

Help restore the 1885 Red Cloud Opera House

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation is pleased to announce that renovations to the historic 1885 Red Cloud Opera House are well under way! When completed, the Opera House will be restored as a center for culture and education and preserved as an important site of Willa Cather's life in Red Cloud. The restored Opera House will include an auditorium, Visitors' Center, gift store and art gallery, and the headquarters of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation.



PHOTO BY BEVERLY J. COOPER

Contributions are still needed to complete the renovation and to create a new home for the Cather Archives. Send your contribution for the Opera House renovation to:

326 North Webster Street
Red Cloud, NE 68970

or call Steve Ryan at (402) 746-2653 for more information.

The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial
and Educational
Foundation



Department of English
800 University Drive
Maryville, MO 64468-6001

T E A C H I N G
C A T H E R

Dedicated to promoting and improving the teaching of the works of Willa Cather



Other guests at Cather's table include, from left, Charles Major, Arthur Colton, Elinor McCartney Lane, Frederick A. Duneka, Edward S. Martin, and Anne O'Hagan. In front is Lilian Bell Bogue.

Willa Cather, third from right, at Mark Twain's 70th birthday party, Delmonico's Restaurant, New York City, December 1905.

SPRING 2002, VOL. 2, ISSUE 2
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
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In this issue we feature an exciting comparison of Willa Cather and Mark Twain, by Martin Zehr. Because both writers are often taught in literature classes at all levels, we are confident that enterprising teachers will glean productive teaching ideas from this comparison. The fascinating photographs that accompany Zehr's article (including our cover photograph) take us for a time back to the turn-of-the-century cultural and aesthetic world which spawned some of our greatest literary works. Photos of the aging Twain and the young Cather capture our imaginations in ways that enhance the distinctions Martin Zehr draws between their literary productions.

Several additional treats await readers of this issue of *Teaching Cather*. Rebecca Pinker, with impressive examples from her students, demonstrates links between Cather's literature and the composition classroom. Kendra Moore, an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska–Kearney, shows that students can indeed combine literary insights with solid research to produce a well-written essay. Sharon Nelson and Christina Rathbun document their successful efforts to inspire their Kansas high school students to combine literature, research, visual images, and technology to produce a work in which an entire community takes pride. Their work also reminds us of the enjoyment and inspiration that comes with a field trip to Catherland. We are pleased to continue our tradition of bringing to our readers the winning essay in the Norma Ross Walter Scholarship competition, this year showcasing the outstanding writing of Anne C. Sloniker. Catherine S. Palmer provides a useful description of the excellent collection of Cather materials in Owens Library at Northwest Missouri State University.

We take particular pleasure in offering the inspirational words of Mellanee Kvasnicka, one of the most distinguished teachers of the works of Willa Cather. We can't think of a more appropriate inauguration for what we hope becomes a regular feature of *Teaching Cather*—interviews with accomplished teachers.

We appreciate your support as we strive to bring to our readers the best work of students and teachers engaged in the challenge of reading, talking about, and writing about the works of Willa Cather.

Steve Shively
Virgil Albertini

ABOUT THE COVER

The cover photo, showing Willa Cather seated with other guests at Mark Twain's 70th birthday party, was included in a special souvenir issue of *Harper's* magazine dated December 23, 1905. This was nearly seven years prior to the publication of Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, but her inclusion among the 170 invitees to Twain's birthday celebration is a clear indication of her recognition and acceptance as an established writer. The author of the accompanying article in this issue, Dr. Martin Zehr, can attest to the difficulty of tracking down the rare *Harper's* souvenir issue, a task which consumed more than a year of repeated calls to booksellers and which was completed only recently, during an internet search of Twain-related material in an eBay auction. Twain scholars have long been aware of the existence of the special *Harper's* issue, but, since the photo of Twain at his table and his dinner speech are readily available from other sources, the original magazine is not a high priority from a research standpoint. While Cather scholars have known that she attended Twain's birthday party, only a cropped version of the photo and two of her dinner companions has previously been published in a Cather-related book. This publication of the entire photo of all the people at Cather's table, along with photos of other guests, including Dorothy Canfield Fisher, provides for Cather scholars a new and more complete look at what must have been for Cather a career milestone.

TEACHING CATHER

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SUBMISSION INFORMATION

The editors of **TEACHING CATHER** seek articles, queries, syllabi, lesson plans, reviews, and news items connecting with the teaching of Willa Cather and her works in middle school, high school, college and university classes. We welcome submissions sharing how you as teachers successfully approach Cather in the classroom. New approaches and interdisciplinary work are especially invited. Please follow current MLA guidelines.

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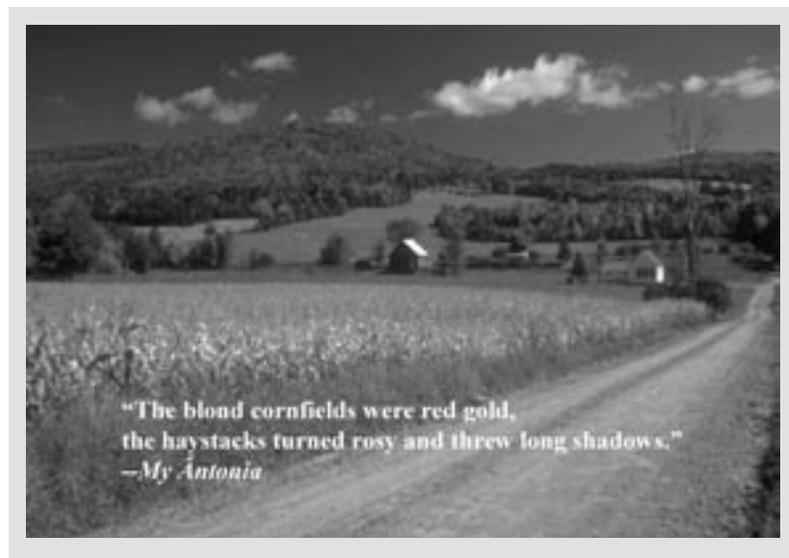
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A photo from the Ellsworth High School students' PowerPoint presentation (see pages 18-19).

The Western Vistas of Willa Cather and Mark Twain:

A Study in Contrasts

BY MARTIN ZEHR

During last year's Willa Cather Festival in Red Cloud, I had the great pleasure of watching a production by a group of high school students from Ellsworth, Kansas, which included beautiful slides featuring the land, horizons, and seasons of the Nebraska landscape that comprises the literary backdrop for her best-known works. Each scene was accompanied by an appropriate quotation from one of her books, further reinforcing the notion, if that was necessary, that Willa Cather's attachment to the gently rolling hills of her childhood was both intimate and respectful. Of course, it is the development and struggle of characters like *Ántonia Shimerda* and *Alexandra Bergson*, literally and figuratively rooted in the land, which are at the core of Cather's Nebraska novels. Cather provides us with an indelible portrait of the West of her youth, a West which has long since disappeared and which even the surviving photographic record of sod houses and immigrant farms cannot adequately convey. The magnitude of her own attachment to the land, moreover, is underscored by the fierce determination of her central characters to survive the often daunting hazards of their relationships to each other as well as the unpredictable and unforgiving hazards of the land to which they commit their lives. Indeed, strength of character, as depicted in Cather's work, is similar to the decision by early European immigrants to make a stand, accept the inevitable hardships, and attempt the transformation of the seemingly barren plains into a source of spiritual and literal sustenance.

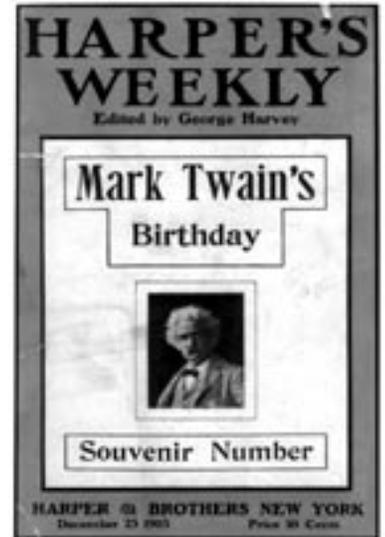
In an almost Darwinian sense, the West of Cather's novels is comprised of strong actors who are committed to stay and those who are "rootless" and lacking in vision. In *O Pioneers!*, when Carl Linstrum, during a return visit to see Alexandra, states that "Off there in the cities there are thousands of rolling stones like me. We are all alike; we have no ties, we know nobody, we own nothing" (83), it is clear to the reader that the rewards of Alexandra's stationary strength, as

it were, are in stark contrast with the products of Carl's travels, tantamount to vacillation in Cather's view. From Cather's perspective, the West of her childhood provides a vivid canvas for her portrayal of stubborn persistence as a trait to be emulated and, eventually, rewarded.

As I sat and watched the patterns of colors and textures in the students' slide presentation which would undoubtedly have been familiar to Willa Cather herself, it suddenly occurred to me that the West of Willa Cather was strikingly different from another West with which

I was more familiar, the West of Mark Twain. Cather and Twain are sometimes grouped in the loosely defined genre of "Western" writers, primarily due to the geographic backdrop of some of their best-known works. On a superficial level, the fact is that, for both writers, the childhood which was the wellspring for the raw material of their most popular work was situated west of the Mississippi.

This categorization is of some heuristic value, perhaps, if their characters and settings are compared with those of more "Eastern" writers, e.g., Edith Wharton or Henry James, who presumably would have been hard-pressed, by constraints of background and experience, to provide us with a convincing literary vignette of *Ántonia Shimerda* or a realistic portrait of the plains with which her character development is inextricably linked. A comparison of these two "Western" writers shows



The cover to the Dec. 23, 1905, edition of *Harper's Weekly* including Willa Cather.

A particular feature of the dinner was the strength of the feminine contingent. There were fully as many women there as men, and they were not present as mere appendages of their husbands, but as individuals representing the art of imaginative writing no less than the men. An observer looking over the host of diners, after having scanned the list of guests and noticed that every feminine name in it was familiar to all readers, could not but wonder that the women he found corresponding to those names were all young and pretty. The whole gathering did not seem to include half a dozen women with streaks of gray in their hair.

— The New York Times, Dec. 6, 1905



This grouping shows Florence Morse Kingsley in front, and, from left, Frederick Trevor Hill, Philip Verrill Mighels, Frances Powell Case, Edwin Markham, Churchill Williams, Dorothy Canfield, and William Dana Orcutt.

that their respective views of the American West are both compellingly different yet simultaneously authentic.

