

Occidental College

From the Selected Works of John Swift

Summer 2010

Miss Cather Talks on Technique

Fredric Klees



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WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

VOLUME 54, NO. 1

SUMMER 2010

“Spirit of Place”

Cather at
Bowdoin, 1925

*Shadows on
the Rock:
'Toinette and
les filles du roi*

Scenes from
the 2010 Spring
Conference

Preserving
Our Past,
Pioneering
Our Future

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Prairie photographs by Barb Kudrna

Letter from the President

Jay Yost



The fun at the Cather Foundation just keeps comin'. After hosting in rapid succession a very successful Prairie Writers' Workshop (our third), an amazingly wonderful Spring Conference celebrating "Food, Drink and Willa Cather's Writing" (our 55th), and a thoroughly appreciated Elderhostel/Road Scholar week in Red Cloud (also our third), the Foundation's Board and the staff decided we just can't sit on our laurels.

So our new endeavor to move the Foundation forward is our aptly named campaign: *The Willa Cather Foundation: Preserving our Past, Pioneering our Future*. As noted below and described on page 24, we are gathering several challenge grants from Foundation supporters which will need to be matched by the end of this year. The goal is to raise our annual giving base by at least \$60,000 to enable us to get even more serious about fulfilling our mission of

promoting the life, times, settings and work of Willa Cather.

Specifically, these added funds will be used to expand the work we are doing with the Foundation's Cather Archives in Red Cloud, and to redouble our efforts to get school kids in the region and throughout Nebraska reading Cather and then coming to her hometown to see those stories brought to life. There is no greater work we can do than to act as a steward to the objects entrusted to us, while also ensuring a new generation of readers has the opportunity to love Cather's words and works as we do.

So on we go, upward and onward, with the help of your support. And with that, let me introduce the talented and lovely Judy Keller.

May We Get Personal?

Judy Keller



It is not often I have the honor to share the President's page. I especially appreciate the opportunity to let the Cather Foundation's friends and scholars know how much I look forward to working with you to enhance the Foundation's important work.

As your development consultant, I ask you to read on page 24 about the special challenge at the heart of a new campaign: *The Willa Cather Foundation: Preserving our Past, Pioneering our Future*. **It is an opportunity that can't be missed.**

When I was in eighth grade my mother gave me a worn copy of *My Ántonia*. We had recently abandoned the East Coast for a small town in Colorado, much to the chagrin of fancy relatives and colleagues.

As a teenager, I was sure my mother was wrong about most things, and her moving West was clearly one of those things. Young and without friends in a new, small town, I discovered the world of Willa Cather at the local library.

She reassured me that changing place, being among strangers, being "out West," having mixed feelings, were all good things and that I would adjust. Her wise counsel helped me select my first job: building a community radio station from scratch on the central High Plains. She certainly encouraged me to keep reading about strong characters, smart women and the American rural experience. She proved to me that a good book is better than indifferent company and there's nothing wrong with staying home on a Saturday night.

Recently I gave my eighth-grade daughter a copy of *My Ántonia*. Cather's legacy is a wonderful gift both to receive and to share.

I thank the Foundation for keeping Cather's gifts alive and I look forward to sharing them widely in the coming months.

The Genius Revisited: Willa Cather and Spirit of Place

Joseph C. Murphy

Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei



Alexandra's epiphanic return to the Divide from a tour of the river country in *O Pioneers!* (1913) is widely considered the novel's decisive passage, not only for the heroine's relationship to the prairie, but for Cather's as well. As "[h]er eyes [drink] in the breadth of" the land, "rich and strong and glorious," Alexandra forges a reciprocal bond with place paralleling Cather's first novelistic embrace of Nebraska: "Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman" (64). Critics have not fully contextualized the topos unifying these fictional and metafictional strains: the ancient Roman concept of genius loci, certainly familiar to the Latinist Cather, whereby a tutelary spirit presides over a particular landscape.¹ The genius loci device, which evolved through the Western tradition toward an association

with authorial genius, reframes some major interpretive problems in *O Pioneers!* and situates Cather's Southwestern novels as avatars of the genius's progress in that region, where a community of modernists pursued "spirit of place" in relation to American Indian cultures. The development of genius loci in literary history and in Cather's oeuvre sharply illuminates her understanding of place, history, and literature itself.

The flexible genius concept that emerged in ancient Roman culture has ramified throughout the Western tradition. The Romans believed each person has an external soul, or genius, a second self that accompanies him through life. (To be precise, each person is guarded by two genii—one good, one evil.) Genii were attached to certain places as well—the genius of a river or village, for example—and peaceful dwelling required an alliance between one's personal genii and the genius loci. The Romans also associated each paterfamilias, in his

reproductive power, with a genius connected to the universal Genius of generation. From early on, then, genius could be personal or supra-personal, local or universal (Lewis 169-70). Each successive age has managed to conjure the genii it needed. The Christian Middle Ages favored Genius as universal generative force (170). The Renaissance entertained, at turns, the universal spirit, private spirits, and genii attached to local topography (Starnes). Beginning in the eighteenth century genius loci was increasingly associated with picturesque aesthetics. Alexander Pope admonished landscape designers to “Consult the Genius of the Place in all” (“Epistle to Burlington” 57), and the British Romantics persistently courted the device, eyeing a marriage between the genius of poetry, typically imported from the East, and the spirit of the English landscape. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth swears off genii as personified allegorical figures and seeks an enlightened consensus between the common English countryside and his poetic genius as such (Hartman 328-30). As John Dixon Hunt has argued, the “imaginative liaison between genius loci and an artistic genius encountering it” is “as much the actual subject [of romantic poetry] as the original landscape itself”; “a landscape is given voice at the same time as we learn how it possesses meaning” (238-39).

Hunt sees the Romantics’ engagement with genius culminating in the work of John Ruskin, Cather’s early intellectual hero, whose chapter “On Turnerian Topography” in *Modern Painters* defines “spirit of place” as the artist’s imaginative encapsulation of historical and cultural experience into highly compressed landscape images (219-21, 239). In a similar vein, Robert Thacker traces through Cather’s fiction “the imaginative struggle implicit in her development of narrative techniques adapted to prairie spaces,” citing among her successes the “two points in time,” past and present, embodied in the image of the plough against the setting sun in *My Ántonia* (1918; 168-69). This struggle synthesizes the history of place with the literary and cultural associations brought there by author and character. Although we might blink to see Cather dragging ancient Roman props onto an unfurnished Nebraska stage, as Hartman allows, “when the poet feels himself alien to the genius of country or age and destined to assume an adversary

role[,] . . . poetry renews itself by its contact with what may seem to be archaic forces” (335). For Cather, first alienated by Nebraska’s bleakness and later its materialism, the Genius of the Divide was a bid for literary renewal—for literary genius—not an allegorical prop but a typological structure, a key to her fictional design. Throughout her work Cather articulates, in modernist forms, the dialectical relationships among cultures, histories, and geographies that constitute the spirits of her landscapes.

From early on Cather understood genius loci as a principle of cultural fusion reflecting the progress of civilization from East to West. In “Behind the Singer Tower” (1912), a skyscraper mixing “Jewish,” “Persian,” and Buddhist effects “watch[es] over the city and the harbor like a presiding Genius. . . come out of Asia quietly in the night, no one knew just when or how” (16). To the theology student Norman Girrard in “The Conversion of Sum Loo” (1900), the odors of a San Francisco Chinese import store evoke “whole Orient landscapes, as though the ghosts of old-world cities had been sealed up in the boxes, like the djin in the Arabian bottle” (4)—this last simile reflecting a common confusion in Western literature between the Roman genius and the proverbial Arab trickster. In “Paul’s Case” (1905) Cather fuses personal genius, local genius, and Arab genie in her description of Paul’s flight of fancy at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Hall, where “the first sigh of the instruments seemed to free some hilarious spirit within him, something that struggled there like the Genius in the bottle found by the Arab fisherman” (75). These overblown examples portray place as fluid, and genius as a crucible of the personal, the local, and the foreign—Alexandra, we recall, encounters the Genius of the Divide while humming “an old Swedish hymn” (63-64).

