

# Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXXIII, No. 1

Editor, Mildred R. Bennett

RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

## Featured Speaker for Spring Conference

The Cather Foundation will present as featured speaker at Spring Conference Michel Gervaud, professor of English at the University of Aix en Provence. Dr. Gervaud has taught French in the United States and has visited Red Cloud several times. He represented France and its admiration for Willa Cather's writings at the International Conference on Cather held in Lincoln in 1973, the one hundredth anniversary of Cather's birth. He has published articles about Cather — both in French and English.

Since 1989 marks the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution, Dr. Gervaud will bring greetings from France who gave us the Statue of Liberty and we will send back our best wishes for the future of France, the country Claude Wheeler thought "better than any country can ever be."



## 1922 Publisher's Advertisement for *One of Ours*

What Dorothy Canfield, author of "The Brimming Cup," etc., says about Willa Cather's new novel *One of Ours*:

"It is always a golden experience for me to read one of Willa Cather's books. To read 'One of Ours' was a glorious experience.

"The novel gave me not only the deep satisfaction and pride which every writer feels in the ripe, sound sureness of Miss Cather's technical mastery of her medium, not only the precious joy in a flawless presentation of character, but a special deep glow of emotion, warm, rich and as personal as if the book had been written for me alone.

"It is my conviction, and one it makes me very happy to hold,  
(Continued on Page 2)

## Uncle Sam Wants You!

... to look at World War I posters which will bring alive for you the appeal, the anguish, the triumphant spirit of that war to "save the world for democracy." You will know how Uncle Sam asked citizens to eat less meat, use less white flour — conserve all other necessities to provide for the boys over there. You will see how we worked with France to help support the spirit of the fighting men and comfort the widows and orphans. We must not let time dim our respect and appreciation for their sacrifice more than 70 years ago.

See the special exhibit at the Depot on loan to the Cather Foundation from UNL's Love Memorial Library Archives, Joseph Svoboda, Archivist.

## Conference Reservations Due May 3!

## Ten New Cather Essays Available from WCPM Bookstore

A special Cather issue of *Literature and Belief*, a national journal devoted to moral and religious issues in literature and published by Brigham Young University, features ten original essays on "Cather and Religion" by well-known Cather scholars.

Mildred Bennett and Bruce Baker review Cather's Nebraska religious experiences and her criticism of Protestant fundamentalism. Stephen Tanner of BYU provides some fresh insights into the religious struggles in *My Mortal Enemy*. Marilyn Arnold explores the transfiguring vision of Bishop Latour in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and John Murphy sees St. Paul's letters and the Acts of the Apostles as a foundation for *Archbishop*. Susan J. Rosowski poses a feminist theological reading of *Shadows on the Rock*, while Merrill Skaggs views the final book of *Lucy Gayheart* as a drama of forgiveness. BYU's Mae Blanch and Jenny Pulsipher offer comparative studies: Blanch compares "Jack-a-Boy" and "The Best Years" to Flannery O'Connor's "A View of the Woods" and "Revelation," and Pulsipher analyzes *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* against *Pilgrim's Progress*. David Stouck gives in-depth evaluations of several recent book-length studies of Cather and her work, and Lance Larsen reviews the recently-released reissue of Father Howlett's biography of Bishop

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## 34th Annual Cather Spring Conference SATURDAY, MAY 6, 1989

8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Registration, coffee and kolache — Cather Foundation Art Gallery and Bookstore, 326 North Webster

8:30 a.m.

Mass — Grace Episcopal Church, 6th and Cedar  
Father Louis Catching, officiating

9:30 a.m.

Mass — St. Juliana Catholic Church, 3rd Avenue and South Walnut  
Father Frank Leiblinger, officiating

10:15 a.m.

Ribbon Cutting Ceremony — Mildred Bennett's Office Building  
immediately south of Post Office, Webster Street  
Ron Hull, presiding

10:30 a.m.

