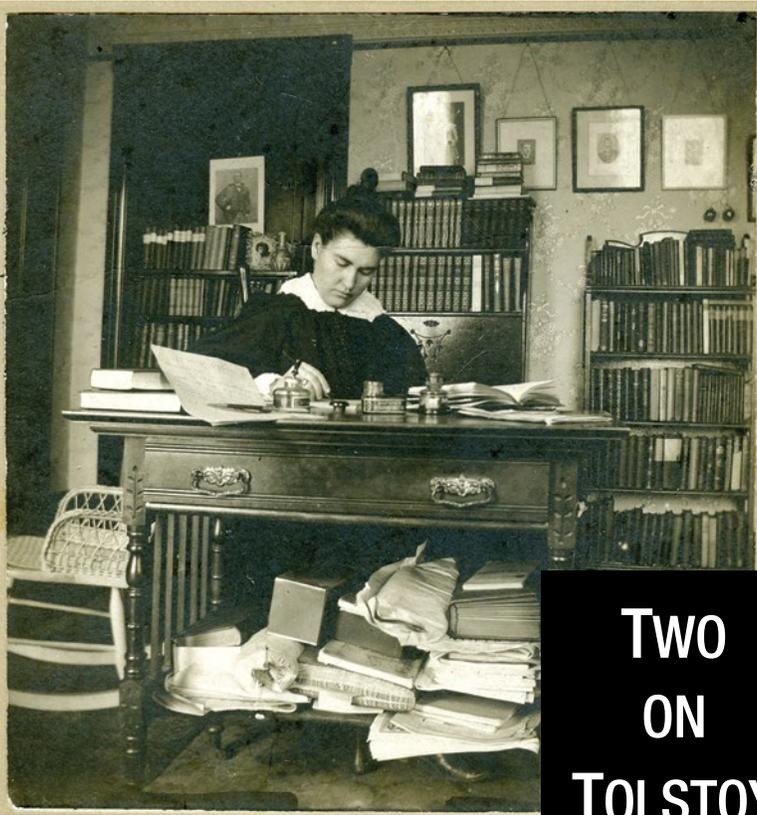
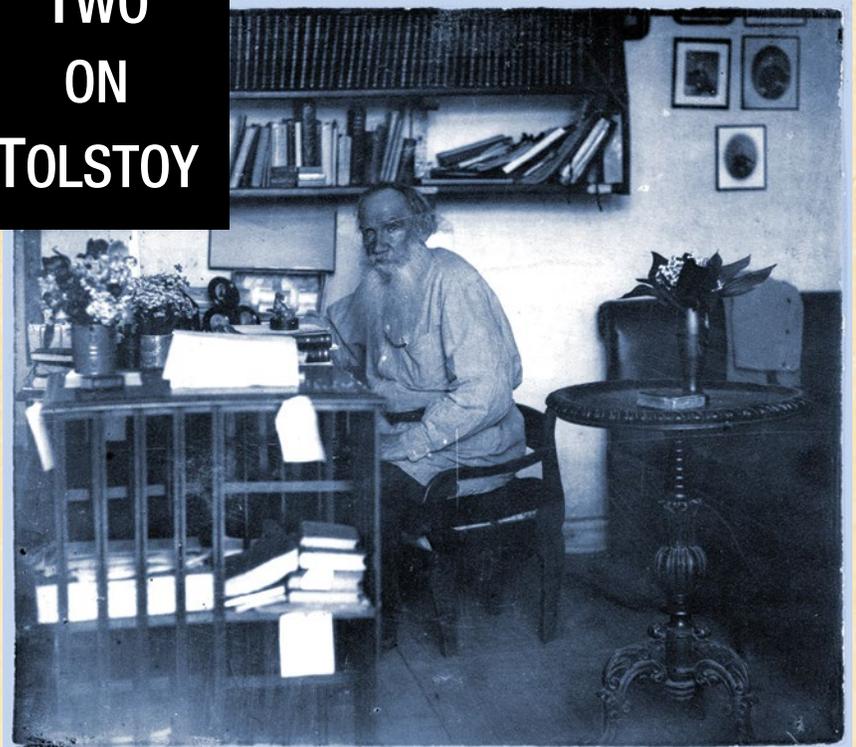


Willa Cather REVIEW

Volume 65 | No. 1 | Spring 2024



TWO
ON
TOLSTOY



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On the cover: Willa Cather in the Pittsburgh library of her friends George and Helen Seibel, ca. 1900. WCPM Collection, Willa Cather Foundation Collections and Archives at the National Willa Cather Center, PHO-4-W689-85.

Tolstoy in his study at Yasnaya Polyana by Sergei Mikhailovich Prokudin-Gorskii, originally published in 1908. Prokudin-Gorskii photograph collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.



Letter from the Executive Director Ashley Olson

Willa Cather was well traveled. Like so many of us, she took trips for business, for pleasure, and to visit friends and family. She also traveled to help shape her writing, to conduct research, and to find the solitude needed to focus on her work. Whatever the purpose for her time away from home, Cather often spent her evenings in charming hotels. For those who seek to retrace her steps, consider the Brown Palace Hotel in Denver, La Fonda on the Plaza in Santa Fe, Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, or Le Château Frontenac in Quebec City.

