

Willa Cather

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CONTENTS

- | | |
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| <p>1 Letters from the Executive Director and the President</p> <p>2 Cather and Progressive Moral Vision: The Tragic Realism of <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i> Charles A. Peek</p> <p>9 The Scene Was Ageless: Arms and a Man Driven by Fate in <i>One of Ours</i> and the <i>Aeneid</i> Sean Lake</p> | <p>15 “The Princely Carelessness of the Pioneer”: Railroads and the Transformation of Space in <i>A Lost Lady</i> Emily J. Rau</p> <p>21 A French Canadian Community Becomes “French Country”: The 1912 Funeral at the Center of Cather’s <i>O Pioneers!</i> Thomas M. Carr, Jr.</p> |
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On the cover: A Friendly Spirit by Bunny Zaruba Design. Original Willa Cather photograph from Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries. Original Red Cloud Opera House photograph by Barb Kudrna.



Letter from the Executive Director

Ashley Olson

Within my office on the ground level of our Red Cloud Opera House, it's been difficult to find a peaceful moment in recent days. I'm not distracted because of the drilling, hammering, and sawing next door as the Moon Block building continues its transformation into the National Willa Cather Center. I've long since learned to suppress these noises.

Coming from the Opera House overhead, I hear music, singing, and jumping. Or maybe it's stomping. Regardless, there's a lot of energy above. Sometimes the rumbling is intense enough to rattle the light fixtures. For a week each summer, I happily endure these sounds. They come from thirty to sixty students ranging from first grade through twelfth grade. Under the guidance of directors from Missoula Children's Theatre, these students participate in enrichment workshops and rehearse for a musical production. This year, it's *Rapunzel*. I just heard Madame Gothel demand that Rapunzel let down her hair.

For many regional students, this experience provides a rare opportunity to participate in a dramatic production. Our

experience tells us very clearly that this is meaningful. But we also know that numerous studies have demonstrated a correlation between drama participation and academic achievement. In addition to having higher standardized test scores than their peers who do not experience the arts, students who participate in drama often have improved reading comprehension, maintain better attendance records, and stay generally more engaged in school than their non-arts counterparts.

What does this have to do with Willa Cather? The Red Cloud Opera House provided Cather with abundant arts and cultural experiences in the late 1880s. In a 1929 interview, she recalled, "But I am sorry that the old opera houses in the prairie towns are dark, because they really did give a deeper thrill, at least to children."

We think Cather would be pleased knowing the Red Cloud Opera House is as vibrant today as it was during her childhood. It seems fitting that the foundation bearing her name is providing a new generation with enriching opportunities to experience and embrace the arts. And one never knows, among these students may be the next great American novelist, singer, or performer. A week of commotion and disturbance is a very small price to pay for that.



Letter from the President

Lynette Krieger

We are only weeks removed from our 61st annual Willa Cather Spring Conference, which took for its theme World War I and Willa Cather's *One of Ours*. During the course of the conference Cather's central character, Claude Wheeler, based in part on her cousin G. P. Cather, became a presence so vivid it was as if he were engraved on our own memories. In a pivotal scene in the novel, Claude goes off to war—with a tender embrace for his adoring mother, he departs his home for his voyage to France on the *Anchises*. He makes one parting glance: "as they neared the crest of the hill, Claude stood up in the car and looked back at the house, waving his cone shaped hat." His mother watches him go, but her tears blur her vision. With great simplicity, Cather overpowers us.

How many of us have experienced that same moment—a quick glance toward a place we're departing, or toward the people who are departing from us. I clearly remember my daughter leaving for London and her final year of graduate school, looking back through a car window, creating a memory snapshot to capture her childhood home. I have my own memory snapshot of her doing it.

The Willa Cather Foundation has been taking good, long

glances at the things we feel are important and memorable for our many audiences. When our National Willa Cather Center opens, it will feature a permanent exhibit called "American Bittersweet: The Life & Writing of Willa Cather." It will include a whole album's worth of memorable snapshots and will enable visitors to experience the full scope of Cather's life and work.

The exhibit will not just look back at Cather, but also show how her work lives on today. As a forward-looking foundation, we must face the challenge of planning for the future. At the heart of our new facility will be an advanced archive enabling us to house and display our priceless collection of artifacts and documents and make them available for study by scholars and other visitors. In addition, we continue to support and maintain twelve Cather properties whose survival depends on our efforts and foresight. Our board accepts the challenges posed by things like aging wallpaper and weak foundations and crumbling plaster.

Our partnership with the Nebraska State Historical Society, the owner of record for six of these properties, is at the center of the picture today. Together, we work to repair the damage where time has taken a toll. Several generations of people already have fond memories of these valuable properties, and of course we hope for the next generations to have the same chance. When you visit us at the National Willa Cather Center and have a wonderful time, we want your parting glances and memories to be sweet.



Cather and Progressive Moral Vision: The Tragic Realism of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

Charles A. Peek | University of Nebraska at Kearney

“One’s articles of faith ought to be the most protected of one’s secrets.”

—Willa Cather, in a letter to Zoë Akins, October 28 [1937?]
(*Selected Letters* 537)

Unlike the anti-intellectual appeals popular religion seems frequently to make today, the widespread interest in religion once shared by many artists and writers a century ago was based on their attraction to the Christianity of their time’s intellectual rigor, moral seriousness, and aesthetic beauty. Some, like C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot, were drawn to the Anglo-Catholic expression of these virtues; others, such as Hemingway and Chesterton, to their Roman Catholic expression; and possibly not alone but certainly foremost, Cather was drawn to both. An old pious adage recommended “knees on the ground, eyes on the cross, hearts in heaven”; Cather’s knees found themselves in the pews of the Episcopal Church of Bishop George Beecher¹ and its Anglo-Catholic heritage, her eyes were most definitely on the meaning of suffering for things more “complete and great” (*My Ántonia* 18), and the heart of her imagination found itself in the forms Roman Catholicism took in the New World. The Catholicism of her imagination, as she presents it at critical, historic moments, might well inform our reading of her “Catholic” novels in general and of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in particular. To allow it to do so does not require a reader’s assent to any dogma or institution, but rather asks the serious reader to allow Cather’s own imagination to inform definitively our evaluation of her work. In that spirit, this paper explores ways that faith shapes an understanding of the world and, hence, provides a sense of both aspiration and limitation. The way faith addresses the all-too-clearly-perceived realities of life is foremost among the things Cather admires about the faith she portrays.

A View of the Forest

The movie *Patton* closes with George C. Scott’s voice recounting a triumphal victory procession into Rome during which a slave whispers into his conquering hero’s ear that “all glory is fleeting.” Such whispers do little to discourage conquerors from continuing to live as though life is a battle and they are the winners, but the whispers won’t cease. The Roman setting for those whispers seems

pertinent, Rome being the setting for “Cather in Europe, Europe and Cather,” the 2014 Willa Cather Symposium, where an earlier version of this paper was first presented.² I should like to offer two brief quotations from one of Rome’s greatest advocates, G. K. Chesterton: “The sages, it is often said, can see no answer to the riddle of religion. But the trouble with our sages is not that they cannot see the answer; it is that they cannot even see the riddle” (57), and “As much as I ever did, more than I ever did, I believe in Liberalism. But there was a rosy time of innocence when I believed in Liberals” (82). Before returning to Chesterton’s observations, I want to consider Rome as both setting and heritage.

When Cather speaks in *My Ántonia* of the “whole adventure” (xii), I take her to suggest a method central to her work, namely, the compounding of sketches of life conceived as an adventure (or, as she would also have said, a journey). When we introduce Rome to those adventures, we find a sort of doubling of the adventures, for Rome doubles and redoubles on itself like a redoubling sonnet. To which of many Romes might we refer? It is clear that, for Cather, Rome does not refer to institutional allegiance. On the contrary, as Cather indicates to E. K. Brown in a 1937 letter concerning *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, “the Southwest is so essentially and at its roots a Catholic country, that it seemed to me no Protestant could handle material properly. . . . I waited fifteen years for some Roman Catholic to write a book about the real New Mexicans, their religion and country” (*Selected Letters* 530). Nevertheless, Cather’s principal interest was in the Rome of the Church, and her interest in that Church was spiritual rather than theological, resting in the way in which the aesthetics of the church (its liturgies and rituals, its architecture and decorations, its disciplines and observances) reflected the deepest of human mysteries: the mystery of suffering and the mystery of grace. Central to that mystery is the idea of Original Sin, not so much as dogma but as something more like the aesthetic principle underlying tragedy. That is, even when she was interested in what Rome saw as doctrine, her interest was humanistic, an interest not in abstraction but in application in human affairs.

I do not see myself here as attempting to prove anything but rather to provoke our thinking about Cather, indicating ways we might broaden our perspective. Many scholars could allude to abundant textual evidence useful in following the threads of the tapestry I hope to weave, but I want to suggest how the view I’m



drawing out might apply particularly to the kind of reading given to passages from *Death Comes for the Archbishop* by Guy Reynolds in his “The Ideology of Cather’s Catholic Progressivism.” I want to suggest how we can embrace the insights of Reynolds’s keen analysis without being forced to his own reluctant conclusion that there is a certain degree of unacceptable moral evasion on Cather’s part (21, 27). Reynolds’s views are from what we might call “postmodern” (or perhaps pertinent to my point, “post-Roman”) narratological premises, and I will examine the contrast between those views and what I take to be the view from Rome that Cather shared.

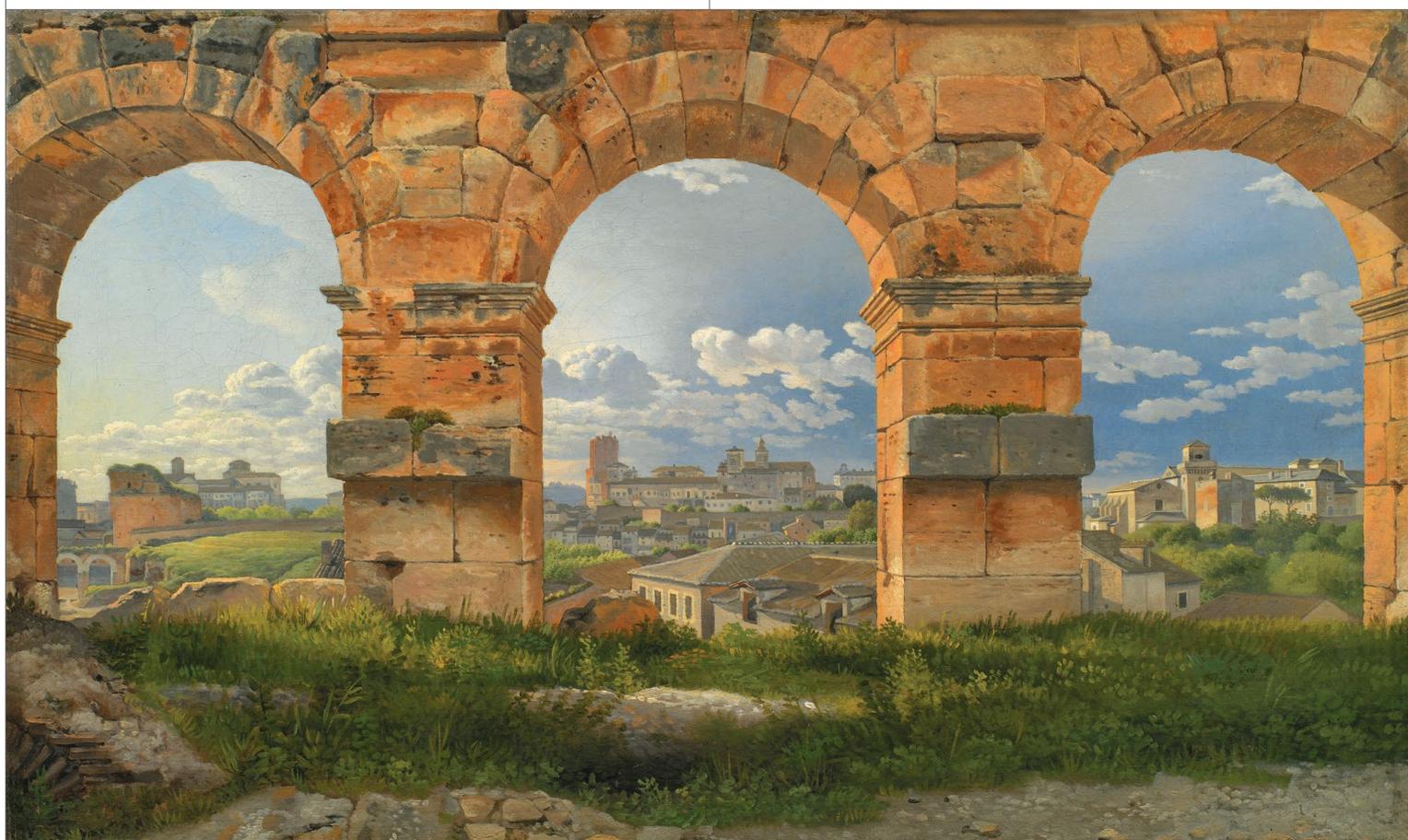
All this may seem a tall order, and at the outset I would agree. I hope here to raise questions and prompt further discussion, not produce definitive answers of my own—which seems to me an aim of much academic work one finds less attractive with age. Surely, however, we must begin by identifying the Rome to which Cather was attracted. This is Reynolds’s assessment:

Cather was received into the Episcopal Church in 1922, and much of the creative energy that went into *Death Comes for the Archbishop* arose from a radical transformation in her religious feelings. She wrote about Catholicism when she herself had recently joined a Protestant Church, but the reasons for Cather’s attraction toward Rome probably lay in the faith’s cultural and

historical significance. For Cather, Catholicism was not the monolithic autocracy caricatured by American nativists; it was instead a repository of European culture, endlessly adapting itself to alien environments. In the early novels, therefore, the Church is akin to the immigrant peoples celebrated and has a similar ideological significance, representing an enriching cultural pluralism.

Cather’s Catholicism is a faith of amalgamating, incorporating power, a church founded on the benevolent axioms of cultural heterogeneity and racial difference. (8)

Reynolds’s summary is all well and good, but three brief comments are in order. First, Catholicism’s adaptation to alien environments is a salient point. Counter to the charges of more “fundamentalist” Christians that Catholicism diluted the purity of the Gospel’s exclusive claims, Catholicism not only always wedded its feasts to celebrations in the local culture but also did so because it found in those local celebrations insights into the large world of “spirit.” In other words, it did not approach its mission as an “either/or” but as a Kierkegaardian “both/and” proposition. Secondly, the “ideological significance” of Rome’s “cultural pluralism” is the recognition in that pluralism of the limits of ideology itself, as well as of any particular ideologies. Thirdly, a Catholicism practicing “benevolent axioms of cultural



A View through Three Arches of the Third Storey of the Colosseum (1815), Rome, by C. W. Eckersberg, from the National Gallery of Denmark.





