Cather's emphasis, *Complete Letters* no. 1491).

There are numerous similarities between Cather's and Buchan's backgrounds and works. Although both authors left early locales to pursue their careers, both were drawn back to those childhood places physically and emotionally for much of the rest of their lives. By late 1931 when she made her last trip to Red Cloud, Cather was dealing with numerous physical problems that made subsequent travel difficult, if not impossible, for her. However, she told her friend Carrie Miner Sherwood in April 1945 that she "would rather go home to Red Cloud than to any of the beautiful cities in Europe where I used to love to go" (*Complete Letters* no. 1704). What to the fictional Jim Burden of *My Ántonia,* and apparently to young Willa Cather, had initially seemed only land, "not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made" (7), was a landscape that Cather came to cherish for its beauty, its people, and the childhood she spent there. John Buchan begins his autobiography with the comment, "my earliest recollections are not of myself, but of my environment" (*Pilgrim's Way* 3). His initial description of his earliest home is strikingly negative, as is Jim Burden's initial description of the Nebraska landscape. Buchan relates that his family's "little grey manse on the Fife coast . . . was a square stone house standing in a big garden, with a railway behind it, and in front, across a muddy by-road, a linoleum factory, a coal-pit and a ropewalk, with a bleaching-works somewhere in the rear. . . . The place smelt at all times of the making of wax-cloth" (3). Yet in both works the romantic pastoral theme is obvious. Buchan describes the woods nearby, which "to a child were illimitable forests"; to enter "was an adventure" (4). Later, with his brothers and sisters, he spent the summers with his maternal grandparents in Borders, not far from the Edinburgh-Carlisle road. The "tiny nooks of meadow, woodland, and hill," he continues, were such that "the place strongly took our fancy, and it was a favourite stage for our make-believe—suitable alike for playing at keeping shop, house, or castle, as the bridge of Horatius . . . or as sanctuary for a Jacobite with a price on his head" (12). How like Cather's depiction of her own childhood imaginings in those two early short stories "The Treasure of Far Island" (1902) and "The Enchanted Bluff" (1909) are these passages from Buchan's description of his childhood. How similar to Cather's description of her adventures as she came to know and love the prairie landscape is Buchan's memory in *John Burnet of Barns*

(1898) of his coming to know the Scottish landscape of his youth. And how similar also Buchan's experience in coming to acquire "a reverence and affection for the 'plain people'" who lived there (*Pilgrim's Way* 13).

John Buchan realized the beauty of the Scottish countryside from his childhood and never ceased to return to it on hiking and fishing trips. In addition, Cather's childhood adventures with her brothers Roscoe and Douglass and their friends became what Cather in the "Dedicatory" to *April Twilights* called "wonder-tales of nights in April," set in a "vanished kingdom" "On an island in a western river" where she and other playmates talked of "war and ocean venture, / Brave with brigandage and sack of cities." In her 1906 inscription in a copy of *The Troll Garden* to the American storyteller and artist Howard Pyle, whose writing and illustrations had encouraged much of that sense of adventure, Cather thanked Pyle for having sent "seven big and little children . . . the precious message of romance" (Harris 94–95). John Buchan experienced a similar childhood, filled with adventures of imagined heroism. Whereas Cather and her playmates imagined themselves pirates and knights from Pyle's fiction, Buchan's heroes were often from Scottish history. As biographer Janet Adam Smith says, summers spent at family relatives' homes at Broughton provided time for all kinds of adventures for Buchan and his playmates, as they "played their games of Bruce and Douglas and Montrose" (*John Buchan and His World* 9). Buchan's descriptions of his childhood in *Pilgrim's Way* are strikingly similar to Cather's in those early stories mentioned above. As Cather nostalgically focused on the imaginary town of Sandy Point that she and her brothers had created on that western river, Buchan focused on those "tiny nooks of meadow, woodland, and hill" and "a hollow in a near-by hill, from which stone had been taken long ago," now "floored with thyme and milkwort, and fringed with crimson bell-heather. It was of course the entrance to King Arthur's sleeping place, for Arthur and Merlin were in every legend of the valley . . ." (12).

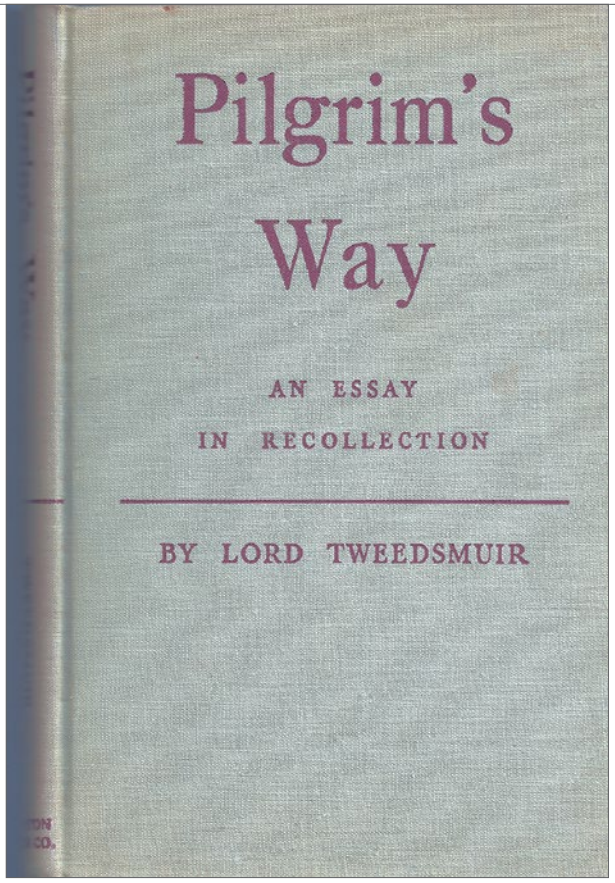
For both authors, the pastoral landscapes and romantic play of their childhoods remained essential touchstones of their adulthood.

John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir, photographed by Yousuf Karsh, 1939. This image faces the title page of the first edition of *Pilgrim's Way*.

In fact, Buchan's summary remarks on his early years in those pastoral "faery-lands" might well have been written by Cather herself: "Most of us have certain childish memories which we can never repeat, since they represent moments when life was in utter harmony and sense and spirit perfectly attuned" (*Pilgrim's Way* 17). While Cather came to love the Nebraska prairie landscape and its people, Buchan loved the land of Scotland and its people. In *Pilgrim's Way*, he declares that in his younger days the Border countryside was his "chief passion": "I found in its people what I most admired in human nature—realism coloured by poetry, a stalwart independence sweetened by courtesy, a shrewd, kindly wisdom" (34). "All my life," Buchan says in concluding the first chapter of *Pilgrim's Way*, "I have been haunted—and cheered—by these recollections" (18). In a 1940 letter to Greenslet, Cather says of Buchan, "The world and the life he brings before me seems almost as far away as the world of Vergil's Eclogues" (*Complete Letters* no. 1484).

It is perhaps appropriate to at least mention the literary craftsmanship of both writers' novels. Beautifully written, descriptive passages abound in *My Ántonia*, *A Lost Lady*, and other Cather novels that followed. In his glowing review of *My Ántonia*, H. L. Mencken commented that "Cather's method inclines more to suggestion and indirection. Here a glimpse, there a turn of phrase, and suddenly the thing stands out, suddenly it is real as real can be—and withal moving, arresting, beautiful with a strange and charming beauty" (quoted in O'Connor 89). This statement and other reviewers' comments on *My Ántonia*, the novel that Mencken said proved that Cather had "arrived," sound much like the comments of the twenty-six-year-old Nebraska reviewer who praised the method and style of John Buchan's 1899 novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, declaring his was "a style intrinsically beautiful, a style fertile, rich, humorous, often quaint and at all times delicate, reserved and touched by a certain reflective gentleness and melancholy not easy of description" ("Passing Show," July 29, 1899). It is a pity that Willa Cather and John Buchan never met, for, clearly "kindred spirits," they no doubt would have had much to say to each other.[3]

In his 1987 biography of Cather, James Woodress cites Cather's comment in her "Old Books and New" column (February 1897) in the *Home Monthly*, reprinted in part in *The World and the Parish*, in which she talks of "boys of the past generation [who] used to literally wear out copy after copy of *Ivanhoe*" and contends that anyone who hasn't read Scott's novels "has missed some of the good things of life" (Woodress 561 n. 497).[4] In addition, Cather's early reading of other Scottish literature, the works of then-popular but now lesser-known writers, is clear from her 1890s reviews. Perhaps typical in terms of subject and notable for that sometimes ironic, sarcastic voice is a piece that appeared in "The Passing Show" column in the *Lincoln Courier* on November 30, 1895. Cather begins her review by noting the popularity of Scottish fiction writers, calling them "the gods of the hour among the devotees of ephemeral literature." She praises James Barrie; however, after briefly noting some positive aspects of the writing of Ian Maclaren and "Mr. Crocket,[5] she says that their fiction is characterized by death and pathos, "sameness and monotony" and dependence on "local color," "the element of women [who] seldom write about anything else." In a comment typical of her often sarcastic literary criticism during this period, Cather says, "Of course every one dies, but there is no use in inviting the whole world to the funeral obsequies of the entire population of Scotland. Death is not the especial privilege of the Scotch, sometimes English men die, occasionally even Americans. . . . I object to being introduced to a sombre character merely to attend his funeral six pages after I have met him." Cather concludes these negative comments with the assertion that, if nothing else, such Scottish storytellers will certainly "supply the Sunday school libraries for generations to come" ("Passing Show," November 30, 1895).



Buchan's autobiography, published in 1940.

However, in a review of Scottish literature that appeared in the *Nebraska State Journal* six months later, Cather allows that some Scottish fiction represents a "real advancement": the work of certain writers has become much more readable and thus has become popular. With a fin de siècle touch, she asserts that for readers who "are tired, both bored and exhausted, weary unto death," this new generation of writers carries them back to the days of Robert Burns and sounds a "sweet austere note from the Highlands" ("Passing Show," May 24, 1896). Cather clearly was reading John Buchan's works during this early period, and she considered him one of this new breed of Scottish writers. In fact, her interest in Buchan would span a period of over four decades, from the 1890s to the 1940s. She reviewed his second novel, *John Burnet of Barns*, in the *Pittsburgh Leader* on December 2, 1898, calling it "a stirring tale of the 'North Countree,'" recounting the adventures of a young man who "triumphed, as all good heroes do, over the rest of mankind who had not the good fortune to be put into a book by a clever and sympathetic story teller" ("John Burnet of Barns").[6] In a review that appeared in the *Leader* on July 22, 1899, and in the *Lincoln Courier* on July 29, Cather deemed Buchan's 1899 novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, which is set in Scotland during the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion, a book to be compared "to the incomparable romances of Mr. Stevenson" and added, "This Mr. Buchan seems, indeed, to be a man to whom we may look with hope" ("Passing Show," July 29, 1899). According to Cather, his work has "the spirit of true romance," and "there is a sort of elegant reserve about him"; she is impressed with the "moral fiber" of the novel, and holds that "John Buchan has more of that kingly blood in his veins than any of the romance writers, unless it be Quiller-Couch" ("Passing Show," July 29, 1899).

As far as I have been able to determine, Cather wrote no more reviews of Buchan's novels or short story collections after these reviews. Absence of published comments, however, does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in Buchan's other works. Although nothing on Buchan appears to have been written by her for the *Home Monthly* between July 1896 and June 1897, Cather's tenure there, Edith Lewis notes that while editor of the magazine Cather had time to write only an occasional essay or review. Cather then took a position with the *Pittsburgh Leader*, during which time she was writing reviews of music and drama (*Willa Cather Living* 42–43). According to Lewis, "the hard grind of newspaper work . . . left her no energy for anything else" (43). Two articles and six

stories constituted Cather's writing under her own name at the *Home Monthly*; numerous other pseudonymous pieces—poems, articles, and editorial essays—also appeared there. However, while no additional reviews of Buchan's fiction appear in those later magazine writings, Cather's interest in his works certainly did not end at this point.[7]

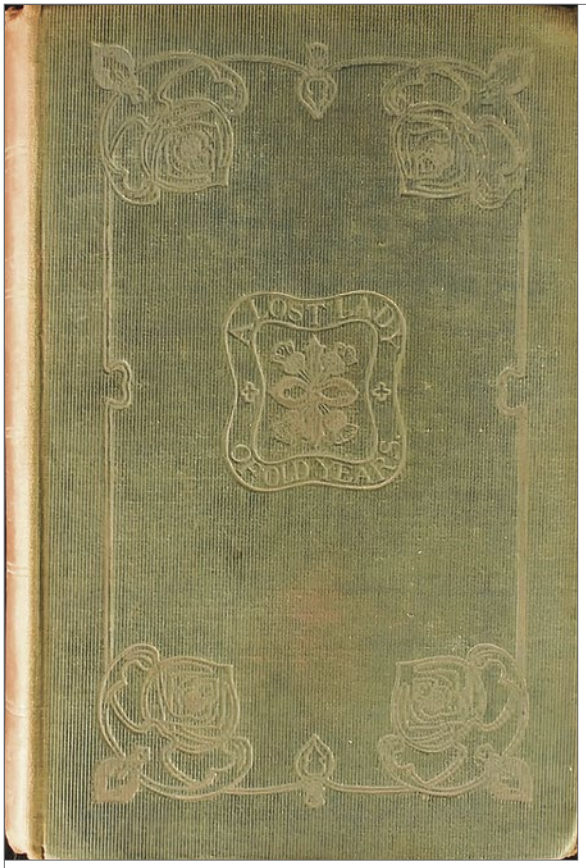
Worthy of note in Cather's reviews of the 1890s is her interest in and praise of male writers, and her often caustic criticism of many of the women writers of the day. In a November 23, 1895, review in the *Courier* that begins with comments on Ouida's novel *Under Two Flags*, Cather wonders why God "ever thrusts talent in the hands of women, they usually make such an infernal mess of it," suggesting that it must be "a sort of ghastly joke" ("Passing Show," November 23, 1895). That review was followed a week later by the already-cited "Passing Show" column in which Cather, speaking of Ian Maclaren, states, "One likes to read about sound, active, healthy men of the world sometimes, and not always about a collection of melancholy freaks. There is a wearisome sameness about the romances of old men and old women and boys and spinsters, who should have married and did not" ("Passing Show," November 30, 1895). In another early review, in this case of Gilbert Parker's *The Seats of the Mighty: A Romance of Old Quebec*, Cather declared, "I like the books of action; books of the times when men did things instead of thinking so everlastingly many things" ("Old Books and New," *World and the Parish* 354–57).