First of all, consider some of the more salient aspects of the respective biographies of these writers as a basis for literary comparison. Both Cather and Twain are strongly associated with the small-town settings of their youth, Red Cloud (*read* Black Hawk) as the chosen stage for *My Ántonia* and Hannibal (*read* St. Petersburg) as the staging point, as it were, for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Cather may have arrived at her starting destination relatively late in her childhood, following her family's move from Virginia, but there is no doubt for readers and scholars alike that Red Cloud is the primal environmental inspiration for her work. Sam Clemens, of course, was born in the small town of Florida, Missouri, just a few miles from Hannibal, where his family would move in his fourth year, but the more pedantic Twainiac would note that, had Samuel Langhorne Clemens been born a scant few weeks prematurely, we would be making much of the observation that he and his family, like Cather's, had emigrated westward from a southern state (Tennessee).

It cannot escape our attention, however, that, for both writers, their Western recollections are memorialized, in literary form, in the environs of New York, Hartford, Philadelphia, and Elmira, from which vantage points their reputations as "Western" writers would become firmly established. Thus, while both writers would carry with them the seeds that would blossom in the form of landmark works in the Western American literary canon, there can be little doubt that they were both acutely aware of the necessity of going east as a prerequisite for establishing reputations as serious authors. For Cather, the train depot on the southern edge of Red Cloud is the symbolic point of departure for the journey which will eventually take her far away from her Nebraska roots. Similarly, for Clemens, the western bank of the Mississippi, just a couple hundred yards east of the house on Hill Street, becomes the highway of oppor-

tunity he chooses for the first of many excursions in the outside world eventually leading to literary superstardom.

These observations provide us with only a superficial basis for comparison of these great "Western" writers; even at this level, moreover, important differences in influence can be easily observed. It is of no small importance, for instance, that Cather's choice of writing as a career was made at an earlier stage of her life and that the degree and direction of her formal education undoubtedly provided her with a well-warranted confidence in her capacity to achieve her goal of becoming a professional writer. Clemens's route to literary prominence, on the other hand, is so extraordinarily convoluted that it resembles nothing so much as the yazoo streams he navigated during his years as a Mississippi river pilot. Clemens's formal education was thankfully, by his account, brief, ended by necessity at age eleven following his father's death, the event which precipitated his real education as a writer, acquired while working as an apprentice typesetter in Joseph Ament's printing shop in Hannibal.

Cather's initial success as a writer, during her college years in Lincoln, served as the inspiration to focus her efforts toward a writing career, to the extent that a retrospective analysis of her career, at least by comparison, makes the eventual outcome appear more or less inevitable. Clemens's early writing efforts were most likely regarded by the author himself as little more than entertaining diversions, providing him with an occasional opportunity to exercise his affinity to the backwoods Southwestern humor of his era and a few extra dollars to supplement his income as a compositor and river pilot. How serious, after all, could be the literary aspirations of a writer who distanced himself from his efforts with monikers like Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass and W. Epaminondas Adrastus Blab? And how focused was Clemens in his career trajectory, meandering, like the Mississippi, from ink-stained printer's devil to would-be

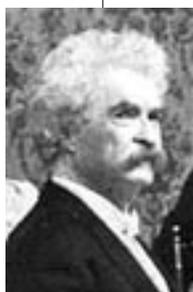
Amazon explorer, riverboat pilot, Confederate irregular, gold miner, journalist, humorist-lecturer and, eventually, almost by default, writer?

Indeed, the only evidence of a strong vocational inclination in his youth is his retrospective observation, from *Life on the Mississippi*, that, “When I was a boy, there was but one permanent ambition among my comrades in our village on the west bank of the Mississippi River. That was, to be a steamboatman” (62). It is instructive here to note that this ambition, eventually realized by Sam Clemens, likely would have been permanent, as he himself acknowledged, but for the intervention of the war, which closed the Mississippi to river traffic and coincidentally provided him with the opportunity to journey west with his older brother, Orion, who had been awarded the patronage position of secretary to the governor of the Nevada Territory.

Aside from these differences in background, or rather, as a result, the West as portrayed in the writing of Cather and Twain has little in common other than the obvious fact that it is not the East. There are, first of all, the vast differences of topography which form the bases for their respective views of “the West.” Cather’s preoccupation with the land in her pioneer novels, *The Song of the Lark*, *O Pioneers!*, and *My Antonia* is hardly surprising given the lack of any other realistic choice if she were to write in a credible fashion regarding the characters she had known in her own childhood. Evidence for the strength of her attachment is abundant in her writings. In *O Pioneers!*, in an early exchange between Alexandra Bergson and her father, both the tenacity of the grip the land has on their psyches and the implied sense of failure imputed to those whose commitment is not so strong is demonstrated when the bedridden John Bergson, in reference to Alexandra’s brothers, entreats her to stand fast: “Don’t let them get discouraged and go off like Uncle Otto. I want them to keep the land” (28). Alexandra, the dutiful “Dotter” and archetypal Cather heroine, cannot, of course, respond in any other manner than to



Willa Cather, 1905



Mark Twain, 1905

state, in her unequivocal manner, “We will, Father. We will never lose the land” (28). Twain, by contrast, has no apparent devotion to agrarian values and only indirect experience with the challenges inherent in farming, through the summers spent with his uncle John Quarles on his farm in Florida, Missouri, which apparently made no impression whatsoever insofar as the actual cultivation of land was concerned. In his *Autobiography*, Twain can only recollect the carefree, happy atmosphere he experienced at his uncle’s farm; his most prominent and influential memory of this time is that of “Uncle Dan’l,” the slave whose storytelling ability is the source of lasting fascination and admiration. Clemens, to be sure, can hardly empathize with the struggle to tame the land, at least on the basis of his own childhood experience, since it appears that John Quarles was generally regarded as a successful and prosperous farmer, while his family’s own penurious existence, a direct result of his father’s consistent ineptitude in a succession of business and professional ventures, becomes the source for his own preoccupation with financial success as an adult.

The most obvious difference between the West of Cather and Twain, of course, is temporal and political as well as geographic in nature. Properly speaking, Clemens’s Missouri, steeped in its slavery heritage, is both western and southern, an inescapable fact underscored by its status as a border state that is an undercurrent in much of Twain’s best writing. This clearly distinguishes him, culturally and politically, from Cather, whose Nebraska plains, even prior to her arrival or statehood status, never were directly subject to the strife and tragedy of slavery. As a direct consequence of this history, most of Cather’s fiction is both literally and thematically unfettered in this regard, despite her own Virginia roots, and her singular foray in the subject area, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, is therefore somewhat remarkable in the adequacy of her portrayal of the institution, absent any significant degree of direct experience.

Twain, on the other hand, cannot escape, in any major facet of

Twain and Howells were the celebrities on this occasion, but there were many lesser notables that Cather must have been excited to meet or at least to see: Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Alice Brown, George Ade, Julian Hawthorne, and Owen Wister. Charles Major and Rex Beach were there too, but Cather disliked their writing. George Washington Cable and John Burroughs were present; so were Andrew Carnegie and Emily Post. Somehow Dorothy Canfield, who had not yet begun her literary career, managed an invitation. Viewed in retrospect, the only important writer at the dinner besides Twain and Howells was Cather. No one had thought E.A. Robinson, Edith Wharton, or Theodore Dreiser worth inviting. It was a glittering evening nonetheless, and Cather enjoyed it seated at a table between two editors, Edward Martin of the humor magazine Life and Frederick Duneka of Harpers.

James Woodress in *Willa Cather: A Literary Life*

his life and career, the weight of this background and his own struggle to rise above his roots as the son of a slave owner and his own former status, if unenthusiastic and decidedly brief, as a Confederate irregular. Indeed, his marriage into a staunchly abolitionist family, his strong association with the Beechers of Hartford, and such actions as his funding of the legal education of Warner McGuinn, a black student at Yale, can be justly interpreted as a deliberate rejection of this aspect of his personal history and, in the latter instance, as a form of penance. Twain's assertion, in a letter to the dean of the law school, that "I do not believe I would cheerfully help a white student who would ask a benevolence of a stranger, but I do not feel so about the other color. We have ground the manhood out of them, and the shame is ours, not theirs, and we should pay for it," is undeniable evidence of the imprint of the "South" of his childhood.¹ This darker aspect of Twain's "West" is as inevitable a subject in his writing as is Cather's eloquent preoccupation in her Nebraska novels with the travails of the plains inhabitant.

The slide show that was the impetus for this essay also highlighted, for me, another striking contrast between the West described by Twain and Cather, specifically, the unspoken, but consistently obvious, emphasis on stability versus movement which permeates their work. Cather's rootedness in the plains of Nebraska provides a solid foundation for her ability to describe, in great detail, aspects of the landscape which would have escaped Twain's attention entirely. Twain's view of the West consists of a constantly changing panorama of characters and scenery, exemplified by the shotgun-seat portrait he provides of the changing terrain while traveling by stagecoach with his older brother Orion, from Missouri to the Nevada Territory, as recorded in seriocomic fashion in *Roughing It*.

Thus, while Cather's particular competence allows her to provide us with three consecutive novels roughly situated in the same geographic area and replete with descriptions of the landscape associated with the plains, Twain, with few exceptions, does not describe the topographical features of the West in a manner that is altogether engaging and lasting. Twain's attitude toward landscape description and his almost compulsive need to move from one vista to the next are amply illustrated in the following excerpt from *Roughing It*: "[. . .] but now we were to cross a desert in daylight. This was fine-novel-romantic-dramatically adventurous, this, indeed, was worth living for, worth traveling for! [. . .] This enthusiasm, this stem thirst for adventure, wilted under the sultry August sun and did not last above one hour. [. . .] The poetry was all in the anticipation—there is none in the reality" (143).