Spirit of place therefore implies the possibility of dispossession. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), for example, Latour associates the Mexican settlement *Agua Secreta* with “those well-heads in his own country where the Roman settlers had set up the image of a river goddess, and later the Christian priests had planted a cross” (33). Spirits emerge and decline as cultures evolve. Consider Cather’s “The Enchanted



Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

"Among them rose the colossal figure of the Singer Tower, watching over the city and the harbor like a presiding Genius."

Bluff" (1909), where six adolescent boys idly dream of the future while camping on the banks of their beloved river. The friends are "sworn to the spirit of the stream" (774), and the narrator feels the river's spirit most strongly as he contemplates quitting it to teach school up north on the Divide, here characterized as spiritually vacant. The highly conventional river spirit and the valedictory tone (with sand imagery reminiscent of Coleridge's sonnet "To the River Otter") anticipate a departure of genius within Cather's oeuvre, a migration toward the newly settled land. Four years later, *O Pioneers!* completes the transition: Alexandra rejects

the river country as passé and encounters Genius on the Divide—though, significantly, only after she considers retreating from the Divide.

The progress of genius within Cather's fictional country confirms the tradition's basis in a transaction between personal and local genii. Each person strikes her own bargain with the genius loci, and thus no two people have the same experience of a place. This principle nicely explains why Alexandra and her father have such radically different experiences of the Divide. For John Bergson the land "was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods. . . . Its Genius was unfriendly to man" (26). How to explain the contrast between this gloomy Genius and the "great free spirit" Alexandra meets? In spirit, Bergson remains an outsider: he "had the Old-World belief that land, in itself, is desirable," and his goal is to "tame" it (26-27). Even before her epiphany, Alexandra shows more willingness to take nature on its own terms; she taps into its generative qualities and sees its Genius as constructive. Sixteen years after Bergson's death, the landscape is admirably picturesque, "a vast checker-board, marked off in squares of wheat and corn; light and dark, dark and light," telephone wires humming, "big red barns wink[ing] at each other across the green and brown and yellow fields," windmills "vibrat[ing] in the wind that often blows from one week's end to another"—as if the Genius were refracting across a thousand human transmitters (73-74).

Despite such expansive rhetoric, Cather's Divide is very localized: "the seventy-mile-long plateau dividing the streams flowing south to the Republican River and those flowing north to the Little Blue River," ranging from one-fourth to one-half mile wide (Stouck 330-31). The "great, free spirit which moves across it," then, runs a narrow course. This tension between mobility and confinement reveals the delicate balance Cather is striking between universal and local spirits, one she telegraphs through well-established allusions to Walt Whitman and Sarah Orne Jewett, but with even more subtlety than Sharon O'Brien and others have noted. Whitman's genius is too restless for local confinement: it is "the genius of the United States" and genius mundi, not genius loci.² His "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" (Cather's

titular allusion) portrays the settlement of the West as an unending march through time and space, uniting the living and the dead. “On and on the compact ranks, / With accessions ever waiting, with the places of the dead quickly fill’d” (49-50): an apt motto even for Bergson’s unconventional choice of Alexandra to fill his role. Cather replays the Whitman passage in another key when Ivar tells Emil how ducks coordinate in V-formation, the rear ducks coming forward to relieve the exhausted ducks flying at the point of the wedge: “they fly on, with a new edge. They are always changing like that, up in the air. Never any confusion; just like soldiers who have been drilled” (45). But if this is an avian and a military ideal, it is not sufficient for civilization, which requires settlements to relay the spirit overhead, as Ivar’s home sustains the migrating birds.

It was the Maine regionalist Jewett (named in the dedication of *O Pioneers!*) who steered Cather toward local genius. O’Brien parallels Sylvia’s discovery of the heron’s hiding place in Jewett’s “A White Heron” and Alexandra’s finding a solitary duck as examples of “Cather’s and Jewett’s joint effort,” as female regionalists, “to revise the male-authored story of woman and nature” (442). On another level, the contrasts between these examples reveal Cather’s gentle parody of her own characters and of a too-narrow conception of region. Jewett’s Sylvia finds the heron by climbing the giant pine that is “like a great main-mast to the voyaging earth,” from which she views a panorama of the Maine coast stretching beyond region to “a vast and awesome world” (239-40). By contrast, Alexandra discovers her duck in a sleepy river inlet, the river she declines in favor of the Divide. This solitary duck is a caricature of regionalism and local genius, a slacker from the disciplined flock Ivar describes moving above the prairies. A dappled figure “in the flickering light and shade” (184), screened off from the Divide’s “vast checker-board,” it reads like a parody, in advance, of D. H. Lawrence’s 1923 declaration, “All creative art must rise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place” (*Studies* 6). Alexandra remembers the duck as an “enchanted bird that did not know age or change” (185)—fittingly so, because it opposes the narrative progress of genius and represents her recoil from the sexual power Whit-

man celebrates. “[O]ur duck down there” (184) becomes Emil’s misleading code to Alexandra intimating a shared reserve of innocence, belying his fatal romance with Marie; he mentions it in their final conversation before his death.

If nine-year-old Sylvia’s circumspection toward the hunter is normative in Jewett’s story, Alexandra’s sexual innocence at age forty appears here as a limitation, an incomplete reading of the genius loci. She doesn’t know which way the wind blows.³ Through expanding meditations on the Genius of the Divide—in dreams of a strong man carrying her across the fields, and finally of Death coming for her—Alexandra, Whitman-like, experiences the land as a source of sexual power and ultimate dissolution, and is reborn as a fuller person.⁴

Although Cather’s genius concept derived from classical, Romantic, and regionalist sources, it joined American modernism’s turn to the Southwest as the genius loci’s ultimate reserve. Like modernists D. H. Lawrence, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Mary Austin, and Georgia O’Keeffe, Cather perceived a distinct spirit of place in the vastness of the Southwestern land and sky and the commingling of Hispanic and Native cultures, present and past, with the land itself. In contrast to the salutary Native landscapes of *The Song of the Lark* (1915) and *The Professor’s House* (1925), romanticized and extinct, the living tribes in the *Archbishop* raise specters of destruction and chaos. Latour acknowledges “the Indian manner to vanish into the landscape, not to stand out against it . . . as if the spirits of earth and air and water were things not to antagonize and arouse” (246-47). This whisper of the abject echoes the roar of an underground river in the “Stone Lips” cave, the Pecos ceremonial site associated with rumors of human sacrifice to a giant serpent. (Cather would have recalled the snake guarding Anchises’ tomb in the *Aeneid* [5.111-30], reflecting conventional Roman symbolism for the genius of the paterfamilias [Osiek and Balch 85].) In what constitute the most provocative, if gnomic, commentaries on spirit of place in Anglo-American modernism, Lawrence charts a similar course between respect and fear in regard to Native cultures. In *Mornings in Mexico* he describes the ritual of the Hopi snake dance as signifying that “cruelty is coiled in the very begin-

nings of all things,” and that “little man, with his consciousness and his will, must both submit to the great origin-powers of his life, and conquer them” (qtd. in Cavitch 177). In *Studies in Classic American Literature* Lawrence observes:

“A curious thing about the Spirit of Place is the fact that no place exerts its full influence upon a new-comer until the old inhabitant is dead or absorbed. . . . At present the demon of the place and the unappeased ghosts of the dead Indians act within the unconscious or under-conscious soul of the white American, causing the great American grouch . . . the inner malaise which amounts almost to madness, sometimes” (35-36). Modern Americans, Lawrence argues, must “recognize and embrace” the “great aboriginal spirit” in order to realize their own future (“America” 90).