A Visit to *One of Ours* Country — Tour departs from Bennett Building. Visit the Wheeler home, then on to Bladen for a memorial service (the Rev. Stephen D. Eldred, officiant) at the Bladen Cemetery (Bladen Opera House if weather is inclement) in honor of G. P. Cather (prototype for Claude Wheeler) and all war veterans.

1:00 p.m.

Lunch — Vet's Hall, 3rd and Cedar

2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

"The Passing Show" — Vet's Hall, 3rd and Cedar  
Panel: *One of Ours* Three Short Paper presentations followed by discussion groups, then a concluding session.  
Bruce P. Baker, moderator

4:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Vet's Hall — World War I Songs led by Marshall Christensen

7:00 p.m.

Banquet — Michel Gervaud, Guest Speaker  
Dr. Harrold Shiffler - poems by American soldiers in France  
High School Gymnasium, 7th and Webster

8:00 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Open — Cather Foundation Art Gallery and Bookstore  
326 North Webster

8:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Open — Cather Historical Center, 338 North Webster  
Open House — Cather Childhood Home, 9:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.  
and 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Grace Episcopal Church, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

St. Juliana Catholic Church, 1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Open House — Burlington Depot, 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Selection of UNL-Love Memorial Library's World War I posters  
Refreshments courtesy of Catherland Federated Women's Club  
(4:45 p.m. - 5:45 p.m.)

★ ★ ★

## Woodress Receives 1st WCPM Annual Award

The first WCPM Annual Award for the year's best book-length scholarly work on Cather was presented to James Woodress (University of California-Davis) at the Western Literature Association's Annual Meeting in Eugene, Oregon, October 6, 1988. The cash book award, for *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*, was accepted by Susan J. Rosowski (UNL) for the absent author.

The WCPM award will be made each year at the WLA Annual Meeting for the best book-length study and for the best article on Cather. The book award will be for work published the previous year; the article award (due to the volume of Cather essays appearing in a wide range of journals) for work published two years prior to the award. The first article award, from 1987 work, will be presented this October 1989.

The committee of judges for these awards includes Mildred Bennett (WCPM), Bruce Baker (UNO), Robert Knoll (UNL), John Murphy (BYU), and Susan Rosowski (UNL), who, as members of WCPM's Board of Governors, will be ineligible for awards.

### 1922 Publisher's (Continued)

that to read this book will bring to an immense number of Americans the same deep glow of feeling, and that innumerable American families will open their arms to the hero as one of their own, much loved, flesh-and-blood kin."

— Dorothy Canfield Fisher.

Alfred A. Knopf, Publisher,  
New York.

Announcing the publication of the autobiography of Mildred R. Bennett (the early years). *The Winter Is Past*. Special pre-publication price is \$14.95. Send check or credit card information to: The Edwin Melten Press, 240 Portage Road, Lewiston, NY 14092

Cather Center Buildings are opened courtesy of Cather Historical Center, Nebraska State Historical Society, John Lindahl, curator.

## Birthday Celebration

We have established a celebration each December in honor of Willa Cather's birthday. In



1988 Betty Jean Steinshouer gave a presentation "Willa Cather Speaks" to the Webster County grade school children at our Foundation office, Sunday, December 4. Ms. Steinshouer's presentation fascinated the children.

Ms. Steinshouer talked to high schools students on Monday and in various other schools the remainder of the week.

On December 7 the Very Reverend Dean John P. Bartholomew of St. Mark's Pro Cathedral in Hastings gave a requiem mass at the Grace Episcopal Church. The communicants and friends gathered afterward at the Corral Cafe for lunch.

### Ten New Essays (Continued)

Machebeuf, the major source for *Archbishop*. John Murphy, editor of the issue, includes a useful bibliography of primary sources and a helpful preface.

The 134 page volume is available from WCPM for \$4.00 or through the mail from WCPM for \$6.00, which includes handling and postage.

## BYU Cather Symposium Wins Humanities Award

"Willa Cather: The Family and Community," a symposium held

on the Brigham Young University campus last September 14-17, has been selected by the Utah Endowment for the Humanities as a "Merit Award Project," an "outstanding example of how the humanities disciplines can be used in public programming."