St. Peter's and Castel Sant' Angelo from the Tiber by Alberto Pisa, from Rome by M. A. R. Toker and Hope Malleson; Adam & Charles Black, London, 1905.

heterogeneity and racial difference” may be hard to find in practice, or at least in consistent practice, but generally emerges as the basis for the reforms that periodically take place in the Roman Church.

A likely source of Cather's attraction to the Episcopal Church was the Anglican claim to be a *via media* between Rome and Protestantism. This is the very quality of the Church of Rome that Reynolds himself asserts Cather found attractive, commenting that “the ‘Midi Romanesque’ church that Latour builds in the New Mexico wilderness symbolizes the harmony of Catholicism and America, the *middle way* between stasis and movement, rootedness and migration” (9, emphasis added). Cather's correspondence makes it clear she was not a Roman Catholic; her work makes it equally clear she held views quite favorable to many of its features. Her October 22, 1931, letter to Read Bain notes:

No, I am not a Catholic, and I do not think I shall become one. On the other hand, I do not regard the Roman Church merely as “artistic material”. If the external form and ceremonial of that Church happens to be more beautiful than that of other churches, it certainly corresponds to some beautiful vision within. It is sacred, if for no other reason than that is the faith that has been most loved by human creatures, and loved over the greatest stretch of centuries. (*Selected Letters* 458)

Cather's attraction to an intelligent, benevolent, and inclusive expression of Catholicism is also examined in John J. Murphy's “Willa Cather's Sheltering Art.” If my interest in the nature of Cather's Rome needs textual support, plenty is available in that article. We should temper any notion of her religious views with her statement in a 1923 letter to her sister Elsie where she compares sitting for a portrait in Leon Bakst's studio in Paris with being in a church, a place she specifies as where “all the religions of mankind come together in one great religion” (*Selected Letters* 343).

A View of the Woods

As I've indicated, Rome is susceptible to many associations. There might well be the Rome of the Roman Empire, an imperial project and the power to sustain it. Rome could as well refer to Rome as a civilization, at first subduing and then succumbing to barbarism. Is it Rome of great inventive genius (the aqueducts) or of dubious achievement (lead piping)? Or the Rome of frequently mad, often rapacious, and consistently superstitious leaders? Or perhaps not the political or cultural Rome at all but the Rome of St. Peter, the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican and the Papacy. But then, is it Roman Catholicism as dogma or as mystery? As aesthetic representation and revelation or as tyrannical conformity and centralized power? The Catholic Worker movement of Dorothy Day and, apparently, Pope Francis, or the monolith standing in the way of the progress of modernity? Notable culture or repressive social order? Mystical Church or institutional hierarchy? Sophisticated freedom from the life-denying aspects of the Judeo-Christian emphasis on sin and guilt or ancient slavery to superstitions from which the Gospel liberates?

In sorting all this out, I agree with Reynolds, who rightly focuses us not on Imperial but on Ecclesiastical Rome. Reynolds's judgment that Cather's aesthetics would have found something congenial in Catholicism is quite accurate. Even so, that still leaves us to ask, toward which Catholicism was Cather predisposed? Here, her letters are of no little help. Note, for instance, the sentiments in these lines from her letter of March 2, 1908, to Roscoe Cather: “I got my guide book for Rome the other day. Seems queer to be really on the way to Rome; for of course Rome has always existed for one, it was a central fact in one's life in Red Cloud and was always the Capital of one's imagination. Rome, London, and Paris were serious matters when I went to the South ward school—they were the three principal cities in Nebraska, so to speak” (*Selected Letters* 105). So, an interest in Rome, indeed. Then she adds a French twist in the same letter:

When you come to study Roman colonization and Roman government and Roman manners seriously, it's all very different from the simple schoolbook tale—it's so much the biggest thing that all the centuries have produced and makes our own civilization look a very temporary and tawdry affair. In the south of France . . . there it all is, theatres, baths, aqueducts; most of the best vineyards were planted under Augustus, and people live just as they do in Virgil's Georgics. It is just as if that whole Roman worl[d] had been preserved in some clear wine. I'm keen to be there again. (105)

But, of course, if it is all there in the South of France for Cather to see in 1908, then it isn't the Empire—it is something

the Empire left behind, something more of manners, more of cultural inheritance. Cather recognizes the possibilities, writing, again to Roscoe, “Next in wonder to the Rome of the Empire is the Catholic Rome of the middle ages” (113). We might be thrown off the trail by that “next,” seeming to subordinate Church Rome to Imperial Rome, but then she writes to Elsie Cather these lines rife with satirical irony: “Yesterday we spent all the morning in the old Palace of the Caesars—such millions of poppies as do grow over them” (114). And, counterpart to an empire overgrown with poppies, there is “the Vatican . . . where the modern world was born. From the day Charlemagne was crowned there and before, the Vatican was fashioning modern Europe” (113).

I conclude then that, though her interests could and did shift about, it was more Holy Rome and less Imperial Rome that captured her admiration; I also conclude that (as Reynolds suggests) it was an aesthetic attraction to moral and physical beauty more than a doctrinal agreement, and that the Imperium, whether of Church or State, was far less attractive than the spirituality Reynolds argues, one sympathetic to mystery, tolerant of others’ traditions because firmly in possession of its own, and desirous to reform whatever evil it encountered. As an editor at *McClure’s Magazine*, Cather was very aware of reform, as her correspondence with Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant indicates. For example, one can see a desire to

reform in Cather’s May 31, 1910, letter to Sergeant on the Labor Congress in Berlin: “What we want is . . . a sort of summing up of the interesting things that have been done abroad for the protection of the laborer” (*Selected Letters* 131). Cather understood, however, that neither moral vision nor a readiness to engage evil in bringing reform to human affairs signifies a “progressive” belief that the engagement will always or even ever be victorious, that there will occur some radical and permanent improvement in human nature or human affairs. If Jesus’s faith encouraged him to pray for heaven on earth, his experience of earth was not reassuring. If Rome, as an idea, means engaging evil, it also means knowing that the City of Man can only approximate the City of God, that we are infected by such “original sin” as assures us “the poor you will have with you always” (Mark 14:7). As Cather dryly wrote to Dorothy Canfield Fisher in 1922, “the vanishing conception of Sin . . . is going to leave people of our profession bankrupt” (319). A Rome symbolic of an attitude toward the tragic dimensions of reality, an attitude rooted in the awareness of extraordinary complexity in human affairs, is not only a Rome consistent with Cather’s aesthetic,

moral, and intellectual philosophy—but it is at the same time the Rome that emerges from her stories in general and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in particular.

This is not to suggest that Cather was under any illusion that one Rome could be so effectively isolated from the others that the remaining Rome was the bearer only of Rome’s virtues and never of its vices. Most readers, myself included, would not find Cather reductive in that manner. Nor is it to suggest that Catholicism (Anglo or Roman) has no place for earthly comedy, nor that Cather was somehow alienated from comedy; it is to say that for both Catholicism and Cather the comedy is Divine—it is reserved for a heavenly city. Ask Dante. Here, then, is the paradox of Rome as iconic. From its inception down through history, Rome so strongly meant romance that it gave its name to the artistic genre celebrating imagination and wild and untamed impulses. At the same time, however, it stood for civilized order: the rule of law, the *Pax Romanum*, and (later) making the trains run on time. Indeed, Chesterton felt that the Rome of the Roman Church got the two poles into proper balance, offering the world not the (impossible) fulfillment of our hearts’ truest desires, but at least the best earthly solution to the human dilemma: how to reconcile imagination and order.

So, to paraphrase the symposium’s theme, Cather in Rome, Rome and Cather.

Complexity abounds! With that I imagine we would all agree. What is crucial here is that this complexity not be seen as a temporary muddle no doubt shortly to be cleared up but rather be seen as a complexity at the very heart of the nature of things, the *res gestae* of being. Even in Chesterton’s apologetics, Romanism provides a balance, not a solution. For Rome, the dilemma of mankind has no solution this side of the grave. Rome stands, instead, for a way of seeing the tragedy at the heart of human existence. Think, of course, of *Guernica*; think, not far from where the symposium gathered, of the *Pietà*—*Pietà* with its plexiglass shroud belatedly meant to protect the suffering figures from further indignities.

Writing Fannie Butcher just before the publication of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather claimed the story was “something in the style of legend, with a sort of New Testament calm,” adding in a follow-up letter, “legend is a sort of interpretation of life by Faith” (*Selected Letters* 396). This key gives us a different way of reading what Reynolds has called “evasion” in Cather’s legend (26), and we could call it the “church key,” or the Roman key, or even, teasingly, the *roman à clef*.



Palace of the Caesars, Rome by Mrs. Jane St. John, 1856–1859, from the J. Paul Getty Museum. Image courtesy of Getty’s Open Content Program.

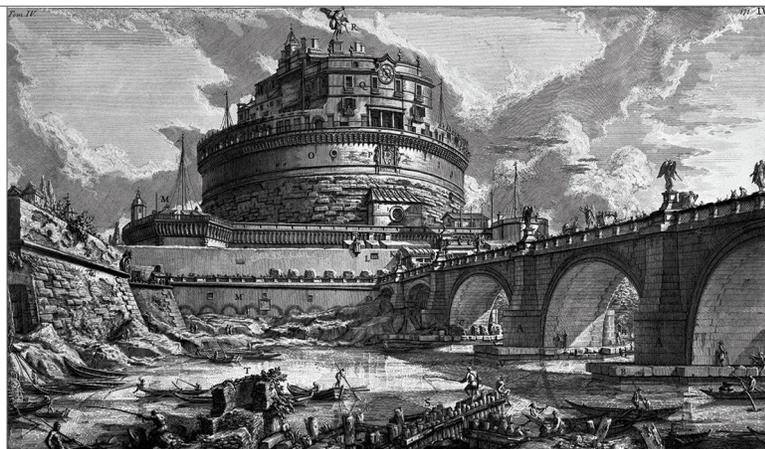


Into the Woods

Now, for Reynolds, too, “Cather’s Catholic Progressivism” may be suggestive of many Romes, but its focus is on the Rome of the Church, and especially the culture of that Roman Church insofar as it provides (as I alluded to earlier) a tradition by which local abuses and petty tyrannies can be checked. Reynolds argues that Cather’s departures from historical accuracy lie in the direction of creating a morality tale in which a broad, tolerant, and adaptable tradition combats contrary tendencies as portrayed in the lives of the novel’s villains: Padre Martínez, Fray Baltazar, and others—even Kit Carson. Through her structure and style Cather presents Rome as a reforming institution “endlessly adapting itself to alien environments” (Reynolds 8). Significantly, for Reynolds the novel becomes an excursion through “experiences outside the range of Common Sense” (4), and he demonstrates Cather’s acute understanding of intellectual currents affecting the thinking of her times; he praises what he terms her paratactic style, one that allowed her to present layered parables in which the reader can feel “the transcendental insight emerging out of the ordinary moment” (12).³

Yet, ultimately, Reynolds concludes that, despite the attempts of her layering technique to obscure it, Cather ends up “caught between conflicting discourses” (25), and thus caught refusing “to work out solutions to these dilemmas,” with the result that “her open text shades into an evasive text” (27).⁴ These are weighty charges. In many ways one of the most insightful readings I know of Cather’s approach to and use of the Southwest, Reynolds’s essay ultimately asserts a serious flaw in Cather. That assertion, however, seems to me to rest on the problems that postmodern reading tends to create. Assuredly, the postmodern emphasis on what Reynolds calls the “gappiness” (5) in the text yields an insightful reading, but here, in my view, postmodernism is simply not postmodern enough. As a result, Reynolds ends with a conundrum, and it is one I hope I can now illuminate and not so much resolve as dissolve. If Cather’s conflicting discourses could be resolved but she could not or would not resolve them, if the conflict and contradictions at the heart of the world could be solved and Cather could not arrive at or convey such a solution, then, of course, her aesthetic is deeply flawed, ultimately simply a tool of evasion as charged. But if your fundamental sense is that these conflicts are ineradicable, that they are the reality at the heart of things, then producing conflicting discourses is something else entirely.⁵ It is my sense that the postmodern problem begins with giving too brief attention to the multiplicity, the doubling and redoubling of Rome.

Reynolds takes note of Father Vaillant’s remark that “it was no easy matter for two missionaries on horseback to keep up with the march of history” (207), but he does not see the remarks as a significant example of the text’s Menippean satire at



View of the Bridge and Mausoleum built by the Emperor Hadrian, by Giovanni Battista Piranesi, from *Antichità Romane* (Roman Antiquities); Angelo Rotili, Rome, 1756.

the expense of the ideologue as compared to the pragmatist: the off-handedness of Cather’s reference in the Rome-set prologue to things geopolitical and her understatement that the New Mexico territory is “a part of North America recently annexed to the United States” (5) suggest how little importance those events had to the heart of the Roman Catholic mission, the Roman view. Reynolds also alludes to the narrative information that “before the nine strokes were done Rome faded, and behind it [Latour] sensed something Eastern, with palm trees,—Jerusalem, perhaps, though he had never been there. Keeping his eyes closed, he cherished for a moment this sudden, pervasive sense of the East” (*Death Comes for the Archbishop* 45–46). This, Reynolds rightly notes, is “what one can only call a spiritual or mystical light” (4). But we should not miss the detail that the Rome that “faded,” the Rome of sight and sound and even ritual, the Rome of the church of St. John Lateran, as Cather carefully specifies (45), is replaced by a “Rome” that is more universal and mystical, part of what Cather describes as an “out of the body” (46) experience—like Jerusalem, “though he had never been there”!

Reynolds also makes much, though I think not enough, of Cather’s remarks about the genre of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in particular and about “a novel’s form” in general (5). He uses this discussion to point us to the acknowledged usefulness of a postmodern “search for moments of incoherence or asymmetry” (6). However, it is equally a discussion that challenges the novel form itself for its authorial intrusion and its acquiescence in the sense that, whether agreeable or disagreeable, there is a resolution to human affairs, one that the author can impose in fiction and, well, surely someone (God?) should impose in fact. It would seem that Cather felt the novel form still takes part in an Aristotelian sense of beginnings and endings of actions, a sense a more thoroughgoing postmodernism would challenge, as Cather surely does with the form of her narrative, the form of legend and even of devotion or piety—the nine strokes of the Angelus bell.