While sightseeing, Cather sought to walk in the footsteps of literary icons and experience settings that had piqued her imagination. Writing from her “old happy home” at the Parker House in Boston, she boasted of the hotel’s comfort and dignity while noting that it hadn’t changed since Thackeray stayed there many years before. While abroad, she took in the olive groves along the Mediterranean, traversed the Italian countryside described in Virgil’s *Georgics*, and explored the ruins of the Roman Empire.

This form of literary and artistic pilgrimage is still wildly popular. I partake, and I suspect a number of you who are reading this letter do too. Here in Red Cloud, we have the pleasure of introducing guests to many sites and settings that were fixtures in Cather’s life

and literature. We’re grateful to each visitor who makes the trip, and we’ve taken note when they identify a needed amenity.

The missing amenity is a hotel. I should confess that Cather didn’t stay in a luxurious hotel while visiting Red Cloud. She had the comfort of her childhood home, and later, a larger house where her parents relocated. The generosity of a Cather family descendant helped us acquire this larger home and open it as a guest house in 2011. It’s known as the Cather Second Home, and the beautiful Victorian house has provided many guests with an authentic and meaningful overnight stay. But six guest rooms are not enough to accommodate the growing number of people who seek to spend extended time chasing Cather’s spirit or honing their creativity here.

In collaboration with the Red Cloud Community Fund, city government, and other partners, we’ve designed a charming hotel to welcome creatives and tourists. I never imagined a decade ago that we would construct a hotel, but what we can accomplish with your generosity is nothing short of incredible. Hotel Garber—named for the couple who inspired the protagonists in Cather’s *A Lost Lady*—will be located in the Potter-Wright building; a site Cather would have strolled past after its 1902 completion. The adaptive reuse of the site is the largest and most comprehensive preservation project we’ve ever undertaken. With construction underway, we invite you to learn more about the building’s storied history and begin imagining your future stay. See page 28 for more.



Letter from the President Mark Bostock

Hi, I’m your new Board of Governors president for the next two years. I’m excited and honored to have this opportunity to serve and represent this wonderful organization. I would like to start by thanking Robert Thacker for serving as president over the last two years. He did a great job and has been very helpful getting me up and running this year (thanks, Bob!). Having grown up and attended school in Red Cloud, I’ve always been surrounded by Cather in some form or fashion. But as a young person, living with her day in and day out, you don’t fully appreciate her contributions to American literature or to the town of Red Cloud. I remember my literature and composition teacher in high school, Barbara Tupper, requiring us to read *My Antonia*. She suggested other books by Cather, too, but I’m pretty sure I didn’t take her up on those suggestions. After all, when you are surrounded by Cather, who wants to have her in school as well?

It was later in my life when I started to appreciate Cather and eagerly read her books. When I would tell people that Red

Cloud was my childhood home, they would get excited that I was from her hometown. When I came home to visit family, I started to see the Cather Foundation expanding and filling long-vacant spaces on Webster Street, Red Cloud’s main street. Then my mom, who volunteered for many years at the Opera House, was always delighted to tell me about the great shows the Foundation brought in. How could I not want to get more involved?

So, I was fortunate enough to be elected to the board in 2011. These last thirteen years have been a great time to be involved with the Cather Foundation. A number of historic properties have been restored, with the Cather Childhood Home just finished up late last year. The conservators are working on the wallpaper in Willa’s room now. The super cool Farmers and Merchants Bank building on Webster Street has been restored and now hosts the Foundation’s new *Making a Place* exhibit. The Burlington Depot has been totally restored. And last but not least is the hotel under construction on Webster Street (for us Red Cloud folks, it is where Brenda’s Shoppe was located). The Hotel Garber will be a great addition to Red Cloud, which has lacked for hotel space for years. More hotel space means we can plan more events. This all bodes well for the Cather Foundation and for Red Cloud.



Cather's "Long Talk" with Tolstoy

Timothy W. Bintrim

In their contribution to this issue, Matthew Hodges and Diane Prenatt place "Old Mrs. Harris" alongside Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* as two texts that share a central idea—how one dies well—expressed in markedly similar details of plot and setting. They do not consider "Old Mrs. Harris" a deliberate or explicit reworking of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; rather, to use some older critical language, they see Tolstoy's novella as an analog rather than a source for Cather's late story ("The End Is Nothing").

My own essay, by contrast, is a source study arguing that Cather engaged in a prolonged conversation with Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) and *What Is Art?* (1897) about the time that she began work on *My Ántonia* (Woodress 285). I focus on two stories she wrote between fall 1916 and spring 1917. "A Gold Slipper" was completed by Thanksgiving Day 1916 (just before she took up *My Ántonia*) (Madigan 339). It sold quickly and appeared in the January 1917 issue of *Harper's*. Protagonist Kitty Ayrshire explicitly refers to *What Is Art?* (1897), summarizes Tolstoy's thesis that art promotes religious perception, and demonstrates his theory that art happens by infecting others with emotion (160). "A Gold Slipper" was reissued as part of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920) and remains a perennial favorite with readers. By contrast, "Her Boss," still among her least favored short stories, had a convoluted path to publication.