Outreach in the academic and local communities involved thousands of participants. In preparation for the conference, veteran American literature critic Alfred Kazin addressed a televised BYU forum on the valuable contribution of unchurched writers to our religious views and concepts of God. Other pre-symposium activities included discussions on Cather with high school teachers and their students. Attendance at symposium lectures ranged from 100 to 200, depending on the hour and class schedules of BYU students and professors. Follow-up included a panel discussion attended by almost 50 people at the Provo Public Library.

As the first Cather symposium to involve historians as well as literature scholars, lectures ranged from James Woodress's review of Cather's relations with her family to BYU his-

torian Ted Warner's analysis of Cather's sources in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Marilyn Arnold discussed Cather's early letters from Nebraska; Susan Rosowski, the families in Cather's fiction; David Stouck, Cather's principles of history; John Murphy, the faith community in *Archbishop*, and Blanche Gelfant and Patricia Yongue, family and marital issues in *One of Ours*. Historians Robert Cherny (San Francisco State) and Wilbur Jacobs (University of California-Santa Barbara) lectured on Cather's Nebraska and Cather's Quebec, respectively. Bruce Baker discussed the inter-generational family in "Old Mrs. Harris," and Lucia Woods shared personal reflections on Cather's fiction after opening an exhibit of her photographs on Cather's various worlds.

Festive symposium events included a recital organized by BYU faculty musicians and devoted to works featured in Cather's fiction. Arias from *Elijah*, *Norma*, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, etc. were placed within texts selected from Cather by John Murphy. Mildred R. Bennett spoke on Cather's European genealogy at the banquet on the

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## Cather Folks Enjoy a Break from the Symposium



Back Row (left to right): Blanche Gelfant, Pat Phillips, Pat Yongue, Bruce Baker. Front Row: Sally Murphy, Susan Rosowski, Kevin Synnott, Emily Murphy, John Murphy, and David Stouck. (Photo by Karen Baker)

## BYU Symposium (Continued)

last night of the symposium and was presented by Marilyn Arnold with a framed official poster of the symposium to bring back to the WCPM in Red Cloud.

The four day meeting generated significant interest in Cather among non-academic as well as academic readers. A major component was the presentation of 48 session papers on various aspects of the theme of family in Cather by scholars from New York to California and a score of states between.

### Call for Essays

To honor Mildred Bennett on her 80th birthday, The Edwin Mellen Press will publish a volume of scholarly essays dealing with any aspect of Willa Cather's life or writings.

The Press invites all scholars, but especially those who wish to share in this tribute to Mildred, to send their contributions before May 31, 1989. It is hoped, but not promised, that the volume will be published during autumn, 1989.

Essays should be not less than 6000 words and not exceed 15,000. They must have full documentation. (The Chicago style manual is preferred.)

We would appreciate your communicating your intentions to us immediately and inform us of the subject of your study.

Write or phone Dr. Linda Hoff, The Edwin Mellen Press, 240 Portage Road, Lewiston, New York 14092 (Ph. 716-754-2794).

## Cather Plaque Returned to UNL

In our most recent newsletter we asked for help in identifying the proper location for a Cather plaque which the sheriff's department of Great Bend, Kansas, had found near a creek in Barton County, about five miles north of Great Bend.

Dr. Robert Knoll of the English department at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln immediately recognized it as one that disappeared from Andrews Hall in 1969 during building renovation. Now much corroded and very dirty, it has come back to the UNL English Department where it will appear after experts decide whether or not to remove the corrosion.

The plaque was given to the University by the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs, Inc. in 1950 to honor Willa Cather as "One of Ours."

## Cather Foundation Receives Rare Book

Marian Yost, whose family knew Willa Cather personally, has given the Cather Foundation the 1903 copy of *April Twilights* presented to her maternal grandfather:

"For my friend C. L. Cotting from Willa Cather New York November 6, 1918"

This rare edition is highly prized in the rare book trade.

Mr. Cotting was a pioneer Red Cloud businessman.