Contrast Twain's rapidly fading interest with the exotic features of the landscape with Cather's ability to enlist our attention in a



Another scene from Twain's birthday party. His daughter Jean is seated center front. Other guests were, from left, Florence Wilkinson, Richard Watson Gilder, George Cary Eggleston, Alfred Henry Lewis, Sydney Adamson, John Uri Lloyd and Anna McClure Sholl.

lingering appreciation of the ordinary and familiar, illustrated by the description from a contented Antonia Shimerda of the apple orchard which has literally required years of caring labors:

There was the deepest peace in the orchard. It was surrounded by a triple enclosure; the wire fence, then the hedge of thorny locusts, then the mulberry hedge which kept out the hot winds of summer and held fast to the protecting snows of winter. The hedges were so tall that we could see nothing but the blue sky above them, neither the barn roof nor the windmill. The afternoon sun poured down on us through the drying grape leaves. The orchard seemed full of sun, like a cup, and we could smell the ripe apples on the trees. The crabs hung on the branches as thick as beads on a string, purple-red, with a thin silvery glaze over them. (219)

This type of meditative and loving description, so frequently encountered in Cather's Western novels, is nearly absent in much of Twain's writing, the singular exception being his detailed discourse on the history and characteristics of the Mississippi contained in the first chapter of *Life on the Mississippi*, and, of course, the references to the river integral to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Indeed, it can be argued that such a vivid evocation of natural features would have been precluded by the frenetic pace and movement which is an integral feature of the life of Clemens. It is no accident that many of Twain's best-known works are, in one sense, literary travelogues, such as *The Innocents Abroad*, the work which gave him national celebrity status. Other well-known works, e.g., *Roughing It*, *Following the Equator*, and *A Tramp Abroad*, reinforce the notion of movement as a common denominator in much of Twain's writing. Even his masterpiece, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is both a literal and figurative travel book. In *Huckleberry Finn*, movement down the river is experienced in a very literal sense and simultaneously as a convenient literary device, giving Twain the freedom to tell a wide variety of stories whose common tie is their proximity

to the river and their interpretation through Huck's perspective. The movement downriver, with all its terrible implications for Jim, is also a vital ingredient in Huck's own movement of conscience, culminating, while on the raft, in one of the most famous expressions of personal transformation in literature, Huck's "All right, then, I'll go to hell" (272). In a very real sense, Huck's metaphoric and literal journey mirrors Clemens's own transformation with respect to racial attitudes.

Twain's almost constitutional inability to stay in one place for any extended length of time also has notable implications for the characters inhabiting his writings. The price to be paid for his continuous changes of vantage point, it can be argued, is a lack of opportunity to maintain a continuous, in-depth focus, on any particular character or feature of the surrounding landscape. Thus, in all of Twain's work, we find no character as well-developed from a chronological psychological standpoint as Alexandra Bergson or Antonia Shimerda, although Twain provides us with numerous glimpses of believable personality typologies and selected, shared individual experiences sufficient to elicit our empathy or disgust.²

Cather, then, can be said to have the patience of focus based on her prairie upbringing necessary to "cultivate" her fictional characters, while Twain is more likely to provide us with brief vignettes and selected aspects of his characters while *en route*, whether downriver, by stagecoach across the plains, or across the Atlantic with his fellow "innocents." This is an oversimplification of the differing styles of these two "Western" writers; nevertheless, Cather's ability to maintain a prolonged focus on both person and place, in contrast to Twain's desire to keep moving, or inability to stand still, can be seen as the natural product of their respective, and very different, perspectives of the American West. Cather herself was no stranger to travel, but the comparison is nevertheless valid in terms of degree. Twain was, without doubt, the most well-traveled of any nineteenth-century American author, spending nearly a third of his adult life living outside the United States.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Western perspectives of Cather and Twain are also distinguishable from a strictly chronological perspective. By the time Cather moves with her family from Virginia to Nebraska, Twain is a household name and his alter-ego, Sam Clemens, is living with his family in Hartford, Connecticut. The train depot which represents the possibility of life outside of Red Cloud for the adolescent Cather did not exist at the time Clemens passed



J. Henry Harper, Twain's publisher, is seated at the far left. Harper also published some of Cather's poems and stories. Other guests included Frances Aymar Mathews in front and, from left, Harper, Elizabeth Bisland Wetmore, Nelson Lloyd, Jesse Lynch Williams, Richard Le Gallienne and Jean Webster.

through the Nebraska Territory with his brother, a journey which preceded, by at least a decade, the influx of waves of European immigrants whose stories would provide the basis for much of her writing. Their respective writing careers overlapped, but just barely, and the first of Cather's Nebraska novels would not be published in Twain's lifetime.

It is interesting to note, however, that there is at least one known meeting which took place between these two "Western" writers, on the occasion of Twain's 70th birthday celebration, at Delmonico's, in New York, in December, 1905. Willa Cather was one of fifty guests (out of 170) who had the opportunity to meet Twain personally before the dinner, although speculation exists that a primary reason for the meeting may have been the desire of Harper, Twain's publisher, to woo her from McClure. It is known, however, that Twain had a copy of *The Troll Garden* in his library which was sent to him by McClure in 1905 and that Twain also praised a poem of Cather's titled "The Palatine," which appeared in an issue of the *Saturday Times Review* in 1909. In the context of the present discussion, the brief meeting between Cather and Twain can be viewed as a sort of "passing of the torch" from one generation of "Western" writer to another, albeit from writers with nearly completely different conceptions, from most perspectives, of the American West.

One distinction between the published forms of the works of these two authors, perhaps not readily apparent to those fortunate to read them in their original editions but related to the present discussion, is the inclusion of illustrations. When I began reading the novels of Cather

While the dinner was in progress, the guests—one table at a time—went out into another room and had their pictures taken in groups. The pictures will form the most conspicuous feature of an album which is to be given to Mr. Clemens as a souvenir of the occasion.

— The New York Times, Dec. 6, 1905

“My own favorite American writers? I’ve never changed in that respect much since I was a girl at school. There were great ones I liked best then and still like—Mark Twain, Henry James and Sarah Orne Jewett.”

— Willa Cather, August 1913

in earnest and had the opportunity to come across early editions of her works as issued by either of her primary publishers, Houghton Mifflin or Knopf, I did not, at first, notice the sparse use of illustrations. It was not, in fact, until I began writing this paper that I was impressed with the striking difference between their published works in this singular respect. To “illustrate” this point, it is noted that the original edition of *The Innocents Abroad* contains no less than 234 illustrations, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, a much shorter book, includes 173 illustrations. This difference also extends to the covers of their books; Cather’s novels are typically spartan in this regard, including only the title and author, whereas Twain’s works commonly featured elaborate embossed and gilded cover illustrations. It could be argued, in the context of the present discussion, that this disparity is consistent with the observation that Cather is much more adept at the art of verbal evocation of the imagery which constitutes the background and foreground of her writings, and, therefore, less reliant on the need for pictographic assistance. The actual explanation for this observed difference, is, however, much more mundane. Twain, with his journalistic background, was much more conscious of, and concerned with, the marketing aspects of publishing, and resorted to the then recent phenomenon of subscription publishing as a vehicle for selling his books. Subscription publishing, books sold in advance of publication by door-to-door commission salesmen in the manner of the Fuller brush vendor, required the incorporation of visual references in the prospectuses of the yet-to-be-issued “merchandise,” and the length, or “heft” of literary wares was also assumed to be of critical importance. This seemingly minor difference between the published works of these two writers can be interpreted as a reflection of their respective writing apprenticeships, served, in Twain’s case, in printing shops or newspaper offices, and, in Cather’s, in more traditional settings, including her university experience.

The usefulness of the categorization of Willa Cather and Mark Twain as “Western” writers can clearly be seen to be limited in many respects, but the analytic exercise does, in fact, support one valuable conclusion for casual readers, serious scholars, students, and instructors. Specifically, it is clear that, from a purely literary perspective, a comprehensive overview of life in the American West cannot be acquired through the eyes and words of any single writer, even when that writer has the status and breadth of work of either of these icons of the American writing establishment. Instead, it is necessary for readers who would attempt anything remotely resembling an adequate comprehension of a temporal and geographic entity as widely disparate in its possible vantage points as the American West to avail themselves of the opportunity to view it from the eyes and words of a wide variety of potential sources. Certainly, to use an analogy with an anachronistic quality that both Cather and Twain would nevertheless immediately comprehend, a three-dimensional image of the West is



Front: Robert W. Chambers, E.A. Dithmar and Margaret Sutton Briscoe Hopkins. Back: Agnes Repplier, Andrew Carnegie, Mrs. Pearl Craigie, Irving Bacheller and Dr. Charles Eastman.

more easily obtained through the use of a stereopticon viewer that provides us the simultaneous sensory impressions of the West as seen by both writers. Finally, in one traditional sense, at least, the label of Western writers is inarguably appropriate. For both Cather and Twain, in their personal lives and the lives of their literary characters, the observation of another traveler, deTocqueville, that the West represents the opportunity for all people, regardless of their station, to make something of themselves, is borne out. Whether through years of toil and effort in working the land, or through repeated and changing attempts to achieve success in a wide variety of occupations, Cather and Twain share this, the notion of possibility and the freedom to be challenged represented by their respective visions of the West. As Twain expressed it, in a paraphrasing of Bishop Berkeley, “Westward the Jug of Empire takes its way” (*Life on the Mississippi* 587). It is perhaps no coincidence that Cather underscores this sentiment many years later through Thea Kronborg’s recollection of the story of the old man who was present when the first message was transmitted by telegraph across the Missouri. That message was, of course, “Westward the Course of Empire takes its way.” ♦

ENDNOTES

¹ The entire text of Twain’s letter, and an account of its rediscovery, a century after it was written, is contained in Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s book, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 101-107.

² An argument could certainly be made that Roxana, the heroine of Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, is comparable, insofar as her character

PHOTO AT RIGHT: Kate Douglas Riggs, Mark Twain, Rev. Joseph H. Twichell, Bliss Carman, Ruth McEnergy Stuart, Henry Mills Alden, Henry H. Rogers; in front: Mary E. Wilkins Freeman.

BELOW, RIGHT: Miss Cutting, William Dean Howells, Adrian H. Joline, Norman Duncan, Edith Wyatt, unidentified woman, Rupert Hughes and Morgan Robertson.



development is concerned, although, unlike Alexandra Bergson or Antonia Shimerda, she is a twenty-year-old adult when we are first introduced to her in the novel.

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May Isabel Fisk, John Kendrick Bangs, Ernest Ingersoll, Charles W. Chesnutt, Anna P. Paret, Roy L. McCardell and John Luther Long. In front: Caroline Duer.