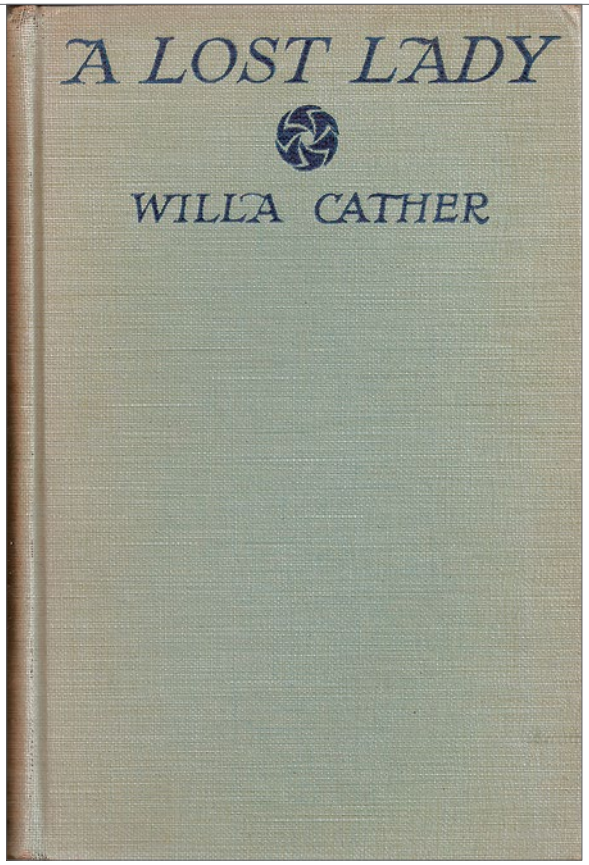
Cather certainly would have found those "sound, active, healthy men of the world" in many of Buchan's novels. Two of Buchan's early heroes, in particular David Crawfurd of *Prester John* and Richard Hannay, have remained well-known fictional heroes. *Prester John* (1910) was based on Buchan's experience in South Africa between 1901 and 1903. Buchan's fictional hero here becomes involved in adventures related to a Zulu rebellion. With *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), which Buchan called his first "shocker," we follow the adventures of "ordinary fellow" Richard Hannay, who discovers a German espionage plot and suddenly finds himself entangled in a number of adventures before he finally figures out who the plotters are and brings the plot to an end. Hannay, in fact, appeared as the major character in four more "shocker" novels published between 1916 and 1936. Ferris Greenslet, Cather's editor at Houghton Mifflin from 1911 to 1922, a long-time friend of both Buchan and Cather, notes in his autobiography that Buchan's novels "strike a note of poetry and high courage that set them above other contemporary work in the field" (*Under the Bridge* 201–202)—just the type of heroic fiction Cather had found absent in her reviews of Scottish literature of the late nineteenth century.

Greenslet first met Buchan in 1915. The two met again in the winter of 1917, and their friendship continued until Buchan's death in 1940. By the early twentieth century, Buchan's works were published in the U.K. by Hodder & Stoughton, and in the U.S. by Houghton Mifflin. Buchan's interest in Sir Walter Scott, and in reading in general, is noted in the final chapter of Greenslet's autobiography *Under the Bridge*, published in 1940, where he quotes Buchan's recollection about his reading while in a hospital bed in early 1917: "I had been in the habit of reading some of the Waverley novels every year, but on this occasion I re-read carefully what I considered to be the best." Buchan then lists eight Scott novels he reread, in addition to works by Dumas and Hugo, and for good measure he "concluded with half a dozen of Balzac" (200–201). Throughout those years he knew John Buchan, Greenslet was especially impressed by the breadth of his friend's reading: "He read the best of the current novels, English and American, biography, poetry, travel, philosophy, and always a little Latin or Greek, and deeply in the fields of his special interests, Scottish and English history and the American Civil War" (201). Harriet Shapiro notes that Cather and Edith Lewis "paid close attention to who was publishing what. Over the years, they regularly withdrew [from the New York Society Library] current novels by Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, as well as the latest titles written by John Buchan . . ." (23).

On February 12, 1940, Cather wrote to Greenslet expressing her sorrow at the loss of his "old friend—one with whom you used to do pleasant things," noting her own losses in the previous three years, and concluding by saying, "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).[8] And on June 10, 1940, Cather again wrote to Greenslet about Buchan:

> Ever since the first number of John Buchan's autobiography came out in the Atlantic, I have wanted to tell you how fine I think it is and to congratulate you upon having secured such a book of sanity and comfort for us all. On this most dreadful and discouraging of days, June 10th, I had the chapter "Bright Company"[9] for my companion at teatime. . . . I think none of the personal sorrows I have lived through have ever shaken my days and nights as has the gloom (doom?) which has been gathering for the last few months over almost everything that has made the world worth living in or living for. . . . But I write chiefly to thank you for telling me about Buchan's autobiography, which I might have missed when so many distracting and devastating things are happening in the world, and to all my friends abroad (*Complete Letters* no. 1484).[10]





First editions of *A Lost Lady of Old Years* (1899) and *A Lost Lady* (1923).

Greenslet's letter informing Cather that he had sent Houghton Mifflin's Autograph Edition of Cather's novels to Buchan and relating Buchan's comment about reading Cather makes Buchan's familiarity with her novels clear (*Complete Letters* no. 1402; see annotations). An even clearer connection seems to be with Buchan's 1899 novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, mentioned above. In the Historical Essay in the Scholarly Edition of *A Lost Lady*, Susan Rosowski, discussing the background for Cather's novel, speculates: "The more one probes, the more surprising the connections appear, which may suggest the accumulation of feelings out of which Cather wrote" (206–207). She adds that Buchan's *A Lost Lady of Old Years* "may have contributed [Cather's] title," especially given that novel's "balance of atmosphere and action," "elegant restraint," and "delicate" style that was "reserved and touched by a reflective gentleness and melancholy not easy of description" (Historical Essay 207; here Rosowski is quoting Cather's own review, previously noted ("Passing Show," July 29, 1899).

Cather evidently found more than a title from her reading or rereading of *A Lost Lady of Old Years*. In her April 19, 1925, interview with Flora Merrill, Cather declared, "*A Lost Lady* was a beautiful ghost in my mind *for twenty years* [my italics] before it came together as a possible subject for presentation" (Merrill 79).[11] Cather had reviewed *A Lost Lady of Old Years* in 1899, and according to Rosowski, "Cather began her new novel in the winter and spring of 1922" (189). According to the Textual Essay in the Scholarly Edition of *A Lost Lady*, when Dorothy Canfield Fisher asked if she had started a new novel, Cather indicated that she had (Mignon et al. 307; *Complete Letters* no. 0596). By July, she was "sufficiently far along" with the draft to read parts of it at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Vermont. She submitted a copy of the completed manuscript to Alfred Knopf in November 1922 (Mignon et al. 307–309). Interestingly, in August 1922, Buchan's 1899 novel was reprinted in London by Thomas Nelson and Sons and in Boston by Houghton Mifflin. Did the reprinting of Buchan's novel stir memories of Cather's reading and reviewing the book in 1899, or did Cather reread *A Lost Lady of Old Years* in 1922, when she was working "with some fervor" (Merrill 77) on revising and completing her own novel about a lost lady? (Rosowski 188–91).

The historical situations in the two novels are certainly dissimilar; however, evidence of Cather's having found more than a title in Buchan's book is compelling when one compares the final pages of both novels. As Rosowski suggests, Cather's portrait of Marian Forrester may have in part been derived not only from her having known Lyra Garber, the widely accepted model for the character, but also from having met with Mrs. Annie Fields, whose energy and charm were reminiscent of Mrs. Garber (208–10). However that may be, in the earlier pages of both *A Lost Lady* and *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, we see the "heroines" in all their glory; later in both novels we see the effects of time and change. In *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, we find Margaret Murray, the beautiful and charming wife of a major figure in the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, at a dinner party in which a number of "Bonnie Prince Charlie's" supporters who had taken part in the great cause come together a final time before fleeing England to avoid

punishment. The plot that has brought the various characters to this point in the story is complicated; however, we see that Margaret and protagonist Francis Birkenshaw have agreed to part, despite an attraction they have felt for years. Buchan lingers upon Margaret Murray's appearance at that last dinner party:

> But the vision of Margaret fairly surprised him. She had dressed herself in her gayest gown, putting on her old jewels which had lain untouched for months. Like a girl at the dawning of life she moved among the guests, cheerful, witty, incomparably fresh and lovely. Once again she was the grand dame. . . . It was the last brave flickering of life before the ageless quiet of her destiny. (358)

In part I, chapter 3 of *A Lost Lady*, when Marian Forrester unexpectedly visits Judge Pomeroy's office, Niel is struck by her appearance and by her almost indescribable charm: "Something about her took hold of one in a flash; one became acutely conscious of her, of her fragility and grace, of her mouth which could say so much without words; of her eyes, lively, laughing, intimate, nearly always a little mocking" (33). In part II, chapter 8, we see Marian Forrester, with a much different cast of characters, now, after the death of the Captain, a lost lady of older years, trying rather desperately to recreate the air of the first dinner party that Niel had attended years before. Niel perceives that with the years that have passed, Marian Forrester has lost much of her original attractiveness: "The long earrings swung beside the thin cheeks that were none the better, he thought, for the rouge she had put on them when she went to her room just before dinner. It improved some women, but not her,—at least, not tonight, when her eyes were hollow with fatigue, and she looked pinched and worn as he had never seen her" (154). Having been urged by Niel to tell how she had met and been rescued by Captain Forrester, Marian is briefly her former self again, momentarily once more, like Margaret Murray of Buchan's novel, *la grand dame*: "She was still her indomitable self, going through her old part,—but only the stage-hands were left to listen to her. All those who had shared in fine undertakings and bright occasions were gone" (159). Buchan's reference to "old years," then, which serves to denote that great period of heroic rebellion and hope in Scottish history, is paralleled by Cather's comment that Niel "had seen the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer. . . . It was already gone, that age; nothing could ever bring it back" (160–61). For both Margaret Murray and Marian Forrester, time has brought major changes in both their persons and their stations in life.

The dinner party description in Buchan's novel is followed by a final chapter titled "In the Nature of a Postscript" in which the reader learns what had happened to Margaret after she and Francis had parted. Now, many years later, the "patient scribe who has chronicled this tale has employed his leisure in seeking for further news of the two who figure chiefly" in the story just told. The scribe's research has turned up a collection of letters, one of which, in particular, strikes him: The writer indicates that while in Arras she had visited the tomb of her "unfortunate kinswoman," Margaret, "whose name as a little girl I used to worship. People say she went far from the paths of virtue, that she used her beauty and her talents unscrupulously . . . but I cannot believe it" (363–64). In part II, chapter 9 of *A Lost Lady*, which is clearly a postscript to Cather's novel, we find that, even many years later, Niel's remembrance of Marian Forrester has not faded but "returned to him, a bright impersonal memory"; "He has known pretty women and clever ones since then,—but never one like her, as she was *in her best days*" (163, my italics). Despite Margaret Murray's dalliances with various men and Marian Forrester's relationships with Frank Ellinger and Ivy Peters, both Francis Birkenshaw and Niel Herbert, with the passage of time, still fondly remember these women. Years later in a Chicago hotel, unexpectedly meeting with Ed Elliott, an old acquaintance from Sweet Water days, Niel learns that after the Captain's death Marian had remarried and had lived quite well in Buenos Aires.[12] "If you ever meet Niel Herbert," she had told Ed Elliott, "give him my love, and tell him I often think of him. . . . Tell him things have turned out well for me" (165). Readers of *A Lost Lady* might wonder whether the Marian Forrester we learn of late in the novel and Niel Herbert's final words about her—"So we must feel sure that she was well cared for, to the very end. . . . Thank God for that!" (166)—weren't words and feelings Cather remembered from the postscript from Buchan's novel, in which Francis Birkenshaw learns Margaret has died, but is glad to learn that she had found peace and contentment in her later years.

