

17th International Willa Cather Seminar

“Unsettling Cather: Differences and Dislocations”

June 17–21, 2019 | Shenandoah University, Winchester, Virginia

Call for Proposals

The 17th International Willa Cather Seminar will be held in the lush, complex place of Cather’s Virginia birth and first nine years. When she was born here in 1873, Cather’s family had already been in Virginia since the 1730s. Here, as observant daughter of a white family, she first encountered differences and dislocations that remained lively, productive, and sometimes deeply troubling sites of tension and energy in her writings. In this Seminar, we do not intend to root conversation solely in this particular locale. Instead, we hope to un-root or unsettle it through attention to such differences and dislocations as they marked Cather’s life and work, beginning in her undergraduate stories and culminating in her late-life return to Virginia in her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

Highlights of the Seminar include:

Siobhan Somerville, keynote speaker

Author of *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* and professor of English, African American Studies, and Gender and Women’s Studies at the University of Illinois

Tours of Cather sites, including Willow Shade, her first childhood home

A day in Washington, D.C., with opportunities to visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture, as well as other museums relevant to Cather’s writing

As always, the Seminar welcomes papers taking a broad array of approaches to Cather’s life and work. We especially invite fresh takes on the many forms of difference and the many moments of dislocation that her readers encounter. We aim to jumpstart a conversation that has been somewhat muted in Cather studies in recent years and to invite new voices and new perspectives into the discussion.

- Differences of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class, region, and nationality are everywhere in Cather’s cosmopolitan fictional world. How do they signify? How do they intersect? How are they navigated? What is at stake in the writer’s explorations of difference?
- Cather’s characters are often on the move. Relocation tends to produce a sense of dislocation that may be destabilizing and disorienting. What are the social and psychic resonances of dislocation in Cather’s writing?
- How has expanded access to Cather’s letters unsettled understandings of her life? How does hearing Cather’s unmediated epistolary voice (rather than the cautious, mediated voice of paraphrase) alter the sound or our sense of that voice?



Program Directors:

Marilee Lindemann, University of Maryland
Ann Romines, George Washington University, emerita

Site Director:

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Please send 500-word proposals of individual papers to the Willa Cather Foundation’s education director, Tracy Tucker, at ttucker@WillaCather.org, by **February 1, 2019**. If your paper is accepted, you will be notified by March 1, 2019. Papers should be 8-10 pages in length (20 minutes when read). The conference organizers also welcome proposals for roundtable panels and other formats; proposals for such alternate formats should be submitted no later than January 15, 2019. Graduate students will be welcomed to the Seminar and those whose proposals are accepted may apply for funding through the Willa Cather Foundation.