Students Connecting with Willa Cather in the Composition Classroom

BY REBECCA K. PINKER

When I was fifteen, I attended a rural country high school in Ohio. Most of the student population came from farm families, as I did, and we were quite familiar with farm life. In my sophomore English class, the teacher assigned the reading of Willa Cather's "The Sentimentality of William Tavener." As I read the story, images came to my mind. I knew about "hog corrals" and "pigs rooting" (353). I recalled "an occasional blue day" when my dad "went over the store bills" (353). And, I remembered the "occasional splash and a laugh ringing" as my brother and I played in the creek south of our house (354). That story was my story; for others in my class, it was their story as well. Although my purpose in this essay is not to explicate Cather's work as Marilyn Arnold has done so beautifully, the tale of William and Hester and the boys opened the door to Cather's work for me.

When teaching high school English in Kansas, I found only one Cather story, "Paul's Case," in the district's mandated text. While the story has many layers for discussion (Albertini 7-9), I wanted a work that would lead into the study of *My Ántonia*. So, I introduced my students to Cather using "The Enchanted Bluff" and "The Sentimentality of William Tavener." Both stories were excellent lead-ins to the study of *My Ántonia*. After reading these two stories, students shared personal experiences from their childhoods. They talked about their dreams and expectations. For high school juniors, these topics of memories, dreams, and expectations were part of their world, just as they were part of the world for the boys on the sandbar and the farm family of McPherson County. After reading the short fiction, the students entered the world of Jim Burden and Ántonia Shimerda. *My Ántonia* "worked" in my high school AP classes for several reasons: students were familiar with the setting, they knew of platonic relationships, and they had a sense of purpose and determination. Some of the students had grandparents in Western Kansas, and they could relate to the vastness of the prairie. Many shared the nostalgic memories of childhood friendships, and nearly all the students possessed goals,

a sense of purpose, and determination to reach these goals. *My Ántonia* became a springboard for discussions and a connection to other literature.

At the college where I now teach, the Composition II class incorporates various types of writing: summary, critique, review, synthesis, compare/contrast, and research. During one class, I asked students which American writers did they find most interesting? My students responded slowly, but at last I got several names: Stephen King, Pat Conroy, and Tom Clancy. I asked: What about classic American novelists? Some stated that they had "read a story or two from Mark Twain" and "the movie *Huckleberry Finn* was good."

Learning that most of the students knew few canonical American writers and that they read few great American classics, I felt a challenge had presented itself to me. I recalled Doris Grumbach's words in her foreword to *My Ántonia*. She refers to Jim Burden, and she states: "The reader thinks back to Jim's reading of Virgil's *Georgics*: 'Optima dies . . . prima fugit' (The best days are the first to flee). [. . .] There is autobiographical truth in the continuation: 'Primus ego in partiam mecum . . . deducam Musas' (For I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country)" (xxvi). This was the challenge. I wanted to bring the excitement and beauty that I found in Cather's writing to my students.

During the summer, I began to formulate a program for combining the required writing assignments for Comp II with the study of Cather. I was uncertain of the outcome, but I was excited to begin. In my plan,

I selected stories and novels by Cather, essays on Cather, and criticisms of her fiction. I paralleled these readings with the required writing assignments found in the Composition II Program Guide. Throughout the semester, students would prepare the required assignments from the college assigned text—summary, critique, and synthesis—using pieces of Cather's writing.

When beginning the American author study, I introduce the students to Cather and her work by reading "A Wagner Matinee" to



Photo taken by Sharon Ziegler to accompany her essay on Cather.

them; this story combines Cather's description of prairie life on the frontier and the glamour and excitement of a metropolitan city. I believe reading to students of all ages to be important, for when reading the story aloud, we share a common experience. In class, students view a brief video on Cather (*Nebraska Historic Shorts: Willa Cather*). Following the biographical presentation, students read several pieces from Cather's canon—two short stories and a novel. Later, students research criticisms on the fiction they have read. For the culminating activity, students prepare a research project that encompasses the different types of writing using the material they read and the research they conduct on Cather.

In my classes, students vary in ages from seventeen to sixty-five, and they have diverse experiences and backgrounds. Even so, each time I read these students' papers, I feel the strength of Cather's imagery and themes that students have put into words showing a connection between Cather's writing and themselves regardless of age.

Each semester, I gather several Cather research projects from students. These papers span various novels, stories, and criticisms; yet, in each paper, I hear not only Cather's voice but students' voices as well. What joy I find in their words. These students *get it* with little prompting from me. Their work shows that they do not merely repeat what they hear or read, but, rather, they discover for themselves the richness and the beauty evident in her work.

For this article, I have selected the papers of three students that bring together two ideas: the dichotomy of the setting and the awakenings of the characters. To provide clarity, I place only Cather's words within quotation marks.

In some of her early fiction, Cather depicts the Midwest prairie as “nothing but sun, and grass, and sky” (“Peter” 542), and the prairie ground as “broken and rough, [with] a narrow strip of timber wound along the turbid, muddy little stream that had scarcely ambition enough to crawl over its black bottom” (“On the Divide” 498). In another piece of Cather's short fiction, her dark view of the prairie existence becomes evident as well. One student, Sharon Ziegler, comments that in “A Wagner Matinee,” Aunt Georgiana leaves the metropolitan life of a music teacher to live as a homesteader's wife on the Nebraska prairie. Some years later, upon returning to Boston on business, Aunt Georgiana attends a Wagner performance, which her nephew had arranged for her enjoyment. Aunt Georgiana knows that her nephew offers her an open window to freedom. She knows, however, there will be no freedom for her in Nebraska—nothing but prairie. There will be no music and art that she knew years earlier (Ziegler); she will know only the “black pond with the cattle-tracked bluff; the tall, unpainted house, with weathered-curling boards; naked as a tower, the crook-backed ash seedlings where the dishcloths hung to dry; the gaunt, moulting turkeys picking up refuse about the kitchen door” (242).

Willa Cather writes her early prairie novels a decade later, and

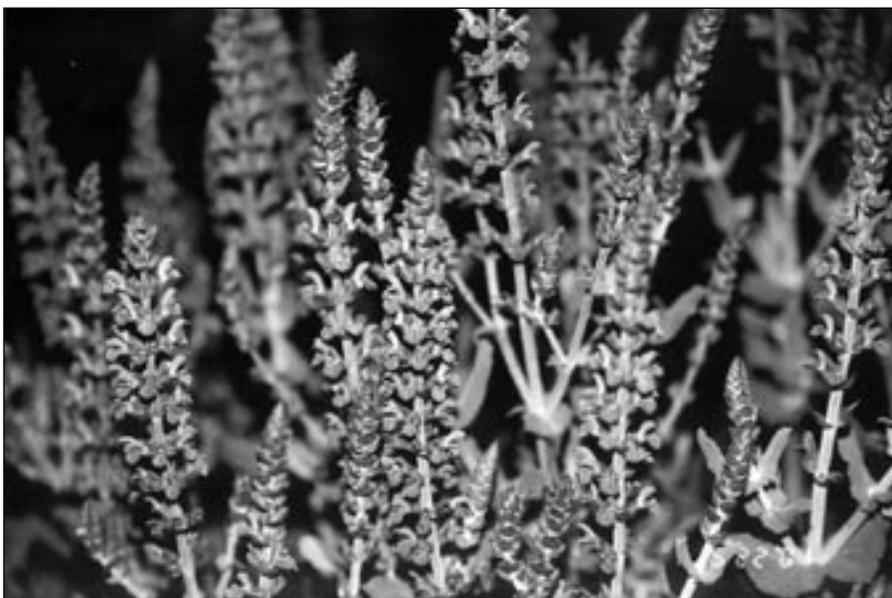


Photo of prairie flowers taken by Sharon Ziegler to accompany her essay on Cather.

she again typifies the flat plains of the Midwest as harsh and barren. “In the eleven long years John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land that he had come to tame. It was still a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knows when they were likely to come, or why” (*OP* 12). In her longer fiction, however, Cather also describes the solid beauty of the land. In *O Pioneers!* the narrative voice declares, “There are few scenes more gratifying than a spring plowing in that country, where the furrows of a single field often lie a mile in length, and the brown earth, with such a strong, clean smell, and such a power of growth and fertility in it, yields itself eagerly to the plow [. . .]” (45). For Alexandra “under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring” (41). Later, Alexandra tells Carl: “[The land] had its little joke. It pretended to be poor because nobody knew how to work it right; and then, all at once, it worked itself. It woke up out of its sleep and stretched itself and it was so big, so rich, that we suddenly found we were rich, just from sitting still” (69). These statements clarify the beauty and lushness that Cather found on the Nebraska plains.

Likewise, in *My Ántonia*, Cather shows the duality of the prairie that Jim and Ántonia experience. Upon seeing the prairie for the first time, Jim feels “erased, blotted out” (8), and Cather describes the prairie as a “wild place” (15). Soon Jim senses the strength and steadfastness of the grassy plains, for he asserts “The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers. [. . .] I was entirely happy” (14). After reading this novel, a second student, Cheryl Carner, writes that through Cather's description, she projects a growing respect for nature as Jim walks alongside his grandmother on a September morning. Cheryl notes that Jim describes the “motion in the landscape: in the fresh, easy-blowing morning winds and in the earth itself, as if the shaggy grass were a sort of loose hide, and underneath it herds of wild buffalo were galloping, galloping” (13). Further on, Cheryl observes even Cather's description of Ántonia expounds on nature as she writes of Ántonia's eyes as being “full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in

the wood” (17). This writer senses that Cather demonstrates man’s tie to the earth

Readers marvel not only at the undulant prairies of *O Pioneers!* and *My Ántonia*, but also at the ubiquitous desert lands Cather describes in her Southwest fiction. The desert Southwest provides a solemnity in Cather’s writing. Her writing of the desert areas reveals grace and beauty as well as loneliness and hardship. The narrator in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* affirms, “The difficulty was that the country in which [Father Latour] found himself was so featureless—or rather, that it was crowded with features, all exactly alike. [. . .] on every side, the landscape was heaped up into monotonous red sand-hills” [. . .] (17). Yet, in this featureless country Father Latour finds “Running water, clover fields, cottonwoods, acacias, little adobe houses with brilliant gardens” (24). A third student, Dana Enyart, experiences Cather’s feeling of the duality of the desert. She writes that across the Southwestern landscape, one can see for miles the hardened earth, passive and protective, rough and frugal with its hidden treasures. Once in a great while, the rains come to the desert, and life flexed itself in response to its beckoning. Normally thorny and unfriendly, brilliant blossoms open wide on the cactus plants, coloring the landscape with unexpected abandonment.