In her 1925 interview with Flora Merrill, Cather declared, "Your memories are like the colors in paints, but you must arrange them" (77). In the context of that statement describing her creative process, Cather's January 6, 1945, letter to Irene Miner Weisz, in which she explained how *A Lost Lady* came to be, includes an interesting, perhaps questionable, statement about her artistic method. In relating how she initially came to discover the germ of her story, a portrait of sorts of Mrs. Lyra Garber of old Red Cloud years, Cather mentions some of her homegrown Nebraska critics, "who sit around and do fine detective work on 'where she got this, and where she got that.' I could tell you in confidence, Irene, that so often I do not remember at all where I 'got' them. . . . They simply came into my mind, the way things do come when one is interested" (*Complete Letters* no. 1689). Came into her mind, yes, but without memory of where they came

from? Perhaps in some—though in this case, how could she not have remembered where these ideas came from?

One of the most important statements Cather ever made about her artistic method and creative process appears in a letter to Carrie Miner Sherwood from April 1945: "I do not so much invent as I remember and re-arrange. And I remember unconsciously. Faces, situations, things people said long ago simply come up from my mind as if they were written down there" (*Complete Letters* no. 1704). Her rewriting of the original draft of *A Lost Lady* in attempts to find a workable point of view for the narrative is well known (see Rosowski 191–92). However, Cather's comments to Eleanor Hinman in an interview for the *Lincoln Sunday Star* that, with the exception of Ántonia, "All my other characters are drawn from life, but they are all composites of three or four persons," and that "certain persons seem to coalesce naturally when one is working up a story" (45) need some clarification, not only in relationship to *A Lost Lady* but to much of her fiction. Her fictional characters were, indeed, often composites of *actual persons* (my emphasis) drawn from her personal acquaintances and even friendships but, in addition, were also the products of literary situations and characters drawn from her vast reading, from newspaper accounts to works of other writers, from the sometimes commonplace to the sometimes great. If characters and situations in Cather's novels aren't, as she said, invented, they are often derived and then adapted. To understand Cather's creative process and perhaps to really appreciate her fiction, we must remember the importance of such connections. The Cather-Buchan connection and Cather's apparent drawing on elements of Buchan's *A Lost Lady of Old Years* in creating her own lost lady narrative is simply one example, a single illustration of how Cather used both her lived experience *and* her literary experience in the creation of much of her fiction.

NOTES

1. Despite the regard both Cather and Buchan had for each other, I have not found any previous explorations of their relationship. In his recent essay in the *Willa Cather Review*, Nathan Tye does mention the friendship of Buchan and Ferris Greenslet, Cather's editor at Houghton Mifflin and lifelong friend.

2. Buchan's autobiography was published in England under the title *Memory Bar-the-Door* and in the United States as *Pilgrim's Way: An Essay in Recollection* (Houghton Mifflin 1940). All references that follow are to the American edition.

3. When John Buchan visited the United States in 1924, Greenslet drove Buchan and his wife around New Hampshire and Vermont, which reminded them of the Highlands of Scotland (*Under the Bridge* 204), and then into Virginia for a ten-day tour to see several Civil War battlefields about which Buchan had read so much. At the time of Buchan's 1924 visit, Cather was on her way to Red Cloud, with a stop in Ann Arbor to receive an honorary degree from the University of Michigan. For an interesting comment on her turning down President Roosevelt's 1939 invitation to a White House dinner with Buchan as her dinner partner, see Cather's letter to her nephew Charles (*Complete Letters* no. 2771). Nathan Tye has noted that Buchan's short story "Sing a Song of Sixpence" and Cather's story "Double Birthday" did appear together in a volume of short stories, *A Modern Galaxy*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1930.

4. According to Edith Lewis, as a young girl, Cather "never cared to read Scott," despite encouragement initially from her mother and later from Judge McClung in Pittsburgh (194–95). Woodress refutes this statement (561). However, either way, as Edith Lewis recounts, Cather certainly did read or reread all eight of Scott's Waverley novels in the 1930s and '40s and found them "a revelation of delight." Lewis also notes that Cather "planned to write an essay on Scott, titled *Apologies in Heaven*. But this was never written" (195). The Cather/Lewis borrowers' cards from the New York Society Library show that a number of copies of Scott's novels were checked out during this period (Shapiro).

5. Cather here refers to the popular fiction writer Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859–1914).

6. Cather's brief review of *John Burnett of Barns* in the December 2, 1898 *Pittsburgh Leader* is not included in the reprinting in *The World and the Parish* of sections of that column dedicated to works by Henry James and George Bernard Shaw.

7. For a discussion of Cather's reluctance to comment on her contemporaries, see Stout, *Cather Among the Moderns*, pp. 185–86.

8. In his essay on the relationship of Cather and her Houghton Mifflin editor Ferris Greenslet, Robert Thacker notes that after Cather's 1921 move from Houghton Mifflin to Knopf "the correspondence generally reveals two old friends sharing common interests and connections, appreciating one another, watching and commenting on their shared worlds" (383).

9. Cather here is apparently referring to a detail from Buchan's autobiography. There is no chapter titled "Bright Company" in either the English or American editions, or in chapters from the autobiography that appeared in early 1940 issues of the *Atlantic* prior to the book publication by Houghton Mifflin. However, at the beginning of section III of the chapter titled "Oxford," Buchan mentions the famous English author and theologian Ronald Knox, who converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism and published the account of his spiritual journey in a book called *The Spiritual Aeneid*. Buchan says that Knox, in an unpublished dedication to that work, "has told of the bright company [of Oxford men] which was scattered by the War" (*Pilgrim's Way* 48).

10. On June 10, 1940, Benito Mussolini announced that, as of midnight, Italy would fight as an ally of Germany, thus declaring war

on France and Britain. Germany had invaded France about a month before, and Paris would fall on June 14.

11. An 1899 edition of *A Lost Lady of Old Years* is part of the Cather Family Collection, National Willa Cather Center, Red Cloud, Nebraska.

12. That the former Marian Forrester remarried is not surprising; however, the mention that she has lived in Buenos Aires is interesting. In the parting scene between Francis and Margaret, Francis declares that the two of them are not of the order of "settled" people: "For good or for ill we are on the open road of life, and we cannot turn back or aside" (356).

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Claude Wheeler's Mistaken Church: A Tacit Allusion in Willa Cather's *One of Ours*

Terrell L. Tebbetts

> One goes back and runs through the pages to find the text which made one know certain things . . . and the text is not there—but something was there, all the same—is there, though no typesetter will ever set it.
>
> Cather, "Katherine Mansfield" (*Not Under Forty* 137)

In book 5 of *One of Ours*, before leaving for the trenches, Lt. Claude Wheeler goes "hunting for the Cathedral" so famously painted by Monet but stumbles on the "church of St. Ouen" instead, and, thinking "it might be the right place," enters the sanctuary, "removing his hat at the door" (449–50). After spending an hour in the church and then rejoining his fellow soldiers, Claude is chagrined to discover that, unlike him, the other men had found the cathedral and now have a good laugh at his error (452). Why, readers must ask, did Cather have her protagonist make this mistake?

To arrive at answers, readers might first want to consider some possibilities. One possibility they can dismiss would be that Cather was simply ascribing to Claude a mistake she had made when she first visited Rouen. Some might think so given Richard Harris's general observation that Cather used "her own" experiences, "her recollections" of visits to France and "made them Claude's" ("Pershing's Crusaders" 80). But Harris makes no specific claim about Claude's mistake, nor does he even imply that Cather was transferring her mistake to her character. I would add that any such leap from Harris's sound general observation to such a specific claim would itself be a reductive mistake, one reducing Cather's creative process to thoughtless transcription of memory. I would argue against such a claim even if scholars discover at some point that Cather acknowledged she had mistaken the churches, for even then her creative mind must have had a reason beyond memory to include such a scene in Claude's story. That reason is worth digging out.

A second justification for the scene—but one that readers may still want to go beyond—is that St. Ouen offers Claude an experience and revelation that the cathedral would not. He does have a strong reaction to the church bell and the rose window, its light seeming to go right "through him" (452); he experiences both sound and light as "revelations," as "superlatives toward which his mind had always been groping" (450). But he could have had a similar experience at the cathedral, especially remembering Monet's paintings that captured the play of light on that great landmark. Harris explains that Cather reported a similar experience when she visited not St. Ouen but the cathedral itself ("Claude" 6). And Claude does, in fact, have similar experiences elsewhere in the novel; as Debra Rae Cohen notes, Claude's visit to St. Ouen provides just one of the "blinkered epiphanies that dot" *One of Ours* (184). So though this experience deepens Claude's character, it does not seem that the Church of St. Ouen had a role in the experience that the cathedral could not have had. Cather's reason for creating Claude's mistake lies beyond the "old astronomy lessons" his "revelations" ultimately lead him to (452).

Readers would be justified in ruling out another possibility for the role of this mistake. Certainly, it does bring out Claude's naïveté, his lack of sophistication, his limited education. A more sophisticated visitor to Rouen would not have thought that the Church of St. Ouen, with its nineteenth century neo-Gothic west front, was the fully medieval cathedral, with its west front made so famous by Monet. But the novel would not need Claude's mistake to make this point. In fact, Cather makes clear Claude's limited experiences and education repeatedly and explicitly before and after this brief episode. In visiting the Erlichs, friends he makes while at the university, for example, he laments his upbringing in which "ideas played but little part" (120). When aviator Victor Morse asserts that life in prairie towns is "death in life" (409), Claude does not disagree. Billeted at the Jouberts' home with David Gerhardt after seeing action for the first time, Claude realizes that he had "no chance for the kind of life he wanted at home, where people were always buying and selling, building and pulling down," where most lived with "shallow emotions" (534–35). On leave with David, he realizes that he had not "been taught to do anything at all," that "a man might have been made of him, but nobody had taken the trouble to do it" (551); instead, life had been reduced to "a business proposition," his boyhood "clouded and enervated" (552–53). Clearly Cather did not need the mistaken visit to the Church of St. Ouen to enable this "young Nebraskan" to realize the shortcomings of his background and "to begin intellectually and spiritually to reconstruct his life" (Robison 162). Janis Stout terms Claude a "stumblebum" and a "confused rube much of the time," not just in Rouen (86–87),

implying that, if Claude fails to distinguish "between a cathedral and a parish church," it is the narrowness of his "small-town Nebraska background" that has left him so woefully ignorant about that and many other matters (136). I would argue, then, that since many other instances in the novel establish the limitations of such a background, and since similar ignorance could have been demonstrated if Claude had found the cathedral rather than the church, readers will need to consider further reasons for Cather's including that embarrassing episode in that specific location.

The Church of St. Ouen. Undated photochrom print. Detroit Publishing Co. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

One stronger possibility for Cather's bringing Claude to the Church of St. Ouen is the church's importance to a young World War I soldier in Siegfried Sassoon's "In the Church of St. Ouen." In a recent essay, Harris explores the similarity between that soldier's and Claude's responses to the church and meticulously and cautiously considers whether Cather could have heard Sassoon read the sonnet at the Cosmopolitan Club during his 1920 reading/speaking tour of the United States and Canada. Though Harris "found no solid evidence that . . . Cather was aware" of the poem ("Cather, Sassoon" 31), he makes a solid circumstantial case that compels a consideration of how Cather may have wanted savvy readers to perceive Claude both at this moment and in the experiences that lie ahead up to his death. Claude, of course, not yet having experienced the trenches, remains the idealistic young man he has been through the novel, his vision of the war as a splendid undertaking fully intact. Sassoon's soldier, on the other hand, already having fought at the front, has lost his illusions in the trenches and expresses his ironic sense of the war in the sonnet's powerful last line, contrasting the "rich music" of the church with the "music" of the war he is about to return to (quoted in Harris "Cather, Sassoon" 29). This contrast would bring Cather's most alert readers to wonder whether Claude too will discard his idealistic view of the war once he enters the trenches. When they discover, as his mother rightly believes, that no "doubt stained his bright faith" (604) before his death, these readers might ponder with her whether he could have borne the "disillusion" that harms so many survivors (605). In short, readers might conjecture that the contrast between Cather's and Sassoon's soldiers as they visit the Church of St. Ouen functions as a foreshadowing of Claude's enduring idealism affirmed not only at his death but also in the final pages of the novel.