## Bequests . . .

Two bequests have come to the Cather Foundation since our latest report to you. The estate of Fanny Butcher Bokum left \$1,000 and an autographed photograph of Miss Cather. Fanny Butcher, a friend of Willa Cather for 35 years, was book editor of the *Chicago Tribune*.

Anne Marie Rehtus Loeslin, who died last fall, left a \$1,000 bond to the Cather Foundation.

We are grateful to all those who have remembered our organization in this way.

## Writer's Workshop JULY 14, 15, & 16

The Cather Foundation will host a Writer's Workshop July 14-16. Instructors are James Work of Colorado State University at Fort Collins, Colorado, and Dorothy Minchin-Comm, Loma Linda University, Riverside California.



Minchin-Comm



Work

Dr. Work, Professor of English; Executive Director, Colorado Seminars in Literature; President-elect, Western Literature Association, and teacher Western American Literature, Heritage of the West, and Nature Writing, brings a versatile background to the workshop.

For three past summers he was on faculty of a back-country and wilderness institute for Colorado College, teaching nature writing during week-long field trips into La Garita Wilderness Area, Canyonlands National Park and Arches National Monument.

Author of dozens of articles on literature and on methods of teaching writing, he edited the University of Nebraska Press critical edition of *Shane*, and UNP's forthcoming anthology *Prose and Poetry of the American West*. He has two other books under contract, both

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## Writer's Workshop

(Continued)

about writing. He has published articles in *Magazine of the Midlands*, *Colorado Country Life*, *Empire*, and other popular regional magazines.

A Colorado mountain native, he is past-president of the Rocky Mountain College English Association, former director of Creative Writing at College of Southern Utah, frequent speaker at Western Literature Association meetings, Western/Southwestern Literature Session Chairman, 1989 Rocky Mountain MLA.

Dorothy Minchin-Comm, author of seven books and numerous articles, teaches at Loma Linda University, La Sierra Campus in Riverside, California. She has conducted writing classes in the United States, India and currently in Jamaica. She specializes in inspirational writing, autobiography, Christian oriented nonfiction and instructs in how to motivate the right brain experience.

Mrs. Comm took her doctorate in 18th Century Colonial Literature at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.

Born of an Australian father and an American mother, she has achieved international citizenship, having lived in New Foundland and Alberta, Canada, England, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, and the Philippines. She has traveled extensively. Immediately after her appearance in *Red Cloud*, she starts on a tour of the Far East to write television documentaries.

### Dead Dogs at Homecoming: A Homeric Motif in *My Antonia*

As Jim Burden approaches Antonia's farm in the final section of *My Antonia*, he comes upon

two of her sons, Jan and Ambrosch, grieving for a family pet: "Ahead of me, in a plum thicket beside the road, I saw two boys bending over a dead dog." In contrast to Jim's joyful reunion with Antonia, this scene comprises a prologue that is both melancholy and puzzling. When Antonia is talking with Jim, she learns of the death from her daughter Anna and she quickly soothes the sad-eyed Jan. Later, while Jim and Antonia admired the apple orchard, Jan, Nina, and Lucie measure an area within the enclosure: "'Jan wants to bury his dog there,' Antonia explained. 'I had to tell him he could.'" (341).

Willa Cather's brief episode recalls the scene from *Joseph Andrews* in which another industrious and affectionate family is distressed by the sudden death of their dog. In Henry Fielding's book too, the death intrudes upon a pastoral setting. As the cheerful Wilsons entertain Joseph Andrews, Fanny Goodwill, and Abraham Adams in their fruitful garden, the sound of a gunshot startles them. The Wilsons' young daughter breaks out crying when their bloodied dog limps up to her and then dies licking her hand. The scene is even more sentimental than its equivalent in *My Antonia*: the little girl "expressed great agony at his loss, and the other children began to cry for their sister's misfortune, nor could Fanny herself refrain."<sup>2</sup> Fielding integrates the incident more firmly into the rest of the story than Cather does; the cruel squire who shoots the pet has "no motive but ill-nature" (219), and the parents and sympathetic visitors display the good nature that is idealized throughout the novel.