For the community of modernists who congregated around Lawrence, associated with Alfred Stieglitz’s “second circle,” this embrace took the form of stylized settlement around Santa Fe and Taos (O’Keeffe at Ghost Ranch) and mystical communion with the local genius.⁵ A summer sojourner, Cather was on the fringes

of this Southwestern salon; her French sympathies famously offended Mary Austin,⁶ and she took her enchantment less from local settlement than from historical consciousness. She perceived in some Indian cultures an intense locality alien to the migrating genius upon which she founded her literary homelands—acknowledging, with Latour, that for the Navajo the Canyon de Chelly and Shiprock are “the very heart and centre of . . . life,” “more sacred than any place is to the white man” (*Archbishop* 308, 310-11).

It is worth returning to Cather’s Nebraska settings, from which Indians had been removed by federal policy (a fact unmentioned in these works), in search of the unappeased demon Lawrence theorizes. In “The Enchanted Bluff” the boys’ moonlit conversation circles compulsively around traces of vanished Indians. In *My Ántonia* the first snowfall exposes a “great circle where the Indians used to ride”; although Jake and Otto interpret this as a site for “tortur[ing] prisoners,” Jim Burden aestheticizes (and orientalizes) the “figure” as “strokes of Chinese white on canvas” and takes it as “a good omen for the winter” (60)—a prophecy soon undercut by Mr. Shimerda’s suicide. In *O Pioneers!* the depressing “absence of human landmarks” on the Divide is strangely coupled with an aboriginal presence: “The record of the plow

was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings” (25). Cather’s compressed syllogism, equating the modern with the aboriginal, and the aboriginal with the glacial, is at once poignant and haunting—as the aboriginal is struck from the record, its trace persists, reechoing in the narrative and paradoxically underwriting its modern and glacial equivalents. This interplay of absence and presence is the subdued rhythm of the American landscape, the undertone Thoreau hears in the “Burnt Lands” section of



“Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before.”

The Maine Woods (1864), where “a region uninhabited by man” is quickly identified as “a place for heathenism and superstitious rites” (70-71). From this perspective, John Bergson’s experience of a Genius “unfriendly to man” could suggest not only a private demon but Lawrence’s aboriginal unconscious, the “inner malaise which amounts almost to madness, sometimes.” Cather’s narrator yearns to elevate this demon into “a record of human strivings.”

Revisionist critics of *O Pioneers!*, rightly pointing to its omissions, argue that Cather’s text is unconsciously haunted by the recent Indian record it represses, hence, for example, the Native American resonances in the Genius figure whisking Alexandra across the plains (Fischer, Ryan). However, the genius tradition entails a more conscious and pragmatic process, which may have served the psychological and rhetorical goals of Cather’s modernism. Traditionally, when poetic genius seeks to merge with local genius, there arise demonic figures that embody at once the migrating genius of poetry and the indigenous spirits of place. Cather embraces this sense of place as palimpsest, as translucent layering, in pointed contrast to the superstitious purification rites practiced by Old World Bohemian mountain folk who, according to Marie, “plant lindens . . . to do away with the spells that come from the old trees they say have lasted from heathen times” of tree-worship (139). As Alexandra encounters the archaic Genius of the Divide, Cather glances, albeit obliquely, at the land’s aboriginal inhabitants: “For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning” (64). This qualified claim to historical uniqueness (“the first time, perhaps”) reanimates ten thousand years of history it would presume to overwrite: What other human faces? What other loves and yearnings? What other bearings toward the land? Structurally, the passage anticipates the most stirring evocation of place in Cather’s



“For Cather, first alienated by Nebraska’s bleakness and later its materialism, the Genius of the Divide was a bid for literary renewal—for literary genius. . . .”

fiction: Latour’s meditation on the light morning air in New Mexico that “released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning!” (288). Like Alexandra’s epiphany, Latour’s vision spans space and time, in his contrast between France and New Mexico and his recognition that “[t]hat air would disappear from the whole earth in time, perhaps; but long after his day” (288, emphasis added). This equivocation about the future, echoing the murkiness of the past in *O Pioneers!*, defines a modern character whose identity is uniquely located within a vast temporal matrix.

Genius loci remained among the cohering themes, and problems, of Cather’s fiction, even as the archaic, personified genius and the “unappeased ghosts of the dead” dissolved into the fabric of everyday life. In reference to the seventeenth-century Quebec of *Shadows on the Rock* (1931), Cather remarked that the “spirit of the place” is “more a song than a legend,” and the “[l]ife of an ordinary household more interesting . . . than exciting things like Indian wars” (Letter to Wilbur Cross; Stout’s paraphrase). While Cather was clearly more interested in homes than battlefields, her best fiction counterpoints the cycles of conquest and the rhythms of domestic experience. The architect Chris-

tian Norberg-Schulz calls genius loci “that ‘opposite’ man has to come to terms with to be able to dwell” (11). If the Genius of the Divide romanticizes this process in *O Pioneers!*, Cather’s subsequent fiction became more critically aware of what might be called, by contrast, the division of genius—the preservation of historical traces, the containment of history’s brutality. At the end of *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), the sympathetic but hardheaded Harry Gordon, having consigned Lucy’s tragedy and his guilt to “the far horizon line” (189), can interpret the “swift impressions” of her childhood footprints on the sidewalk near the Gayheart property he now possesses, as a sign of life, “as if the feet had tiny wings on them, like the herald Mercury” (191). “What was a man’s ‘home town,’ anyway,” he muses, “but the place where he had had disappointments and had learned to bear them? . . . [H]e paused mechanically on the sidewalk, as he had done so many thousand times, to look at the three light footprints, running away” (195).

NOTES

1. Matt Hokom incisively delineates Cather’s adaptation of the Roman genius in *O Pioneers!* The present essay sketches a broader context for genius loci in Cather’s writings and in modern literature.

2. “Preface 1855” 712. See Kerkering’s illuminating study contrasting genius mundi and genius loci in, respectively, Walt Whitman and William Gilmore Simms.

3. Cather places Marie, too, at an ironic distance from Jewett’s Sylvia. When Marie, sitting under the white mulberry tree where the lovers will ultimately meet their deaths, pronounces to Emil, “I feel as if this tree knows everything I ever think of when I sit here” (139), her claim to the tree’s spirit seems casual, unmerited, compared to Sylvia’s epic ascent of the old oak—and fatally lacking in prescience.

4. John J. Murphy traces the Whitmanian dimension of Alexander’s development (124-27).

5. The New Mexico modernists’ devotion to “spirit of place” is at the heart of Corn’s chapter on O’Keeffe in *The Great American Thing*. See especially 249-66.

6. Cather worked on the *Archbishop* in Mary Austin’s Santa Fe home but later downplayed this hospitality after Austin criticized the novel’s celebration of “a French cathedral in a Spanish town” (in Woodress).

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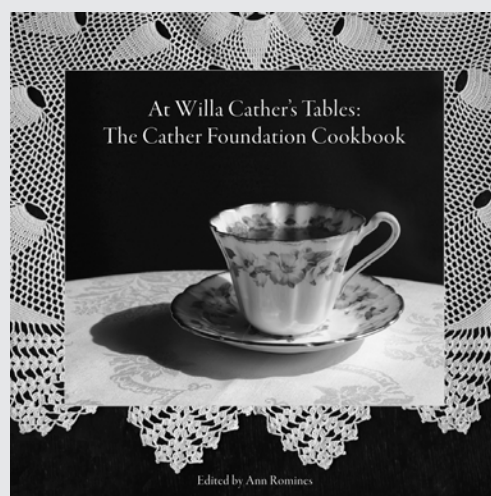
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EXPLORE THE RICH (AND DELICIOUS) LEGACY OF A GREAT AMERICAN WRITER



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Spring Conference 2010



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More than 200 people gathered for the 55th Annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, held June 3-5, 2010 in Red Cloud. Bearing the theme "Food, Drink, and Willa Cather's Writing" and co-sponsored by the Cather Project at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the conference coincided with the introduction of the Foundation's new book, *At Willa Cather's Tables: The Cather Foundation Cookbook*.