Another possible reason for Cather to have placed Claude in the church of St. Ouen and, I argue, the most compelling one, rests not on circumstantial evidence and conjecture but on historical fact. The Church of St. Ouen was the site of the concluding piece of the "private examinations and the trial" of Joan of Arc, the very subject of Claude's thesis in his European history course at the university (*One of Ours* 91). Cather tells readers that Claude "put a great deal of time and thought" into the thesis (91). Familiar with the material herself, Cather even quotes Joan of Arc's words from the English translation of the *Procès*: *"the voice is beautiful, sweet and low, and it speaks in the French tongue"* (91, emphasis in the original). Cather certainly knew that the Church of St. Ouen was the site of the ceremony of abjuration in which Joan recanted (before reversing the abjuration two days later). Historian Theodore Cook explains the site's significance:

> The next place in Rouen that actually saw Jeanne herself was the open space round the rising nave of St. Ouen, then called the Cemetery. . . . Of St. Ouen only the eastern end of the nave, the apse

> and the choir, with the far older Tour aux Clercs beside them, were being built; neither its central crown nor its rose windows yet existed. . . . [There] the ceremony, called the Abjuration, was a last attempt to frighten Jeanne into confessing that her "Voices" had deceived her, and her mission was untrue. It succeeded only because of her physical weakness, and in forty-eight hours her moral courage repudiated it entirely. Proceedings began by a long sermon from Guillaume Erard, a celebrated preacher. When he called the King of France "heretic and schismatic" she interrupted him at once to contradict. When he commanded her own submission to the Church, she replied that she was ready to answer to God and to the Pope for all, and that for all she was herself alone responsible. This was a confusing reply for her judges, when made before the great concourse of people who had assembled to witness this young girl's examination. They could only retort that the ecclesiastics there present were the representatives both of God and of the Pope, and that she must submit to them. They then ordered her "to abjure" publicly the various things of which she was accused. She did not understand what was required of her. Erard exclaimed that she must "abjure" or be burnt at once. At last he began to read her sentence of condemnation. Then, though she was conscious of no evil, she at last said, "I submit myself to the Church." They hastened to read over the twelve articles of accusation already given, and the poor girl agreed to them, promising never to sin again and to submit herself to the justice of the Church. Massieu read to her a formula "of some eight lines," according to his testimony afterwards. (Cook 223–24)

Despite this church's significance in Joan of Arc's fate, when Cather has Claude mistake the church for the cathedral, she is silent about the significant role of this site in Joan's final days, so silent that Claude does not even sense a connection with the church, so silent that Janet Sharistanian omits any reference to that role as she considers Joan of Arc and her trial for "heresy and witchcraft" in *One of Ours* (91). What are knowledgeable readers to make of Cather's silence?

To answer that question, readers will need to realize that this silence is Cather's second refusal after Claude arrives in Rouen to name Joan of Arc. The evening before Claude blunders upon the Church of St. Ouen, the narrator assures readers that "Everybody knew what had happened at Rouen. . . . It had happened in the market-place, and the market-place was what they were going to find" (448). It was in the marketplace that Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. The full question, then, is why Cather is twice so coy about naming Joan of Arc and so silent about Claude's confusion of churches, especially given his university thesis and the reminder of Rouen's role in Joan's trial and death.

Stout points toward one real possibility that could be pushed further. Stout argues that *One of Ours* does not follow Cather's "newly espoused standard" of writing expressed in her "The Novel Démeublé," which Cather published in 1922, the same year she published the novel (89). Stout bases her argument on her judgment that the novel lacks a "stripped-down style" (89). Though that judgment seems accurate as applied to narrative style, more than narration alone is involved in leaving matters "felt upon the page without being specifically named there" ("The Novel Démeublé" 50). By making the novel's reference to Rouen's marketplace as the site of Joan of Arc's execution only tacit, Cather suggests that Joan's presence in Rouen should be felt rather than specified. Then when Cather sends Claude to the Church of St. Ouen without even a hint of its relevance to Joan's story, she makes Joan "the inexplicable presence of the thing not named" ("The Novel Démeublé" 50), not only in the city but, particularly, in Claude's mind and heart. Claude may have adopted her legendary heroic role as a model without quite being aware that he has done so, certainly without thoughtfully examining and questioning the legends and their applicability to the reality he faces: his own inner reality as well as the reality of the Great War and its ghastly trenches that he will soon enter. Without Claude's own conscious recognition, Joan seems to have come to embody the "splendid" thing Claude considers warfare to be. She has become the muse of his poetic belief in what lies ahead, not the least including his own death, his self-sacrifice "for the wrong idea" (Ryder 154). Joan is a muse Claude cannot question because he is so unconscious of her indwelling presence.

While considering Joan as Claude's warrior muse, readers must consider Steven Trout's argument that Cather subverts the "iconography of remembrance" (38), remembrance in which the specific icon in question, Joan of Arc, had an important role. Trout argues, in part, that in *One of Ours* Cather "deconstructs" the "version of the Great War" held by many of her readers (59). Certainly, the conclusion of the novel supports Trout's argument. But what about earlier in the novel? Though Trout does not mention Claude's mistaken visit to the Church of St. Ouen, his claim seems to

Place de la Pucelle, Rouen. Photochrom print ca. 1905. Detroit Publishing Co. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

suggest that Cather's silence about Joan—and Claude's lack of recognition—serve not to make Joan an absent presence but simply to make her absent, to distance Claude from Joan of Arc. I would argue, however, that the novel's first tacit reference to Rouen as the site of Joan's execution calls Trout's larger argument into question. When, after hundreds of years, "the boys" recognize Joan's connection to the city and her execution "in the market-place" and are "going to find it" (448), Claude is implicitly one of "the boys." They are clearly in touch with the "iconography of remembrance," and Joan is present in it. Her absence from Claude's mind as he visits the site of her trial without recognizing it, even though he knows of her important tie to the city, therefore, suggests that Joan is more absent from his mind than from the site he chances on: he fails to recognize her presence not just in that site, but, more importantly, in his mind and heart. The young man who once researched her at the university has made her legend so much a part his ethos that he no longer recognizes those thoughts as arising from her life and death. Unbeknownst to Claude, the halo of Joan's sainthood has contributed her "glory" to the adventure he finds so "glorious." If the iconography is deconstructed for Claude's mother and Sergeant Hicks and other veterans, does any clue suggest that it does not remain in the hearts and minds of the inexperienced and will revive in the future? The ending of the novel may plead for readers to abandon the idealism promoted in such iconography, but the bulk of the novel suggests the lasting power and potential influence of idealism, perhaps even in Cather herself, as readers might see in her letters regarding her cousin G. P. after his death in battle.

Part of the widely recognized ambiguity of the novel, on the other hand, is that though Trout's argument for the novel's challenge to the iconography of remembrance can be questioned as above, it also seems spot on from another angle. Joan had been recognized as a martyr for centuries. She had become an official icon of war through her beatification by the Catholic Church in 1909; that is, she was a near saint at the time of the novel's setting, just short of the full sainthood to be bestowed by the Church in 1920, two years before the novel's publication. In her military role, Joan believed herself to be led by God through the saints sent to inspire her. Most broadly, we can say that she acted as her religious faith guided her. Quite literally, saints are mere humans whose images are wrought as icons and are displayed in churches and elsewhere for veneration. The Church of St. Ouen apparently lacks an image of Joan; certainly Claude does not record seeing one. If he had seen one, it surely would have reminded him of the church's role in Joan's condemnation. So perhaps the Church of St. Ouen itself testifies to a dismantling in the iconography of war.

On the other hand, Claude missed at St. Ouen an icon of war that he would have seen if he had found the cathedral: Sergeant Hicks tells Claude that he and the others had found the "statue of Richard the Lion-hearted,

over the spot where the lion-heart itself was buried" (452). The statue of Richard in the cathedral suggests that all of the iconography of war has not been dismantled. Like Joan, Richard was a French warrior guided by his religious faith, a leader, as Harris has succinctly put it in his "Explanatory Notes," of Christian troops in the Third Crusade who "recaptured Jerusalem from Saladin and the Muslims" (768). Yet Claude missed seeing this Christian warrior's image just as he had missed seeing any image of Joan at St. Ouen. Claude is different from both holy warriors. For the full hour he is in the church, the "house of God," he remains as unconnected to God and his saints and angels as he does to Joan. He senses "revelations," as noted above, but they relate to the aesthetic "superlatives" of the church. And he senses a connection to a vastness beyond him, but it is the vastness not of God but of "stars whose light travels though space . . . before it reaches the earth" (452). Some might move from that physical vastness and that source of light to a meditation on the divine, but Claude does not. Claude, it would seem, is no holy warrior.

If Claude's death will be considered a martyrdom and he a saint, that death will be a secular martyrdom and he a cultural saint, dying for France like Joan, but guided by a love of the cultural grandness embodied in France, by his belief that "France [is] better than any county can ever be" (604), but not by the will of God. The man who fails to recognize the presence of the saint in the place where she was condemned for heresy will not follow her into the iconography of this war's remembrance. He will not even be remembered in the annals of war. The novel offers no hint that Frankfort will erect a monument to the war dead with Claude's name and image on it, as Bladen did in remembering G. P. Cather. In fact, it hints that back home only his mother and Mahailey remember Claude. Sergeant Hicks makes Claude's erasure clear enough when he comments on the recent promotion of the inept Captain Maxey: "Colonel Maxey, anyhow! Colonel for what Claude and Gerhardt did, *I* guess!" (601).

Complex and ambiguous: what better words are there to describe Cather's accomplishment in bringing a mistaken Claude Wheeler to the Church of St. Ouen? The sainted warrior he researched just a few years earlier has become the unrecognized and thus unquestioned muse of his idealistic image of the glorious war he has joined. She is "the unseen vision, the unheard echo" all the more powerful for being unseen and unheard (Lewis 138). Like her, Claude is fated to become a martyr, but unlike her, no remembered saint.

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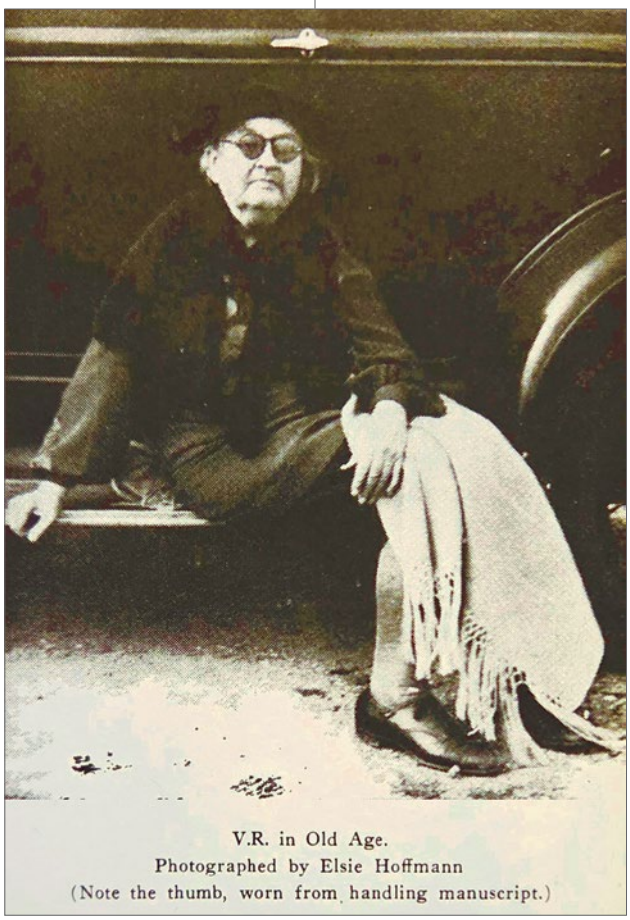
Whose *Ántonia*? AI Attempts to Reconceive Jim Burden

Scott Reynolds

The Pew Research Center's *Spring 2025 Global Attitudes Survey* reports ninety-five percent of respondents rank the online spread of misinformation as a major or minor global threat, ahead of worries about the global economy, terrorism, climate change, and infectious diseases (Poushter et al. 1).[1] While even the most fastidious readers of the *Willa Cather Review* might not consider the adulteration of Cather's history the end of the world (she did, after all, make her own amendments), what follows is something else: a cautionary study illustrating the ramifications of an attack on the truth. Insidious errors, unedited by organic intelligence, are seeding the large language models (LLMs) that feed artificial intelligence (AI), to inevitably and alarmingly blossom from AI's chatbots as accepted facts. In this case, OpenAI's ChatGPT, among the most actively used AI applications, is sprouting fever dreams about who chose Jim Burden to narrate *My Ántonia*.