Cather hoped "Her Boss," originally titled "Little Annie," would pay some of the bills as part of a projected "Office Wives" series she offered to the *Century*. But even as a potboiler, "Little Annie" was a nonstarter. Agent Paul Revere Reynolds began pitching the story on May 10, 1917 (*Complete Letters* no. 0416), yet it did not sell for more than two years. According to James Woodress, *Century* editor Michael Doty accepted another of the "Office Wives" stories, "Ardessa," but rejected "Little Annie" on the grounds that it was "too sad" to be published during wartime

(286). It earned Cather nothing until it appeared in the *Smart Set* in October 1919, the year after the war ended.

Mirroring *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* in plot, characterization, and denouement, "Her Boss" is a conscious tribute to Tolstoy. Not only does it enact Tolstoy's theory of art as infection, but it also illustrates the distinction he makes between "real" and "counterfeit" art (*What Is Art?* 152–55).

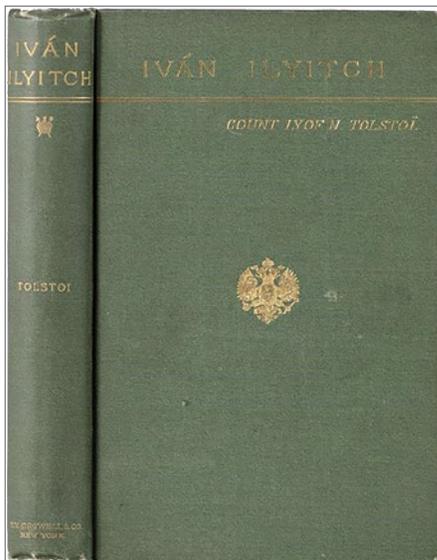
Set in Manhattan and Orange, New Jersey, "Her Boss" is the story of Paul Wanning, a successful attorney who learns he is dying of an incurable disease of the kidneys. He decides to spend

his remaining time writing an autobiography, fulfilling his long-deferred dream of becoming a writer (103). Cherishing his freedom and focus during his last months of life, he remains in Manhattan after his family disperses for their summer holidays.¹ Annie Wooley, an unpolished girl from an Eighth Avenue tenement just learning stenography, is his unlikely pick as his personal secretary. As they work steadily at dictation throughout the weekdays (and, as Wanning's time grows short, into the evenings and Saturday mornings), Annie witnesses Wanning's awakening as a writer. Inexplicably, he has not revealed his project to his family or law partners, inviting the rest of the firm to gossip about all the time he and Annie spend behind closed doors.

When his death comes suddenly, the book Paul Wanning intended to self-publish to vindicate his life is not finished, but Annie's employment is. As soon as Wanning is buried, his senior partner McQuiston lectures Annie on her lack of propriety, fires her, and, with the cooperation of Wanning's son and executor Harold, cheats her of the thousand dollars Wanning left in a codicil to his will as compensation for her time and kindness. Annie has every reason to curse Paul Wanning for disgracing and cheating her, but in a denouement echoing the parables of forgiveness Tolstoy wrote after his conversion, Annie defends her boss instead.



Ilya Repin, *Leo Tolstoy Barefoot*, 1901. State Russian Museum.



The first American edition of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, 1887, translated by Nathan Haskell Dole. Cather may have owned a copy of this edition.

Cather famously claimed that all her stories had been written from materials she had “absorbed before [she] was fifteen years old” (Hinman 43). Her exposure to Tolstoy’s shorter novels, and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* in particular, seems to have come midway through this receptive period. She told H. L. Mencken in 1922 that she first acquired a set of Tolstoy’s four short

works when she was thirteen. For the next four years, she read them “backward and forward” until the paper bindings fell apart (*Complete Letters* no. 0577; see also Stouck). One of these four was *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*. She must have lucked upon one of the earliest releases in this country, for *Ilyich* was first translated into English by Nathan Haskell Dole in 1887, the year she turned fourteen. The same letter to Mencken suggests the anxiety of influence. While writing *O Pioneers!* she worried “whether my mind had got a kink put in it by the four shorter novels of Tolstoi.” She also wondered if, in *O Pioneers!*, she had been “unconsciously copying” Tolstoy’s depictions of peasant life. In fact, had he lived long enough to read her second novel, Tolstoy may have applauded not only her accurate rendering of Swedish, French, and Russian communities in Nebraska, but also Alexandra’s forgiveness of Frank Shabata and her seeking a reduced sentence for her brother’s murderer.