In addition to readings, panels and scholarly discussions, programming of a rather different nature helped to feed scholarly appetites. A wine-tasting, ice cream so-

cial, and festive barn dance and supper helped keep things spirited and lively.

1. Jenny Nixon 2. Diane Smith and Elisabeth Bayley 3. Rev. Charles "Chuck" Peek 4. Jim and Angela Southwick 5. Barn dance revelers 6. Jane Jewell 7. Nancy Sherwood 8. Toni Turner 9. Phyllis Palmer, Daryl Palmer, Andy Jewell, and Susan Meyer 10. David Porter and Erica Marcus 11. Dolores and Virgil Albertini 12. Fritz Mountford and Patty Sue Mountford Doty. (Photographs by Barb Kudrna.)



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Cather in Spearfish

One of the largest annual gatherings of Cather scholars has long been the meeting each fall of the Western Literature Association. Catherites turned out in force for the 2009 gathering last October in Spearfish, South Dakota.

Front row, left to right: Tim Bintrim, Evelyn Funda, John Swift, Bob Thacker, Gretchen Koenig, Florence Amamoto, Anne Kaufman. Back row: Daryl Palmer, Steve Shively, Michael Gorman, Max Despain, Steven Trout, Mark Madigan, Barbara Johnson. In 2010 we gather in Prescott, Arizona October 20-23.



“Miss Cather Talks on Technique”

Fritz Klees '25

The *Bowdoin Orient*, May 20, 1925

CATHER AT BOWDOIN, 1925

On May 13, 1925, Willa Cather spoke at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, as one of several literary luminaries invited to the college's Institute of Modern Literature, a celebration of the centennial of the graduation year of Hawthorne and Longfellow. The speakers included Robert Frost, Henry Seidel Canby, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Irving Babbitt, John Dos Passos, and Christopher Morley, among others. Cather's theme was novelistic technique, and her remarks were described in detail in the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Boston Evening Globe*, and the *Lewiston Evening Journal*; these three articles have been reprinted

in L. Brent Bohlke's *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches, and Letters*. The following fourth account of her presentation appeared in the Bowdoin college newspaper, the *Orient*, a week later. The undergraduate contributors to the *Orient* reported the Institute's two weeks of speakers in a set of lively and irreverent articles, and Cather fared better than most. (Irving Babbitt's lecture on Wordsworth, for example, was described as “one of the most unfortunate ever delivered to a Bowdoin audience.”) The article on Cather was written by Fredric “Fritz” Klees, an almost-graduated senior.—John N. Swift

It was a rather plain woman, yet a charming one withal, that spoke to what was up to the ninth evening the largest crowd of the Institute. Memorial Hall was jammed to the doors, the air was hot and sticky, and the benches harder than granite—yet all these torments were patiently endured by the large audience that assembled to hear Willa Cather speak on “The Talk About Technique.” Possibly it was the tone of scorn that appeared in the very wording of the title that filled the hall; but more likely still it was the fact that Willa Cather, probably the greatest novelist that America has produced since Henry James, had never written a dull page.

The technique of “The Talk About Technique” was poor. It was worse than poor, it was decidedly rotten. One could readily see that she had never taken a course in public speaking. And yet her lecture, which should properly be termed a “talk,” was altogether delightful and



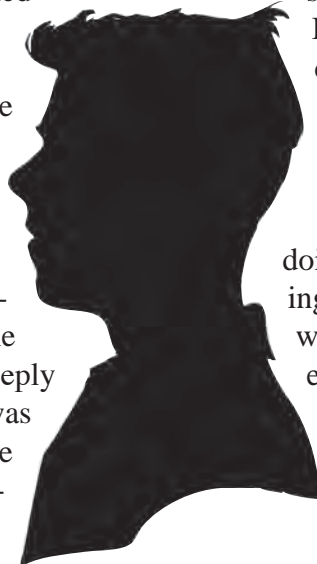
This 1921 publicity photo accompanied the story when it appeared in the *Orient*. The circumstances of Cather's autograph are unknown.

exceedingly enlightening. Her manner was most informal; she talked in much the same way she would have talked if she had been entertaining at her home, the Ladies Aid of some small Nebraska town. I do not mean that she talked down to her audience; I merely mean that she conducted herself in the most natural and human manner possible. There was not the slightest touch of affectation to the woman.

From the very start, a remark that “a watch was a necessary part of every lecture,” she had the vast crowd in Memorial Hall with her. Nobody yawned or fell asleep, as—it pains me to say—had occurred on previous evenings. Her wit and kindly humor made her audience an easy prey. She especially endeared herself to most of her Maine hearers by her lavish praise of Sarah Orne Jewett. She definitely placed Bowdoin on the side of “sweetness and light” because the college had conferred an honorary degree on Miss

Jewett, thereby bringing great honor to itself. Bowdoin, she went on to say, was not responsible for Longfellow and Hawthorne. She refused to honor this college on that score. They were here and had enough credits to graduate, at least Longfellow did (one smiled at her doubt of Hawthorne), so what could Bowdoin do but let them graduate?

It was not all glory, however, that she gave to Maine. The Pine Tree State received one or two well-deserved raps. She had stopped in Portland to buy a copy of Longfellow's "Golden Legend." The particular bookstore she tried had no Longfellow on its shelves; it was stocking up on the novels of Zane Grey and his ilk! More deeply tragic, however, and far less humorous, was her statement of the great pleasure it gave her to be here in Sarah Orne Jewett's country, to be with people who truly loved the "country of the pointed firs," who had no desire to advertise and boom it. One sadly thought of the Rotary Club that had been organized in Brunswick the week before, of the tremendous advertising campaign on which the state of Maine has ventured, of the "boom" spirit that is so much in evidence throughout the state. To paraphrase a remark of James Stephens, Maine is fast becoming a parish of California. One could well agree with Miss Cather that the simple days of handicraft—yes, and even illiteracy—were not so much inferior to the present one of sweatshop, radio and Rotary Club.



Fritz Klees depicted himself in silhouette in 1921, during his sophomore year at Bowdoin.

Miss Cather, in her talk concerning the novel was not diffuse in her praise of that form of literature. Too frequently, she said, the American novel is merely the commuter's convenience. One was glad to learn that she also disliked the Pollyanna type of novel. It was impolite, she declared, to force good cheer on one's readers. Even more keen were her attacks on those writers who concern themselves solely with sex, "grubby Freudian spies" she termed them.

Most enjoyable of all, at least to the Bowdoin students, were her attacks on the teaching of technique. Most professors, she stated, wanted every novel to be like some other novel they had liked very much or like some past novel of the writer's. Consequently, when these same learned professors found that a novel did not conform to either of these types they condemned it. Most biting of all was her ridicule of the teaching of such matters as plot-structure and characterization. As she talked my convictions of the way in which a good novel should be written, which past professors at Bowdoin College had so painstakingly imbedded within me, slowly melted away. I left the hall with no more convictions than I possessed when I entered college. Once I knew the various ways to form a plot or create a character, but no longer. This woman from the West had deprived me of a part of my college education.