Reynolds refers to the Angelus bells, old Sada's December visit to the church, Bishop Latour's comments on Jacinto's way of thinking, the mission of the Church to make "good Americans," Kit Carson's sins and their motivation, and the sources of native genocide, noting how Cather shades some of these episodes with the inclusion of Islamic practice and influence, praising to some extent what he calls Cather's "only connect" liberalism—a liberalism made possible by bridging various "cultural or racial gaps" (13). These discussions are all helpful to our reading. But then Reynolds comes to the Archbishop's description of the rock sanctuary of Ácoma, and it is here that he points out how Cather "occludes the historical status of the rock" and evades any satisfactory explanation of what the primitives should have done rather than take to the rock where they lost their lives, tribe, and way of life (24). In a similar vein, Reynolds asks why Cather would make her account of Carson's assault on the Navajo, which he says casts Carson as "a historically culpable figure" (20), ambivalent by her treatment of the decline of the Pecos Pueblo. Cather, he argues, creates a discrepancy between the novel's own narrative account and an asterisk-denoted footnote stating, "In actual fact, the dying pueblo of Pecos was abandoned some years before the American occupation of New Mexico" (130). Reynolds calls the narrative account in the main text "fictional history" and labels the information in the footnote "'objective' history" (22). Furthermore, he continues that "the footnote authoritatively overrides the main body of the text," its account thus undermining and "supplanting" Cather's version in the major text of "contagious diseases brought by white men" as the cause of the decline of the pueblo (*Death Comes for the Archbishop* 130).

Now, absent other strong evidence, this stands on an idiosyncratic sense of the relative importance of text and footnotes to text. Reynolds, of course, may be right; however, most people read the text as "overriding" the footnote. To do so would mean to claim that the imaginative creation of later American responsibility overwhelms the factual chronology of earlier Spanish exploration. This, in turn, suggests that vexed historical questions can only be resolved in art, not in fact. The dilemma posed by the rock sanctuary goes even more to the heart of my observations. Latour understands both the human need and affinity for rock sanctuaries and understands their dangers and perils. Understanding this, he respects the literal rock sanctuaries of the former natives and builds his own, one equally attractive . . . and equally tenuous. Apparently, to the Archbishop, the poles of this dilemma are not only not easily reconcilable, but also simply not reconcilable at all. They lie at the heart of things and expose tragedy as not what we do at our worst but quite often what we do when we are at our best, always coming from the impossibility of knowing the world sufficiently or in time.

And Out Again

If I can be said to have an argument here, it turns out to be this: that Rome symbolizes mostly a recognition, an understanding that some of the dilemmas we face may be capable of solution, and these we should damn well try to solve; yet our deepest dilemmas are at the very heart of what it means to be human, to live on this earth. If so, failure to resolve them is not evasion; it is acknowledgement, it is recognition. At its heart, it is the "peace which passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Rome stands for a realization that there are terrible sufferings that can neither be understood nor avoided, and there are lights that shine in the darkness without dispelling it. Indians, Muslims, Roman Catholics (or just Catholics)—and Cather also—may each, or all, grant us entry into this common ground. That is the riddle that Chesterton suggests and such sages as Reynolds do not accept; it makes the choice they offer not a belief in liberalism but in liberals. It turns out Reynolds is an idealist. Like all idealists, he wants to believe in a resolution, a decisive victory in the confrontation with evil, wants to believe that the boat rowing against the tide will one day make the port to which it was headed. But Rome in Cather suggests a belief only in liberalism, not in liberals. Consequently, in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Reynolds is confronted by a set of moral dilemmas he outlines with acuity, but a view of the human condition with which he cannot "only connect." Writing Louise Guerber Burroughs just after the publication of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather remarked on Rebecca West's review of the *Archbishop*, "I think the question she brings up really interesting, and she says a lot about it that's interesting to me. [D. H.] Lawrence is the Puritan reformer, for all he's habitually indecent, and I am the Pagan, for all I'm stupidly decent!" (*Selected Letters* 397).

Cather in Rome means, above all, her awareness of the persistence of evil and her revelation of that evil in the parables she composed. If our human dilemma is, indeed, capable of resolution if only we were but more courageous in our warfare, then it is indeed cowardly and "evasive" to shirk the call to battle. But in fact, at least as Rome stands for the facts, if our dilemmas are engrained in the very nature we share, then glory, even the glory of moral battle, never flees before it has infected us with the evil we presumed our wiles and wills could eliminate or resolve. It is of this that the captured slave whispers to the conquering hero.

I close by letting Cather speak for herself. In a letter to a Mr. Watson on February 12, 1941, Cather wrote

I wish I were able to answer your letter at length for it is a thoughtful one, much beyond the range of the usual intelligent reader.



I can best answer briefly by saying that I never try to write any propaganda—any rules for life or theories about the betterment of human society. I by no means despise that kind of writing. It can be very noble, at its best, and very useful. But I think it loses some of its strength *when disguised as fiction*. You mention Dickens. Of course, important reforms resulted from his books. But he did not write in the reformer's spirit, nor did he write in order to produce reformers. He wrote because his heart was touched, or his indignation aroused by certain abuses. In other words, he wrote about life itself, as it moved about him. He had no theories for the betterment of the world. So many of the books on social betterment which are written nowadays are written out of ill feeling; out of class hatred, or envy. Very often they are written out of a very great conceit and vanity, by young writers, who really think that the history of the world and the wisdom of the great statesm[e]n was all a very silly affair. These new writers think they can manage the age-old tragedies of life very neatly. (*Selected Letters* 597, Cather's emphasis, editors' interpolation)

NOTES

1. George Allen Beecher (1868–1951) served as Bishop of the Episcopal Missionary District of Western Nebraska, which included Red Cloud, during the years 1910–1943. A friend and correspondent of Willa Cather, he conducted a memorial service for her at Grace Episcopal Church in Red Cloud in November of 1947.

2. My thanks to John Murphy, Mark Madigan, Cristina Giorcelli, and Andrew Jewell for organizing the 2014 Willa Cather Symposium in Rome and for inviting me to give one of the plenary papers from which this article is drawn. The paper originally had the somewhat frivolous and I had hoped humorous title, "The Whole Adventure: Doubling, Complexity, and the Duty of Mute Communication, or, How to Be a Catholic and Not Be Stupid." The last portion of that was a riff on a comment inscribed in my notebook from a remark Françoise Palleau-Papin made during conversation in Flagstaff, Arizona, at the 2013 International Cather Seminar. "I may be Catholic, but I'm not stupid" was her remark, and I took it to be a challenge to the prevailing American notion that faith means giving mental assent to absurd propositions and then excusing that lack of intellectual rigor by blaming it on God.

3. Reynolds means Common Sense as a school of thought, one with philosophical pedigree (3–4). Along the way Reynolds

treats readers to a tour of relevant texts including a host of studies contemporary to Cather of the Southwest in particular and America in general, such as D. H. Lawrence, William Carlos Williams, and contemporary novelists. His discussion of parataxis is found on p. 27.

4. Compare Reynolds's "The result is a Cather who harmonizes contradictory creative impulses and conflates polarities" (4) to this observation by Susan J. Rosowski: "There is a long tradition of art that eschews a 'single person's vision' and that is multivocal rather than univocal. . . . Cather . . . conceived of art not as imprinting the world with a single person's vision but rather by an older tradition of story telling as a multivocal experience, a creative and reciprocal act between teller and listener" (16).

5. For an example of an essay noting conflicting discourses but avoiding the charge of evasion, see Urgo's "The Cather Thesis: The American Empire of Migration."

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The Scene Was Ageless: Arms and a Man Driven by Fate in *One of Ours* and the *Aeneid*

Sean Lake | Valencia College

One of Ours has often been misunderstood and Willa Cather's approach to her story misinterpreted, especially by early and influential critics like H. L. Mencken, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway (105), and, later, Stanley Cooperman (30), all of whom found the novel to be naïve, romanticized, idealistic, or unrealistic.¹ The key to a deeper appreciation of Cather's novel lies in its classical allusions, specifically her use of Virgil's *Aeneid*.² Cather, an avid reader of classical literature, consistently displays the depth of her knowledge of ancient myth, history, and literature throughout her short stories, poetry, journalism, and novels. Virgil is one of her favorite ancient sources, and she even quotes his Latin in *My Ántonia* and *The Professor's House*. *One of Ours*, however, is the novel most inspired by Virgil, and reading it side by side with the *Aeneid* is crucial to its interpretation. Cather imitates the structure, themes, and evolution of Virgil's hero; the novel also alludes to Anchises, the father of Aeneas, as well as historical figures that are featured in the *Aeneid* and intimately related to its vision of Roman history. In addition, and what has remained the most overlooked and unappreciated aspect of her novel, Cather is influenced by the ambivalence of Virgil's poem. *One of Ours* is not exactly, or not merely, an American *Aeneid*, but recognition of the overarching significance of Virgil's epic answers many of the most common criticisms of the novel and provides a much fuller understanding of its meaning and complexity.

Cather's imitation of the *Aeneid* begins with the structure. Virgil himself imitates, but reverses, the structure of the two Homeric epics, following Aeneas from his wanderings to a war abroad, from his native Troy to a foreign land. The twelve books of the epic, therefore, are clearly divided into two distinct parts (the first six books imitating the *Odyssey*, the second six the *Iliad*) of roughly equal length. Cather imitates Virgil's plot, beginning with Claude's wanderings and ending with the war abroad. This two-part structure, which has often dominated critical commentary on the novel, was noted by early critics like Mencken, Gilbert Seldes, and Ludwig Lewisohn, who criticized Cather for doing precisely what Virgil does; one doubts that Lewisohn would also have referred to the *Aeneid* as "a broken epic," the title of his review of *One of Ours* (144).

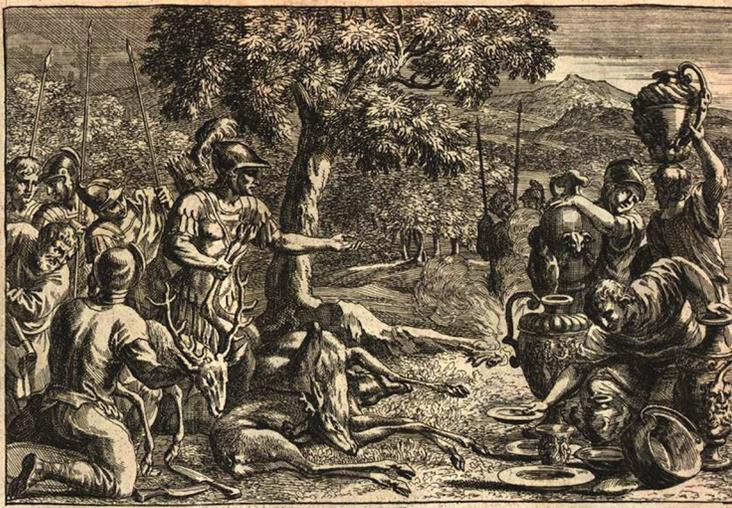
Although his wandering is more spiritual than physical, Claude is clearly lost throughout the first half of the novel.



Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius, detail (1618–1619) by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, from the Galleria Borghese in Rome; photograph by Roger Cavanagh.

He searches to find himself and his proper place in the world, despairing that "if we've only got once to live, it seems like there ought to be something—well, something splendid about life, sometimes" (79). All his efforts, however, seem to be in vain until he joins the war effort. Cather writes of Claude's thoughts on the troopship to France, "Three years ago he used to sit moping by the windmill because he didn't see how a Nebraska farmer boy had any 'call,' or, indeed, any way, to throw himself into the struggle in France" (413). He does, finally, find his call in doing his duty for his own nation and for France. Claude even entertains ideas of making France his new home (534), just as Aeneas settles where he fights, far from his native Troy.





LIB. I. ÆN. 214.
 Illi se prædæ accingunt dapibusq; futuris:
 usq; 219.

Aeneas brings deer to his companions in this engraved scene from a children's illustrated Aeneid by G. J. Lang and G. C. Eimmart, published in Germany in 1688. Courtesy of Dickinson College Commentaries; image from the Bavarian State Library, Munich.

Like Aeneas, Claude's sense of duty brings him to foreign soil and war. Virgil is very deliberate in respect to the significance of duty, using the epithet *pious* (Latin for "dutiful") to describe his hero fifteen times, with other characters using it of him eight times, and Aeneas using it twice to speak of himself. Cather does not imitate Virgil's use of *pious* per se, but does note Claude's "call" in the passage cited above, as well as in its echo at the end of the novel when his mother reflects on his life: "for him the call was clear, the cause was glorious. Never a doubt stained his bright faith. She divines so much that he did not write. She knows what to read into those short flashes of enthusiasm; how fully he must have found his life" (604).

In the first half of Virgil's epic, we learn that Aeneas has wandered the Mediterranean in his quest to find a new homeland, and that he eventually finds some hope after landing in Carthage, where Dido is queen. Aeneas stays with Dido for some time (books 1–4) and loves her, but, reminded by Jupiter of his fate and spurred by his sense of duty, the hero abandons his new lover and continues his mission of seeking a new land for his Trojans, landing in Italy in book 6. Like Claude, Aeneas is constantly frustrated in his wanderings in the first half of his story. His despair grows as he arrives in each new land and encounters disappointment, death, or narrowly avoided disaster. Among the most significant losses is the death of Aeneas's father, Anchises.

The first half of Cather's novel ends with book 3, and Claude begins to find himself during the harrowing trip to the overseas war, a voyage filled with the suffering and death of many of his fellow soldiers. Significantly, the name of the ship that conveys Claude and his comrades is the *Anchises*. With the name of the

ship and her title for the whole of book 4, "The Voyage of the *Anchises*," Cather clearly signals the influence of the *Aeneid* on her work. Virgil's Anchises assumes his most important role in the middle of the *Aeneid* in book 6, during which he provides a prophetic vision of the future glories of Rome. Cather, therefore, places the voyage of the *Anchises* in the middle of her novel, again imitating Virgil's structure in fine detail.