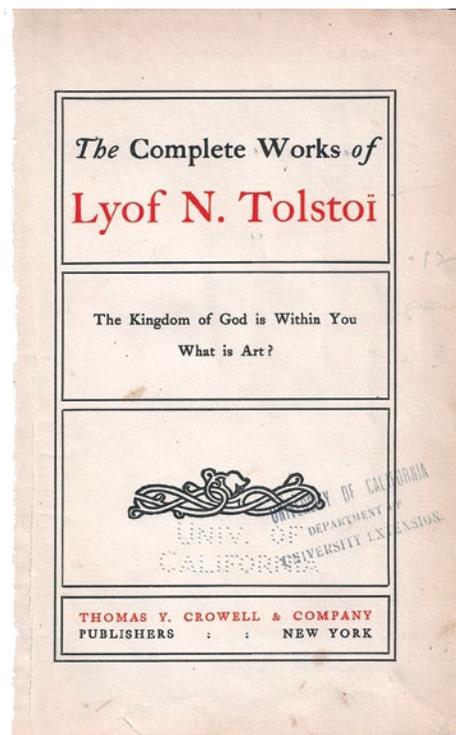
Although she sometimes pardoned offenders in her own fiction, like many other fans, Cather regretted the didactic, moralistic turn Tolstoy’s writing took after his conversion. Around 1869, Tolstoy had suffered an existential crisis. Though possessing wealth, position, family, and accomplishments, he could not shake the conviction that death made life meaningless. His spiritual malaise lasted a decade, encompassed the four years it took to write *Anna Karenina* (1873–77), and only eased around 1880 when he observed that the Russian peasants, despite their poverty, seemed happy. Trading inherited wealth and station to dress, eat, and labor like a peasant, he assumed an austere form of personal Christianity, grounded in the Christian Gospels but denying any elements of the supernatural (Kaufman and Koss). Post conversion, he renounced much of his own writing. *War and*

Peace he classed together with Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* as immoral (Chaliakopoulos). He stood by *Anna Karenina* and a few short stories, including his 1872 parable of forgiveness, “God Sees the Truth but Waits.” *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886), written after his conversion and ending with Ilyich seeking forgiveness for a misspent life, is an artifact of his spiritual crisis.

II: Art as Infection in “A Gold Slipper”

Cather’s suspicion that Tolstoy’s stories were infectious may indicate she had some sympathy with his theories set forth in *What Is Art?*, first published in English in 1897 in an authorized translation by Aylmer Maude after the Russian censors corrupted the serial publication. Much studied even today, *What Is Art?* attempts to define art objectively on moral rather than aesthetic grounds (Chaliakopoulos). Art can be grounded in neither beauty nor taste, Tolstoy reasoned, as both are entirely subjective. Nor can an objective definition be based on that which gives pleasure. Rather, Tolstoy defined art as a moral activity whereby people communicate emotion and, in doing so, break down barriers between the minds of creator and perceiver, encouraging community. As speech enables people to pass along ideas, so art allows the communication of feelings. Or, as Tolstoy himself put it (in Aylmer Maude’s translation), “*Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain*

external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them” (50; original emphasis). Art happens first when the artist, moved by great emotion, communicates an experience and relives it with original intensity. Art happens again when the audience, infected by the artist’s feelings as they view or hear the work of art, feel the transmitted emotion (*What Is Art?* 49–50).



The title page of volume 12 of an 1899 multivolume U.S. edition of Tolstoy’s complete works. By the time of her 1900 account of Jane Addams’s lecture, Cather may have owned such a set.





Ilya Repin, *Ploughman*, 1887. Tretyakov Gallery.

In peasant societies, Tolstoy argued, art, like speech, infuses everyday life. He would have agreed with what Cather told to journalist Eleanor Hinman in 1921: “The farmer’s wife who raises a large family and cooks for them and makes their clothes and keeps house and on the side runs a truck garden and a chicken farm and a canning establishment, and thoroughly enjoys doing it all, and doing it well, contributes more to art than all the culture clubs” (47). Post conversion, Tolstoy tried to become a peasant—he ate plain food, wore homespun clothes, worked the fields with horses and oxen, and even repaired his own shoes. The best, most moral art he thought was accessible to laborers and people without formal education: it needed no critics, intermediaries, or explicators.

It is probable that Cather read *What Is Art?* soon after it became available in Maude’s 1897 translation. In 1900, while freelancing in Pittsburgh, she attended a lecture on Tolstoy by pioneering social worker Jane Addams at the Sewickley Women’s Club and wrote of it in her column in the *Lincoln Courier* (“Passing Show”). Four years before the Sewickley lecture, Addams had made a pilgrimage to visit Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, his ancestral estate near Moscow (De Lisi). His writings about radical Christianity and pacifism inspired Addams’s work at Hull-House (Gibbon). In her account in the *Courier*, Cather was impressed by the lecture and declared that Addams, unlike Tolstoy, “was not an extremist in anything, but a candid, large-minded student of men and measures” (“Passing Show” 3). Late in her account, Cather contests Tolstoy’s opinion that “no greater poetry has been written than the *Iliad* which came almost

directly from the people” (4), a claim found in chapter ten of *What Is Art?* (103). Unconvinced, Cather scoffs, “No, it is the people who have grown, and art with them” (4).

Despite their differences, Cather continued reading Tolstoy in better bindings and more authoritative translations into the 1910s. She was surely thinking about and possibly rereading his work as she embarked on *My Ántonia*. The evidence is in “A Gold Slipper,” written in the fall of 1916, published in the January 1917 number of *Harper’s*, and included in the 1920 collection titled *Youth and the Bright Medusa*.²

Perched on a folding chair on the Carnegie Music Hall stage, a sullen satellite to his musical wife and the monumental Mrs. Post of Cincinnati, coal merchant Marshall McKann does not even try to hide his disapprobation from Kitty Ayrshire. Later, when fate tosses Kitty and him together in section 13 of a Pullman sleeper, she invites him to explain himself. Through McKann’s myopic third-person narration we see him take Kitty’s measure—and then take the bait: “[He] settled himself in his seat. He thought he would try her out. She had come for it, and he would let her have it” (155).