FREDRIC "FRITZ" KLEES

Born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1901, Fredric Klees graduated *cum laude* from Bowdoin College in 1925 and completed his education at Exeter College, Oxford University. He was a professor of literature for many years at Swarthmore College, where among his students was Cather Foundation Board of Governors member David Porter. David recalls: "Klees taught two highly popular surveys on drama and dramatic theory, one focused on tragedy, the other on comedy. I took the one on tragedy my sophomore year and

both at that time and in retrospect the course struck me as among the transformative experiences of my college career."

Klees's well-regarded and highly popular *The Pennsylvania Dutch* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1950. "Himself a Pennsylvania Dutchman," as the jacket copy on our 13th edition states, "Mr. Klees probably knows more about his people than any other human being in America." In 1963 Houghton Mifflin published his *The Round of the Year*, a Pennsylvania Dutch almanac. Klees died in 1985.

Les filles du roi and Female Destinations in *Shadows on the Rock*

Jacqueline H. Harris
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Throughout her writing career, Willa Cather created female characters that defied stereotypical gender roles. In *O Pioneers!* (1913) Alexandra Bergson fought to tame the Nebraska frontier against her family's circumstances as working-class immigrants. In *The Song of the Lark* (1915), Cather chronicled the life of the struggling female singer Thea Kronborg and the sacrifices and challenges she faced to in order to pursue her art. In *My Ántonia* (1918), Ántonia Shimerda overcame poverty and the limiting gaze of the male lens. And in *A Lost Lady* (1923), Cather depicted Marian Forrester's battle against restrictive small town life. And yet with all of these progressive texts paving the way for her most revolutionary work, little work on Cather's *Shadows on the Rock* (1931) emphasizes this novel's revolutionary rewriting and challenging of women's historic roles. In this novel, Cather continues to depict female characters who challenge traditional stereotypes but she also rereads women's history, making *Shadows on the Rock* a culmination of her exploration into the reframing of women's lives, both past and present. Her writing deepens the understanding of female immigrant history, marginalized women, and the commodification of the female body, all within her rewriting of historical characters in a way that leads to a reinterpretation and new understanding of the past. *Shadows on the Rock* is a text that invites readers to rethink the women of our past and give old definitions and stereotypical readings new understanding.

Based in seventeenth-century Quebec, *Shadows on*

the Rock follows the lives, destinies, and commodification of three of the novel's female characters: 'Toinette Gaux, descendent of *les filles du roi*, prostitute and mother of Jacques; Jeanne Le Ber, "*la recluse de Ville-Marie*" Quebec's religious recluse; and Cécile Auclair, daughter of the colony's apothecary (108). It is the character of 'Toinette Gaux who will here receive the greatest examination; while 'Toinette might appear to serve a minor role in the text, a greater analysis of her historical significance and role in Quebec reveals that Cather is commenting on the history of this colony, its founding, and in her depiction of 'Toinette demonstrating how she defies the historical commodification of her body in her current renegade role as prostitute.

In her characterization of 'Toinette Gaux, Cather's subtle allusion to the colonial migration that greatly impacted her ancestry reveal that she was indeed rewriting the history of women from a new angle. On the surface, 'Toinette is portrayed as a "woman of ill repute" and nothing more, yet Cather includes that 'Toinette's mother was one of *les filles du roi*, or King's Daughters, a group of French women and girls recruited by King Louis XIV to come marry soldiers and populate the colony in New France (March and Arnold 299). The history of *les filles du roi* is a significant story of female commodification and migration. By focusing on this unexplored dimension of 'Toinette's character and genealogy, we find these influences greatly bearing on new readings of these women, both in literary and historic terms.

In a letter to Governor Cross written on October 17, 1931, Cather writes about her state of mind in composing her novel *Shadows on the Rock*:

To me the rock of Quebec is not only a stronghold on which many strange figures have for a little time cast a shadow in the sun; it is the curious endurance of a kind of culture, narrow but definite. . . . There, among the country people and the nuns, I caught something new to me; a kind of feeling about life and human fate that I could not accept, wholly, but which I could not but admire. (qtd in Footman 125)

As evidenced in the historical analysis of Cather's female characters, part of the human fate that Cather cannot accept yet can't help but admire is that of the emigrant women of Quebec, the migrations from which 'Toinette descends.

No in-depth critical analysis of 'Toinette has ever been written. The lengthiest note on 'Toinette only identifies her as a "young woman of ill repute" and fails to include reference to her royal heritage, entirely focusing instead on her reputation: "After her short-lived marriage to a sailor, she and another woman opened a 'lodging-house' for sailors and lured them there with promises of culinary delicacies, frogs and snails" (March and Arnold 299). Referred to as the frog ("*La Grenouille*") and defined as "a young woman who was quite irreclaimable," readers are informed of her ancestry and that 'Toinette herself fell in love, made promises of reform from her promiscuous ways, but that after her marriage and the birth of her son, she "returned to her old ways, and her husband disappeared" (Cather 41). 'Toinette's return to prostitution suggests her actions and choices are purposeful.

Because Cather was an avid art lover and had said that art was "immortally joy-giving and immortally young," it isn't a stretch to imagine that she was likewise aware, both artistically and literarily, of the symbolism behind the image of the frog (qtd. in Hirsch 13). In addition to the humorous façade of luring sailors with the outward promise of fine French cuisine, the frog's symbolism makes references to the Greek myth-

Cather is not simply writing the story of a girl gone wrong—she is reading women's history from a fresh point-of-view, one that connects 'Toinette's heritage to her current lifestyle and yet highlights the irony of celebrating the one and condemning the other

ological story of Leto, the mother of Apollo and Diana (Hall 192). During her travels, Leto wanted to stop at a lake in Lycia to relieve her thirst but was unable to do so due to the peasants who wouldn't stop their work in the lake's willow beds. Consequently, Leto punished them all by turning them into frogs, a theme that continues to appear in art (192). James Hall connects the image of the frog to the naked female personification of Lust, which was "To the medieval Church, supreme among the Deadly Sins" (196). Hall identifies the toad as an attribute of death and explains that the Church related lust as pertaining to women (196). Gothic and Romanesque sculpture depicting the Last Judgment of Christ, often contains "the rather repellent image of a naked woman whose breasts and genitalia were eaten by toads and serpents. The Church's explanation was that sinners in hell were punished through the bodily organs by which they had offended" (196).

Knowing that the use of a frog or toad alludes to ancient religious stories of both the punishment of peasants and the eternal physical punishment of lustful women in hell, it is not surprising that the colonists with whom 'Toinette lived would stereotypically refer to her as *la grenouille*. If on the surface, Quebec and society at large objectively labeled 'Toinette as nothing more than a prostitute who deserves what she gets, then Cather's additional allusion to *les filles du roi* within

the same passage suggests that there is another connection to be made. Indeed, there is something more to be explained regarding this novel's historical context. By investigating the framework Cather established, we find that 'Toinette gains larger humanity and significance in the text and that both readers and critics will have a more informed knowledge with which to evaluate 'Toinette's choices.

The significance of 'Toinette's ancestry begins with first understanding the colonization of Quebec. While the land that would become Canada was first claimed for France by Jacques Cartier in 1534, it wasn't until 1608 that Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec City. Originally the French came up the St. Lawrence River seeking furs, specifically beaver, as a supplement to the fishing industry (Thacker 12; Easterbrook and Aitken 40). According to the official Canadian organization

La Société des Filles du roi et soldats du Carignan, a French regiment was sent to New France after the colonists pleaded for help in their struggle with the Iroquois. In the summer of 1665, 1,200 soldiers arrived in Quebec under the leadership of Lt. General Alexander de Prouville. Forts were established along the river, which led to peace and prosperity. King Louis XIV, however, wanted the settlement to be permanent, so an estimated 450 troops remained behind to colonize (para. 1-2). Thus, the migration to New France largely consisted of men. Less than one-fifth of all immigrants were female, and according to Peter Moogk, during the 1660s in Canada there "were twelve single men, aged sixteen to thirty, for every eligible woman in the same age group" (106). In addition, there were "discriminatory measures against bachelors" in the Quebec colony, including a 1670 interdict on hunting and trading by single

men which was meant to "compel men to wed and to make a home in New France" (Moogk 106). As the number of male settlers increased, they began reproducing with local native women. Under the reign of King Louis XIV, in 1663 Quebec was made a royal colony and steps were taken to greatly increase the number of immigrants to the city, particularly French female immigrants.

