“Here at Last is an American Novel”: Celebrating 100 Years of My Ántonia

The Willa Cather Foundation presents its
63rd annual Willa Cather Spring Conference
Red Cloud, NE | May 31–June 2, 2018

When critic Randolph Bourne heralded My Ántonia as the arrival of the “American novel,” in 1918, he could not have known the many ways the novel would remain relevant to today’s American experience. As we celebrate the centennial anniversary of My Ántonia’s publication, we invite paper proposals that examine the life and writings of Willa Cather with a focus on My Ántonia and its reputation as a most “American novel.”

Topics for consideration include:

• Examining My Ántonia or Cather’s works in light of immigration and diversity in the United States, from the late 19th century through today;

• Approaches to teaching, understanding, and interpreting challenging moments from My Ántonia, such as: racialized scenes and language (Blind d’Arnault, Native American absence, and discrimination); suicide; sexual violence; xenophobia;

• Unpacking the significance of Cather’s letters to interpreting My Ántonia, or Cather’s life and work more broadly;

• Exploring unique or surprising connections between My Ántonia — or Cather’s life and work more broadly — with the work of other 20th or 21st century writers or artists;

• Examining My Ántonia in light of its regional and/or environmental setting, particularly considering new approaches to the global Midwest, the rural/urban divide in United States culture, and mobility;

• Exploring representations of community in My Ántonia, including dancing, cooking/food sharing, folkways, or religious traditions;

• New approaches to reading and teaching My Ántonia, especially through participatory culture, such as fanfiction, derivative works, fan studies, literary pilgrimage, and others.

Please send 350-500 word proposals of individual papers to the Willa Cather Foundation’s education director, Tracy Tucker, at ttucker@WillaCather.org, by February 1, 2018, along with your preferred email and college or university affiliation. Papers will be accepted by March 1, 2018. While there is no set word count; papers should be no longer than twenty minutes when read.