Initially he trolls Kitty and other performing artists for being social parasites, “self-indulgent and appetent” (158). Kitty admits that she lives well, but it is only fair because she has supported eight members of her family ruined by the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, as well as her retinue. Thus she rejects the bait that artists do not “help to carry the burdens of the



Jane Addams, ca. 1926. Bain News Service Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, control no. 2014719193.



world” (158–59). His next charge, that artists are hedonistic, she rejects with a reference to Tolstoy’s book saying the opposite: that art is a function of “religious perception.” She name-checks *What Is Art?* and adds that she “had a long talk with [the author] once, about his book” to make sure she understood it.³ Assuming that McKann’s reading is sedimentary at best, she explains Tolstoy’s thesis:

As nearly as I could get it, he believes that we are a race who can exist only by gratifying appetites; the appetites are evil, and the existence they carry on is evil. We were always sad, he says, without knowing why; even in the Stone Age. In some miraculous way a divine ideal was disclosed to us, directly at variance with our appetites. It gave us a new craving, which we could only satisfy by starving all the other hungers in us. Happiness lies in ceasing to be and to cause being, because the thing revealed to us is dearer than any existence our appetites can ever get for us. I can understand that. It’s something one often feels in art. (160)

A few years later, Jim Burden would feel a similar happiness when “ceasing to be” and merely “being” on a sunny afternoon in his grandmother’s garden. For Cather, as for Tolstoy, art and divine revelation were one.

Kitty’s reference to Stone Age people “gratifying [their] appetites” until they apprehended a “divine ideal . . . directly at variance with [these] appetites” is a close paraphrase of chapter nine of *What Is Art?*, in which Tolstoy describes the “religious perception” of each age:

There is nothing older and more hackneyed than enjoyment, and there is nothing fresher than the feelings springing from the religious consciousness of each age. It could not be otherwise: man’s enjoyment has limits established by his nature, but the movement forward of humanity, that which is voiced by religious perception, has no limits. At every forward step taken by humanity—and such steps are taken in consequence of the greater and greater elucidation of religious perception—men experience new and fresh feelings. And therefore only on the basis of religious perception . . . can fresh emotion, never before felt by man, arise. From the religious perception of the ancient Greeks flowed the really new, important, and endlessly varied feelings expressed by Homer and the tragic writers. It was the same among the Jews, who attained the religious conception of a single God,—from that perception flowed all those new and important

emotions expressed by the prophets. It was the same for the poets of the Middle Ages, who, if they believed in a heavenly hierarchy, believed also in the Catholic commune; and it is the same for a man of to-day who has grasped the religious conception of true Christianity—the brotherhood of man. (*What Is Art?* 74)

Following Antonis Chaliakopoulos, I should clarify that Tolstoy’s phrase “the religious perception of the age” does not refer to the rites or beliefs of any particular organized religion, for after his conversion to anarchism, Tolstoy rejected all dogma of church and state. Consequently, he was excommunicated from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1901 and his criticisms of that church were excised by the Russian censors. For Tolstoy, Chaliakopoulos explains, “the definition of religious perception is so wide, that it describes ideology in general . . . even if a society recognizes no religion, it always has a religious morality. This can be compared with the direction of a flowing river: *‘If the river flows at all, it must have a direction. If a society lives, there must be a religious perception indicating the direction in which, more or less consciously, all its members tend’*” (*What Is Art?* 157; quoted by Chaliakopoulos, with his emphasis). Tolstoy thought the dominant religious perception of Western society during his lifetime was Christianity, contained in the central teachings of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount: pacifism and the brotherhood of humanity (*What Is Art?* 74).

Had he—not Kitty—answered McKann’s claim that art is hedonistic, Tolstoy would blame any corruption of art on the privileged classes, who as patrons insist that art reflect their limited preoccupations: “the feeling of pride, the feeling of sexual desire, and the feeling of weariness of life. These three feelings, with their outgrowths, form almost the only subject-matter of the art of the rich classes” (*What Is Art?* 76). But a revitalized and moral art would focus not on the idle preoccupations of the elite, but on the more varied interests of working people:

The life of a labouring man, with its endlessly varied forms of labour . . . his migrations, the intercourse with his employers, overseers, and companions and with men of other religions and other nationalities; his struggles with nature and with wild beasts, the associations with domestic animals, the work in the forest, on the steppe, in the field, the garden, the orchard; his intercourse with wife and children, not only as with people near and dear to him, but as with co-workers and helpers in labour, replacing him in time of need; his concern in all economic questions



... as problems of life for himself and his family; his pride in self-suppression and service to others, his pleasures of refreshment; and with all these interests permeated by a religious attitude towards these occurrences. . . . (*What Is Art?* 75–76)

Reviewing this Whitmanesque catalog of the inexhaustible plenitude of moral art after she wrote “The Bohemian Girl” and *O Pioneers!*, Cather rightly may have wondered if she had been fortunate to get a kink in her mind by reading Tolstoy.