Between 1663 and 1673, some 770 young girls and women referred to as *filles du roi* (King's daughters), were financially sponsored by King Louis of France to go to Canada (Verney 104). King Louis was motivated to recruit these females in order to "provide brides for the surplus bachelors" to help balance the gender ratios of New France which was thought to have a "moderating effect" upon the unruly male soldiers and promote further colonization and sta-



"L'Arrivée des filles du roi à Québec, 1667" by Arthur E. Elias
From the National Archives of Canada

bility in the colony (Moogk 166; Verney 104). Based on the 10 percent mortality rate of transatlantic crossings during the seventeenth century, Yves Landry guesses some 850 women originally embarked on the trip (90). Most of the women came from Paris and the remainder from northwest France, thus making French the dominant language (Eccles 89). Most, but not all, of the French females were single and many were orphans or widows. Of this female transaction, Peter Moogk writes

Jean-Baptiste Colbert regarded the women being sent as breeding stock so that the colony's population would grow without extensive emigration from France. He specified that they be "of an age suitable for reproduction," healthy, strong, and not "outwardly repulsive." In 1667 Colbert wrote, "the king will send . . . four hundred good men, fifty girls, twelve mares, and two stallions . . . and next year, I will ensure that a larger number of girls will be sent so that the soldiers who had settled in the country and the new colonists will marry, and thus give rise to the multiplication of people." (106)

These women were listed as commodities amongst mares and stallions and reduced to nothing more than "breeding stock" (106). It is not accidental irony that these women recruited by King Louis XIV were celebrated for the patriotic sacrifice of their bodies as commodities while 'Toinette as a descendent of these royal daughters of France will herself be ostracized from the colony that created her.

According to Landry, the women chosen to come to Canada came from backgrounds of poverty; one-third came from the General Hospital of Paris where "the diet was meagre enough to cause stunted growth" (15). Landry reemphasizes the tragic lives of the girls by reporting "Declarations on their marriage certificates and contracts suggest that close to 65 percent of them had lost their fathers before they reached adulthood" (15). The population benefit of the exchange is greatly complicated by the fact that some of these females were literally starving, and additionally that the matrimonial ages of these females ranged from age fourteen to fifty-

nine, and that only an estimated 23 percent were literate and thus able to read the government contract and sign their own name (Eccles 91). Furthermore, Moogk points out that as attested by their low fertility rates, it is suggested that these females "were malnourished in France and had accepted emigration as an escape from harsh circumstances. Canada was chosen as the least of many evils" (106). Whether or not society or history has found it surprising that King Louis XIV would choose impoverished and vulnerable females to seduce with offers of money and marriage does, however, point to our need to reread this event in French Canadian history, and what reevaluations of these women's lives bears on 'Toinette's story in Cather's *Shadows on the Rock*.

King Louis XIV paid for the transportation of *les filles du roi* to Canada and the colonial settlements there. The females received a dowry of 50 *livres* only upon marriage to one of the many male colonists; evidence of these dowries can be seen in some of the marriage contracts (*La Société des Filles du roi* para. 1). The dowry, of course, would have been handed over upon marriage as the woman sacrificed not only her body but also the only money she had to a relative stranger. This small dowry, however, would have greatly added to the motivation to agree to the binding contract. This Canadian settlement promotion resulted in a population boom and thus girls and women served as paid commodities for the good of King Louis XIV and New France. The Society of the King's Daughters and Soldiers of Carignan states as a point of great national pride, that most of the millions of French Canadian descendants, both in Quebec and the rest of Canada, are descendants of these females—thus making 'Toinette the true mother of Canada, and not Cécile Auclair as is often assumed (para. 2). Even today, few seem to realize the tragic role all of these females played in French Canadian history, and furthermore conversely label 'Toinette as an outsider when her inherited commoditized understanding of her body has been historically celebrated under a different name.

In his book *The Good Regiment*, author Jack Verney writes about the soldiers of the regiment, and only comments briefly on the role of the King's

Cather has written a novel rereading history, rereading women, and rereading mothers all within the characterization of a seemingly minor character

Daughters. Regarding the marriages Verney states, “it is unlikely that romantic love was as important a factor as it is today,” and cites the example of a seventy-one-year-old soldier’s marriage to a fifteen-year-old girl named Denys. Verney believes their marriage seemed to work because Denys had the “moderating effect” upon her husband (103). Verney also states that most of the soldiers were likely to have been motivated by the promise of the 50 *livre* monetary dowry or other “practical considerations” (104). Also reported is the fact that marriages involving *filles du roi* were made in haste and society excused the extreme age differences:

In seventeenth-century Canada, the moment a girl reached puberty, pressure was brought on to bear, both on her and on her parents, to marry; that pressure originated in the need to increase the size of the population and thus contribute towards consolidating and defending the colony. (105-106)

It is unlikely that with such pressure put on child-bearing, that this role or contribution to the good of the country was not emphasized in order to persuade the females to sign the contracts, or rather have them signed in their behalf. Landry’s article records that King Louis XIV’s orders were that “courtships were to be kept to a strict minimum” (18). Landry goes on to report that a ruling was made in 1670 that ordered, “all Voluntary Companions and other persons old enough to enter into marriage to marry within fifteen days of the arrival of the ships carrying the *filles* under Pain of being

deprived of the rights to any kind of fishing, hunting, and trading with the natives” (qtd. in Landry 18). Just fifteen days to secure the hopes of some kind of future brighter than the bleak ones from which they were selected surely would have greatly added to the mass act of marketplace.

According to Edith Lewis, Willa Cather was “always very painstaking about her facts—she intensely disliked being careless or inaccurate, and went to much trouble to verify them” (161). Knowing that Cather knew her Canadian history supports the tie between ’Toinette’s ancestry of Canada’s *filles du roi* in the same passage regarding her employment as a prostitute; Cather is not simply writing the story of a girl gone wrong—she is reading women’s history from a fresh point-of-view, one that connects ’Toinette’s heritage to her current lifestyle and yet highlights the irony of celebrating the one and condemning the other. Surely it wouldn’t make sense to harshly critique these females who grabbed the first opportunity out of poverty that life extended to them, but it also enables us to view and understand ’Toinette more clearly. Knowing that some of the *filles du roi* were decades younger than their husbands, as well as impoverished, illiterate and thus unable to read the marriage contract, and only received dowries upon marriage points to an act that belittled the whole value of these females more than a royal name can ever correct. This also alters the quick judgments of ’Toinette and how she would have historically perceived her female sexual role in connection to men—as nothing more than a commodity or monetary transaction.

Before *Shadows on the Rock* was published in 1931, Willa Cather would have been aware of Canadian historical societies that proudly commemorate pioneer ancestry and trace lineage to key events. In addition, it would have been and continues to be common for people in the Americas to try to trace their genealogical ancestry to the patriotic pilgrimages of the *Mayflower* and the like. Cather recasts the historic detail of the King’s Daughters through her *Shadows* character and prostitute ’Toinette Gaux by taking a character of royal and celebrated lineage and portraying her as a woman with a misunderstanding of the ownership and usage of her sexuality as a form of power or simply a commod-

ity and sadly, a means of survival. In so doing, Cather is rereading women's history in a defiantly new way.