Besides these similarities in plot, both works focus on the importance of fate for the hero. In the second line of his epic, Virgil states that Aeneas is "driven by fate" (*fato profugus*) to found Rome. This is the first of 241 references to "fate" throughout the *Aeneid*. Near the very end of the poem, Jupiter, speaking to his wife Juno, states, "You know yourself and confess to know that Aeneas / is destined for heaven and is to be carried to the stars by the Fates" (*Aeneid* 12.794–5).³ Cather also repeatedly evokes fate and destiny throughout her novel. For example, Cather writes of Claude's patriotic feeling aboard the *Anchises*, concluding that "The feeling of purpose, of fateful purpose, was strong in his breast" (413). Earlier, when Claude first hears about the war, he looks up at the winter stars and "felt more than ever that they must have something to do with the fate of nations" (307). When Claude reflects upon his accident and the mules that caused it, Cather writes, "It flashed upon Claude that these muscular quadrupeds were the actual authors of his fate" (335). In one of the final battles before his death, Claude listens to the artillery fire and is somehow comforted; he realizes that "Ideals were not archaic things, beautiful and impotent; they were the real sources of power among men. As long as that was true, and now he knew it was true—he had come all this way to find out—he had no quarrel with Destiny" (553–54). Fate is a supernatural force in the *Aeneid*, but it is no less significant in Claude's life than in Aeneas's, and both heroes perceive that they are driven by something greater than themselves.

As a hero, Claude is similar to Aeneas in the way he evolves throughout his story.⁴ As Joseph Farrell has described him, Virgil's Aeneas is "heroically challenged" (96). Farrell explains that Aeneas "narrates a long sequence of debilitating experiences. . . . These events, the narrative of books 1–4, paint the picture not of a commanding figure . . . but rather of a helpless refugee unable to escape from a home world that has irrevocably vanished and to find his way in the unfamiliar lands beyond" (96–97). Many heroes have a tragic flaw, but few can rightly be called "heroically challenged," as Farrell labels Aeneas. Cather's Claude, however, fits the label well, especially in the first half of the work: like his classical model, Claude is far from a commanding figure. His life at home is a series of disappointing (if not debilitating) experiences: his accident with the mules, his marriage to Enid and other failed

relationships, his experiences at college, and his father's treatment of him, culminating in the command that Claude stay and manage the family farm. Claude himself confides to his friend Gladys, "What *have* I ever done, except make one blunder after another?" (345). Claude's flaws and weaknesses are perhaps more mundane than Aeneas's, but they are modeled on Virgil's uninspired, vacillating, and uninspiring hero. Claude, however, does evolve as the novel progresses; he does not remain a lost and wandering blunderer. His transformation takes place when he sets out to war, around the middle point of his story—just as Lee Fratantuono describes Aeneas becoming "more confident and self-possessed" midway through his epic (257). It is a relatively slow process for both characters, but by accepting their destiny and duty (or "calling") they make great and heroic sacrifices for their nation, even if they did not start out as obvious and self-sufficient heroes.

Among their early flaws and failures, Claude and Aeneas have similar relationships with women. Virgil's hero has three important women in his life: his Trojan wife Creusa, Dido, and his second wife Lavinia. Aeneas leaves Creusa behind as he flees the burning city of Troy. He makes sure his household gods, his father, and his son are with him, but he forgets his wife in the course of his hurried escape. When he finally realizes her absence and goes back to look for her, she is already dead. Aeneas recounts this story to Dido, and not long afterwards he abruptly abandons the love-stricken queen when he is reminded by Jupiter that he is fated to found Rome. Next, when Aeneas arrives in Italy, he is betrothed to a native princess, Lavinia. This marriage is not based on love but is part of his fate and part of his duty, sanctioned by the gods in a prophecy to Lavinia's father. There is never any warmth of affection expressed between Aeneas and his new wife, for it is a political marriage useful to the war effort.

Claude has a similar series of poor and emotionally distant relationships with women. One of the earliest is with his Temple College classmate Annabelle Chapin. Annabelle and her brother are the primary residents of the house where Claude takes room and board while in college, and she does the cooking and housekeeping chores. Notably, Cather links Annabelle to the

Latin classics, especially Horace, who, like Virgil, was financially supported by Maecenas and closely linked to the emperor Augustus: "Last winter she had recited the odes of Horace about the house—it was exactly her notion of the student-like thing to do—until Claude feared he would always associate that poet with the heaviness of hurriedly prepared luncheons" (52). Annabelle wants a closer relationship, but Claude maintains his distance. The

most poignant example of his attitude toward Annabelle occurs when she embraces him after a football game; he completely rejects her display of physical affection and throws off her embrace (60). Claude has a similar reaction to his appealing classmate Peachy Millmore; displeased with her superficiality and also her clingy behavior on a moonlight skate (84), he begins to avoid her whenever possible. Gladys Farmer, from his hometown, is the woman who seems most promising for Claude. She even confesses that she believes she will not marry Claude's materialistic brother Bayliss because it has always been Claude that she truly admires (345). He eventually recognizes Gladys's value, but he takes her for granted until it is too late. Like Aeneas, Claude has no real success in his romantic relationships, and, also like Virgil's hero, he coldly and cluelessly leaves behind the woman who truly values him.



The Dream of Aeneas (1660–1665) by Salvator Rosa, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. As Aeneas sleeps on the banks of the Tiber, the river god appears to him and tells him "This spot shall be the place for your city."

Aeneas and Claude both marry partners who show them no love and with whom they establish no significant bond. Consider Claude's first kiss with Enid, foreshadowing their unfulfilling marriage: "A terrible melancholy clutched at the boy's heart. He hadn't thought it would be like this. He drove home feeling weak and broken. Was there nothing in the world outside to answer to his own feelings, and was every turn to be fresh disappointment?" (210). Virgil's poem does not report thoughts like this inside Aeneas's mind—they would be out of place in an epic—but the similarities between the failed or meaningless relationships with women for Claude and Aeneas emphasize their devotion to nation, fate, and duty, and a similar emotional cast to their characters.

The women who play the most consistent and important parts in the lives of Claude and Aeneas are not romantic interests: their mothers, both of whom are highly protective, are significant,



as is, for Claude, the valued household servant Mahailey. For example, in book 1 of the *Aeneid* when Aeneas is shipwrecked at Carthage, his mother (the goddess Venus) guides him to the city and consoles him, telling him his lost comrades are alive, and then arranges for Dido to fall in love with him so that he will be safe and cared for. Later, when Aeneas is wounded in a battle in book 12, his mother heals his wound. In this scene, Virgil is following Homer where Aphrodite (his mother's Greek name) saves her



Coast View with Aeneas and the Cumaean Sibyl (ca. 1669–1672) by Claude Gellée, known as Claude Lorrain, from the Louvre. The Cumaean sibyl leads the way as Aeneas prepares to visit the underworld to meet the spirit of his father, Anchises.

son from a duel in which he seems certain to die (*Iliad* 5.311–18)—but this treatment by Aeneas's mother is highly unusual since, in other scenes, even Zeus does not save his son Sarpedon from death in the *Iliad*, and the divine Thetis cannot steer her son Achilles from his fated early death.

Claude's mother cannot perform the miracles that Venus/Aphrodite can, but she is still highly protective of her child. She cannot bear to see him bullied by his father with his sarcastic comments and hurtful jokes, and she consoles Claude and keeps house for him when his wife Enid leaves. At the end of the novel she finds comfort, in a small way, that he dies rather than suffer further disappointments. Remembering the optimistic enthusiasm in his letters home, she muses, "Perhaps it was as well to see that vision, and then to see no more. She would have dreaded the awakening,—she sometimes even doubts whether he could have borne at all that last, desolating disappointment" (604–605). Even after his death, Claude's mother is concerned for him: she thinks of other soldiers who shared his idealism and who ended their own lives after the war; compared to them, she thinks that Claude is "safe, safe" (605).

Failing in their romantic relationships with women, Claude and Aeneas both form their closest bond with one of their comrades in war. Starting in book 8, Aeneas develops an immediate and deep friendship with the warrior prince Pallas, a native of Italy with whom Aeneas forms a military alliance. Similarly, Claude's strongest bond is with David Gerhardt, "his best friend and his best officer" (593). Both Pallas and Gerhardt die tragically in battle.

Cather's allusions to Roman historical figures are another powerful means for her to assert the primacy of the *Aeneid* in her text. Julius Caesar traced his lineage back to Aeneas, and Virgil

composed his poem under the rule and indirect patronage of Caesar's adoptive son and heir, Augustus. Both Caesar and Augustus feature prominently in the *Aeneid* as central figures among the many future glories of Rome revealed to Aeneas in the underworld. Cather evokes the history of the *Aeneid's* composition by alluding to Julius Caesar and Augustus in the admirable characters Julius and Augusta Erlich, Claude's college friend and his mother. Another relevant historical figure, mentioned alongside Caesar in

book 6 of the *Aeneid* is Pompey, whom Cather uses as the name of one of the horses owned by the Wheelers (72). Pompey died fighting Caesar in a civil war, and his son, Sextus Pompey, was defeated by Augustus. Cather again alludes to Caesar later in the novel with an officer named Owens, who becomes obsessed with the remains of one of Caesar's fortified camps and sends for books about Caesar. Cather writes, "When Owens was in college he had never shown the least interest in classical studies, but now it was as if he were giving birth to Caesar" (486). The men call Owens "Caesar" because of his preoccupation with the Roman general. Caesar is especially appropriate for this context since the Americans are in France and Caesar was the Roman who conquered France, or as the Romans called it, "Gaul." The written history of France begins in many ways with Caesar, the first surviving author who wrote in detail about the land and its people. Caesar, therefore, is relevant not only for his significance in the *Aeneid* but also for his own history of warfare in France.

Arguably the most important similarity between *One of Ours* and the *Aeneid* is the ambivalent tone or "two voices" found in both works. Reading *One of Ours* in light of its strong ties to the *Aeneid* helps to highlight the pessimistic, dark side of a novel that has so often been criticized for being too romanticized and idealized. ("Pessimism" is a term critics sometimes use to describe the darker side of Virgil's narrative.) A comparative reading may also help explain what Guy Reynolds has found to be the novel's "unevenness" or "clashing discourse" (123). For decades scholars have been commenting on the two distinct "voices" in the *Aeneid*, but rarely criticizing Virgil because of it; on the contrary, Virgil scholars still discern or debate the meaning and intent of each "voice" and ways they work in tandem. Cather may fail to match the effectiveness of Virgil's use of two voices, but without any

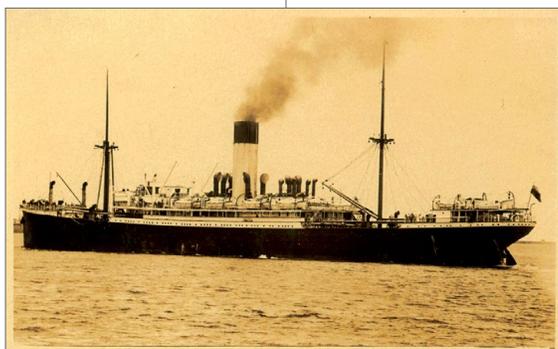
awareness of the *Aeneid's* influence, it has, perhaps, been difficult for readers to judge this aspect of the novel.

The recognition of the two voices in Virgil's epic, one lighter and optimistic, the other darker and pessimistic, was first noted by Tiberius Claudius Donatus, a commentator on Virgil from the fifth century of the modern era. Steven Farron writes, "it is normal in the *Aeneid* for the light passages to be counteracted and subverted by dark passages, a technique which was widely noticed in antiquity" (53). Over the course of the last fifty years or so (with little credit given to Donatus) this reading has slowly become a mainstream reading of the epic and is arguably the most prevalent interpretation today. Few modern scholars would venture to characterize Virgil's work in the derogatory manner in which Hemingway, Lewis, or Mencken, for example, condemned Cather's; instead, most would agree that Virgil's work is a relatively balanced account of warfare, with due praise and blame, and little romanticism about war or the exploits of the hero. While there are indeed still scholars who would argue that Virgil's work is not subversive, very few, if any, would claim it is romantic, idealistic, or in favor of war. As Richard Tarrant writes, "the poem is permeated by revulsion at a war that should have never happened" (179).

Some scholars have indeed come to the similar conclusion that *One of Ours* is not simplistic or idealized either, while recognizing that it is also not wholly dark or pessimistic. Steven Trout puts it well when he states, "*One of Ours* examines . . . the paradoxical nature of war and the idealism it inspires" (53). Trout also argues that the American experience of the war was "ambiguous," a quality Cather recreates (66); this ambiguity is even better understood as *ambivalence* if it is considered in light of the many allusions and imitations of the *Aeneid* and Virgil's own ambivalence. It seems that Cather was perceptive in her own interpretation and imitation of the *Aeneid*, recognizing the different voices of Virgil's epic at a time when this reading was only beginning to gain traction among modern classicists and other scholars. Neither Cather nor Virgil romanticizes war, yet both make an historical war into a myth of national significance, showing the lofty ideals of the heroes and the many harsh and disappointing realities that lay behind their ideals.⁵ Like Virgil, Cather includes moments of glory, but she does not shy away from graphic or poignant examples of the brutal and harsh side of war: the "heap" of rotting corpses Claude and his comrades find in the trenches with putrid gases escaping

from their decaying flesh (587), the suffering and death during the sea voyage across the Atlantic, the loss of friends like Gerhardt, the psychopathic cases, and the suicides of war heroes after the fighting has ended. Cather, following Virgil's lead, gives readers a choice about how to read her work without tendentiously presenting a one-sided perspective on heroism or warfare. One of the best passages in which Cather expresses the dichotomy comes in the final thoughts of Claude's mother at the end of the novel: she recognizes the dark side of the war, but she is comforted that Claude focused only on the glory in it.

Cather writes of Claude, "It was a curious thing, he reflected, that a character could perpetuate itself thus; by a picture, a word, a phrase, it could renew itself in every generation and be born over and over again in the minds of children" (92). These words anticipate the passage where she describes Claude's departure onboard the *Anchises*: "the scene was ageless; youths



The S.S. Anchises. Constructed in 1911 as a passenger ship for the Anglo-Australian trade, the ship was requisitioned for Australian troop transport in 1915.

were sailing away to die for an idea, a sentiment, for the mere sound of a phrase" (364). Both passages reveal Cather's purpose: the perpetuation of a myth of national significance. Trout suggests that Cather's myth is both old and new: "*One of Ours* offers a new myth of American destiny and places it in a new direction—not west on the frontier but east in the Old World" (41). Cather chose as her model the *Aeneid*, one of the most celebrated, and arguably well balanced, war

narratives in the western tradition. She updated the story, but the heart of it remains the same: the evolution of a dutiful but somewhat unimpressive young man, a vacillating figure who is ultimately driven by fate to pursue something great for his nation as well as himself. Cather places her character in the Great War, basing him not only on Aeneas but also on her cousin and other soldiers as she refashions her story for the United States. As Joseph Urgo notes, "In *One of Ours* the enduring background underlying the nation is the persistent, national narrative of imperial ascendancy" (145). The same is true of the underlying background of the *Aeneid* with the truly imperial phase of Roman history just beginning under Augustus. Virgil, following Homer, turned the Trojan War into the single most important myth for his nation, rewriting Roman identity as he rewrote the Aeneas myth. Cather follows in this tradition, rewriting the Aeneas myth and turning the Great War into a "myth" which, like Virgil's *Aeneid*, reveals many of the awful realities of war but also preserves the idealism of the hero.