A second novel of the Southwest captures readers’ attention because of the detailed beauty. In the mid-section of *The Professor’s House*, Tom Outland discovers the splendor of this area as he punches cattle. Sharon Ziegler states that Outland describes the valley so vividly it comes to life. The “bluish rock, sun-tanned grass, purple-gray sky, and lavender and pale gold colors” (200) of the valley can be pictured easily. Outland tells of what he sees “through a veil of lightly falling snow” (201), and he recounts the “great cavern in the face of the cliff” and his first glimpse of “a little city of stones, asleep” (201).

Another theme that these students identify in Cather’s fiction comes in the awakenings of her characters. While characters experience awakenings, their responses to this epiphany differ; some characters move to greater understanding of self while others choose to remain as they are before the awakening. Aunt Georgiana awakens to a former life of music and art in “A Wagner Matinee”; however, she remembers more clearly her prairie existence than her youthful experiences at the conservatory. By the end of the story, Aunt Georgiana appears to be returning to Nebraska, but the ending becomes foggy and uncertain for Aunt Georgiana and for the reader; a hope remains, however, that Aunt Georgiana may rediscover her connection with music (Ziegler).

In the story “El Dorado: A Kansas Recessional,” Colonel Josiah

Bywaters discovers the deception of the Gumps. After the Colonel buries Apollo Gump, he takes his spoils and leaves his deserted town although his destiny remains uncertain (Ziegler). In a third story, “Eric Hermannson’s Soul,” Dana sees a character who comes to more than one awakening. First, Eric comes to believe that in order to have peace, he must set aside the things he enjoys. He smashes his violin, a prized possession. Eric sacrifices his personal joy of music to walk a narrowly furrowed path step-by-step across the crusted earth of his fields. With dramatic skill and precisely timed fear, Asa Skinner brings Eric to the belief that “one must live without pleasure to die without fear; to save the soul it [is] necessary to starve the soul” (369). But Cather does not leave Eric in the desperate grasp of Skinner. Eric experiences a second awakening when Margaret Elliot comes to the Divide. Margaret becomes the catalyst for Eric as he comes to know himself. Indirectly, Margaret gives Eric the confidence to stand up to Skinner, servant of God and Free Godspeller, and he frees himself (Enyart).

Several student writers trace these awakenings through Cather’s novel characters as well. In *My Ántonia*, Jim Burden returns to Black Hawk before entering Harvard Law School. He travels by buggy to the prairie land where he and Ántonia “had each other when [they] were little” (206). Because of his new experiences at Lincoln and Harvard, Jim sees Ántonia differently from their time as children. Jim states, “Do you know, Ántonia, since I’ve been away, I think of you more often than of anyone else in this part of the world. I’d have liked to have you for a sweetheart, or a wife, or my mother or my sister—anything that a woman can be to a man” (206). Ántonia never becomes Jim’s sweetheart or wife, but he does awaken to the richness of Ántonia; he, however, takes twenty years to rediscover this awakening. At that time, Jim comes from the city to visit Ántonia. Cheryl Carner notes that Ántonia proudly shows off her children and her home to her old friend. After he has viewed the rows and rows of canned fruit and barrels of vegetables, Jim and Ántonia step out into the bright sunlight. Although Ántonia no longer can be called a young girl, Jim still feels she has something special, something innate:

“She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last” (227). Jim comes to appreciate and to understand his childhood friend. And, although Ántonia is never more than a childhood friend to him, she becomes a mainstay in his life.

In *The Song of the Lark*, Dana Enyart finds Thea’s awakenings most remarkable. The middle of seven children, Thea reveals through her observations the fatuities of others in her small town

[E]ach time I read these students’ papers, I feel the strength of Cather’s imagery and themes that students have put into words showing a connection between Cather’s writing and themselves regardless of age.

and fights against being swallowed up by the average expectations of life [that] she sees everywhere around her. Thea Kronberg nearly withers in her own spirit after a dismal attempt at living alone in Chicago. When Thea gains a benefactor, Fred Ottenburg, she soon discovers her awakening. She accepts Fred's invitation and moves from the cold, dismal weather and dreary city of Chicago to the warm sunshine of the Arizona landscape. Here, Thea loses herself among the old structures of the cliff dwellers in Panther Canyon. She is renewed within the walls of the canyon, connecting with the women that once lived there by studying her surroundings and the relics left behind. Without the pressures of a caustic world pushing in on her, Thea opens up in an intriguing display of unthreatened honesty. Much like the flowering cactus, her surroundings now beckon her to flex her innermost soul. Most individuals make such transitions somewhat unconsciously, barely aware of it, and perhaps only realizing it one day when noticing a change in thought process or seeing something different in the mirror. Thea Kronberg moves through this transition in the naked freedom of the Arizona canyon, and Cather presents [this experience] almost like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Only Fred, her friend and benefactor, observes the process.

Two characters experience awakenings in *The Professor's House*. Sharon Ziegler sees both Godfrey St. Peter and Tom Outland begin inward journeys of discovery. St. Peter believes that he documents his discovery in his many volumes of *Spanish Adventurers in North America*; however, Professor St. Peter comes to his true awakening as a much older man. With his family in France, the professor finds his time of contemplation as his awakening. St. Peter "now thought of eternal solitude with gratefulness; as a release from every obligation, from every form of effort. It was the Truth" (272). Tom Outland confines his epiphany to a diary, and through his discovery and writing of the cliff people, Tom awakens unto himself. His life has finally come together; he welcomes the isolation and aloneness of that mesa. Tom sees beauty as never before.

In much of her fiction, Cather presents her feeling of the duality of the prairie. In many short stories and nearly half of her novels, this beauty and harshness as well as community and isolation become evident to readers. The characters' awakenings seem also to bring readers effortlessly to an epiphany of Cather's characters. Cather creates stories with a flow and ease that make for uncomplicated reading. When readers *read between the lines* of Cather's writing, they find the richness that Cather has lovingly placed before them. In these shared works, three students demonstrate their understanding of Cather's dichotomy of settings and the joy and excitement of the awakenings in her characters. For these students, who had never read Cather's work before this composition class, they present well their understanding of her writing. It matters not if one comes to Cather's work as a fifteen-year-old sophomore in high school or a mature sophomore in a college composition class; Cather's fiction touches each reader with a remarkable lasting impression. ♦

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Willa Cather’s “Neighbour Rosicky”: *Painting a Realistic Portrait of Immigrant Life in Nebraska*

BY KENDRA L. MOORE

Since the beginning of American exploration in the western United States, many authors have chosen this new frontier as the subject of their writing. From Mark Twain to the authors of dime-store novels, a different picture has been painted about late nineteenth-century life on the Great Plains and in the Western United States. One author, Willa Cather, also chose to discuss life in the West in her writing, specifically the Plains state of Nebraska. Migrating with her family to Nebraska in 1883, Cather experienced firsthand the beginning of a new life in this newly formed territory. From this experience, the author was able to write novels and short stories that realistically portrayed the hardships and joys experienced by the immigrants of this area.

Many literary critics have praised Cather’s ability to portray the immigrant experience in her works. Clifton Fadiman, in a 1932 review of Willa Cather’s later novels, states, “no one has better commemorated the virtues of the Bohemian and Scandinavian immigrants whose enterprise and heroism won an empire” (95). I agree with Fadiman, and believe that one of Cather’s works which best commemorates the virtues of the Bohemian immigrants is “Neighbour Rosicky,” which the author finished writing in 1928. In this story, Cather paints a faithful picture of Czechoslovakian life in the West in two ways: by presenting realistic details of the Czech immigration and settlement process in the United States and by accurately presenting Czech immigrant ideals.

Cather paints a realistic picture in “Neighbour Rosicky,” first by presenting factual details of the immigration and settlement process. In the story, Cather divides the immigration process of Anton Rosicky into two stages: the first stage describing his move from the land of Bohemia to the city of New York (by way of London) and the second stage narrating his move from New York City back to the farm land of Nebraska. In the first stage, Anton has left Bohemia because of a shortage of land and has migrated to America after a stay in London. In order to support himself, he has given up on tending to the land that he loves and is working as a tailor. He finds his life in the city to be enjoyable because he has enough money to support himself, and “he was never hungry or cold or dirty” (28). Coming from a country of poor farmers to the city of New York was an incredible experience for Anton Rosicky. It offered him a way to

earn enough money to live a comfortable life and to have a little fun on the side.

Rose Rosicky, in her introduction to *A History of Czechs [Bohemians] in Nebraska*, describes the land shortages that many immigrants faced in their home country. “Bohemia and Moravia,” she states, “are rich agriculturally, although their industries are many and varied. However, it may be said that the people inclined towards farming are in the majority, but the country is densely populated. This fact and another [. . .] were the two chief factors why so many emigrated to this country” (22-24). Another author, Gregory C. Ference, in his article entitled “Slovak Immigration to the United States,” describes the ways that, like Rosicky, the Czech and Slovak immigrants supported themselves when they entered the cities. “In 1840,” he states, “a family of Slovak tinkers, the Komada, established the first Slovak business, dealing with wire and wire products, in Philadelphia” (131). According to Ference, other occupations held by these immigrants also included unskilled labor, such as work in “coal mines and steel mills” (131). Czechs and Slovaks often enjoyed taking these jobs because “they had year round employment with wages five to six times higher” than what they would have been making in their home country (131). Realistically, many Czech immigrants did leave Bohemia in the nineteenth century because of a land shortage and took varying jobs in the city because the price was right, and they were able to support themselves.

In the second stage of immigration presented by Cather, Anton Rosicky has learned about Nebraska in the Czech newspapers and has migrated back to the country from New York. Although he truly loved the time that he spent in the city, Anton remembers clearly that “the desire to return to the country never left him” (32). While living in New York, Rosicky began subscribing to Czech newspapers from Chicago and Omaha and “begins to save a little money to buy his liberty” (32). At age thirty-five, he decides to leave New York, and a few months later he is headed to Nebraska where he purchases a plot of land and etches out a new life for himself.

Joseph Svoboda, in his article titled “Czech Americans: The Love of Liberty,” explains that, like Anton Rosicky, many Czechs migrated to the West because of their love of the land. “The Czechs

[Rosicky was] a man who had helped to do the work of great cities and had always longed for the open country and had got to it at last. Rosicky’s life seemed to him complete and beautiful.