Kitty Ayrshire is intensely interested in the “fresh emotion, never before felt by man” that Tolstoy extols in *What Is Art?* She slyly asks McKann if he agrees with Tolstoy’s exacting version of Christianity. McKann says no; he considers Tolstoy a “crank” and an “extremist” (161). Earlier in the story McKann rehearsed his own creed as he dined at the Schenley Hotel while waiting for train time. His inflexible, performative religion is both a birthright and an infallible guide to conduct:

He was born a Presbyterian, just as he was born a McKann. He sat in his pew in the First Church every Sunday, and he never missed a presbytery meeting when he was in town. His religion was not very spiritual, certainly, but it was substantial and concrete, made up of good, hard convictions and opinions. It had something to do with citizenship, with whom one ought to marry, with the coal business (in which his own name was powerful), with the Republican party, and with all majorities and established precedents. He was hostile to fads, to enthusiasms, to individualism, to all changes except in mining machinery and in methods of transportation. (148–49)

His outright rejection of Tolstoy’s valuation of the fresh and the new affronts Kitty:

Your morality seems to me the compromise of cowardice. . . . When righteousness becomes alive and burning, you hate it as much as you do beauty. You want a little of each in your life perhaps—adulterated, sterilized, with the sting taken out. It’s true enough they are both fearsome things when they get loose in the world; they don’t, often. (161)

She continues, “You are naturally afraid of everything new, just as I naturally want to try everything: new people, new religions—new miseries, even. If only there were more new things—If only you were really new! I might learn something” (164–65).

Playing with her quarry like McKann might play a native trout, Kitty decides to give the coal man something to think

about, a glimpse of unadulterated beauty and righteousness without “the sting taken out.” Her challenge to “dream of me tonight” and the gold slipper that she leaves in his berth infect McKann with self-knowledge of what might have been (Siporin). The slipper is a hook in his sneering lip, “a thorn in the side of a just man” (“A Gold Slipper” 167) that rankles his imagination like the venom of a serpent or jellyfish (Wells).

III: Real and Counterfeit Art in “Her Boss”

By 1900, Tolstoy was known across Europe, Russia, and America as a bearded holy man, a crotchety saint. “So commanding was his moral stature,” write Andrew Kaufman and Erika Koss, “that leading statesmen, activists, and artists from across the globe wrote . . . and visited him at Yasnaya Polyana in search of spiritual illumination. Some said there were two tsars in Russia’s late nineteenth century, Nikolai II and Leo Tolstoy—and that Tolstoy was the more respected of the two” (5–6).

Even after his death in November 1910, Americans facing moral cruxes asked, “What would Tolstoy do?” The painter Frederick A. Demmler, Cather’s former student at Allegheny High School, struggled in 1918 to decide between military conscription and adhering to the pacifism he had adopted after reading Tolstoy’s *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* (1894). Demmler answered the draft, but only after three days’ struggle with his conscience and long talks about Tolstoy with his friend, poet Haniel Long (Long 53). Reflecting on Fred’s decision, Long remarked dryly, “Only the best go to the cannons. . . . Fred Demmler went” (55–58). Fred exchanged a relatively safe assignment as a camouflage painter to lead a machine gun team into combat because he said he did not want another man to die in his place (Miller). Demmler died of shrapnel wounds in Belgium on All Saints Day, about two weeks before the Armistice (Long 60). Given Tolstoy’s fame, even in wartime, Cather could have counted on the editors of New York and Boston magazines as well as many of their readers to recognize “Her Boss” as a tribute to *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

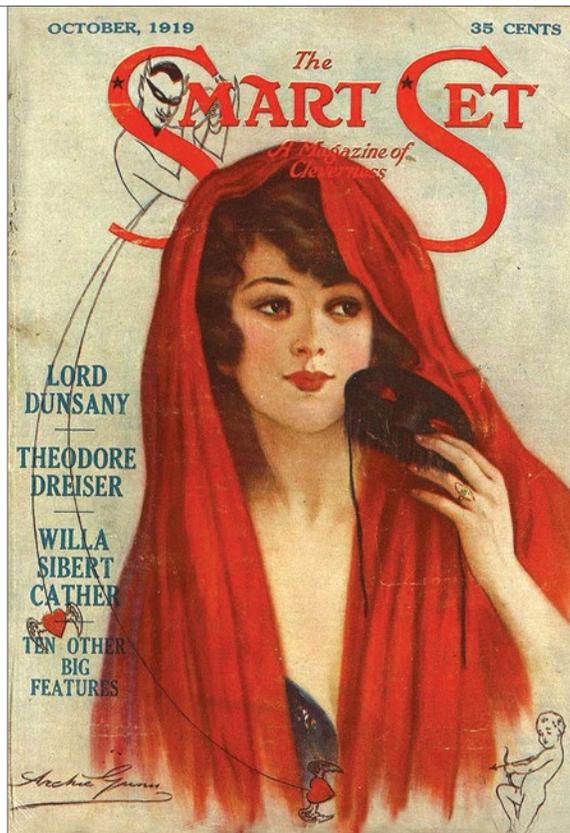
Tolstoy’s novella is the story of a midlevel Saint Petersburg judge whose upward mobility is interrupted by a fall from a stepladder while hanging curtains in his new townhouse. The pain from the bump that he suffered in the fall does not fade as expected, for it has unmasked something more malign—an incurable disorder of the kidneys. Before long, Ilyich is bedfast and in terrible pain. His wife hires a series of expensive specialists from Saint Petersburg who dispense contradictory diagnoses