NOTES

1. For a summary of critical responses to the novel see Harris 654–67.

2. Some scholars have identified other classical allusions in the novel, but the influence of Virgil's *Aeneid* has been neglected. Erik Ingvar Thurin and Mary Ruth Ryder, for example, have written on the similarities between *One of Ours* and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Thurin writes that *One of Ours* “contains a host of classical elements, perhaps more than any other novel she wrote” (230). Thurin’s work has passing reference to the *Aeneid* (244) but focuses more frequently on Homer’s epics and just as often on Apollonius’s *Argonautica*. Ryder notes that the later chapters of *One of Ours* become an “epic adventure” but her emphasis is on Homeric epic (193). The focus on Homer makes sense since Virgil himself imitated Homer—but this also means that even Cather’s allusions to Homer can be interpreted as Virgilian.

3. All translations from Latin are mine.

4. One model for Aeneas is Jason, hero of the Hellenistic poem *Argonautica*, by Apollonius. As R. L. Hunter shows, Jason is another figure who is difficult to characterize as traditionally heroic (11–16). See also Theodore M. Klein, who refers to Jason as “pallid and unprepossessing . . . the paradigm of the compromised hero” (115), and Moses Hadas, who writes, “Jason exhibits neither national character or individual prowess, except in the lists of love” (408).

5. By “myth” I mean a story with cultural standing like those found in ancient epic, not a “falsehood” as the word is often used in colloquial speech. Edmund Wilson, in an unfavorable review, describes *One of Ours* as attempting “a tragedy of national significance” (39), but reading it as a “myth” of national significance, like Virgil’s epic, seems a better path given the strong presence of the *Aeneid* underlying the novel.

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“The Princely Carelessness of the Pioneer”: Railroads and the Transformation of Space in *A Lost Lady*

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In a January 5, 1919, letter to her brother Roscoe, Willa Cather describes an encounter with Edwin Winter, former president of the Northern Pacific Railroad Company: “Such a man! all that one’s proudest of in one’s country. . . . I’d rather have the admiration of one man like that than sell a thousand books” (*Selected Letters* 272). At many points in her fiction, Cather expresses similar regard for the men who built the railroads and first settled the American West, although those warm characterizations remain negatively tinged by her awareness of the ultimate costs of the railroad project. At no point does this tension emerge more clearly than in her 1923 novel *A Lost Lady*. Here, Cather employs the railroad as a literal and metaphorical vehicle through which she examines the complex relationships between individuals and the spaces they create and occupy. Cather was well aware of the impact of the railroads on the Great Plains as a result of her childhood experiences in rural Nebraska, her brother Douglass’s career with the railroad, and her own travels. Expanding upon the work of critics including Mark A. R. Facknitz, I argue that even as Cather maintains a certain regard for the men who constructed the railroads and made possible the settlement of the Great Plains, in *A Lost Lady* she also exposes the detrimental effects of the railroad project upon the land and its inhabitants. She draws on the materiality and history of the railroads, specifically the transition from iron to steel rails, to chart the increasingly destructive nature of settlement. In that process, Cather acknowledges how the foundation for these more violent, permanent consequences exists within the actions and priorities of the very men she celebrates, those who laid the tracks across the nation. The methods employed by the younger, steel generation result in the erasure of difference and the establishment of grey, formulaic towns across the Great Plains.

Cather pushes back against this narrative of a uniform, democratic geography in *A Lost Lady*, narrowing her lens to focus on the efforts of individual characters to create unique spaces that will stand out and be recognizable against the generic, seemingly dull spaces seen from the seats in the railcar. Cather’s account of the individual and communal efforts of the pioneers is ambiguous as she presents both heroes and villains, success and failure, often within a single character. Niel Herbert, the character whose perceptions dominate much of the novel, romanticizes Captain Forrester to the point that he often misses the Captain’s culpability in the decline of the region, but at times he senses flaws in his heroes. He admires the

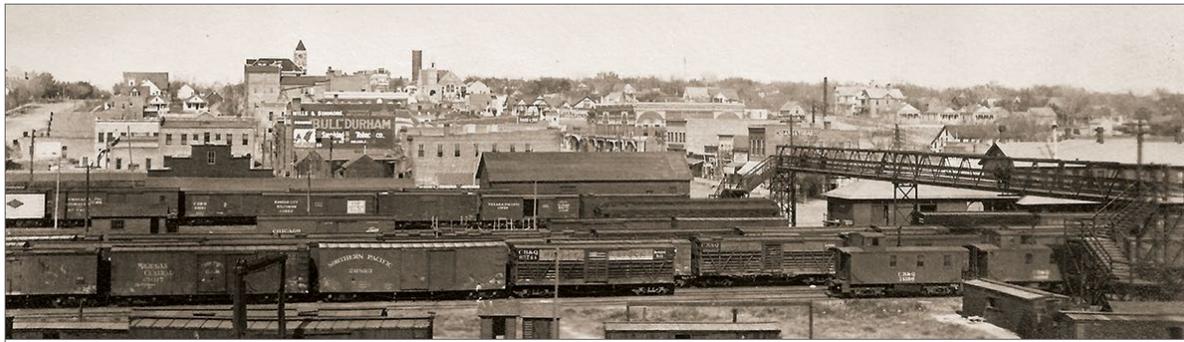
pioneers as “dreamers, great-hearted adventurers” and as “a courteous brotherhood,” but he acknowledges that they were “unpractical,” “strong in attack but weak in defence,” and that they “could not hold” what they had conquered (102). Niel’s mixed feelings seem also to be Cather’s.¹ The novel’s ambiguous title captures Marian Forrester’s status as a “lady” while communicating that she is morally and geographically “lost.” Similarly, Daniel Forrester is one of those pioneers whose “princely carelessness” will be destroyed (102).

Cather opens her novel by giving readers a glimpse of the town of Sweet Water as it might be seen by passengers from the windows of the train, describing her fictional version of Red Cloud, Nebraska, as “one of those grey towns along the Burlington railroad, which are so much greyer today than they were then” (7). By introducing the setting for her novel in this way, she draws on the history and spatiality associated with the construction of the railroads and the towns built alongside the tracks, many of which appear, from the traveler’s glance, indistinguishable from each other and from her childhood hometown, Red Cloud. In a rich study of the construction and purpose of these towns, John C. Hudson highlights their uniform nature, defining three distinct layouts the towns followed, culminating in the familiar T-town plan still apparent in Red Cloud and many other towns. The T-town, popular during the later phases of railroad construction, features a main street that begins at the railroad station and runs perpendicular to the tracks. Due to the almost cookie-cutter quality of these towns, they tended to lose their distinctiveness, becoming merely another marker of the miles



The Missouri Pacific Depot, Weeping Water, Nebraska, 1912.





McCook, Nebraska, ca. 1911, looking north from the railyards; photograph by Solomon Butcher.

traveled along the rails: “hundreds of [towns] were only glimpses, unremembered and unremarkable, except in their predictable appearance and disappearance, mile after mile. They made an impression collectively, not as individual places” (Hudson 41). After Cather uses an omniscient voice to establish her scene in the opening pages of *A Lost Lady* as one of these many towns that has popped up beside the tracks, she pivots to the individual perspective of Niel Herbert, a character who exists outside the window of the train, whom readers might imagine gazing at the passing railcars containing passengers who may or may not notice him standing beside the tracks. Through Niel’s observations Cather portrays characters attempting to create individual identities for their geographic and social spaces. Railroads, including their builders and their passengers, play significant roles in both the creation and erasure of such spaces.²

Before shifting to Niel’s perspective, Cather describes Sweet Water, and the Forrester place specifically, as a destination along the rails, one that stands out from the grey background of the other towns. Owned by a member of “the railroad aristocracy” (7), the Forrester place was “the first thing one saw on coming into Sweet Water by rail, and the last thing one saw on departing” (9). Cather’s narrator establishes the Forrester residence as a destination or stop along the tracks, highlighting the new mobility of professional men and the emerging tourist class. Businessmen stop at the Forrester place even when their business is elsewhere, and they sometimes bring their families. In an essay that catalogs the various impacts of railroads on places and people, Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte highlights the railroads’ responsibility for “transforming American geography from a vast adventureland to an organized system of destinations” (173). While Sweet Water is a place to stop and stay—a destination—Cather’s novel emphasizes the role of individual transformation of space occurring within such places.

Many of Cather’s characters rather desperately seek what Berte terms “‘geographic essentialism’—the cultural preoccupation with spatial authenticity and its close relationship to conceptions of identity formation” (172). Each of the novel’s central characters desires to make his or her place unique and individual, causing it to stand out from the backdrop of grey towns and empty spaces observed through the windows of a train. Cather distinguishes

personal place from the monotonous places seen by railcar tourists most clearly through her careful presentation of the house plotted and built by Daniel Forrester: “The Forrester place, as every one called it, was not at all remarkable; the

people who lived there made it seem much larger and finer than it was” (8). By selecting a beautiful spot outside of town framed by a hill and marsh, Daniel Forrester ensures that his home will be visible and distinguishable from the surrounding space. Geography and inhabitants come together to make the place special. The Forrester home contrasts markedly with Niel’s home, which is “not a pleasant place to go to; a frail egg-shell house, set off on the edge of the prairie where people of no consequence lived” (26). By positioning Niel’s home on the edge of the prairie rather than locating it in relation to the town, Cather implies that his home is even more invisible than the town to passing tourists. The Forrester house, by contrast, is an appealing destination for rail travelers who “found it agreeable to drop off the express and spend a night in a pleasant house where their importance was delicately recognized” (8).

Other characters seek to create their own unique places as well. Marian Forrester claims “the big bedroom” for her own and separates it from her husband’s space by closing “the heavy curtains that shut off [his] alcove” (56); while waiting for the doctor in this bedroom, Niel “was thinking that he would probably never be in so nice a place again” (26). After the Captain’s stroke, Niel notes that “he had never seen her more . . . the mistress of her own house” (94). Even as a boy Ivy Peters seeks to “get inside the Forresters’ house” (23), and he fancies that he will “sit down in the biggest leather chair and cross his legs and make himself at home” (25). Eventually he purchases the home and makes it his residence. Niel also creates his own distinctive space after his father leaves Sweet Water; he moves into his uncle’s suite of law offices “on the second floor of the most pretentious brick block in town” and “arranged them exactly to suit his taste, making the rooms so attractive that all the judge’s friends, and especially Captain Forrester, dropped in there to talk oftener than ever” (31).

Paradoxically, Daniel Forrester’s first positive, hopeful time in the novel comes when he freely explores and inhabits the land rather than when he claims it as private property, constructs a home, and transports his wife to his chosen spot. This idyllic time occurs when Forrester drives supplies across the plains for a freighting company before any railroads are completed:

The freighters, after embarking in that sea of grass six hundred miles in width, lost all count of the days of the

week and the month. One day was like another, and all were glorious; good hunting, plenty of antelope and buffalo, boundless sunny sky, boundless plains of waving grass, long fresh-water lagoons yellow with lagoon flowers, where the bison in their periodic migrations stopped to drink and bathe and wallow. (50)

Cather paints a scene of communion and collaboration among the young men, emphasizing their “boundless” environment, one in which they individually and collectively experience what Captain Forrester calls an “ideal life for a young man” (50). Throughout *A Lost Lady*—and in much of her *oeuvre*—Cather laments the loss of boundlessness and the degradation of open landscapes.

Cather plants the seed for the end of the pleasant life of the freighters when Captain Forrester drives a stake into the ground to claim the spot where he someday intends to build a fine home, complete with grove and orchard. She immediately follows the description of this act by linking the Captain to the railroads: “He went away and did not come back for many years; he was helping to lay the first railroad across the plains” (50). With this statement Cather solidifies Forrester’s transition from a mobile explorer who inhabits unbounded space to a builder participating in an industry whose business is to dominate and control the landscape; she connects his desire to claim land with his participation in the construction of the railroads. Ironically, Forrester must buy the land he staked from the railroad company (51). Suggestive of the organic lifestyle of the migratory freighters, the willow stake the Captain drives into the ground takes root and grows into a tree, but it will be removed and its spot will become a corner of the Forrester home.

In only a few short years, railroad tracks cross the countryside, and fine homes and towns with optimistic names like Sweet Water rise above the now-cultivated prairie. Cather exposes, however, the long-term failure of these attempts to produce distinctive spaces, a failure caused by the small-minded, profit-driven methods employed by the younger generation, an effect which Niel mourns throughout the narrative. According to Niel, “the town of Sweet Water was changing. Its future no longer looked bright. . . . railroad officials were not stopping off at Sweet Water so often,—were more inclined to hurry past” (30). The house on the hill deteriorates with the decline in the fortunes of its inhabitants; Mrs. Forrester herself regrets “I can’t keep it up as it should be kept” (108). The members of the railroad aristocracy

and their intellectual, well-mannered companions are replaced with petty, unprincipled men like Ivy Peters, who “destroy and cut up into profitable bits” the legacy created by pioneer dreamers (102). Judge Pommeroy recognizes that the new generation of businessmen, “young men, bright fellows, well thought of in the community,” are, in fact, “white-livered rascals” who refuse to rise to Captain Forrester’s standard of behavior (87–88).

Cather establishes the primacy of the railroad in the economic and social concerns of the region’s people in the first paragraph of the novel as she specifies the all-encompassing aspect of “the railroad aristocracy” by listing its members:

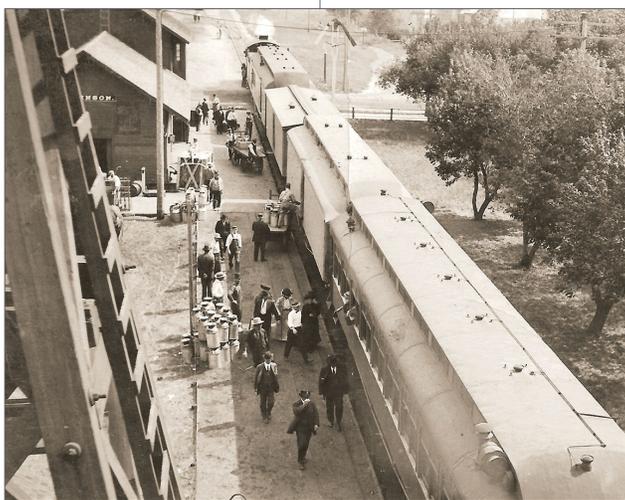
There were the directors, the general managers, vice-presidents, superintendents, whose names we all knew; and their younger brothers or nephews were auditors,

freight agents, departmental assistants. Everyone “connected” with the Road, even the large cattle- and grain-shippers, had annual passes; they and their families rode about over the line a great deal. (7)

In addition, Cather includes “bankers and gentlemen ranchers” as well as “men who had to do with . . . one of the ‘land companies’ which were [the railroad’s] by-products” (7). Specifically, Captain Forrester’s status comes from the railroad: “Captain Forrester was himself a railroad man, a contractor, who had

built hundreds of miles of road for the Burlington” (8). Not only the successes but also the failures of people are linked to the railroad; farmers, bankers, merchants, and domestics all rise or fall with the railroad. As Facknitz notes, “As a result of the growth of the railroad, the character of rural life begins to change.” He concludes that “*A Lost Lady* tends to suggest that Cather understood the closing of the prairie, its domestication and degradation, as one and the same with the growth of the railroads” (80).