— Willa Cather, “Neighbour Rosicky”

settled in Nebraska,” he states, “for the same reason they settled in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, and the Dakotas. [. . .] [T]hey hungered for land they could till and own; and the land was there in abundance” (114). Svoboda explains that many immigrants learned about the availability of this new land through Czech newspapers. “The early Czech newspapers directed the newcomers interested in farming to the most favorable, unsettled parts of the Midwest [. . .]. The first Czech Newspaper in Nebraska, *Poprok Zapadu* (Progress of the West), published in Omaha from 1871 by an enterprising Czech Jew, Edward Rosewater, served in its early stages as a land advertising sheet” (114). These contemporary and modern sources reinforce Cather’s facts concerning the second stage of immigration. Czech immigrants in the nineteenth century settled in the Midwest because they loved the land, and they often heard about that land through the Czech newspapers being published in the cities.

Cather continues her realistic portrayal of Czechs in Nebraska through her presentation of Czech immigrant ideals. She presents four Czech ideals in the story: independence, hard work, family unity, and freedom. The first ideal, independence, is presented when Rosicky is contemplating his son Rudolph’s desire to be a factory worker in Omaha. Because of the trouble with drought and farm prices, he is seriously considering moving to Omaha and taking up a factory job where the pay is better. Anton could not bear to have his son move to the city. He does not want Rudolph to leave the independence of landowning and become a slave of industry. “To be a landless man,” he states, “was to be a wage earner, a slave, all your life; to have nothing, to be nothing” (40). For this reason, Rosicky would rather have Rudolph be a poor independent landowner than a rich factory slave.

In his article, “Nebraska: My New Home,” Vladimir Kucera discusses the Czech ideal of independence. Having moved from Bohemia to Nebraska, he devotes a paragraph to the freedom that he feels when working the land. “The heritage of this land is the love of freedom for a single human soul,” he states, “a steadfast belief in hard, honest labor, battles and heroism, where bravery and determination walk side by side with suffering, tears and even blood” (176). At the end of the article, Kucera also expresses his feelings on work in the factories. “The American public has become a slave to the materialistic world,” he states, “and the almighty dollar seems to rule” (177). This Bohemian immigrant values the independence of the land over the slavery of the materialistic world, just like Anton Rosicky.

Cather also presents the Czech ideal of hard work through the character of Anton Rosicky. One March day Anton is sitting by his window and thinking about his children’s futures on the farm. He understood that they would have both good and bad years ahead of them, but that with hard work and persistence they would survive. As he worries about Rudolph leaving the farm, he realizes that,

They would have to work hard on the farm and probably they would never do much more than make a living. But if he could think of them as staying here on the land, he wouldn’t have to fear any great unkindness for them. Hardships, certainly; it was a hardship to have the wheat freeze in the ground when seed was so high; and to have to sell your stock because you had no feed. But there would be other years when everything came right, and you caught up. (58-59)

Rosicky clearly feels that if his sons continue to work hard through every problem Mother Nature hurls at them, they will survive and prosper on the land.



Czech pioneers in Nebraska. Photo from the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation Website.

Svoboda explains that many immigrants possessed the ideal of hard work. He recites a story told to him by a third generation Czech woman about the hard work and persistence shown by her grandparents when they first moved to Nebraska. “The next year they started to farm for themselves,” she explains, “and not being used to hard work, they found it awfully hard [. . .] they made a nice crop that year and also the following two, so grandpa paid most of his debts. And they got used to the hard work and began to like it here” (115). Kucera also dedicates a portion of his article to the Czech’s hard work ideal: “These predecessors broke the virgin sod, and husband and wife lived together to sow and later to reap their meager livelihood. Their immeasurable sacrifices are buried alongside with their tears in the fields of Nebraska” (177). Stories like these and hundreds of others support Willa Cather’s presentation of hard work as a Czech immigrant ideal.

The third immigrant ideal presented by Cather is family unity. Unity is very important to Anton and Mary Rosicky. They love each other, and they love their children. They are happy in their marriage and have “been shipmates on a rough voyage” for many years (24). They also enjoy gathering with their family, and Mary often cooks large meals for them, including Czech favorites such as “coffee cake, or prune tarts or a fresh loaf of bread” (50). Anton shares Mary’s love for their children. In one part of the story, he helps his daughter-in-law Polly with her chores so she can spend a night out with her husband, and, perhaps, save her marriage. For Anton and Mary Rosicky, family is the most important part of their lives and the center of their social structure.

Kucera agrees with Cather in this presentation of family unity as a Czech ideal. When discussing the idea that many people characterize Czechs as “clannish” and “self-centered,” Kucera offers the following argument: “I think it would be wise for anyone holding these beliefs to remember the Czechs are not self-centered but that they entertain a deep love for home, family, and friend” (177). Svoboda tells readers that Czechs not only had a deep love for family, but they also had a deep love for celebrations with their family, like large meals, that released them from the stresses of life. Svoboda writes, “Although the minds of Czechs were for centuries exposed to west-

ernizing influences, their inner makeup remained Slavic, inscrutably complex and sentimental. Their love of music, dance, and beer occasioned joyful celebration, and the release from monotony of day-to-day existence” (115). The sentimental Czechs who love their families and celebrations described by these two authors sound very much like Anton and Mary Rosicky, making Cather’s presentation of the Czech ideal of family very realistic.

Freedom is another Czech ideal that Cather highlights in “Neighbour Rosicky.” Rosicky is very proud of the freedom that he

Czechs not only had a deep love for family, but they also had a deep love for celebrations with their family, like large meals, that released them from the stresses of life.

possesses by living in the United States. He counts his blessings every Fourth of July and makes sure that he celebrates with his family, even if times are tough. Mary recalls one Fourth of July in the story when Anton wanted to have a picnic even though they had lost their corn crop to the heat. On that day, even though “all the corn [. . .] was cooked by three o’clock,” Rosicky makes sure that his family enjoys a picnic with fried chicken and wild-grape wine to celebrate their freedom (49). Clearly, on that day, Rosicky’s freedom means more to him than anything money could buy.

According to Kucera, one reason the Czechs came to the United States was that “they yearned for the freedom of thought as well as speech and for a higher standard of living” (177). He also tells readers that these immigrants never forgot that yearning, no matter what their hardships. “Throughout their misery,” he writes, “they stood straight with the flame of love for the new American freedom and life” (177). One Czech immigrant who never forgot her new-found freedom was Marie Jelinek. In her memoir *Our Start in Saline County*, Mrs. Jelinek describes her first Fourth of July celebration in Nebraska: “We celebrated our first Fourth of July in Nebraska in 1866.” She remembers, “We all gathered on Vaclav Petracek’s farm where we danced, sang and feasted. It was indeed a merry time” (153). This firsthand account shows just

how important freedom was to the Czech immigrants in the United States.

Like Anton Rosicky, many Czechs journeyed to the United States in two stages: from the land in Bohemia to the cities, and then from the cities back to the land in the Midwest. Also, like Rosicky and his wife Mary, Czech immigrants possessed the ideals of independence, hard work, family unity, and freedom. Because Cather lived in rural Nebraska and experienced immigrant life firsthand, she was able to write works like “Neighbour Rosicky” and *My Antonia* that painted a realistic picture of the Czech immigration experience. For this fact, I am grateful. Stories like these will not only inform our children of the history of our state, but also entertain them at the same time. They will know that it was the blood, sweat, and tears of these immigrants that helped to color the canvas of the mural that we call Nebraska.

Immigrants settled our vast country, and Cather’s stories centering on the Czech experience in rural Nebraska also have a universal appeal. They help make the classroom a pleasant and edifying experience for students and instructors alike on many levels. ♦

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Willa Cather, Nature, and Our Students

BY SHARON NELSON AND CHRISTINA RATHBUN

For the past ten years, we (Mrs. Christina Rathbun, English instructor, and Ms. Sharon Nelson, Librarian) have been traveling to Red Cloud as a project extension on a Willa Cather literature unit. All junior English students at Ellsworth (Kansas) High School read and study the novel *O Pioneers!*. Interested students who also read *My Antonia* are invited to take part in the field trip to Red Cloud. This trip takes place in the spring, late April or early May. In Red Cloud, we tour the town and, if possible, the country sites especially the Pavelka home place. The trip always includes a picnic at one of the featured locations. The interest is generated by students who have traveled with us, thus making this trip a traditional event.

Every year, we have taken pictures, recently with digital cameras, and have accumulated quite a photo library. Since PowerPoint software allows the students to share their experiences with the class, we have encouraged participants to create presentations for their classmates and underclassmen.

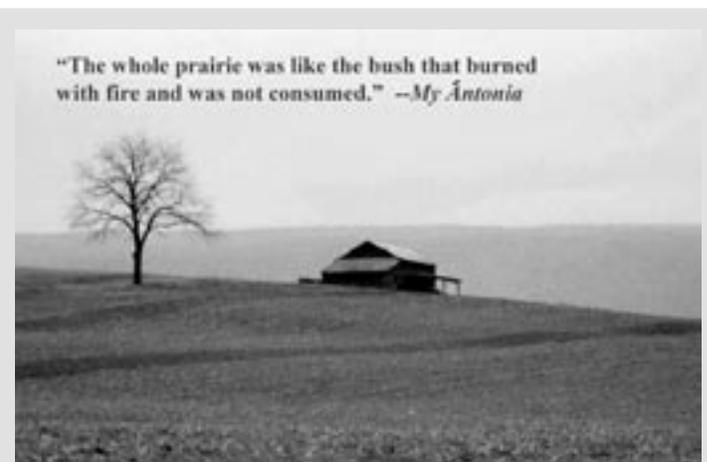
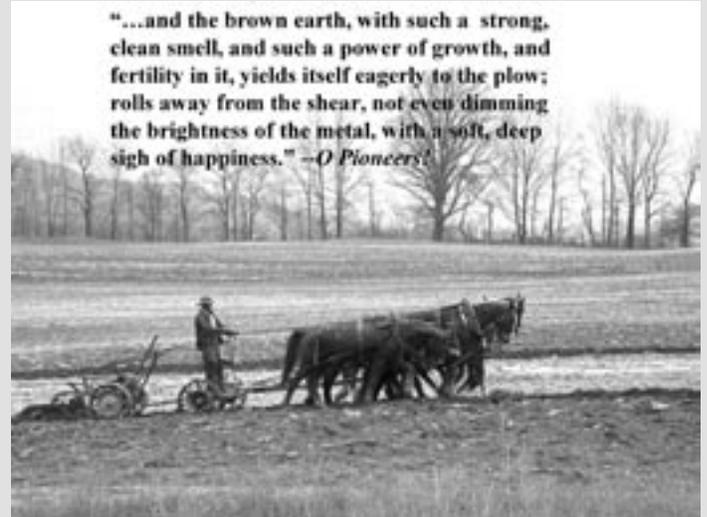
Both of us sponsors have often considered traveling to the annual Cather Spring Festival. In the spring of 2000, we decided that our goal for the following year would be to attend the Festival with student presenters. The students would plan, create, and deliver a presentation. (This idea was initiated by one of the tour guides from the Cather Foundation.)