and conflicting treatments, to little effect. Meanwhile, the sick man is shunned by his friends and colleagues, who in their secret hearts are pleased that his misfortune will advance their own careers. But what disturbs Ilyich most is the refusal of his family and doctors to admit what he knows—that he is dying (Gawande 2). He wants to be coddled and pitied like a sick child, but his family clings to the false hope that the next doctor will pull a curative rabbit from his hat. Only one person acknowledges Ivan’s fears, offers genuine sympathy, and cheerfully performs services that ease his pain—the peasant youth Gerasim. When Ilyich discovers that he can ease his terrible pain by resting his legs on Gerasim’s shoulders, the young peasant cheerfully sits up all night for that purpose, reasoning, “Why should I grudge a little trouble?” Gerasim hopes that when he is similarly afflicted, someone will offer such kindness to him (Gawande 1–3, 99–100; *Death of Ivan Ilyich* 27).

The characters and plot of “Her Boss” closely parallel *Ivan Ilyich*. Paul Wanning also was driven to succeed because he married an acquisitive woman. Wanning’s career (at age sixty) is cut short by a kidney disorder, as was Ilyich’s at forty-five. Although a kidney specialist gives Wanning just months to live, his wife and three children deny this prognosis because his dying would inconvenience their summer plans. Wanning’s son Harold, a literary poseur, blusters, “Those specialists are all alarmists” and of the specialist’s prognosis, Harold snorts, “That’s the sort of thing I consider criminal” (96, 100). If men of science were to study art, they would understand that the sheer force of the human will can sustain life—with or without kidneys. Harold, of course, is an ass. Dr. Seares knows exactly what is talking about, and Cather makes the quack playwright Harold her equivalent of the quack doctors treating Ivan Ilyich.

Whereas Ilyich relies on his servant Gerasim (the butler’s assistant), Wanning unburdens his mind to his “old colored” butler Sam (98–99) and his secretary Annie Wooley (102). What Annie lacks in office skills, Robert Thacker observes, she makes



“Her Boss” was published in the *Smart Set* in October 1919.

up for in “human—as opposed to her ‘businesslike’—qualities” (131). For Annie, like Gerasim, no request is too much trouble. Her sympathy is born of lived experience of hardship. Like many of Cather’s heroines, Annie is fatherless. Her father, a commercial painter, died four months after taking a seventy-foot tumble into the East River. But the hurt father lived long enough to instill self-sufficiency in his children, and Cather makes the familiar point that exposure to illness and death usually develops a family’s capacity for sympathy. “Annie and her family did not consider illness or any of its hard facts vulgar or indecent,” she writes. “It had its place in their scheme of life, as it had not in that of Wanning’s friends” (104). This gulf of experience is what Atul Gawande

in *Being Mortal* calls “the chasm of perspective between those who have to contend with life’s fragility and those who don’t” (99). Wanning’s cronies at his club, his partners at the law office, even his immediate family, avoid acknowledging life’s fragility by dispensing pep talk or by avoiding him:

[Annie] was the only person to whom he had talked about his illness who had been frank and honest with him, who had looked at him with eyes that concealed nothing. When he broke the news of his condition to his partners that morning, they shut him off as if he were uttering indecent ravings. All day they had met him with a hurried, abstracted manner. (102)

Equally unhelpful is Harold, whose parlor dramas, one of which is titled “The Street Walker,” exploit “the grimmest and most depressing matters, but he himself was always agreeable, and he insisted upon high cheerfulness as the correct tone of human intercourse” (100). As one of the artistic “boys’ of his set,” Harold has enjoyed a carefree, extended adolescence financed by his tolerant father and doting mother. He cannot look realistically at his father’s case, lacking the sincerity and imagination needed to step across Gawande’s “chasm of perspective.”

Wanning himself understands his illness, accepts his doctor’s prognosis, and recognizes that his time is short. His only worry is how to prepare his fashionable daughters, foolish son, and



acquisitive wife to survive without his salary. Fortunately, he has a last project to occupy his mind. Wanning combats his periodic depressions by reviving his youthful aspiration to be “a literary lawyer.” Cather writes, “In his youth Wanning had hankered for the pen. . . . His illness seemed to bring back to him the illusions with which he left college” (103).

Putting aside other work, Wanning decides he will write “not only the story of his life, but an expression of all his theories and opinions, and a commentary on the fifty years of events which he could remember. . . . He meant to publish the work handsomely, at his own expense and under his own name” (103). But being out of practice at the manual labor of writing longhand, Wanning finds it necessary to dictate to a stenographer. He chooses the cheerful novice Annie Wooley over the curt, professional Miss Doane, a choice viewed as “irregular” in the office. He finds that dictating to Annie allows him a more expansive style, and learns that, as Tolstoy predicted, rendering past events into his own language allows him to relive these experiences with their original intensity:

Like many another business man Wanning had relied so long on stenographers that the operation of writing with a pen had become laborious to him. When he undertook it, he wanted to cut everything short. But walking up and down his private office, with the strong afternoon sun pouring in at his windows, a fresh air stirring, all the people and boats moving restlessly down there, he could say things he wanted to say. It was like living his life over again. (103–4)

Though Wanning’s situation is not enviable, it has compensations: freedom to work at his own pace, an appealing workspace when the office windows are opened, and a congenial stenographer as a companion. Most important to his development as an artist, with nothing to lose, he has absolute sincerity, which Tolstoy thought the chief determinant of the “degree of infectiousness” which is “the sole measure of excellence in art” (*What Is Art?* 153). Wanning has no patience for baroque phrases or striking mannerisms. He is writing for himself and a few others: Annie Wooley and a friend of his young adulthood, the Wyoming rancher D. E. Brown (an avatar of Cather’s preferred first reader, her brother Roscoe, who lived in Lander, not far from Wyoming’s Wind River Range) (Madigan 338).