Drawing on railroad history, Cather reinforces her presentation of the decline of places like Sweet Water (and their builders) with multiple references to iron and steel, which are not only powerful symbols for her characters but also suggest the historical reality of the transition from iron to steel rails. While some early tracks in the United States were built with wooden rails, on the Great Plains railroad companies first used iron rails; these rails were subject to corrosion, leading to brittle rails which often broke and could not carry heavy loads. New technologies allowed the railroad companies to convert to steel rails, which are stronger, more durable, and resistant to corrosion, thus enabling a more



Atkinson, Nebraska, ca. 1910.





The First Train Over the New Bridge, Valentine, Nebraska, 1910.

successful—and more permanent—control of the landscape.³ In *A Lost Lady*, Cather's visionary pioneers thrive when iron was still in use. Even though the Bessemer process made possible the manufacture of steel rails in the mid-1860s, they did not come into widespread use for several years. Douglas Alan Fisher notes that this was particularly true west of the Mississippi River, where "the western lines chose to lay wrought iron rails over the plains and other sparsely populated areas" (124). In November 1878, when iron was still widely used for rails, the Burlington and Missouri River Rail Road, through its Republican Valley Railroad Company, completed tracks to Red Cloud (Overton 167). In his *History of Nebraska*, James C. Olson calls the first railroads "the iron chain binding East and West" (115), but "by about 1890 nearly all important trackage was of steel" (Jensen 188). The switch from iron to steel corresponds to the historical period of *A Lost Lady* and to the history of Red Cloud.⁴

Cather repeatedly associates Daniel Forrester with iron, metaphorically linking him to the earliest rails, those which provided the foundation for settlement but could not withstand corrosion and had to be replaced. Significantly, when Cather connects Captain Forrester to iron, it is always in the context of passivity and the past, never with tools, weapons, or heavy equipment. After Forrester has a stroke, his doctor comments that "he was originally a man of iron," implying this may no longer be the case (120). Three times Cather specifies that the Captain sleeps in an iron bed, a passive context in any case but further weakened by specific language and details. The Captain sleeps "in a narrow iron bed"; in addition to noting the bed's size, Cather makes clear it is not a shared marital bed but is "in the alcove which had formerly been his wife's dressing-room" (56). Cather follows the description of the bed with a detailed account of the Captain's clumsy, futile efforts to undress himself: "While he was undressing he breathed heavily and sighed, as if he were very tired. He fumbled with his studs, then blew on his fingers and tried again. His wife came to his aid and quickly unbuttoned everything. He . . . submitted gratefully" (56). Cather repeats mention of the iron

bed, pointedly removing any remaining possibility of virility for the Captain: "When the iron bed creaked at receiving his heavy figure, she . . . drew the heavy curtains that shut off the alcove" (56). Furthermore, the Captain's stroke occurs in this iron bed (89). Cather's final association of iron with the Captain alludes to the iron rails, once the source of his power and wealth, but now as obsolete as he and his companions: "This was the very end of the road-making West; the men who had put plains and mountains under the iron harness were old; some were poor, and even the successful ones were hunting for rest and a brief reprieve from death. It was gone already, that age; nothing could ever bring it back" (160–61). Cather invokes iron, which usually suggests strength, as symbolic of Daniel Forrester's decline, a decline that is physical, economic, sexual, and social.

When Cather uses iron to describe the younger generation, it is in a much different context. The predatory Frank Ellinger has "the look of a man who could bite an iron rod in two with a snap of his jaws" (44), a description that takes on special meaning when Captain Forrester is a diminished "man of iron." Later, Ellinger is the "magnetized iron" to which Mrs. Forrester's white fingers cling (57); he is not the weak, passive iron of Captain Forrester but is a powerful iron able to attract what he desires. Similarly, though without the sexual connotations, Cather describes the self-serving bank directors who, unlike Captain Forrester, refuse to make any large sacrifice to reimburse the working-class investors when their bank fails: "The other directors were promising young business men with many irons in the fire" (86). Cather repeats this phrase when Ivy Peters tells Niel he needs to "keep more than one iron in the fire" (100). Here, heated iron is associated with activity and potential rather than passivity, even as it symbolizes the willingness of the new generation to take advantage of others.

Cather draws on the rhetoric of iron and steel to illustrate generational decline through the character of Ivy Peters, who, even as a teenager, is the incarnation of the worst aspects of the younger, profit-driven generation: arrogance, cruelty, and selfishness. Cather notes that "Ivy's red skin was flecked with tiny freckles, like rust spots," thus symbolizing the corrosion of his character (19). Ivy, however, does not succumb to the decay; rather, he metaphorically converts his backbone into steel and "carried himself with unnatural erectness, as if he had a steel rod down his back" (18). Ivy manifests characteristics of steel in his very bones, leading to his haughty, proprietary stride through the landscape, especially the Forresters' property. He openly undermines Daniel Forrester's power as he asserts his superior ability to traverse and navigate the land, penetrating even into the private space of their home, not only through his affair with Marian but also with his eventual purchase of the property. As steel rails replace rails made of iron, Ivy Peters and his steel backbone replace the "man of iron," Daniel Forrester.

Cather continues her nuanced references to iron and steel in her portrayal of Marian Forrester. The first picture readers get of her is as welcoming hostess, sometimes greeting guests while wearing an apron and “waving a buttery iron spoon” (10). This warm image of domesticity casts Marian as a willing participant in her husband’s dream, years earlier, of a time when he would “build a house that my friends could come to, with a wife like Mrs. Forrester to make it attractive to them” (51). Near the end of the novel, Cather again uses iron symbolically as Marian gleefully tells the young men of Sweet Water that someday they will all visit her at a summer cabin in the mountains where she will “bake bread in an iron pot” (156). Like the iron spoon earlier, the iron pot binds Marian to the role of domestic hostess as it places her in a fairy tale, an idyllic pioneer setting. She does not, however, limit herself to the domestic role. Cather affirms Marian Forrester’s complexity by matching the two times she links Marian to iron with two mentions of steel. Iron and steel coexist as aspects of her character, unlike when steel replaces iron in the cases of railroad tracks and Ivy Peters. The first time Marian is characterized as steel comes in a paragraph where Niel acknowledges, even celebrates, “the magic of contradictions”: her “quality” is “something that could never become worn or shabby, steel of Damascus” (75). Damascus steel is the label for particularly decorative and strong knives and swords created through a technique lost in the sixteenth century; today most authentic examples are museum pieces. The allusion is remarkable in capturing Marian as both decoration and weapon. Cather reinforces the steel-like aspects of Marian’s character after Niel discovers her intimate relationship with Frank Ellinger and wonders, “What did she do with all her exquisiteness when she was with a man like Ellinger? Where did she put it away? And having put it away, how could she recover herself, and give one—give even him—the sense of tempered steel, a blade that could fence with anyone and never break?” (95). More than any other character in the novel, Marian is multi-dimensional, and Cather uniquely characterizes her with images of both iron and steel.

The settling of the West as Cather presents it in *A Lost Lady* is ambiguous—heroic pioneers had opportunities to fulfill their dreams, to create places they valued and enjoyed, but the glory of settlement soon turned grey as optimism faded to pessimism. People of grace, vision, and generosity of spirit were succeeded by stingy, petty people of dubious morals. Even these dualities do not capture the full complexity of Cather’s writing, however, because Cather blurs what at first seem to be glaring generational differences. When Ivy Peters drains the marsh, buys the Forrester place, and settles in with his wife, he is echoing the behavior of Captain Forrester. When Ivy unscrupulously “gets splendid land from the Indians some way, for next to nothing” (117), his behavior is little different from Captain Forrester’s, who uses railroads as a weapon against Native Americans, buys his choice plot of land, and builds on it a home for the wife he brings from California.

This home, intended as a fairy tale castle for a princess, ironically becomes a near prison for Marian. Her value resides inside Daniel Forrester’s property and inside his conception of the ideal pioneer life. She is like the marsh he leaves undeveloped, a thing of beauty, inviting and offering pleasure, but nonetheless his property and under his control. Niel tries to continue the Captain’s dream as he attempts to “save” Marian, by which he means to keep her contained within his vision of the glorious pioneer period. Niel’s view of Marian is even more devastatingly old-fashioned than the Captain’s: “It was what he most held against Mrs. Forrester; that she was not willing to immolate herself, like the widow of all these great men, and die with the pioneer period to which she belonged” (161). Even in his more generous moments, Niel cannot imagine an independent, unbounded life for Marian; as he leaves one of her parties, he believes that “the right man could save her, even now” (159). The “right man” would undoubtedly be a pioneer aristocrat, a man of the past not the future. Marian proves durable enough to survive among the new generation, but even then she remains tied to the role of charming domestic hostess as she entertains and coaches the uncouth younger men of Sweet Water. She only escapes Sweet Water-in-decline when she marries a wealthy, old man who takes her to his “estate,” a “big stock ranch” in Argentina (165).

In a novel that features railroads, movement, and change, it seems ironic that Niel seeks to contain Marian within her husband’s property and to freeze the moment when the dawn of settlement was still beautiful and vibrant. He wishes to stop both movement and time. Foremost among the younger generation for culture and manners, Niel nevertheless monitors Marian’s behavior and judges any actions he deems wrong. He watches her through windows, listens outside her bedroom, escorts her to and from the edges of her property, and, when he believes she has lost all control, physically moves her to his bedroom, removes her clothes, and confines her there with his uncle as chaperone. Marian remains ultimately as bounded within male-owned property as the flourishing marsh—and almost as tenuous.



Unknown location, probably Douglas County, Nebraska, ca.1910.



Throughout *A Lost Lady* people attempt, sometimes successfully, to transform locations into personally meaningful places that reinforce a distinctive identity. The importance of the railroad hangs over their efforts. This novel is not the only one in which Cather explores the ambiguous nature of progress, specifically of the western railroads, nor is she the only writer to do so. Emerson Hough, the well-known chronicler of the West, wrote,

The old West begot character, grew mighty individuals, because such were its soil and sky and air, its mountains, its streams, its long and devious trails, its constant stimulus and challenge. That which was to be has been. The days of the adventurers are gone. There are no longer any Voices to summon heroes out on voyage of mystic conquest. . . . As a region the West offers few special opportunities. . . . It is all much alike. (358)

Robert Edgar Riegel makes Hough's comment specific to railroads: "The railroad net is complete, the land has been settled. . . . The West no longer presents any distinctive features" (318). Cather uncovers the long-term costs of settlement caused by the railroads that irreversibly change the spaces her characters occupy, contributing so often to their decline. By the end of the novel, the capacity for quick departure and arrival in new places tinges human relationships with an ephemerality that would be foreign to pioneers like Daniel Forrester. Ed Elliott and Niel Herbert have travelled—separately—in Europe, Argentina, and New York, and they briefly meet in a Chicago hotel. Cather mentions nothing about a permanent home for either of them, yet they are grateful Marian Forrester found a good home for her last years. Niel and Ed are apparently well removed from Sweet Water and other grey places, and they do not need to observe the presumed decline of the Forrester home. But there seems little doubt they still ponder the ways they and others were influenced by efforts to transform places into distinctive, personal, meaningful space.

NOTES

1. Janis P. Stout notes the "narrative indeterminacy" of *A Lost Lady*, pointing out that Cather's "detachment from Niel's point of view is not complete" (192).

2. The efforts of towns and their residents to create distinctive, unique places continued long after the pioneer period, of course. Such features as water towers, churches, courthouses, mansions, grain elevators, and landscaping have been used to make towns stand out (sometimes having the opposite effect). Still today billboards and town websites regularly use words like "special" and "unique" to describe their towns. For example, the town of Ault, Colorado, which was built beside Union Pacific tracks, features the acronym "A Unique Little Town" in its promotional materials.

Travelers (passing through in automobiles rather than railcars today) rarely perceive the town as different from many others.

3. The dramatic increase in the use of steel for railroad tracks corresponded to the use of steel for barbed wire fences, another significant factor in shaping the West. Fisher reports, "The first barbed wire was made out of wrought iron; but after steel replaced iron in wire in the 1870s, the greater usefulness of steel further increased the demand for barbed wire. Production soared from 10,000 pounds in 1874 to 80 million pounds in 1880" (93).

4. Cather indicates an awareness of the historical reality of steel rails in *The Song of the Lark*, when she twice refers to "steel rails," not during Thea's childhood in Moonstone, but when she is in Chicago (299) and Flagstaff (363).

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A French Canadian Community Becomes “French Country”: The 1912 Funeral at the Center of Cather’s *O Pioneers!*

Thomas M. Carr, Jr. | University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The July 4, 1912 edition of the *Campbell Citizen* announced that Bishop J. Henry Tihen of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lincoln had confirmed a class of 107 the previous Sunday at the local Catholic Church. The parish, named St. Anne’s, is in the town of Campbell several miles west of the Cather family properties in Webster County.¹ On the same page the paper announced the sudden death of young Arthur Chevalier from appendicitis the day before the bishop’s arrival and his funeral on Monday, the day after the confirmation service. Readers of *O Pioneers!* will recognize the inspiration for the tragic climax of the novel. Emil Bergson is so moved by music he hears at a similar confirmation service that he believes he has found the courage to break off with Marie Shabata. Instead, her husband Frank finds them together under a white mulberry tree and murders them. Cather had been visiting her nearby relatives and friends that same late June weekend, and the events reported in the *Citizen* were crucial to the genesis of her first successful novel.