Since the 2001 Festival would feature *O Pioneers!*, we felt it would be the perfect time to participate in the event. After considering the Festival's theme, "Willa Cather and Nature," we met with students and decided to create a PowerPoint presentation featuring the photography we had accumulated over the years. Students who became involved in the project were seniors who had taken the field trip in the spring of 2000 and juniors who would be traveling to Red Cloud in the spring of 2001.

Together, these students scoured the texts of *O Pioneers!* and *My Antonia* to find suitable quotes emphasizing nature. They then searched for appropriate photos to accompany the quotations. The photos were scanned or downloaded and pasted into PowerPoint. The juniors who traveled to Red Cloud focused their picture-taking on nature and the objects that could illustrate the quotes.

The final touches occurred as students arranged the PowerPoint slides according to the seasons in much the same way that the descriptions unfolded in Cather's novels. This helped them realize the rule of the seasons as it relates to the life and culture of an agricultural community. Understanding the effectiveness of background music, they selected music to accompany the presentation. Students then rehearsed the lines as each took turns reading the quotes. The presentation was ready.

Before the performance at the Festival, however, the students



were given a couple of opportunities to perform before an audience. They presented their PowerPoint to the AAUW (American Association of University Women) and a local reading club. These groups praised the students' work.

On the day of the Festival, the EHS school board president accompanied us to Red Cloud. He gleaned firsthand knowledge of the program's effectiveness there. He and the Festival participants were generous with their praise of the students' performance and the beauty of the slides.

Little did we know that the Spring Festival in Red Cloud would not be the students' last performance. In July, we were asked to be part of a C-Span program on Willa Cather and other American writers. Once again we traveled to Red Cloud to present. On this particular trip, the students who attended were invited to tour the C-Span bus and were given various memorabilia including T-shirts and bags to thank them for their efforts. The local newspaper published an article and photo of the students. Later in July, they also presented their work at the school board meeting. Their display and the kind words of the school board president will go a long way to ensure that our Red Cloud field trip will not be a victim of budget cuts. We look forward to future presentations.

We invite everyone to enjoy the PowerPoint project produced by our students. It takes awhile to load but may be accessed at <<http://www.usd327.org/instructors/EHS/Nelson/Willa%20Cather/Catherland.ppt>>. ♦



The students who worked on *The Language of Catherland* were Jackie Allen, Will Buchholz, Andrea Christiansen, Jennifer Davis, Ashley Ploutz, Emmylou Rathbun, Tina Schneider, Deanna Schultz, Eli Svaty, and Tony Svaty.



A Circle of Memories

EDITORS' NOTE: Anne C. Sloniker was selected as the winner of the prestigious Norma Ross Walter Scholarship for 2002. The Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation presents this scholarship each year to a young woman who intends to major in English in college. The \$2,000 award is renewable for four years with a 3.50 grade point average as an English major. We are pleased to print Sloniker's essay, written on an assigned Cather topic in partial fulfillment of her application process.

BY ANNE C. SLONIKER

Memory is like the moon. As the moon draws water and reflects itself upon it, a person's memories draw him to look back upon the past, and they reflect themselves in his future life. In Willa Cather's novel *O Pioneers!* and short stories "Old Mrs. Harris" and "Neighbour Rosicky," remembrances motivate the main characters to wring the greatest value possible out of their present lives. Whether they recall the past during quiet moments of nostalgia or in bouts of animated storytelling, the people in the stories never forget their previous experiences; rather, they incorporate those experiences into the rest of their lives. The memories of Cather's characters influence

them to devote themselves to the present rather than worry about the unforeseen.

In *O Pioneers!*, the recollection of her father's tenacity strengthens Alexandra Bergson's resolve to follow her own intuitive belief in the promise of the land she loves. At the beginning of the novel, although the future of agriculture in Nebraska seems unprofitable, Alexandra devotes herself to farming and to acquiring land, in part because she admires the perseverance of her late father. Toward the end of the novel during a conversation with her brother Emil, Alexandra's nostalgia evinces the reverence in which she holds the memory of her father. Emil asks, "Father had a hard fight here, didn't he?" and Alexandra replies, "Yes, and he died in a dark time. Still, he had hope. He believed in the land" (138). The memory of her father's strength inspires Alexandra to commit herself to the life she loves despite its potential hardships and uncertainties. In addition, one poignant memory of an afternoon spent in the splendor of nature reinforces this inspiration. She feels a complete satisfaction in watching a solitary duck swimming on a pond, and she never forgets the sight: "Years afterward she thought of the duck as still there, swimming and diving all by herself in the sunlight, a kind

of enchanted bird that did not know age or change” (119). The duck, representative of all wildness and connection with the earth, enralls Alexandra and infuses her mind with a sense of security: whenever she thinks about it, she remembers the great fulfillment she finds in nature, and it is strong enough to overcome any worries about whether or not her lifestyle will ultimately be a profitable one.

In “Old Mrs. Harris,” Mrs. Harris’s memories of her life in Tennessee influence her to keep working and helping her family even when her death becomes imminent. Though she has seen much sickness and death, she realizes that everyone must suffer and that life must go on regardless of that suffering. Her quiet internal reflections upon earlier encounters with death reinforce this idea: she reflects that “Many a time she had gone into a house where five or six children were all down with scarlet fever or diphtheria, and done what she could. Many a child and many a woman she had laid out and got ready for the grave” (142-143). These memories make her disinclined to pity herself; rather, she endures with fortitude the pain of growing old. She goes about her housework as usual and makes an extra effort to help her granddaughter find money for college. Likewise, the recollection of her community in Tennessee as a phalanx society, where neighbors are eager to assist in the management of an established household, instills in Mrs. Harris the conviction that the purpose of an older woman is work and not relaxation. Lying awake in the dark hours of early morning, she recalls models of accepted behavior who eagerly effaced themselves as much to serve a younger generation: “The hills were full of solitary old women, or women but slightly attached to some household, who were glad enough to come to Miz Harris’s for good food and a warm bed [. . .]” (131). The memory of these staunch old women drives Mrs. Harris to continue devoting herself to her family rather than shirk her responsibilities in the hope of delaying death.

Echoing *O Pioneers!* and opposed to “Old Mrs. Harris,” “Neighbour Rosicky” testifies to the value of a human life. Rosicky’s belief in enjoying the present without worrying unduly about the future pervades the story, and it is strengthened by his memories of the past. Telling a story of the hard times he endured as a boy staying with a poor family in London, Rosicky recalls one Christmas Eve when his hunger plagued him incessantly, and he ate half the goose that had been prepared for the next day; driven by remorse to beg for money in the streets, he buys a new goose and several other Christmas foods, and he delights in thinking of the mother’s joy when she discovers his gifts. As he proceeds through the story,

Rosicky reflects, “I pile all I bought on the kitchen table, an’ go in an’ lay down on my bed, an’ I ain’t waken up till I hear dat woman scream when she come out into the kitchen. My goodness, but she was surprise! She laugh an’ cry at de same time, an’ hug me an’ waken all de children” (55). The memory of this fleeting happiness in a world of squalor prompts him to make joy a constant presence in his house even if he must spend a little extra money to do so. Additionally, his conscience goads him as he remembers his work in London. Thoughts of his former inability to assuage ubiquitous

hunger cause him to abhor want in any form. He recalls that “he too, in his time, had had to take money for repair work from the hand of a hungry child who let it go so wistfully. [. . .] When he thought of these things, Rosicky would put on his cap and jacket and slip down to the barn and give his work-horses a little extra oats, letting them eat it out of his hand in their slobbery fashion” (61). He gives extra food to the horses in the same manner as he keeps the extra cream from his milk and organizes a large picnic even as his crop is failing, for he has realized the importance of enjoying life and wants everyone around him to experience the same pleasure. This response to his memories constitutes a corporeal manifestation of the strongest belief his past has instilled in

him: that one must not cheat oneself of happiness by scrapping and rationing and agonizing over the uncertainties of the future.

The moon, at its fullest, appears as a circle; likewise the richness of our fullest memories creates a circle that binds the fragments of life into a unified whole. In Cather’s stories, her characters’ memories of the past influence their current actions. In turn, by devoting themselves to the present instead of to the uncertain future, these people ensure that they will be well prepared to meet whatever new circumstances await them. When chance occurrences inspire them to sober reflection, the characters draw their strongest values from their memories and apply those values to their present lives. ♦

*In Cather’s stories,
her characters’
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Remarks of a Master Alumna:

On Education and On Willa Cather

BY MELLANEE KVASNICKA

It has been a genuine pleasure being in such distinguished company this week, celebrating the value of education. On this campus, as I studied Willa Cather and her time in these places, I thought a good deal about what education meant to me. Education has been for me, as was true for Cather as well, a central theme in my life and life's work. Like Willa Cather, I arrived on my undergraduate campus anxious to make my connections with the wider world. But, like Cather, the more I learned, the more I found myself centered at home. I came to realize that I had been wrong from the start. Education was not that which drew me away from what I knew—it was that which anchored me to the people and events of my past and enabled me to know myself better than I could have dreamed.