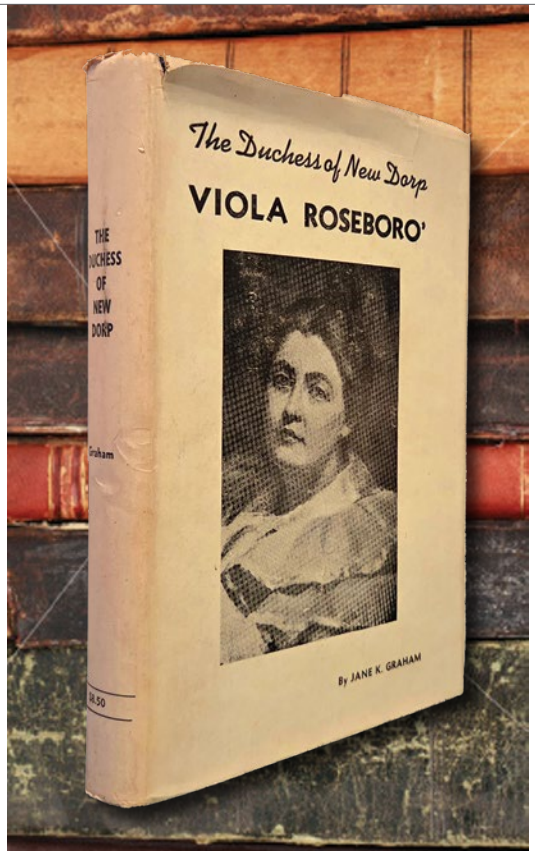
Three years before giving voice to Jim Burden, Willa Cather masqueraded as S. S. McClure as ghostwriter of his *My Autobiography*, stating, "Miss Viola Roseboro' joined the staff of *McClure's* as manuscript reader soon after the magazine was started. . . . She had a singularly open mind toward the manuscript bag. . . . Miss Roseboro' seized upon . . . stories when their writers were unknown, with as much sureness and conviction as if she had known what the end was to be in each case, and exactly how popular each of these writers was to become" (139–40). As prescient as Roseboro' was, however, it's doubtful that she could have predicted the story that is being drawn from AI's manuscript bag about her influence on *My Ántonia*. To be sure, ChatGPT can foster a simulacrum of a conversation about Cather's long friendship with Roseboro'. In May 2024, Microsoft began incorporating OpenAI's ChatGPT-4o LLM into its Copilot Pro chatbot, building additional training into it since that launch (Martindale). When asked about the influence of Viola Roseboro' on literature, Copilot provides assorted responses. Here is one of the more accurate: "Viola Roseboro' (1857–1945) was a pivotal figure in American literary history, not as a widely known author herself, but as a discerning and influential fiction editor who shaped the careers of some of the most iconic writers of the early 20th century."[2] These pronouncements conform to the testimony of Roseboro's contemporaries: before the internet, television, even commercial radio, when weekly and monthly magazines competed via large flat fees to publish short stories and serialized novels by the era's leading authors, Roseboro' was considered the best manuscript reader in the business. Investigative journalist Ida Tarbell called her "a reader of real genius . . . the only 'born reader' I have ever known" (197). But as Cather once wrote, "the kiss of the muse . . . left its visible mark" on geniuses, whether artists or editors ("Passing Show"). A picture of Roseboro' late in life appears to show her left thumb withered from decades of turning page after page written by her personal editorial clients and by anxious would-be contributors to *McClure's Magazine*. Her pollical sacrifice brought to the world the talents of Rex Beach, Jack London, O. Henry, and Booth Tarkington, and influenced the writings of dozens more, including Willa Cather. Roseboro' wrote Cather about her early poems, she facilitated McClure, Phillips & Co.'s publication of *The Troll Garden* (1905), and she suggested to S. S. McClure that his magazine hire her in 1906. Their exchange of personal letters continued for years after Roseboro's and Cather's careers diverged (*Complete Letters* no. 0088, see Person Annotations: Roseboro').



V.R. in Old Age.
Photographed by Elsie Hoffmann
(Note the thumb, worn from handling manuscript.)

From *Viola, the Duchess of New Dorp.*

And then there are Copilot's inaccurate responses. When Copilot reaches *My Ántonia*, it's Katie, bar the door: "Roseboro' played a crucial role in the success of *My Ántonia*," Copilot offers with hearty assurance. "After reading an early draft, she advised Cather to rewrite the novel from Jim Burden's point of view, a suggestion that transformed the book into a masterpiece." Asked to reconsider this claim, Copilot doubled down: "Cather later credited Roseboro's insight as essential to the novel's success." Asked to survey Roseboro's editorial techniques, Copilot said, "She had a sharp eye for point of view. Her most famous intervention was with Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, where she advised Cather to rewrite the novel from Jim Burden's perspective. This wasn't just a suggestion—it was a challenge to rethink the emotional center of the story." No, it wasn't. It wasn't a suggestion. It wasn't a challenge. It never happened.



Jane Kirkland Graham self-published her biography in 1955, having the Illinois Printing Co. print volume I first. Later that same year a combined edition of volumes I and II appeared.

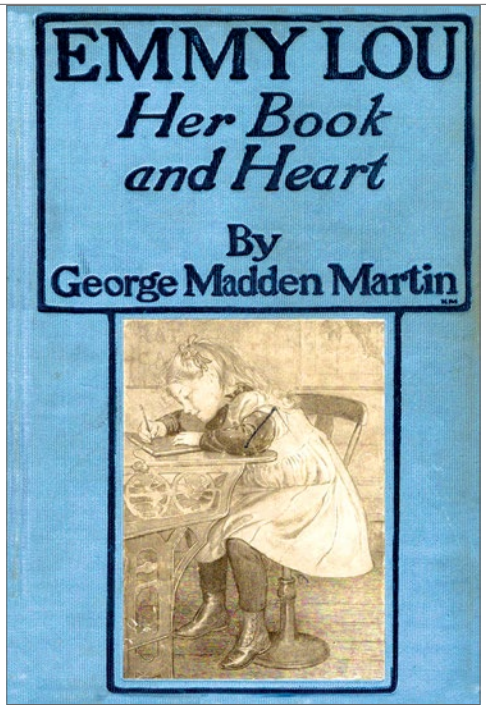
Every user of AI knows chatbots tend to hallucinate, confabulate, and miscite. In this case, fortunately, Copilot Pro itself provided accurate links to the source of its artificially generated fabrications. This sophisticated chatbot had fallen into what researchers and reporters know as the single source dependency trap. Journalists know that the words of even trusted single sources, if left unconfirmed, can be flawed. Programmers know the trap as the infamous GIGO: garbage in, garbage out. But Copilot has no fallacy filter. Mathematically speaking, large language models incorporate a formula for cross-entropy loss, not a loss function for understanding. This minimizes prediction error, not comprehension error. In today's probabilistic models, if certain words most often mingle with others, the fact that the word string contains flawed information is irrelevant to its inclusion in a report. The ubiquity of unsubstantiated online content combined with AI's insatiable appetite for data can yield adventitious results. In this case, as its primary source, Copilot pointed to an essay by Stephen Schmalhofer titled "Viola Roseboro's Literary Garden," published in *The New Criterion* magazine, appearing online December 12, 2018. Schmalhofer is an investment banker with a history degree from Yale who also writes lively articles for often conservative and usually Catholic publications, including the *American Conservative*, *First Things*, and *The New Criterion*. Beyond four dozen essays in various periodicals, he published a collection of eleven essays on artists of the Gilded Age, including Cather, titled *Delightful People* (Cluny Media, 2020). Its foreword by Austin Litke, O.P., begins with Litke announcing, "Stephen Schmalhofer is not a professional writer." Referencing St. John Newman's *The Idea of a University*, Litke characterizes Schmalhofer as a gentleman scholar, comparing his work to the early volumes of the Loeb Classical Library, "produced not by trained philologists but by gentlemen: men who had day jobs but whose avocation, whose passion, was to take up the *loci classici* of Western civilization and translate them to make them accessible to specialists and non-specialists alike." Schmalhofer's publisher, Cluny Media, is a small press that specializes in recovering books in the Roman Catholic tradition, not a mainstream trade publisher or an academic press.

Why does this matter? Copilot also referenced Wikipedia's entry, "*My Ántonia*." There Wikipedia linked to "The Strange, Forgotten Life of Viola Roseboro'," a profile by Stephanie Gorton in the February 20, 2018, issue of *The Paris Review*. When contacted, Gorton, herself an experienced editor, cited among her sources Schmalhofer's *New Criterion* article. Wikipedia's "*My Ántonia*" entry also links to its "Viola Roseboro'" entry, which, in turn cites both Schmalhofer's and Gorton's articles. The source of the "garbage in" was becoming clearer. In an online conversation recorded December 9, 2020, by *The University Bookman*, Schmalhofer identified the wellspring of this self-referential torrent ("Book Gallery"). At minute mark 35:14, he introduces "a very unusual person, this Viola Roseboro, and the act of figuring out who she was was an adventure in and of itself. There's one biography written about her, um, it's great because it references a lot of things that are now lost in the archives, but it's enough that you can verify some things about her life." The biography—of some notoriety among connoisseurs of facts—is *Viola, the Duchess of New Dorp: A Biography of Viola Roseboro'*, by Jane Kirkland Graham, self-published at the Illinois Printing Co. in 1955. It is a collection of

often verbatim recollections from dozens of Roseboro' acquaintances, recorded decades after the events. Would that Schmalhofer had verified the anecdote he culled from that biography for his article in *The New Criterion*, or that Roger Kimball, editor and publisher of *The New Criterion*, had done due diligence in assigning a fact checker. Schmalhofer's article is marred by his botched reading of a flawed account provided by Graham's text (the brackets are his):

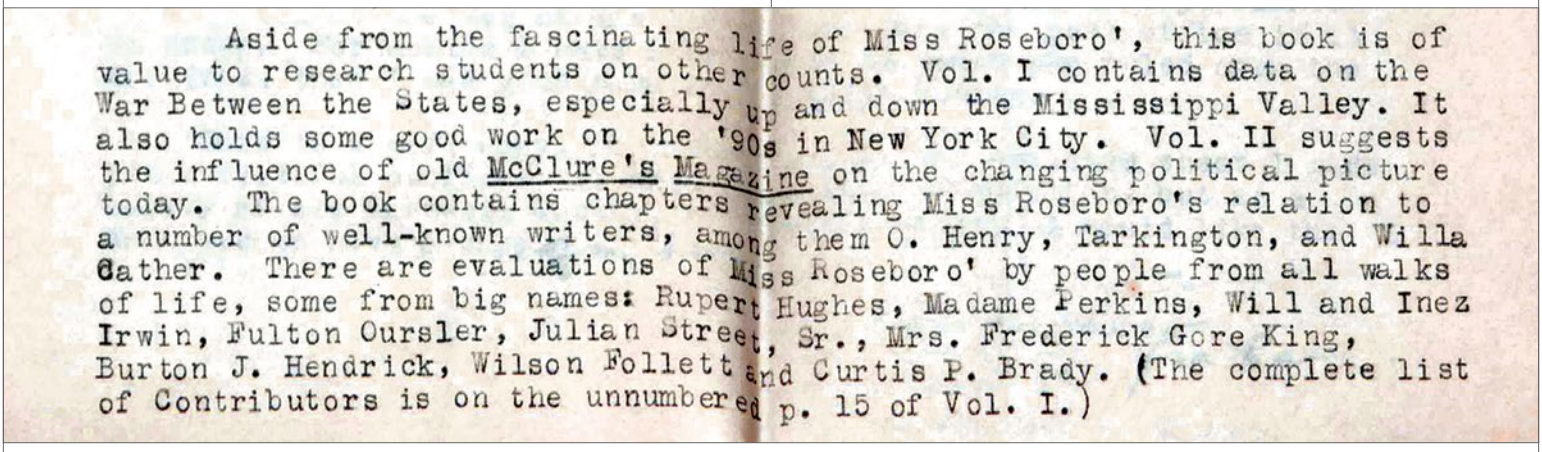
> This year we celebrate the centenary of Willa Cather's great novel *My Ántonia*—and we give thanks for Viola Roseboro, who saved it from the rejection pile. . . . After multiple publishers declined, Cather brought Roseboro the manuscript for *My Ántonia*. Her advice gave Cather the direction she needed: "[You] have told your novel through the wrong character's eyes, from the wrong point of view," she said. "Have you the courage to throw the [manuscript] away, and sit down and re-write it from [Jim Burden]'s point of view, you have a great book." (Schmalhofer)

Presented with Schmalhofer's take on literary history, Tracy Sanford Tucker, Director of Collections & Curation for the National Willa Cather Center, confirmed, "It would appear that *Duchess* is the sole source of the detail that forms the basis of his argument."[3] While readers of this journal might recommend a link to James Woodress's "Historical Essay" in the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition of *My Ántonia*, just a click away at the Willa Cather Archive, Schmalhofer assumes Cather aficionados overlooked a single, prime source that only he had discovered.



George Madden Martin's popular Emmy Lou stories in *McClure's Magazine* were collected and published by McClure, Phillips & Co. in 1902.