Scholars have long recognized that “French country” in the novel (Cather uses the label multiple times) refers to the French Canadian community around Campbell,² but the fact that a key incident in the novel is based on one that Cather certainly knew of and could even have attended has been missed by biographers and critics. Like Kathleen Danker’s comprehensive essay, “The Influence of Willa Cather’s French-Canadian Neighbors in Nebraska in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock*,” the Explanatory Notes to the Scholarly Edition of *O Pioneers!* refer to a confirmation service that had taken place in 1881, two years before Willa Cather had arrived in Nebraska (Stouck 345),

and neither the Explanatory Notes nor the Historical Essay on the novel’s composition makes reference to the Chevalier funeral. Furthermore, commentators have rarely noted that Cather’s early writings show an ambivalent attitude toward French Canadians. Writing from what might be described as an Anglo-American viewpoint, the Francophile Cather initially depicts their culture as an inferior, diminished variant of the one she truly prized, that of France. Investigation of the role the Chevalier funeral plays in her novel will allow us to see how “French country” emerges in *O Pioneers!* as the seat of a vibrant community where fine music is prized, after the largely patronizing references to French Canadians in her early journalism and fiction.

Cather’s Francophilia did not find its source in the “French country” so close to her parents’ farm.³ Once the Cathers moved from the country into Red Cloud, it was surely nourished by a Jewish couple from Alsace who spoke both French and German. The Charles Weiners represented the cultured European life that contrasted so strikingly with the conventionality of the typical inhabitant of Red Cloud. Cather’s studies at the state university in Lincoln included French courses, and she read Flaubert, Mérimée and Dumas *fi*ls with enthusiasm. Also in Lincoln she was befriended by the Canfields, a family of Francophiles who probably played

much the same role as the Weiners in Red Cloud. The mother of her friend Dorothy Canfield was an artist who felt Paris to be her second home and “gave [Cather] a yet more intimate sense of what it meant to be French” (Brown 269).

Even before Cather made her first trip to France in 1902, she had formed a notion of the French national character which she articulated in the reviews published



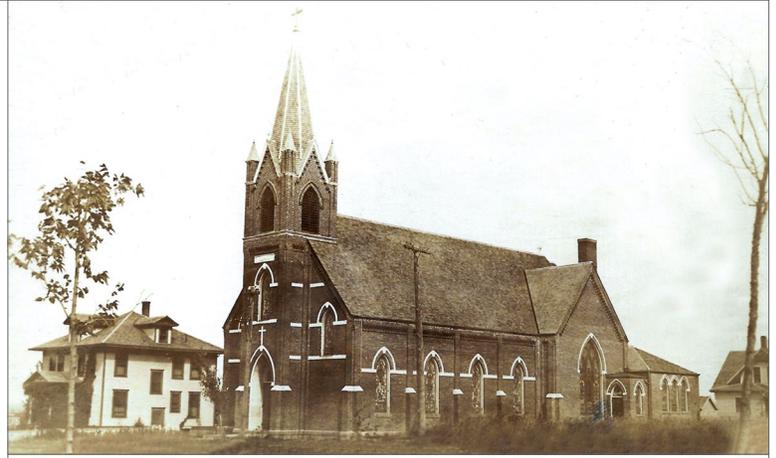
One of the illustrations by Frederick Simpson Coburn from the original publication of *The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems* by William Henry Drummond. The caption reads “Away she go Hooraw! Hooraw!”



during her Lincoln and Pittsburgh days. Bernice Slote summarizes Cather's view succinctly: "Willa Cather did not admire French culture because it was elegant or sophisticated, but because it had standards, excellence, warmth and color" (61). Slote adds that Cather was probably acquainted with W. C. Brownell's 1889 study of the French character, *French Traits*, and that she did not hesitate to modify his analysis: "For his basic French traits of reason and intellectuality, she substituted grace, wit, and 'the hot blood of the South'" (127).

An 1898 book review and a 1900 short story written during Cather's Pittsburgh days show that her view of French Canadians, however, owed more to longstanding Anglo-American stereotypes of degenerate frontier French who interbreed with Indians and prefer conviviality to work than to her view of France. Edward Watts has analyzed this stereotype of the "Frontier French," the "intercultural leftovers" of the pre-1763 French colonial empire in the upper Mississippi valley (12). For the most part they were engaged in the fur trade or lived in small agricultural settlements like Sainte Genevieve, Missouri. Unlike the male Protestant yeoman idealized by Frederick Jackson Turner, the frontier French suffered from multiple "deficiencies." They did not practice "the type of large-scale land speculation or commercial farming associated with Anglo ideas of proper uses of 'empty' lands" (Watts 9). They intermarried with Indians instead of exterminating them or taking their lands. Finally, "the life of the habitants was not business; it was life" (57); work took second place to conviviality and enjoyment.

Cather's first use of these stereotypes is found in her praise for William Henry Drummond's dialect verse rendition of French Canadian speech, *The Habitant* (1897), in a review for the *Pittsburg Leader*. Drummond's poems exploit the same fashion for ethnic dialect tales that gained Joel Chandler Harris success for his Uncle Remus stories in the 1880s. While Harris imitated black speech, Drummond, an English Canadian, has his Quebec French-speaking peasants tell their tales in a comic, fractured English. At the start of her short review, Cather indirectly acknowledges her own acquaintance with her Campbell neighbors when, with mildly patronizing tone, she vouches for the veracity of Drummond's tales: "Anyone who has lived among the Canadian French must at once feel their genuineness." She identifies "that subtle [sic] charm" which Drummond's characters radiate with the Latin temperament she attributes to the French: "All Mr. Drummond's verses embody truly the peculiar temperament of the Canadian exile, that joyous, buoyant, Provençal nature which even the mixture of sluggish Indian blood has not wholly tamed. It is there still, that old imperious blood of the Latins, that tender, fanciful spirit which the northern winters have not chilled, that pale fleur-de-lis blooming in the Canadian snows" ("Books and Magazines" 13).



St. Anne's Catholic Church in Campbell, Nebraska, ca. 1910, from the Yost/Leak Collection.

The "sluggish Indian blood" of this review was merely a warm-up for Cather's short story "The Dance at Chevalier's," published in the *Library* in 1900. Virginia Faulkner, editor of *Willa Cather's Collected Short Fiction*, recognizes the setting (ostensibly Oklahoma ranch country) and characters as belonging to the Divide. Taking an Anglo stance, its narrator is even more dismissive in his comments on race and national character when describing the French Canadians at their festivity than Cather had been in the Drummond review:

They were not of pure French blood, of course; most of them had been crossed and recrossed with Canadians and Indians, and they spoke a vile patois which no Christian man could understand. Almost the only traces they retained of their original nationality were their names, and their old French songs, and their grace in the dance. Deep down in the heart of every one of them, uncrushed by labor, undulled by enforced abstinence, there was a mad, insatiable love of pleasure that continually warred with the blood of dull submission they drew from their red squaw ancestors. Tonight it broke out like a devouring flame, it flashed in dark eyes and glowed in red cheeks. Ah that old hot, imperious blood of the Latins! It is never quite lost. These women had long since forgotten the wit of their motherland, they were dull of mind and slow of tongue; but in the eyes, on the lips, in the temperament was the old, ineffaceable stamp. The Latin blood was there. ("The Dance at Chevalier's" 551)

To the patronizing, dismissive tone, the narrator has added a significant charge, a fall from linguistic grace. Cather had found the broken English dialect of Drummond's Quebec peasants charming, but here the French of the French Canadians is not: "a vile patois which no Christian man could understand." Only the heroine Severine Chevalier, who studied in a Toronto [not a Quebec!] convent school for two years, speaks "the French of France" (551).

Cather's French Canadians are no more capable of speaking proper French than Drummond's are of speaking proper English.

When we recall how Sloté noted the importance of standards, grace, and wit in Cather's formulation of French character, we see how much the French Canadians of "The Dance at Chevalier's" have lost. Gone is the "tender, fanciful spirit" that she conceded them in the Drummond review; gone is their command of the language. Cather's point, however, is less to denigrate than to focus on the positive. Despite the bad Canadian and Indian blood, despite the Canadian cold, despite their hard life of labor, the Canadian French have retained what for Cather is essential Frenchness: the Latin *joie de vivre*. Thus, Cather sees a victory of sorts; the Canadians have triumphed over all obstacles (or at least their Latin blood has) by retaining their vitality and love of life.

Moreover, Cather does not show the nativist hostility toward French Canadians that developed in the eastern United States in the 1880s and 1890s. The French Canadians who immigrated by the hundreds of thousands from Quebec and who crowded the industrial slums of late nineteenth-century New England mill towns were perceived as a clerically dominated menace who multiplied all too rapidly and who preferred to send their children to factories instead of school, or if to school, to a French-language parochial one. Just over the border from the province of Quebec, they refused assimilation. In Cather, however, there is no anti-Catholicism or fear that the French Canadians are an alien danger, although she does allude to the sectarian rigidity of late nineteenth-century Catholicism when the Bohemian Marie Shabata affirms that most Catholics would burn John Huss again, if they had the chance (*O Pioneers!* 77). Of course, the small pockets of French Canadians on the Great Plains presented no political danger to the local establishment as they did in New England. Other immigrant groups like the Germans were much larger in Nebraska. In fact, to judge by sociological studies of similar groups of nearby French Canadians along the Republican River in Kansas, they were more easily assimilated than some other ethnic groups (McQuillan 118–120).

The first European settlements in Nebraska had been made in the early nineteenth century by frontier French engaged in the fur trade along the Missouri River, where they intermarried with their Indian partners (Thorne 156–160). However, the French

Canadians of Campbell were not their descendants; nor were they the textile workers in New England factories although they were part of the same out-migration from Quebec in the years after the Civil War. Between 1874 and 1895, some sixty French Canadian families moved into this area where Cather's family was to arrive in 1883. Most of the French Canadian families came from villages around Montreal, some by way of stops further east before arriving in Nebraska (Danker 36).

In 1912, although *Alexander's Bridge*, set partially in Canada, had just appeared, Cather had not yet found her voice. She returned to the Nebraska material of some of her early short stories in "The Bohemian Girl," and then she embarked on "Alexandra," a story dealing with the Swedes on the Divide. It was during a summer 1912 visit to Red Cloud that Cather encountered the material that would place "French country" and its French Canadians at the center of her next novel; in fact, two events in Campbell provided

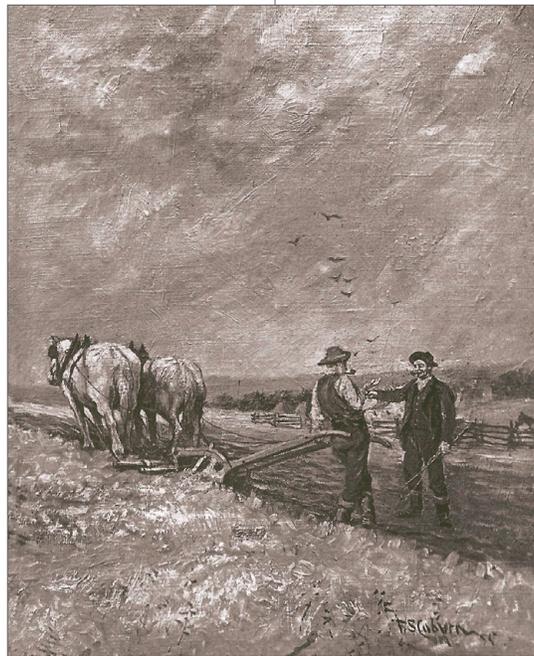
the inspiration that unified disparate stories into *O Pioneers!* In Red Cloud on June 27, she writes Annie Adams Fields that she will go up to Bohemian country (not French country) near her family's farms north of the town for a week to watch the wheat harvest. It is not the Canadians who live in the same area who are on her mind, but the Czechs who were the subject of "The Bohemian Girl." She attributes to them a sparkle much like that of the Latins: "There is much merry-making among the people. They are a wild, fierce people, but very energetic and intelligent" (*Selected Letters* 163–164). She returns a week later to Red Cloud with the inspiration for what was to become *O Pioneers!* She writes Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant on July 5: "I've a new

story in mind that will terrify Mr. Greenslet. I think I'll call it 'The White Mulberry Tree'" (164–165). It was by joining this new story to the already existing "Alexandra" that Cather created *O Pioneers!*

Specifically, what helped spark Cather's new plan? The *Campbell Citizen* reported on July 4 that the previous Sunday (June 30), Bishop J. Henry Tihen of Lincoln had confirmed 107 children at St. Anne's after having been greeted by a cavalcade suggesting the one described in the novel:

Class of 107 Confirmed.

At the Catholic Church last Sunday Bishop Tihen of Lincoln conducted the confirmation exercises for a class of 107 boys and girls. The Bishop arrived Saturday



"He's tole me all de w'ole biz-ness." From *The Habitant*.



afternoon about five o'clock, coming from Hastings by auto. A party of about twenty-five horsemen met him out of town and acted as an escort to the church. The band was out and greeted his appearance with a burst of music, while Main street was lined [with] people who were present to show their appreciation of the honor of his presence. Besides bestowing the sacrament of confirmation upon the class, the bishop gave two fine talks, one to the congregation and one to the class, which held the attention of all. The church was crowded to its capacity, many being present from outside the church.

Moreover, on the same page we find the funeral announcement for young Arthur Chevalier, who had died of appendicitis on Friday, June 28, after an unsuccessful attempt at surgery, and who was buried Monday, July 1. Arthur was not a young farmer father, as is Amédée Chevalier in Cather's novel, but the sixteen-year-old son of the owner of a local general merchandise store. The newspaper's tribute to Arthur might well have applied to Amédée, and the circumstances of his death parallel Arthur's:

He had been attacked by a severe attack of acute appendicitis only a few days before his death and while every effort was made for his relief, his condition steadily grew worse, until attending physicians concluded that an operation was necessary in the hope that he might recover, but he was unable to withstand the shock. Arthur was born and raised here and was a manly young man, beloved by all who knew him. He was just entering into a life of usefulness with all the vigor that nature generally endows the upright and honest youth of his age, and it is most deplorable this taking from the midst, not only of the immediate loved ones, but from the community, a youth whose future seemed so bright with its promises of a useful and noble life.

Cather could well have attended one of the services or been in the crowd that had not gained access to the church on Sunday. She certainly would have heard first-hand reports of the proceedings that became the backdrop and impetus for the double murder of the Emil Bergson and Marie Shabata in the novel: the nearly simultaneous confirmation of 100 youngsters at Sainte-Agnès by the bishop and the death of a young Canadian father, Amédée Chevalier, after a sudden attack of appendicitis. In the novel the confirmation is on Sunday with the burial scheduled for Monday, just as they occurred. Emil Bergson attends the confirmation service and is so enraptured by the music that he shortly flees to Marie's farm, where he and Marie are found and shot by her husband.