In Susan Rosowski's article "Willa Cather's Women," she explores the female protagonists' choices and how they continually break from tradition. While Rosowski focuses on Cather's earlier novels, her ideas can be extended to incorporate *Shadows on the Rock* and its female characters as well. Rosowski's argument bases itself on the idea that "Just as Cather's women embody themes concerning the pioneer, artist, and materialism, so they embody themes concerning female experience" (261). Continuing this idea, Rosowski postulates that Cather's women have within themselves two contradicting selves, only one of which can ever be satisfied in the struggle to claim identity; thus, as Cather's career progresses and her novels become more and more saturated with this struggle, the novels too become "increasingly complex examinations of social roles assigned to women and of the implication of those roles for individuals caught in them" (261). As 'Toinette fights the commodification of her female ancestors and if even confusedly attempts to claim her sexual self in defiance of that past, if nothing else this novel reveals Cather thinking about the past and how the female history we inherit affects our future. This idea recalls Cather's epigraph to *Shadows on the Rock*:

Vous me demandez des graines de fleurs de ce pays. Nous en faisons venir de France pour notre jardin, n'y en ayant pas ici de fort rares ni de fort belles. Tout y est sauvage, les fleurs aussi bien que les hommes.

Les filles du roi came to France to help what was to be *notre jardin* and yet we may never know in their own words how this transaction changed them.

Cather has written a novel rereading history, rereading women, and rereading mothers all within the characterization of a seemingly minor character, 'Toinette Gaux, as a woman who cannot resolve her commoditized ancestry and her presenting understanding of her body. While up to this point literary critics have pointed to Cécile Auclair as the new hope for Canada, in focusing on 'Toinette and the possibilities in her future we may find the most significant garden awaiting Quebec.

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Remembrances

The scholarly Cather Community mourns the passing of two of its number, Charles W. Mignon and Linda Hughson Ross, each a frequent and valued presence among us. With his wife Mary, Chuck was the first to sign up for the seminars in Quebec in 1995 and France in 2007—they participated in each (and many others besides) with enthusiasm and élan. I last saw

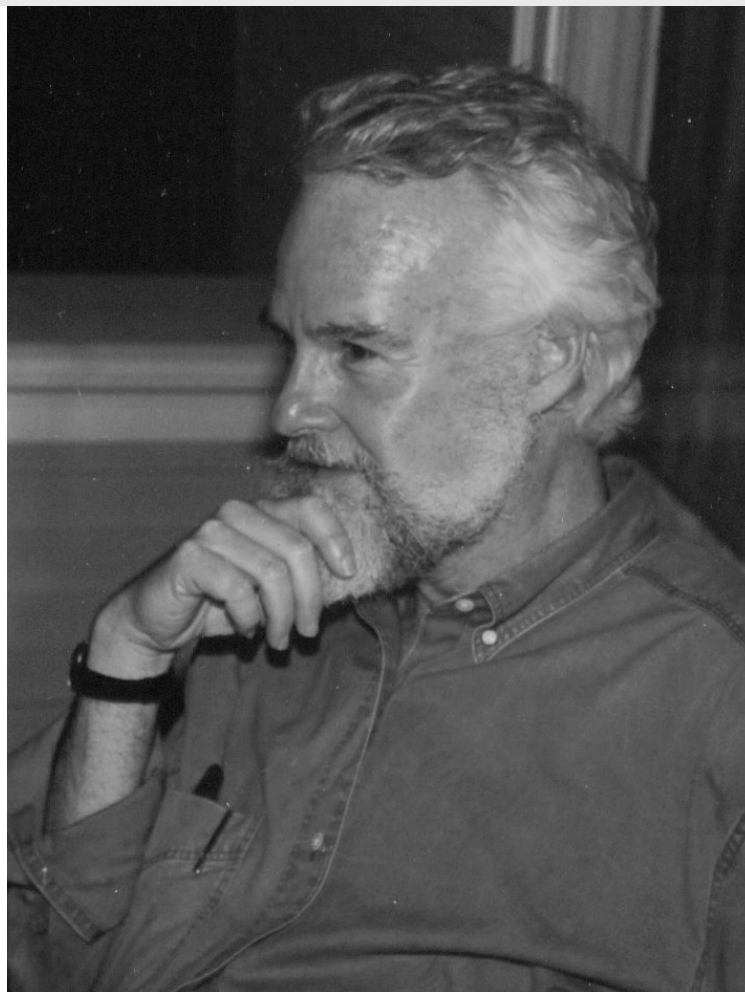
him in Chicago in 2009, but I was in touch with him until a few days before his death as he worked away on the textual issues surrounding the Scholarly Edition of Cather's *Collected Poems*. Those of us at work on it are all in his debt. When that volume appears, it will have Chuck's clear mark on it. As well it should, as Guy Reynolds details below.—Robert Thacker

Chuck Mignon

Guy Reynolds

Chuck was a man of very many talents, all of them mischievously but authoritatively displayed. An old-school textual editor, Chuck left his fingerprints all over the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition. Over two decades he worked with a succession of volume editors and the in-house UNL group on this project. Editing latterly with Kari Ronning, Chuck established the clearest and cleanest versions of Cather's texts, meticulously reading backwards and forwards across different printings to establish the basis of the Cather Scholarly Edition. He was at his best working in the thickets of the text, looking for variations, revisions, printers' errors. He had a meticulous, scholarly eye for detail.

But he was as expansive and carefree in manner as he was concentrated in his working techniques. When I last visited with Chuck and Mary in his downtown Lincoln apartment, he nonchalantly pointed out a Matisse print hanging amongst his extensive collection of Japanese and Korean prints. He was delighted with it, but not showy or boastful. And in typical Chuck fashion he immediately suggested we raise a glass to celebrate his great good fortune. He was quite simply one of those people with a huge appetite for life. We'll miss him.



Linda Ross

Robert Thacker

This past January saw the untimely passing of Linda Hughson Ross, a longtime presence among us at foundation conferences, seminars, and at the Western Literature Association meetings. A native of Mitchell, Nebraska, Linda taught high school in Buffalo, Wyoming for many years before moving to Sheridan College. Commuting to Lincoln, she earned her Ph.D. under Susan Rosowski at the University of Nebraska with a dissertation on Cather's skyscapes. At meetings, as another friend has written, Linda's presentations "were mini-plays, complete with a varied cast of characters, and dramatically, empathetically, performed." She was, he also maintained, "invariably ebullient and smiling." She was this certainly, and I experienced her dramatic flare many times.

For the International Cather Seminar in Hastings and Red Cloud in 1993, Sue Rosowski gave me the assignment of "directing" the world premiere of Cather's "A Westbound Train" (1899)—"A Thirty Minute Sketch for Two People." So far as we knew, it had never been produced, so Sue wanted to use it as a concluding entertainment on the last night of seminar. (For any unfamiliar with this Catherian gem, this is to be found in the *Collected Short Fiction*, 1892-1912. Revised Ed. Ed. Virginia Faulkner [Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 1970. 381-93].) Well, I'm capable of being directive, but I'm a better producer. Seeing my uncertainties, Linda almost immediately took over as director: citing all the high-school productions she'd done in Wyoming, she told me to get out of the way. I did. She then proceeded during our week together to organize and directed a smash hit, hilarious and just what was needed for our final evening together. It was wonderful, the acting superb and comical. But by far the best part was the ending, though, when Linda emerged--unexpected and unknown--as Cather in full midi-blouse costume from the famous Steichen photograph. As Cather, she denounced



the play, the reading of the play, the whole concept of a Cather seminar, and chastised us most sternly, finally, saying "You've been reading my letters!" It brought down the house and was much more than memorable. A triumph.