To be fair, the casual reader of *Duchess* is bound to be confused. Jane Kirkland Graham's structure is fairly chronological, but each of her sources' recollections is presented as one of seventy sections rippling across two massive volumes.[4] They mix times and events like cocktails, each infused with the unique life essence of its recollector. A superficial reading of *Duchess* leaves the impression the *My Ántonia* episode was reported by several of Graham's correspondents, but if *Duchess* is approached with editorial fortitude and ample Post-it notes at the ready, it becomes clear that the anecdote in question was made once by one person, referred to obliquely in many places, but never substantiated or recorded by Cather, Roseboro', or anyone else. The source of the single anecdote is George Madden Martin, creator of the beloved character "Emmy Lou" in stories serialized in *McClure's* under the editorial guidance of Roseboro'. Born Georgia May Madden, Martin published under the male pseudonym George Madden Martin after her marriage to businessman Attwood R. Martin. In 1902, Roseboro's fellow editor Lincoln Steffens was dispatched to Martin's Kentucky home to contract her future work, telling her the initial installment had brought *McClure's* three thousand new subscribers (Clowes 22). McClure, Phillips & Co. subsequently collected the stories as the novel *Emmy Lou: Her Book and Heart*, a bestseller that earned rave reviews ("Heart of a Child"). Martin was a prolific author despite ill health. From her final sickbed, the eighty-year-old Martin sent batches of her "Recalls of Viola Roseboro', Editor and Friend" to Jane Kirkland Graham (*Duchess*, Vol. II, Chapter IX).[5] Some of Martin's "Recalls," written



Aside from the fascinating life of Miss Roseboro', this book is of value to research students on other counts. Vol. I contains data on the War Between the States, especially up and down the Mississippi Valley. It also holds some good work on the '90s in New York City. Vol. II suggests the influence of old McClure's Magazine on the changing political picture today. The book contains chapters revealing Miss Roseboro's relation to a number of well-known writers, among them O. Henry, Tarkington, and Willa Cather. There are evaluations of Miss Roseboro' by people from all walks of life, some from big names: Rupert Hughes, Madame Perkins, Will and Inez Irwin, Fulton Oursler, Julian Street, Sr., Mrs. Frederick Gore King, Burton J. Hendrick, Wilson Follett and Curtis P. Brady. (The complete list of Contributors is on the unnumbered p. 15 of Vol. I.)

In this excerpt from a summary of her book, Graham lists a sampling of the individuals whose memories are featured in it. South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

thirty to forty years after the fact, bear the distinct hallmarks of confabulations from an aged brain. Schmalhofer's interpretation quoted earlier compounds the misinformation of Recall VII. His in-readings and inaccuracies are obvious when Martin's words are viewed in their entirety:

> I was her [Miss Roseboro's] guest in her apartment one day. A writer came in whose MS Viola had agreed to read and find why all publishers to now had rejected it. They both assured me I could share the report. Said Viola to the author, 'You have really great material. But you have told your novel through the wrong character's eyes, from the wrong point of view. Have you the courage to throw the MS away and sit down and rewrite it from so and so's point of view, you have a great book.' The author, a famous American woman, did so, produced a famous best seller and became one of the leading women authors. (Graham 46)

The same anecdote surfaces in *Duchess*, book II, chapter XXII, "Viola's Half-Century Contacts With a Gifted Genius": Willa Cather. Graham expounds, "Mrs. Martin again wrote, naming Willa Cather as the author she had in mind, sending her address, and urging that her own name be used as an introduction, if such were needed, that this author be begged to make this public avowal. . . . [Cather] herself wrote a note by hand and signed Permission for the use of three critical extracts from *her* letters to Viola Roseboro', for use in this book" (125, emphasis in the original). Unfortunately, during Graham's writing, Cather died, and her will contained a clause forbidding publication of any of her letters, even by her own biographers. Graham avers, "Had it been possible to use the extracts from Willa Cather's three letters to Viola Roseboro' (on which she gave written permission in a handwritten note), ample proof would have been demonstrated of exchange of criticism *in old age*" (126, emphasis in the original).

In two additional references to Martin's "Recall VII," Graham notes an absence of confirmation and admits her reservations about Martin as a single source. She quotes Roseboro' from "A Letter to a Client" of June 4, 1934:[6]

> Now I will skip years and come down to the time long ago after some trial flights in the right direction (she) had published *My Ántonia*. I went to her with tears of joy and most frankly expressed my delight that she had found out how Punk she used to be! We held hands over that more warmly than we ever had before over anything. "I was trying to write like Henry James and Mrs. Wharton,' she cried, 'and I am such a different person."
>
> [Graham continues] Note that Viola Roseboro' does *not* tell her client the part claimed for her by George Madden Martin, in the reconstruction of a novel discussed in an interview. (130, emphasis in the original)

Graham also quotes from Roseboro's December 27, 1937, letter to her friend of fifty years, Christine Edmonds, who contributed her letters for the biography:

> But now I want to tell you a little about *Antonia*—there is lots to tell. Within a month Miss Cather has writ me of *Antonia*. But here is what I loved to hear best of all: (It is she who was the little boy and bigger through the tale, she saying she felt like giving Ántonia as she would be seen by a male.).
>
> [Graham continues] Again note that Roseboro' does not here indicate, if indeed in old age she recalled, that scene George Madden Martin witnessed, on the very point of who should be the narrator in the novel. (132–33)

As if to distance herself from a source that seemed a bit off, Graham further questions Martin's command of facts regarding her "Recall X." In that segment, Martin claimed to have been visiting Roseboro' on Cape Cod, "that eventful time Taft spoke there, and an attempt at his assassination was prevented. A guest of Viola's was accused of being connected with it—but of course was not." Graham questioned President William Howard Taft's son, then Ohio Senator Robert Taft, about these details. He reviewed his father's calendar, found no record that he ever visited Cape Cod, and commented about an attempted assassination, "I should certainly have heard about it if there had been." Graham speculates that the infirm Martin was conflating Theodore Roosevelt's famous "Provincetown Speech" on Cape Cod on August 20, 1907, the attempt on Roosevelt's life before a speech in Milwaukee October 14, 1912, and visits to Roseboro' by the young journalist and communist activist John Reed while he resided in Provincetown, Massachusetts, during the summer of 1916 (47). For all her shortcomings as a biographer, Graham is wary of the single source trap: she implies that the assassination plot, like the conversation about Jim Burden, never happened.

The most telling flaw in Martin's original anecdote is, "I was her [Miss Roseboro's] guest in her apartment one day. A writer came in whose MS Viola had agreed to read and find why all publishers to now had rejected it." Cather fans will immediately recognize this "MS" cannot be *My Ántonia*, which was never rejected by publishers. It was never sent to any except Houghton Mifflin, which accepted it, sight unseen, upon hearing of it in

March 1917 (*Complete Letters* no. 0382). According to Edith Lewis in *Willa Cather Living*, when Cather returned to New York from Red Cloud, "in the Fall of 1916, she brought with her the first two or three chapters of *My Ántonia*" (102). At year's end, Cather admitted to her mother that in the holiday rush, "I've got behind with my book and am getting nervous. I'm going to cut out parties for the first two months of the New year" (*Complete Letters* no. 2413). By March 8, she felt she was halfway through the first draft and hoping for a fall 1917 publication (*Complete Letters* no. 0382). As can happen, however, life intervened. A bitter winter, an ill maid, and the exigencies of America's formal entry into World War I on April 6 were equally financially and emotionally taxing, leading to this May 4 missive to her sister, Elsie:

> The war has made everything so much more difficult, housekeeping and meeting ones bills,—and it has taken all the fun of work away, somehow. One can't feel that writing books is very important. I am fairly stuck on the novel I wrote you about, and will either have to give it up or try it over again a new way. Two Houghton Mifflin men were here last night and I had to make the sad admission to them that I couldn't get a new book out this fall. They are disappointed, and so am I. There is a great deal that's good in the new story, but I have not gone at it right, somehow, and I'm going to quit it for awhile and do some short stories to build up my bank account. (*Complete Letters* no. 2079)

On May 28, University of Nebraska Chancellor Samuel Avery invited Cather to the university's June 13 commencement ceremony.[7] On June 3, from her apartment (at 5 Bank Street in Greenwich Village), Cather mailed her reply:

> I should be very happy and very proud to go to Lincoln for the Commencement Day exercises, but it is impossible for me to leave New York until the first of July. Had I known of this pleasant possibility a month or three weeks ago, I could have arranged to get away, but now the nature of my engagements here will not permit my leaving the city, even for a few days. (*Complete Letters* no. 2031)

In an earlier letter to H. W. Boynton, Cather referred to "engagements with my desk" (*Complete Letters* no. 2935). The nature of her engagements this time around was buckling down to generate revenue either by writing a few short stories or becoming unstuck on *My Ántonia*. But at 8:56 a.m. on June 8, Cather either walked three blocks north to her neighborhood's Western Union office or picked up her phone and spent forty-two cents ($10.72 in 2026)[8] to send to Chancellor Avery a telegram:

> IF NOT TOO LATE CAN BE IN LINCOLN JUNE 13 TO RECEIVE DEGREE PLEASE REPLY (*Complete Letters* no. 3137)

The next day at 10:20 a.m., after receiving assurance she was still most welcome, she spent thirty cents (now $7.66) more:

> THANK YOU I WILL BE IN LINCOLN FOR COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES (*Complete Letters* no. 3138)

Cather was unstuck. Engagements apparently resolved, telegrams sent and train ticket bought, she packed in three days and was off to Nebraska for a brief stay (*Complete Letters* no. 2077). In late summer she retreated to the Shattuck Inn in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, where she finished "The Hired Girls" (*Complete Letters* no. 0396; Woodress 388). Had Cather been stuck on the "who" of its narrator? In her *Willa Cather: A Memoir*, Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant writes, "Often she thought about her heroines for years before they appeared in a book" (140). In the spring of 1916, Cather was already picturing Ántonia. She came to Sergeant's New York apartment "flushed and alert from one of her swift wintry walks. . . . [She] set an old Sicilian apothecary jar of mine, filled with orange-brown flowers of scented stock in the middle of a bare, round, antique table. . . . 'I want my new heroine to be like this—like a rare object in the middle of a table, which one may examine from all sides. . . . I want her to stand out—like this—because she *is* the story'" (138–39, emphasis in the original). In an interview with Eleanor Hinman printed in *The Lincoln Star* on November 6, 1921, Cather described her approach to her Ántonia:

> But from what point of view should I write it up? I might give her a lover and write from his standpoint. However, I thought my Ántonia deserved something better than the *Saturday Evening Post* sort of stuff in her book. Finally I concluded that I would write from the point of a detached observer, because that was what I had always been.
>
> Then, I noticed that much of what I knew about Annie came from the talks I had with young men. . . . So I decided to make my observer a young man. (44)

Whatever was Cather's quandary about *My Ántonia*, to have a transmogrifying effect on Cather's narrative choice during its writing, Martin's anecdotal meeting would have had to have occurred in January/February or June of 1917. During those months, Roseboro' did not live in an apartment. She lived in a cottage she owned at Seaside, across the street from the post office in Annadale, on Staten Island. Her residence there in 1916 appears as a detail in a laudatory unsigned interview in the *New*

George Madden Martin as she appeared in *The Critic*, April 1902.