It is not clear just when Cather realized that the funeral in French country could link Emil's roles in "Alexandra" and "The White Mulberry Tree." In a letter to Sergeant on August 14, she refers to "The White Mulberry Tree" as being "about Bohemians" (*Selected Letters* 166). On July 24, however, she reports in a letter to Fields on a second visit to the area above Red Cloud, noting both the wheat fields and the sacred music that are so notable in her novel:

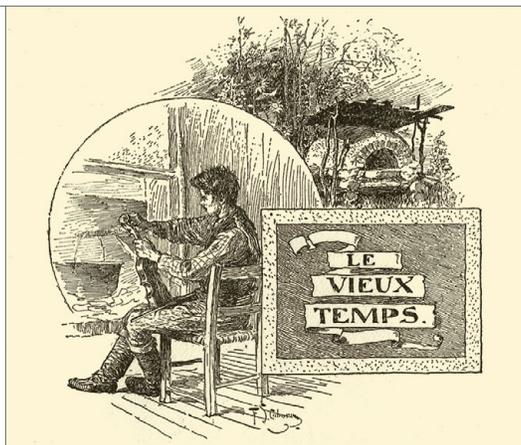
I am just back from another week up in the French and Bohemian country where the harvesters are still "reaping late and reaping early" and the wheat fields stretch for miles and miles. There is a big Catholic church up there, the church of Saint Anne, set upon a hill like the churches of the old world, and you can see it for six level miles across the wheat fields. I heard a beautiful service there, all in French, with excellent music.

It is clear that the French Canadian community of Campbell had entered her consciousness; Bohemian country had become "French and Bohemian country." In 1913, in conversations with Sergeant discussing reviews of the novel, Cather describes the joining of the Swedish story and the "fiery Bohemian" one as "a sudden inner explosion and enlightenment" (Sergeant 116) without saying just when the junction took place. There is no "Bohemian country" or "Swedish country" in the novel, although a Norwegian graveyard is mentioned. There are, however, several specific mentions of "French country," which is a physical, geographical place, but, above all, a cultural and emotional link between the Czech world of Marie and the Swedish world of the Bergsons.

More important than when Cather fashioned this link is how. She transformed Campbell into the Sainte-Agnès of "French country" in *O Pioneers!* by muting stereotypes about the French Canadian identity of these "Frenchies" (145). Although there were few French from France in the vicinity,⁴ the explicit references in the novel are to France. Cather compares the fine brick church of Sainte-Agnès set on a hillside dominating the little town of the same name and the countryside around it to ones in France: "The church looked powerful and triumphant there on its eminence, so high above the rest of the landscape, with miles of warm color lying at its feet, and by its position and setting it reminded one of some of the churches built long ago in the wheat-lands of middle France" (189). In the novel, the mother of the church's priest lives in L'Isle-Adam, a town just north of Paris (196), although Arthur Berneche, the priest of the church when Cather visited in 1912, was from Quebec. Most important, as we will see, "French country" is the homeland of *joie de vivre* in the novel, the positive trait Cather associated with the French.

An attentive reader can nonetheless discern elements that are Canadian. The characters' names are typically Canadian; in fact,

they are names of Cather's Campbell neighbors. The families are large; the Canadian hero Amédée Chevalier has twenty cousins and brags that he hopes to "bring many good Catholics into this world" (145). Amédée speaks a fractured English akin to that of Drummond's *habitants*. The most explicit reference to their French Canadian origin, and one that echoes the disparaging description of the frontier French found in "The Dance at Chevalier's," occurs when Cather's Swedish hero, remarking on "the



"O dem was pleasure day for sure, dem day of long ago. . . ."
From *The Habitant*.

black fuzz" of Amédée's baby boy, Baptiste, says to his wife, "I say, Angélique, one of 'Médée's grandmothers, 'way back, must have been a squaw. This kid looks exactly like the Indian babies" (216). Emil evidently hits a sensitive issue because the narrator continues, "Angélique made a face at him, but old Mrs. Chevalier had been touched on a sore point, and she let out such a stream of fiery *patois* that Emil fled from the kitchen." The pejorative traits of the French Canadians Cather highlighted earlier have been largely airbrushed away in *O Pioneers!*, leaving only a sort of quintessential Latin Frenchness. Their true Canadian identity becomes a "sore point," to be glossed over, like the ancestry of Amédée's child.

A March 22, 1913, letter to Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant, written when Cather was correcting proofs of the novel, hints at this process. Cather explains that she had tried to use the French actually spoken around Campbell, which she recognized as different from the French spoken in France. Doubting that she has succeeded, she asks Sergeant, who had a much firmer grasp of the language than Cather and who was in France at the time, to at least make it conform to standard norms: "I'll be forever grateful to you if you corrected the French. I tried to use the queer sort they speak out there, but I felt that I was unsuccessful, so it will be better to have it simply correct. I wrote it down by ear, so to speak, phrases I heard out there last summer" (*Selected Letters* 175). The novel's published version contains only two short sentences in French, neither marked by French Canadian speech patterns (196–197). Cather's request suggests that earlier versions contained more "queer" Canadian French, which was eliminated between this letter and publication in June.

Cather's French in *O Pioneers!* stand between strait-laced Swedes who restrain their emotions and the Bohemians who are impulsive and unsteady. Their Latin *joie de vivre* finds communal outlets at Sainte-Agnès on three occasions that mark the progression of Emil's passion for Marie: Amédée's wedding dance; the parish social where fortune telling, charades, sports, and an auction are

the entertainment; and the confirmation service and accompanying festivities. Above all, they embody an effortless vitality that the other groups cannot match. While the Swedish Alexandra gropes toward accepting her desire to marry Carl Linstrum, and her brother Emil and Bohemian Marie cannot deal their unspoken passion, Amédée has an exuberant love for his wife, described as "Amédée's sunny, natural, happy love" (147). The French of "French country" exuberantly enjoy all the pleasures of

life, the natural ones of love and friendship and the aesthetic ones, like fine church architecture and music of Gounod (228) and Rossini (225). In *O Pioneers!* there is no hint of the dullness or submissiveness of "The Dance at Chevalier's," and they are successful financially, not economic left-behinds like the frontier French. In fact, Amédée refuses to go to the doctor, despite his pain, because he has expensive farm machinery to maintain (218). Emil, who has just returned from a stay in the Latin culture of Mexico, reconnects with this spirit at the confirmation High Mass. In an exalted state, he vows to break off with the married Marie, but instead they are found together by Frank, who kills them.

The way the French accept Amédée's death prefigures both Emil's own attitude to death and Alexandra's response to the tragedy of her brother's death. In "French country," life trumps death. "The Church has always held that life is for the living" (225), the narrator proclaims. Preparations for the joyous confirmation ceremony and the sad funeral go apace because no one doubts that Amédée has entered the church triumphant. As the boys in the cavalcade sent to greet the bishop pass the gravedigger preparing the cemetery for Amédée, "with one accord [they] looked away from old Pierre to the red church on the hill, with the gold cross flaming on its steeple" (227). Cather here conflates the flaming passion of the Latins with Catholicism. As Emil looks at the grave on his ride to see Marie, he "felt no horror. That, too, was beautiful . . . ecstasy has no fear of death" (230). Likewise, Alexandra refuses to be caught up in a futile quest for vengeance against the killer of her favorite brother.

By setting Amédée's positive traits such as his French *joie de vivre* alongside Frank Shabata's brooding Bohemian impulsiveness and Alexandra's resolute Swedish work ethic, Cather formulates an enticing portrayal of Nebraska's immigrant culture. Her success is generally credited to her ability to create recognizable ethnic groups without slipping into facile stereotypes. "French country," in which the negative features attributed to French Canadians have



been airbrushed out, is a good example. Still, Cather, who writes implicitly from an Anglo-American perspective, presumably does not notice the fact that, unlike recently arrived Swedes and Czechs, the ancestors of her Campbell French Canadian neighbors had roots in North America for two hundred years, at least as long as her own Virginia ones. She makes whatever is Canadian about them accessory. The Francophile Cather sees straight past any Canadianness to the essential nature she values, their French vitality, embodied by “French country.”

NOTES

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Dorothy W. Zimmerman, who first told me about French country around Campbell. I first knew Dorothy as a Francophile member of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln English Department who was a George Sand scholar and coeditor of a pioneering guide to French women writers. Only later did I learn of her ties to the Cather community.

1. The church was originally named in French, Eglise Sainte Anne, and this name is inscribed above the entry to the current church building, which was built in 1910. Since English has come into common use, the official designation is St. Anne’s, although St. Ann is sometimes used; the name on the gate to the church cemetery is “St. Ann Cemetery.” In *O Pioneers!* Cather names the church and the community Sainte-Agnès (189).

2. Kathleen Danker’s overview of this community does not disengage Cather’s Francophilia from her acquaintance with the Campbell French Canadians. Thus, Danker attributes to them various aspects of Cather’s knowledge and love for things French which she very likely acquired elsewhere. The sort of direct contact Cather had with Czech and German families has not been documented with the French Canadians. Moreover, Danker deals with *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and *Shadows on the Rock* rather than *O Pioneers!*, where the Campbell component is strongest.

3. Michel Gervaud’s assessment of Cather’s attachment to France remains the most comprehensive and penetrating point of departure for study of this topic.

4. Renée M. Laegreid reports census numbers. In Cather’s Webster County, the 1900 census showed thirteen French immigrants and seventy-one French Canadians; Franklin County had six inhabitants from France and 122 from French Canada. Furthermore, this French Canadian (or for that matter even French) presence was unique in the state. Cather’s area of central Nebraska, the four counties of Webster, Adams, Franklin and Clay, contained the only large concentration of rural French Canadians in the entire state.

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"... that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great."

—Willa Cather

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The *Willa Cather Newsletter & Review* welcomes scholarly essays, notes, news items, and letters. Scholarly essays should generally not exceed 5,000 words, although longer essays may be considered; they should be submitted in Microsoft Word as email attachments and should follow current MLA guidelines as articulated in the *MLA Handbook*.

Direct essays and inquiries to Ann Romines at annrom3@verizon.net.

Send letters and inquiries to Thomas Reese Gallagher at tgallagher@nyc.rr.com.

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"It t'ink of you night an' day." From *The Habitant and Other French-Canadian Poems* by William Henry Drummond. See the essay on page 21.



Call for Papers

Beyond Nebraska: Willa Cather's Pittsburgh The 16th International Willa Cather Seminar

June 11–17, 2016

Duquesne University • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dr. Timothy Bintrim
Saint Francis University

Directors

Dr. James Jaap
Penn State Greater Allegheny

Dr. Faith Barrett
Duquesne University

Site Director

Willa Cather left Nebraska in 1896 and for the next decade made Pittsburgh her primary residence. During these years, Pittsburgh rapidly expanded as steel, glass, and other industries grew to meet the demand of a growing nation. Immigrants and African Americans flocked to the city as jobs were readily available, and the city nearly tripled in population during this decade. This was Cather's first experience in an urban, multiethnic and multiracial city, and she took advantage of all the city had to offer. She worked as an editor, teacher, reviewer, and freelance writer. She cultivated friendships and

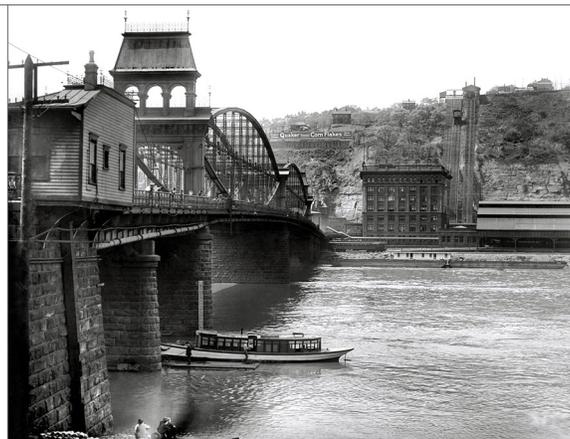
mixed with all sorts of Pittsburghers. She published extensively—not only hundreds of profiles and reviews, but also more than thirty short stories; a collection of poetry, *April Twilights* (1903); and *The Troll Garden*, her first collection of stories. After moving to New York City in 1906, she continued visiting Pittsburgh until 1916, writing parts of several novels at the McClung residence.

Despite the importance Pittsburgh played in her life, much remains undiscovered. This seminar will explore Pittsburgh's influence on Cather's life and career.

We invite proposals on a wide range of topics within Cather studies,
but particularly the following:

Cather's Pittsburgh Writings • Cather's Pittsburgh Life • Pittsburgh's People and International Connections

Please send 500-word proposals of individual papers to the Willa Cather Foundation's education director, Tracy Tucker, at ttucker@WillaCather.org, by **February 15, 2017**. If your paper is accepted, you will be notified



Smithfield Street Bridge, looking at Mount Washington, Pittsburgh, 1910. Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Div., Detroit Publishing Co. Collection.

by March 15, 2017. You will need to submit your final paper by May 1, 2017. Papers should be 8–10 pages (20 minutes when read).

Visit www.WillaCather.org for the full Call for Papers.

Walk in Cather's footsteps. Stay in her town. The National Willa Cather Center



- Tour Cather's childhood home and other historic sites
- Spend a quiet evening at the Cather Second Home
- Take in a show at Cather's beloved 1885 Red Cloud Opera House
- Experience our exhibit *American Bittersweet: The Life & Writing of Willa Cather*
- Shop in our well-stocked bookstore and gift shop
- Hike the 612-acre Cather Memorial Prairie
- Explore a vast collection of Cather-related archival materials

Clockwise from upper left: The Willa Cather Childhood Home, the "Harling House" from My Ántonia, the Burlington Depot, St. Juliana Church, and the Willa Cather Memorial Prairie. The Childhood Home, the Burlington Depot, and St. Juliana Church, originally acquired by the Willa Cather Foundation in its early years, are part of the Willa Cather State Historic Site, owned by the state of Nebraska and managed and maintained by the Cather Foundation with funding from the Nebraska State Historical Society. All images courtesy Nebraska Tourism or the Willa Cather Foundation.

| Summer Hours (April 1 – Sept. 30) | Winter Hours (Oct. 1 – March 31) |
|--|--|
| Mon. – Fri.: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm | Mon. – Fri.: 8:00 am – 5:00 pm |
| Saturday: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm | Saturday: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm |
| Sunday: 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm | Sunday: Closed |
| Tours: 9:30 am, 11:00 am, 1:30 pm, 3:00 pm No Sunday morning tours. | Tours: 9:30 am, 11:00 am, 1:30 pm, 3:00 pm No Saturday afternoon or Sunday tours. |



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The new National Willa Cather Center will have its official grand opening June 3, 2017.
Mark your calendars!