Cather's scene may intentionally parallel that of Fielding, whom she ranked among the best writers of English prose.<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Wilson and Antonia are their children's main source of comfort in the scenes of death; more-

over, the love of each woman inspires her husband to both financial success and emotional contentment, mirrored in the flourishing landscapes. Both scenes, however, may have a common source in *The Odyssey* that can help to explain the unusual coupling of the central character's arrival with the death of a dog. In Book XVII, Odysseus finally reaches home after a 20-year absence. The loyal swineherd Eumaios hospitably welcomes him to his cottage in the country but does not know his disguised master. When Eumaios guides him to the palace, Odysseus is recognized by his old dog Argos, who weakly wags his tail. "[W]iping a salt tear from his cheek,"<sup>4</sup> Odysseus hides his sorrow as the dog dies; he listens to the swineherd's lament for the lost glories of the past, when Argos was swift and Odysseus was in command.

Jim Burden and Joseph Andrews, like Odysseus, are journeying heroes who return to the homelands they left about 20 years before. None of the three men is immediately recognized by his loved ones. "My husband's not at home, sir. Can I do anything?" Antonia asks her childhood friend (332), and the Wilsons do not realize that Joseph is their son, who was kidnapped as a baby. In all three works, the death of a dog is a prelude to the eventual recognition of the protagonist and his assimilation into a family. This Homeric element joins many others in *My Antonia* and *Joseph Andrews*: the division of both works into "books"; the elevated language — for example, Jim Burden's reference to a prairie "the colour of wine-stains" (15) and Fielding's elaborate description of dawn as Aurora (71); epic battles, such as Jim's struggle against the rattlesnake and Joseph Andrew's use of his legendary cudgel against an attack of vicious dogs, including one "descended from an Amazonian breed" (229).

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Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial  
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**AIMS OF THE WCPM**

- To promote and assist in the development and preservation of the art, literary, and historical collection relating to the life, time, and work of Willa Cather, in association with the Nebraska State Historical Society.
- To cooperate with the Nebraska State Historical Society in continuing to identify, restore to their original condition, and preserve places made famous by the writing of Willa Cather.
- To provide for Willa Cather a living memorial, through the Foundation, by encouraging and assisting scholarship in the field of the humanities.
- To perpetuate an interest throughout the world in the work of Willa Cather.

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**Dead Dogs (Continued)**

In contrast to these snarling adversaries, the well-loved dogs who die in *The Odyssey*, *Joseph Andrews*, and *My Antonia* serve as a type of sacrificial offering, with each death soon followed by the restoration of the hero's lost kingdom: Odysseus's Ithaca, Joseph Andrews's share in Mr. Wilson's estate, and Jim Burden's recovery of his boyhood happiness through his renewed friendship with Antonia, the "rich mine of life" (353).<sup>5</sup>

Joan Wylie Hall  
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**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Willa Cather, *My Antonia* (1918; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954), p. 329. Future references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. R. F. Brissenden (1742; Middlesex: Penguin, 1977), p. 219. Future references will be noted parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup>Willa Cather, *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893-1896*, ed. Bernice Slote (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 373.

<sup>4</sup>Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City: Double Day, 1961), p. 332.

<sup>5</sup>Evelyn Helmick, among the few Cather critics to mention this scene, briefly compares the dog's death to the animal sacrifice of the Eleusinian Mysteries: "a reminder that a ceremony of resurrection must include a recognition

of death." See "The Mysteries of Antonia," *Midwest Quarterly*, 17 (1976): 173-85; rpt. in *Willa Cather's My Antonia*, ed. Harold Bloom, *Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), p. 116.

**April Event**

On Friday evening, April 14, at 8:00 there will be a public reading of *April Twilights*. Readers will be Susan Rosowski, Stephen Behrendt, and Julie Cochran of the UNL Department of English. Come to The Haydon Gallery, 230 North 7th Street, Lincoln.