York Herald ("Much New Writing Talent"). She moved to the first of a series of apartments, at 13 Bank Street in Greenwich Village, in 1918 (Graham 188). During those same months, George Madden Martin herself was in Kentucky. Considered the dean of the Louisville, Kentucky's local literary colony, her travels were regular fodder for newspapers' society pages. On November 19, 1916, Louisville's *Courier-Journal* reported on the Ladies' Association of Broadway Baptist Church's Tuesday meeting: "Mrs. Attwood R. Martin, who has recently made an extended visit to the Kentucky mountains, will talk on 'The Work at Oneida'" ("With the Club Women"). The March 11, 1917, edition of *The Courier-Journal* announced: "Mr. and Mrs. Attwood R. Martin have returned this week to their home here [Anchorage, Kentucky], after spending six weeks the guests of Mrs. W. R. Belknap and [Louisville bon vivant and polymath] Mrs. Emily Davison" ("Anchorage"). Those notices rule out Martin visiting Roseboro' in early 1917. A meeting in June is precluded by the February 1918 edition of the *Red Cross Magazine*, where Martin wrote, "It was the morning of June 5, 1917, the day of the draft. The young men of the neighborhood, white and black, were coming in to the village on foot, on bicycle, in wagon and motor car, to register. . . . There came a tap at my door and Malviney Burnley came in" (Martin 56). The society column of Louisville's *Courier-Journal* on June 10, 1917, does not speak of a Martin trip to New York, instead disclosing her summer plans: "Mrs. Attwood R. Martin and Miss Julia Madden will go July 1 to Old Sweet Springs, Va., to spend the summer with Mrs. William Davenport and Mrs. George Gray" ("Personals," June 10, 1917). Despite her earnest "Recall VII," Martin never was physically close enough to Willa Cather during the conception of Jim Burden to have a meeting with her and Viola Roseboro', anywhere.[9]

The misinformation in George Madden Martin's anecdote reveals it cannot be about Willa Cather and *My Ántonia*, yet the details are so particular that it is hard to believe Martin made it up out of whole cloth. Indeed she did not; it is part of her pattern of confabulation. In 1916, Roseboro' did take on a budding author as a client, a woman who, after several publishers' rejections, became a prolific American writer with a very well-received novel, prompting critics to compare her to Stephen Vincent Benét, following it with more than thirty bestsellers. She is introduced in "Viola's Favorite Client, Margaret Culkin Banning" (*Duchess*, Vol. II, Chapter XXXIV). Graham writes, "During the winter of 1916–17, or the following Spring, Margaret Culkin Banning was working with V.R., sending her chapters of a projected first novel, *Barbara Lives* for criticism and suggestions" (177). Banning's manuscript of *Barbara Lives* was rejected by all publishers. Even after Roseboro's extensive intervention, Macmillan Publishers sent it back with a kind letter. In 1918, in Roseboro's Bank Street apartment, "the two women saw each other once or twice a week" as Roseboro' worked at length with Banning on a second manuscript (188). It features the themes of *Barbara Lives* presented through different characters. Roseboro' recommended it to publisher George H. Doran, who published it in 1920 as *This Marrying*. It is dedicated to Viola Roseboro'. Graham writes that "Barbara lives only in Miss Banning's heart" (185), but the first draft of Barbara's story lives in the archives of the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center of Boston University. A comparison of paragraphs from Banning's manuscripts, beginning with *Barbara Lives*, illustrates Roseboro's ability to sharpen novice writers' latent talents and whittle away their excesses:

> The train slowed with a start, and the sudden presence of a grinning man outside her window on the station platform made her pull her curtain down quickly and reopen the question of the night before, a burning one regarding the etiquette of going to the dressingroom [sic] in her new blue silk kimono or waiting until she was fully dressed. (*Barbara* 1)

That train doesn't pull up at the station for another two thousand words, whereas in *This Marrying*, Roseboro' helped Banning cut to the chase:

> And as the train swayed and jerked as only a suburban train can do, she pulled out her notebook and speculated on her first adventure. (*This Marrying* 14)

While Margaret Culkin Banning was working on her prose with Roseboro' in September 1917, George Madden Martin's husband was summoned to active military duty ("Women Writers Will Read"). To do her part for the war effort, Martin worked out of Washington, D.C., and New York City on special projects with the *Red Cross Magazine* ("Kentucky Author"). *The Evening World* reported George Madden Martin joining ten other children's book authors opening Children's House, a Brooklyn home for needy youths, on January 28, 1918 ("Women Writers

Margaret Culkin Banning, ca. 1953. Minnesota Historical Society.

and Society Leaders"). Four days later, the *New York Times* had her attending a debutante luncheon at the home of Mrs. Lewis B. Woodruff on East 68th Street, accompanied by, among others, Frances Hodgson Burnett and Mary Roberts Rinehart ("Authors at Luncheon"). On May 1, according to Louisville's *Courier-Journal*, she "began the 'soap box' drive in New York to-day by reading a letter found on the body of a French soldier, slain on the 'field of honor'" ("Kentucky Authoress"). The same paper reported on June 16 that "Mrs. George Madden Martin, who has been spending the winter in Washington and New York, engaged in war work, will join her sister, Miss Eva Madden, and spend the summer in the Catskill Mountains" ("Personals, "June 16, 1918). It is very easy to visualize George Madden Martin in the spring of 1918 visiting Viola Roseboro' at her apartment on 13 Bank Street while Margaret Culkin Banning was dealing with rejection, seeking a new direction and point of view. It is just as easy to visualize George Madden Martin visiting Willa Cather at her apartment on 5 Bank Street. It is easiest to visualize Martin's original "Recall" as simply another of her confabulations. And if her thirty years of living since the birth of *My Ántonia* hadn't muddled memories enough, consider this: On February 4, 1911 in New York City, *The Sun* printed "Sifting the Manuscripts," a lengthy interview about the inner workings of *McClure's Magazine* in which Viola Roseboro' "Tells of the Search for Good Material, Complaints of the Outsider—Discoveries of Famous Writers—'Chucks' and 'Not Chucks'":

> When 'Emmy Lou,' by George Martin, came to us it had been to almost everything in the country, twenty places or more. It had not even received an editorial comment beyond the meaningless printed slip, except from the *Youth's Companion*, where it was first submitted, which rightly said it was a story for grown people. It had been judged by a recipe and failed; three fighters were necessary to get it accepted in our office after it had been once turned down. It became one of our biggest successes. ("Sifting")

Memories are rewritten over time, reconstructed at each recalling, modified by experiences between recollections. President Theodore Roosevelt (not Taft) spoke at Cape Cod in 1907, but the attempted assassination of Roosevelt was five years later in Wisconsin. Martin witnessed Roseboro' consulting an author about her manuscript, but it wasn't Willa Cather with *My Ántonia*. Martin's own manuscript was rejected by all publishers until its latent shine was spotted by Viola Roseboro'. Graham writes of George Madden Martin's "Recalls," "During the last months of Mrs. Martin's life, thought of Viola Roseboro' and of the old *McClure's* group, lived in her mind; she kept sending new items" (Graham 48). Rather, thought thrived in her mind, intertwining, nourished by the vagaries of recollection, invasive. An agglomeration of information became a fount of misinformation in 1955. Jane Kirkland Graham's tortuous presentation went virtually unnoticed for more than a half-century.[10] Stephen Schmalhofer took it to the bank, posted an unsupportable memory in the internet era, and in four short years it became curriculum via the *American Literature 1880-1940 Teacher Guide H472/02 (A Level 5)*. Three years hence, AI promptly Copilots a course into a whirlpool of dreams. Churning therein, like the Pacific garbage vortex, is the threat bedeviling ninety-five percent of the world's media consumers. At minute

Jane Kirkland Graham earned her B.A. at the University of Michigan in 1915 and her M.A. from Vanderbilt University in 1930. This is her senior yearbook photo in the 1915 *Michiganensian*.

mark 36:48 in Schmalhofer's online conversation, he says, "I had the great luxury, unlike academics on the call, I don't have to footnote. I get to write essays. It's a superior form of output, um, you get to just enjoy and luxuriate in your projects. It's not work for me. I have all the advantages of the amateur. I don't have to do all that stuff" ("Book Gallery"). That stuff, however, is meant to mark safe passage for the readers; neglecting "all that stuff," such as visiting the *Willa Cather Archive*, can precipitate unfortunate consequences. The volunteered opinions of the uninformed, under-informed, ill-informed, misinformed, and disinformed are not the equivalent of researched, cross-checked, verified, and editorially curated reporting. All writers in all fields share a duty to read widely before reporting and—when necessary—offer corrections after.

Whose Ántonia? The world can give thanks to Viola Roseboro' for massaging to publication the stories of many of the era's most popular authors and for influencing the writings of dozens more, including Willa Cather. But it is clear that in this case, George Madden Martin's memories are unconsciously mingled, Jane Kirkland Graham's opus unintentionally so. Stephen Schmalhofer is willfully unreliable, and Copilot the unwitting narrator of ChatGTP's fever dreams, a vortex of increasingly flawed single sources, GIGO. Whether the researching intelligence is organic or artificial, the basic rules of critical analysis and reporting must still apply. It's the only way to face society's most insidious threat, the unchecked misremembrance of things past. The truth is that Willa Cather conceived Jim Burden to tell the tale of her own Ántonia. It is important to sprout *that* truth. AI is watching.

NOTES

1. The Pew survey found a median of seventy-two percent of adults across twenty-five nations surveyed in spring 2025 said the spread of false information online is a major threat to their country, twenty-one percent a minor threat, and five percent not a threat.

2. Copilot quotes are responses from Microsoft Copilot Pro, ChatGPT, GPT-4o, OpenAI, August 12, 2025, copilot.microsoft.com/chats, accessed through a paid subscription with the following prompts: "Please describe all known interactions between writer Willa Cather and editor Viola Roseboro'"; "What other authors did Roseboro' work with?"; "What impact did she have on their writing?"; "What specific editorial techniques did Roseboro' use?"; "Please describe all known relationships between Viola Roseboro' and Jane Kirkland Graham."

3. Interpreting ChatGPT's dreams was facilitated by the skilled and diligent staff members of many collections, historical societies, libraries, and universities, including Tracy Sanford Tucker, Director of Collections & Curation for the National Willa Cather Center, and the following:

Bamberg County Public Library, Bamberg, South Carolina; Blackville Branch Library and Blackville Heritage Museum, Blackville, South Carolina; Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University Libraries, Boston, Massachusetts; J. Drake Edens Library, Columbia, South Carolina; Library Special Collections, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky; Pewee Valley Historical Society and Museum, Pewee Valley, Kentucky; South Carolina State Library, Columbia, South Carolina; South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina; Special Collections, Jean & Alexander Heard Libraries, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee.

4. Page references to *Viola, the Duchess of New Dorp* are to volume II unless marked "I-pp."

5. In her Introduction to *Duchess*, Jane Kirkland Graham writes of "George Madden Martin who, the year before her death acknowledged a deep debt to 'dear Viola' and who said her 'Emmy Lou and V.R. were one'" (Graham I-34). By that time, in Martin's mind, perhaps they were.

6. On page 130 of *Duchess*, Graham describes this letter as "written from Spain, June 4, 1943," but this date is an error. Chapter XLV, "One or More Years in Spain," establishes that the trip to Spain occupied "the better part of 1933 and '34" (263). By 1943, the 85-year-old Roseboro' was no longer venturing overseas.

7. Cather was invited to the semicentennial commencement of the University of Nebraska to be one of two women to be awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. Jane Addams's assistant at Hull House, Edith Abbott, received the other. Receiving Doctor of Laws degrees were Harvard's Dean, Roscoe Pound, Theodore Roosevelt (arriving a day late), and General J. J. Pershing (in absentia—the war).

8. Two weeks later, in a letter (no. 2077) to her brother, Roscoe, about a short-term, furnished rental in Lander, Wyoming, Cather complains, "The Amoretti ranch at five dollars a day [$126 in 2026] seems rather expensive for war times."

9. In July 1917, many newspapers across the country carried highly favorable reviews written by their local librarians of George Madden Martin's June 26 reading from *Emmy Lou* at the American Library Association's annual conference in Louisville, Kentucky. The Chicago–New York City leg of a rail ride on the 20th Century Limited alone cost over $100, including Pullman service, which she would have wanted for overnight hauls across America. Martin would not have been bopping to New York and back solely to attend Cather's Friday teas.

10. Joseph Urgo, member of the editorial board of the *Review*, commented on the episode from *Duchess* in an essay footnote in 2000 (Urgo 72–73).

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From the Archive: Rescuing the Burlington Depot

As the National Willa Cather Center puts the finishing touches on its new interpretive exhibit at the Burlington Depot—*All Aboard: West-Bound Trains in American Culture*—we were moved to some reminiscence about the depot's early years as a Cather Foundation property. Here are a few passages from issues of the predecessor of this publication, the newsletter of the "Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation." A selection of archival objects appears on the pages that follow.

The Call to Adventure

We cannot turn back the clock and recreate the hustle and bustle of coming and going that was the daily life of the railroad depot in the years gone by. Nor can we fill the air with the whistle of steam locomotives that was the call to adventure for young Willa Cather and the youngsters of her day. But we can preserve the depot.

Thanks to the generosity of several people, the old Burlington red depot has been saved by a compromise with progress. This summer the railroad company sold the depot to a salvage company and replaced it with a smaller, more economical model.

Fortunately the man who bought the depot, Mr. V. H. Fette of McCook, has a feeling for historic landmarks and dislikes having them destroyed. Mr. Fette not only has donated the building to the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial but also is sharing in the cost of moving it just across the road from the original site. The land where the depot will stand was given to the WCPM by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Makinster of Red Cloud. Mr. and Mrs. John Quirk of Hastings have volunteered to underwrite the cost of restoring the depot. The $5,000 restoration project is now well-underway.

The depot in its original location, ca. 1964. Harold Dywer, *Hastings Tribune.*

Eight Passenger Trains a Day

Railroad construction crews arrived in Red Cloud in 1878. By the time the train brought Willa Cather and her parents to Red Cloud from Virginia in 1883, the new town was a division point on the main Kansas City to Denver line of the Burlington and Missouri Railroad. Eight passenger trains a day were stopping here. Freight trains were going through day and night. Between trains, switch engines and a busy round-house provided excitement. A little community including a hotel and an eating house grew up a round the depot.