Linda and I repeated our act at the 2000 Seminar in Nebraska City when, after years of collecting apt songs for Cather characters to sing (for example, Marian Forrester singing "I Am Woman" or Neighbour Rosicky singing "Achy Breaky Heart"), we produced "Willa: The Quiz Show" in which the titles of such songs were the questions and the contestants had to come up with the appropriate Cather character as singer. Linda, ever thorough, had brought buzzers and had done a PowerPoint. Another raucous, splendid event. Janis Stout won, with Chuck Mignon (also recently and too soon gone) a close second. Utter Joy. Linda.

Preserving Our Past, Pioneering Our Future

Two longtime contributors to the Foundation recently joined forces to issue a challenge to Willa Cather devotees.

Their generosity has led to the creation of a new campaign: *The Willa Cather Foundation: Preserving Our Past, Pioneering Our Future*. This campaign will provide resources critical to preserving the Cather Archives and expanding familiarity with the author among Nebraska's school children.

The donors, who both wish to remain anonymous, have offered \$20,000 in challenge money to be used to help raise \$60,000 of additional annual fund contributions both from new donors and from current donors who increase their pledges. The deadline to meet the challenge is December 31, 2010.

"More than 50,000 people visit the Foundation every year—either in Red Cloud or online," said one of the donors, "so if everyone who's been touched by Cather's work gives just a little, we will be able to do so much."

Funds raised by this appeal will be used to preserve letters, writings and artifacts recently given to the Foundation and to pioneer efforts to expand activities for children.

"Willa Cather left us such great stories about who we are as Americans," said the other donor. "We want to be sure new readers embrace Cather. She has so much to teach us about who we are as a people."

To help us meet the challenge send your donation marked "challenge" to the Willa Cather Foundation, 413 North Webster Street, Red Cloud, Nebraska 68970 or visit us online at www.WillaCather.org.

Smith College and the Willa Cather Foundation present
The International Cather Seminar 2011
Willa Cather and the Nineteenth Century
June 20 - 25, 2011
Smith College, Northampton, MA

Call for Papers

While we welcome a broad array of approaches to Cather's writing, we hope via the work of the 13th International Seminar to examine the legacy of nineteenth century culture in Cather's life and work and to explore through her writing the transition from a Victorian to a modernist America. We envision this as a continuation and perhaps a complication or expansion of the conversation about the nature of Cather's modernism that emerged so fruitfully from the Chicago Seminar. The Seminar encourages papers that will address a wide range of intersections between Cather's work and this pivotal cultural moment, including the following:

- **Willa Cather and Nineteenth-Century Writers and Cultural Figures**
- **Willa Cather and Histories: of race, of sexuality, of class identity**
- **Willa Cather and intellectual ferment: the professions, the forms of knowledge, the new social sciences**
- **Willa Cather, the Slave Narrative, and the Antebellum South**
- **International Approaches to Teaching Cather**
- **Willa Cather and New England**

The Seminar will take place at Smith College, in Northampton, MA, a setting replete with connections to Cather's life and work. We encourage papers that consider Cather and New England within the context of turn-of-the-century culture. Diverse perspectives are encouraged, as are proposals for sessions focused on exchange rather than formal presentation.

Interested contributors should submit abstracts of 500 words with a cover letter and brief resume by March 1, 2011.

Papers should be 10-12 double-spaced pages for a 20-minute presentation time.

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John Murphy Delivers Santa Fe 400th Anniversary Lecture on Cather

On March 5, 2010, Board of Governors member John J. Murphy presented “Willa Cather’s Sheltering Art: Latour’s Cathedral and the Adams Factor” as part of the Carol J. Worrell Annual Lecture Series on Literature at the Santa Fe campus of St. John’s College (the “Great Books School”). Part of Santa Fe’s city-wide 400th anniversary celebration, the event was attended by over 150 people and followed by refreshments and a lively discussion.

At the outset Murphy tried to correct provincial views of Cather held by some Nebraskans who regard her primarily as a prairie writer and some New Mexicans who grudgingly acknowledge her as a biased biographer who idealized the historical Archbishop Lamy, a Frenchman, at the expense of the local Hispanic and Native population.

The lecture centered on *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as a major component in Cather’s response to the materialistic crises of the 1920s and 30s, a response which also included *The Professor’s House*, *My Mortal Enemy*, *Shadows on the Rock*, and the Avignon story, “Hard Punishments.” As such, the *Archbishop* and the two later works are comparable to *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*, Henry Adams’ reaction to the materialistic culture of late nineteenth-century America.

In the *Archbishop*, the building of the Santa Fe cathedral serves as a metaphor for the creation of an idealized Church, a shelter existing only in this fiction as the artistic achievement of Jean Marie Latour, although perhaps prophetic of America’s potential.



John Murphy at the entrance to St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe. The twenty panels of the bronze doors depict scenes from the history of the church in Santa Fe; the panel to Murphy’s right shows Archbishop Lamy and the laying of the cathedral’s cornerstone in 1869.

Among the responses to Murphy’s lecture was an email by Lib O’Brien, a former student of the late Merrill Skaggs and now a teacher in Santa Fe, who wrote, “You have helped me re-read *Death*. . . . You have added a new dimension to my understanding by bringing in . . . references to Adams, Aquinas, Augustine, Cather’s own search for that Sheltering Art.”



WILLA CATHER NEWSLETTER & REVIEW

VOLUME 54, NO. 1

SUMMER 2010

The Willa Cather Foundation

(Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation)

Established 1955 by Mildred Bennett

www.WillaCather.org

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Design: Kelly Blanchat

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The Newsletter & Review welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should not exceed 3,500 words; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as an e-mail attachment and should follow MLA guidelines.

Essays and notes are listed in the annual *MLA Bibliography*.

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Newsletter & Review

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Willa Cather Newsletter & Review (ISSN 0197-663X)

is published three times a year by:

The Willa Cather Foundation

413 North Webster Street

Red Cloud NE 68970

(402) 746-2653

(866) 731-7304

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Family Bequest Continues Cather Legacy

The Willa Cather Foundation has received a significant gift from the estate of Willa Cather's niece, Ella Cather Lewis. Lewis, who died in 2001, made a gracious provision for the Foundation in her estate, which was settled in 2009 following the death of her sister, Catherine Cather Lowell.

Ella and Catherine were regular visitors to Red Cloud and long-time supporters of the Foundation, both serving on its Board of Governors for many years. Ella's gift is being held by the Foundation as a reserve to support programming, the Cather Archives, and maintenance of historic buildings in Red Cloud.

Ella was born in Smethport, Pennsylvania in 1921. She and her sister were the daughters of Willa's youngest brother, John Cather. Graduating from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1942, Ella was a speech professor at Long Beach City College for almost 30 years. Her husband Harry Lewis preceded her in death. Of all of Cather's nieces, she is said to have borne the strongest physical resemblance to her aunt.

Ella was by all accounts an inspirational teacher. One of her students, Beverly O'Neill, became Mayor of Long Beach and a close friend, ultimately serving as executor of Ella's estate.

"Gifts by bequest or through one's will can be the most simple to set up and can also have a strong impact on the Foundation's future," said Jay Yost, Foundation President.

"They are easy to establish and provide meaningful gifts to the Foundation. Sometimes we don't even know we are in a donor's estate plans," he said.

The most common way to provide for an organization is to simply name the organization and an established amount or percentage of the estate. Some donors name the organization as a recipient of a portion



*Ella Cather Lewis and Catherine Cather Lowell
in Red Cloud, 1977.*

of the proceeds once family members have received an established amount. In all cases, it is important to use the Willa Cather Foundation's full name.

"We wish people would tell us that we are in their will so we can appropriately thank them," Jay remarked. "But we understand that many prefer to remain anonymous. And of course we are equally grateful to our anonymous donors."

For more information about leaving a gift by bequest, email Ashley Olson, the Foundation's Director of Finance and Administration at: aolson@willacather.org, or call 402-746-2653.



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