As I did my work on Willa Cather, I came to realize that being educated does not only mean that one learns *things*, although that certainly is an important aspect of what happens in classrooms everywhere. What I've discovered is that I need education in order to live as well as to make a living, in order to think as well as to know, in order to dream as well as to hope. Education enables us to succeed, helps us be responsible, shows us how the world works. Education does not, of course, guarantee happiness or even fulfillment. But what I think does happen in education at its best is a kind of breakthrough to the self, a better understanding of one's position in the world and society. After working with high school students for thirty-two years, that conviction has evolved into a kind of mission, I suppose. I have told my students that we read literature to know that we are not alone, to know that whatever our specific griefs or joys, whatever misery or happiness, others have felt as well. Understanding our humanity, our shared history as human beings makes us compassionate as people, able to live beyond ourselves. In learning about myself, I have become a better teacher, more able to encourage and energize my own students in their journeys.

Education also enables us to see the world around us more clearly. Not long ago my students and I were discussing William Carlos Williams's poem "The Red Wheel Barrow," which begins with the words "So much depends upon [. . .]." My students are often confused by the poem, feeling they are missing something, wondering what's the deal with the chickens and the wheel barrow. What I wanted them to see that day, as always, is that so much depends upon their ability as human beings to see beauty in the ordinary, to make connections between what they read and how they live, to understand the relationships between past and present. Most of all, I want my students to understand the value of learning as an end in

itself. Not long after I completed my doctoral work, someone asked me what I was going to DO with it. I didn't know how to answer, because, frankly, I had already DONE it.

In Willa Cather's short story "Old Mrs. Harris," Mr. Rosen gives his young, college-bound neighbor a note inscribed with the following: "The end is nothing; the road is all." For me, education has been companion and road map along my own life's journey, enabling me to continue my own sojourn and to understand my human companions more completely. And what a journey mine has been! I am forever grateful to the University for such "travel" opportunities.

EDITORS' NOTE: Mellanee Kvasnicka made these remarks at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on Nov. 7, 2001, when she was honored during Masters Week as one of seven distinguished graduates of the University. We followed up her remarks with an interview and are pleased to share her comments on Cather and teaching with our readers.

1. Do you remember the first Cather work you read? What were the circumstances?

I read *My Ántonia* in my high school English class as an eleventh grader. That first experience was not a stellar one; I recall only two things—endless lists of vocabulary words my teacher asked me to look up and define, and her admonition not to read Book II, chapter 15

(Wick Cutter's attempt to molest Ántonia). We read that chapter first, of course, wondered what the fuss was about, and sank back into lethargy. The fault was not Cather's. The fault was the teacher's. She had not a clue about how to deal with a literary text.

2. How did it happen that you began teaching Cather's works?

I began teaching Cather because Cather was in the curriculum. But when I read Cather again, a strange thing happened. I discovered something wonderful. Even on my own, reading for pleasure, it was clear to me that this was the genuine article.

3. Tell us about the different settings (or contexts) in which you have taught Cather's writing.

When I first began teaching in 1969, I often had students in class whose parents or grandparents were immigrants from Eastern Europe. Sometimes students would ask to borrow *My Ántonia* so that their families could read it as well. During that time a very successful assignment involved interviewing a relative born in another country and discovering that heritage and the traumatic experience of leaving a familiar place forever to establish a new home and identity.



Mellanee Kvasnicka. Photo from *The Mower's Tree*, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Then, as the years passed, fewer and fewer students had family members who had immigrated from another country, so I changed the focus a bit. We talked about Cather's treatment of women in the novel. *My Antonia* contains a wealth of female characters whose life choices gave us the background for discussing the women's movement and women's issues. I have also taught *My Antonia* with friendship as its theme because to high school students their relationships with others are supremely important. We've also dealt with *My Antonia* as a novel of place—that is, not just place as setting, but place as moving force, even character.

4. Which Cather works do you and your students most enjoy?

These days, I'm teaching *A Lost Lady* to Advanced Placement seniors and "Old Mrs. Harris" to Women's Studies students. Both of these works provoke excellent discussion, though with *A Lost Lady*, it is very difficult for students to accept Marian without making tough judgments about her. That's why I so like to teach that novel—it forces them to re-examine things they have always believed to be carved in stone.

5. How has your teaching of Cather's works changed over the years?

As a less experienced teacher, I know I focused on character, plot, setting, themes, etc.—those basic elements of literature with which we begin with students. As I grew older, read more extensively, and wrote more myself, I became much more aware of language—and its importance as a central part of teaching. I have come to be convinced that we must, in an age which emphasizes technology, be vigilant in our preservation of the artistic use of language to lift human beings above technology. I want my students to understand the power of language.

6. Do students respond differently to Cather's works today than they did 25 years ago?

I think some do. This is in no way an indictment of my students as human beings. It does, I think, reflect the changes in our society. I think students today are more likely to say that "nothing happens" in a Cather novel than they would have 25 years ago. Some students see Cather's works as unfolding too slowly. Nevertheless, I still have students who draw parallels between Cather's characters and other literary people. That's a powerful statement about the ability of Cather's writing to leave indelible impressions.

7. Will you tell us about a few of your more memorable experiences as a teacher of Cather's writing?

Just recently Women's Studies students were working on a project with Opera Omaha to develop a libretto to be used next season for *Carmen*. This was to be a version of the opera for young people. The executive director of Opera Omaha came to class for a residency experience, and talked with students about Carmen's character, motivation, appearance, etc. During one of those conver-

sations, one of my students remarked that Carmen reminded him of Lena Lingard. It was one of those moments because that's what I wish for—connections between bodies of knowledge—and with Cather, those connections are easy to establish because Cather so understands what it means to be a human being.

8. Do you think your teaching of Cather would be different if you weren't in Nebraska? In other words, perhaps address briefly the universality of Cather's writing. To what extent are her works most effective in Nebraska classrooms?

It is a blessing, of course, to be here teaching Cather. But I have to say that Cather's genius makes it possible to envision the places she speaks of and to see these Nebraskans as people one might live next door to anywhere. My doctor is aware of my interest in Cather and during a recent visit, he came through the door announcing, "I have to tell you something!" He described a long vacation trip he took with his family, during which they listened to an audio tape of *My Antonia*. "How did you like it?" I asked. "We were absolutely transported. We might as well have been on that prairie," he responded. What more could a writer ask for? What more could a teacher ask for? Cather's skill makes me grateful for a room full of students, *My Antonia* before us, and forty minutes. ♦

I have told my students that we read literature to know that we are not alone, to know that whatever our specific griefs or joys, whatever misery or happiness, others have felt as well. Understanding our humanity, our shared history as human beings makes us compassionate as people, able to live beyond ourselves.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Lela Bell Cather Collection

B.D. Owens Library, Northwest Missouri State University

BY CATHERINE S. PALMER

The Archives Room in Owens Library at Northwest Missouri State University houses a rare collection of works by Willa Cather. Northwest acquired the collection in 1987 through the generosity of Mrs. Lela Bell, a lifelong reader of Cather. She, along with her lawyer husband Charles Bell, studied Cather in the first (1979) of many classes offered at Northwest and in this region.

Mrs. Bell, who was prominent in Maryville and Missouri, possessed the characteristics Cather admired — talent, dedication, devotion, and passion. Although proud to own such Cather materials, Mrs. Bell understood that a collection as rare as hers should be housed and made available in an archives. Mrs. Bell's gift provides the archives at Northwest with a wealth of Cather holdings.

The Lela Bell Cather Collection consists of novels, short stories, and poetry by Cather. Many of the books have special printers' covers, while others are limited editions, numbered editions, and autographed copies. Works that stand out as the high spots of the Bell Collection include the following: the first edition (1905) of *The Troll Garden*; *The Sombraero*, the 1895 University of Nebraska Yearbook with Cather as associate editor; a framed Cather photo and typed manuscript page of her poem "Spanish Johnny," with hand corrections in ink



Catherine Palmer with some of the collection's items.

by Cather; the 13-volume 1937-1941 Houghton Mifflin autographed set, number 217 of 970; another set, number 481 of 970; *April Twilights and Other Poems* (1923), signed, numbered (178 of 450) limited edition. Also of interest are the signed, numbered limited editions of *One of Ours*, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *Lucy Gayheart*, *My Mortal Enemy*, *Not Under Forty*, *Obscure Destinies*, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, and *Shadows on the Rock*. First editions, not signed or numbered, include *O Pioneers!*, *A Lost Lady*, and *My Antonia*.

The Bell Collection also contains several volumes written about Cather, and Owens Library, through the years, has developed a solid collection of primary and scholarly materials ranging from biographies and annotated bibliographies through memorabilia to current criticism of her work. ♦

CONTRIBUTORS

MELLANEE KVASNICKA chairs the Department of English at Omaha South High School, where she has taught several courses, including honors, standard, remedial, and advanced placement classes. A prolific Cather scholar, she has received numerous awards for outstanding teaching and is vice president and a long-standing member of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial and Educational Foundation Board of Governors. Last fall the University of Nebraska-Lincoln honored her during Masters Week when she was invited to return to the campus as one of seven distinguished graduates.

KENDRA L. MOORE is a senior at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, majoring in secondary education with endorsements in both English and history. She plans to teach her future students about the pioneer past in connection with the work of Cather.

SHARON NELSON, librarian at Ellsworth (Kansas) High School, received a bachelor's degree in English from Marymount College, Salina, Kansas, and a master's degree in instructional technology from Kansas State University in Manhattan. **CHRISTINA RATHBUN**, secondary school instructor of English at Ellsworth (Kansas) High School, received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas. She has taught for 25 years in Kansas.

CATHERINE S. PALMER holds a bachelor's degree in Social Science/Library Science and a master's degree in history from Northwest Missouri State University. She serves as the University Archivist and also is a Technical Services Assistant.

REBECCA K. PINKER spent many years teaching secondary school English, the last 14 at Olathe North (Kansas), where she taught Advanced Placement classes. She currently teaches composition at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kan. She received a doctoral degree from the University of Kansas in 2001. Her dissertation explores the teaching of Cather in selected geographical areas related to Cather's life.

ANNE C. SLONIKER graduated in May from Bellevue West High School, Bellevue, Neb. She ranked first in a class of 327 and will major in English at Harvard University this fall.

MARTIN ZEHR received a B.A. from the State University of New York at Binghamton, an M.S. and a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Memphis, and a J.D. from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. He is a clinical psychologist living in Kansas City, Mo., and he teaches in the Department of Psychology at Central Missouri State University (Warrensburg) as an adjunct faculty member. He is a member of the Mark Twain Circle of America and has presented papers based on his interest in the writings of Twain at the Modern Language Association and Western Literature Association conventions. ♦