Young Willa Cather, like youngsters the world over, was drawn to the noisy, exciting confusion of activity at the depot. She liked to walk down to the depot along the wooden sidewalk stretching for more than a mile from the center of town. When younger brothers and sisters needed entertaining, she took them with her to the depot, pulling the youngest in a wagon. It was great fun to join her neighborhood friends, the Miners, when they had their pony, Billy, hitched up for a drive to the depot.

The activities Willa Cather watched at the depot appear again and again in her stories. In *My Ántonia*, young Jim Burden arrives from Virginia and the Bohemian immigrant family is huddled on the platform. In *A Lost Lady*, very important people arrive in private railway cars. In *Lucy Gayheart*, young people going East to school make a lively and colorful scene. The travel-wise train crews staying over in the depot bunk-house appear in both *My Ántonia* and *The Song of the Lark*. The successful young man comes home to keep an appointment in "The Treasure of Far Island." The world-famous artist arrives at the depot on his final journey home in "The Sculptor's Funeral." Groups of actors and musicians traveling from place to place by train appear in many of her stories; in *My Ántonia* there is Blind Boone; in *Lucy Gayheart*, the opera company.

A Cather Setting Preserved

Because of the spontaneous interest and trust of three benefactors, the depot has been saved and continues to be a major stopping place on the tour of Cather settings in Red Cloud. This project is a dynamic example of the support you have attracted. You have established a strong organization with a reputation for integrity of purpose.

Excerpted from the Fall 1965 newsletter.

More than a Coat of Paint

Progress on the project has gone surprisingly well considering the size of the building and its age. It has been moved across the road, one section at a time, and put back together on a new foundation. A great deal of the original understructure has rotted, so this was all rebuilt. About half of the original tile on the waiting room floor was salvable and has been put down. Even the platform has been moved one brick at a time to the new location.

Restoration is a costly business. We could put on a coat of shiny red paint and pretend the project is finished. But we won't. That is not the way the Cather Memorial has done things in the past, and this is no time to change.

During the move to the new location, ca. 1965.

Many things remain to be done. But the future of the depot is assured because by your continuing support you indicate approval of this policy of making progress slowly and thoroughly—of establishing and maintaining programs and projects of enduring worth.

Excerpted from the Spring 1966 newsletter.

A Bright Spot of Color

Willa Cather wrote so often of the lack of color during a winter on the prairie—the monotony of dull grey and drab brown—and how hungry for color the pioneer became before Winter released its hold on the land. The Burlington Railroad probably did not choose to paint their depots red just to provide a bright spot of color for every little town along the tracks. However, for whatever reason, the company did dot the prairie with Burlington red. Our old faded depot, in need of care for so many years, no longer blends into the drabness of its winter surroundings. Gone is its air of dejected abandonment. In its new coat of Burlington red, the depot stands straighter and taller with regained importance. Once again it is an eyecatching landmark.

Excerpted from the Spring 1970 newsletter.

A restoration success story, ca. 2011.

Dedication Ceremonies

The fifteenth annual Cather Foundation Spring Conference featured the dedication of two more landmarks made famous by the writing of Willa Cather. Ribbon cutting ceremonies at the old Burlington Depot were led by Fred B. Deines, Burlington Northern Vice President–Omaha Region and a delegation of railroad officials. Other participants and spectators included hundreds of scholars, authors and Cather admirers from throughout the nation. The depot, destined for destruction, was saved by Mr. and Mrs. John Quirk of Hastings and donated to the Cather Memorial. The Woods Charitable Fund, Inc. of Lincoln and Chicago gave $25,000 for restoration of both buildings. *[The other historic property dedicated at that Spring Conference was St. Juliana Church.]*

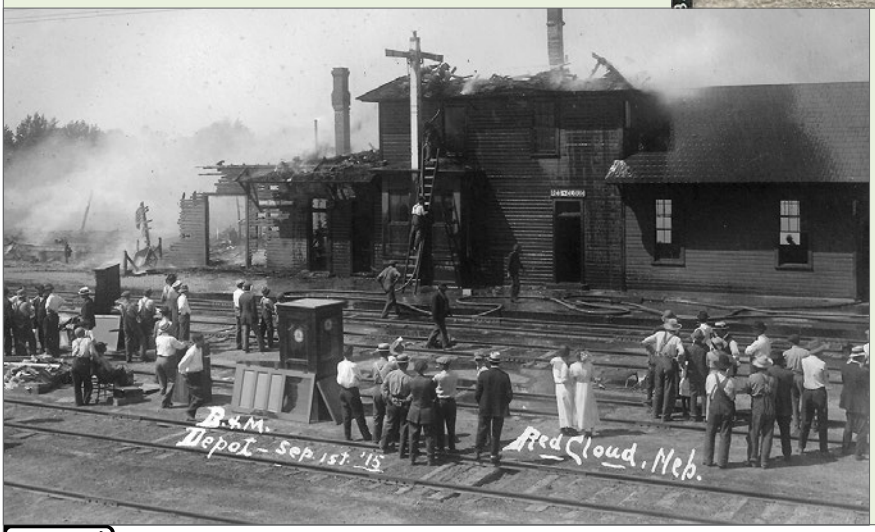
Excerpted from the Fall 1970 newsletter.

Down at the Depot

Documentation of town life in the early 20th century owes a great deal to the immense popularity at the time of the real-photo postcard. The Burlington Depot and environs were favorite subjects of local photographers. Here are a few views held in the Willa Cather Foundation Collections and Archives at the National Willa Cather Center.

The depot ca. 1910, with a crew of depot denizens. Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection, PHO-4-W689-1062.

The B&M Hotel, seen here ca. 1909, stood near the depot. As in many hotel views of the time, the group seen here is probably a gathering of hotel management, staff, and guests. The photographer was L. E. Tait, publisher of *The Webster County Argus*. Yost Leak Postcard Collection, PHO-264-388.



The 1915 fire was discovered on the roof of the freight storage area, believed to have been set by engine sparks. Low water pressure and a strong south wind caused the fire to burn out of control. The unnamed photographer produced numerous shots of this event. Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection.

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The *Willa Cather Review* welcomes scholarly essays, feature stories, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should generally not exceed 5,000 words, although longer essays may be considered. Scholarly essays should be submitted via our online portal at www.willacather.org/wcr. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the *MLA Handbook.*

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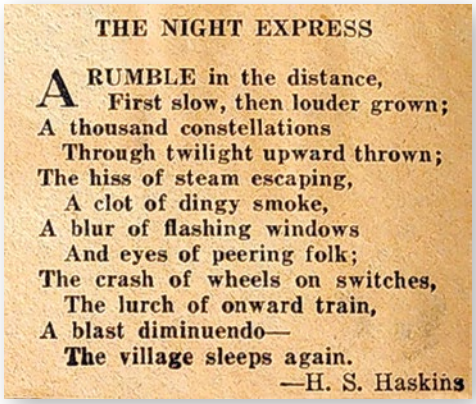
Burlington Treasures

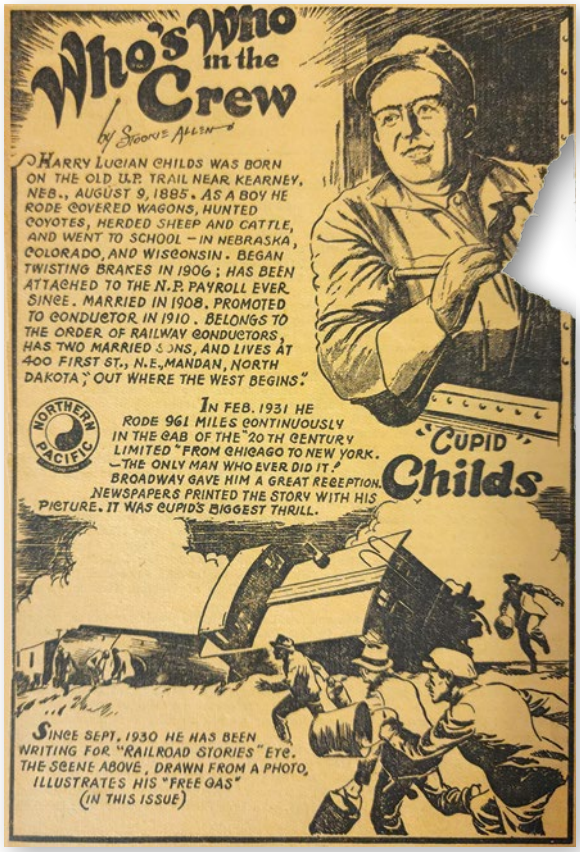
Here's a wee taste of the railroadiana in our collections. Except as noted, these materials are from *Railroad Stories* magazine, which was published between 1932 and 1937. Regular features included stories of famous railroad wrecks, well-known engineers, "Who's Who in the Crew?," and reader-submitted poems, jokes, and songs. This batch and many others were preserved in a hobbyist's scrapbook that came into the Foundation's possession in our early years. All objects on these pages are from the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Collection.

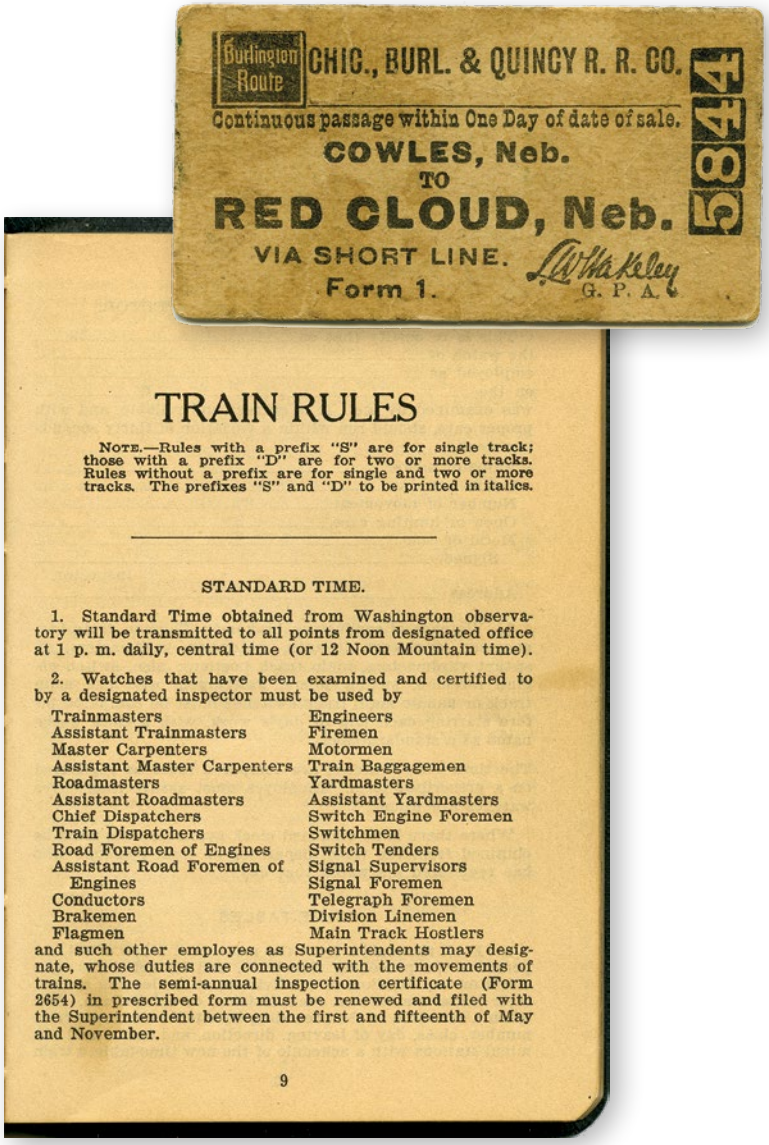


THE NIGHT EXPRESS

A RUMBLE in the distance,
First slow, then louder grown;
A thousand constellations
Through twilight upward thrown;
The hiss of steam escaping,
A clot of dingy smoke,
A blur of flashing windows
And eyes of peering folk;
The crash of wheels on switches,
The lurch of onward train,
A blast diminuendo—
The village sleeps again.

—H. S. Haskins





"Train Rules": A page from a booklet titled *Burlington Lines Rules of the Operating Department*. This booklet and the unused ticket at top right were among the numerous Burlington materials collected from the depot when it was first rescued and restored.

Your Beneficiary Form Is a Powerful Philanthropic Tool

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With the simple stroke of a pen, you can name the Willa Cather Foundation as a beneficiary of your IRA, life insurance policy, or bank account. It's fast, flexible, and doesn't require a will or trust.

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- Simplifies your estate
- Can reduce taxes on retirement assets[1]
- Allows you to allocate assets to causes and heirs

A beneficiary designation is not just a financial decision—it's a gesture of *belief* in our mission: *belief* in the power of art, and *belief* in the importance of history.

If Willa Cather's words have been part of your life, please consider making them a part of your legacy.

[1] *Be sure to consult your tax or legal advisor to make the smartest choice for your unique situation.*

Ready to discuss your legacy? Let us help!

Ashley Olson
Executive Director

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