Absorbed by his own emotions, Wanning is at first surprised at the effect his words have on Annie:

Wanning’s thoughts were fixed on the trout streams and the great silver-firs in the canyons of the Wind River Mountains, when he was disturbed by a

soft, repeated sniffing. He looked out between his fingers. Little Annie, carried away by his eloquence, was fairly panting to make dots and dashes fast enough, and she was sopping her eyes with an unrepresentable, end-of-the-day handkerchief. . . .

Why was she crying? What did it matter to her? He was a man who said good-morning to her, who sometimes took an hour of the precious few she had left at the end of the day and then complained about her bad spelling. (101)

Annie’s receptivity to his emotions, conveyed through his dictation, is exactly what the sick man needs. Annie does not hide her response behind professional reserve. Hired as his amanuensis, her role expands to private nurse, occupational therapist, and paid companion. She is his Gerasim, for whom no request is too much trouble.

“When she was there,” Cather writes, “Wanning felt as if there were someone who cared whether this was a good or a bad day with him. [His butler] Old Sam, too, was like that. While the old black man put him to bed and made him comfortable, Wanning could talk to him as he talked to little Annie. Even if he dwelt upon his illness, in plain terms, in detail, he did not feel as if he were imposing on them” (104). Old Sam listens carefully to his boss, enquires about his symptoms, and commiserates that a temperate man like Mr. Wanning does not deserve trouble from his kidneys.

Cather contrasts Wanning’s plain style, the sincerity of his voice, with the literary affectations of his foppish son Harold. The degree of an artwork’s infectiousness, synonymous with its excellence according to Tolstoy, depends on three qualities: “individuality,” “clearness,” and “sincerity” (*What Is Art?* 153). Of the three, sincerity is hardest to attain and is what Harold lacks most. Wanning expects that Harold will despise his father’s plain style and lack of ornament, in words that mirror Tolstoy’s distinction between the “real” and the “counterfeit” in art:

[Wanning] had the happiest convictions about the clear-cut style he was developing and his increasing felicity in phrasing. . . . He rather enjoyed the thought of how greatly disturbed Harold would be. He and Harold differed in their estimates of books. All the solid works which made up Wanning’s library, Harold considered beneath contempt. Anybody, he said, could do that sort of thing. (103)

In counterpoint to Wanning’s real art, Harold’s counterfeit plays, written for an elite audience, are derivative, opaque, and insincere (*What Is Art?* 155).



Wanning's project gives him comfort and diversion, but he fails to anticipate its threat to Annie's good name. Early on, he speaks to Annie's family and her young man friend to secure their approval of the extra duty he is asking of her, but Wanning refuses to explain himself at the law office. He knows his gossiping senior partner Alec McQuiston suspects something untoward, but he thinks that the thousand dollars he plans to leave Annie will set things right.

As July turns to September, the end comes quickly: Wanning dies after eight days. His book is left unfinished, and Cather does not mention the fate of his manuscript, but we can imagine it has fallen into Harold's hands. Scandal-loving McQuiston convinces Harold that his father had been having an affair with Annie; the two conspire to cheat her of Wanning's gift, and McQuiston dismisses Annie from the firm. On her way out, Annie gives McQuiston a piece of her mind, but she reserves judgment on her dead boss. At home, Annie's façade breaks as she tells her friend Willy and her mother about her dismissal. Although Cather did not share Tolstoy's conviction that art must serve a moral purpose, she seems to tip her hat to him by ending "Her Boss" with an ecumenical scene of forgiveness. Willy bristles at what he sees as Wanning's betrayal of a promise: "Rich is tight. There's no exceptions." But Annie's clear, individual, and sincere response becomes an artful epitaph for her boss and a nod to the Russian moralist: "I didn't want anything out of him. He was a nice, kind man, and he had his troubles, I guess. He wasn't tight" (108).

In his 2001 reappraisal of S. S. McClure's *My Autobiography*, Thacker reads "Her Boss" as a fictive recasting of Cather's affectionate regard for her own deeply flawed boss. Having been forced out of the magazine bearing his name, McClure in the summer of 1912 had written to Cather admitting his financial crises. He asked if she would assist him in writing a series of autobiographical articles that he could sell to *McClure's*, articles that would eventually become the book *My Autobiography*. Willingly taking up the task she would later assign Annie Wooley, Cather pledged her services free of charge, as a gift of friendship. At the time, she joked that she didn't know if she was his ideal collaborator, but she could save McClure "the expense of a good stenographer anyway" (Cather to McClure June 12 [1912]; *Complete Letters* no. 0235; Thacker 128). Just as Annie would for Paul Wanning, over a series of weekly meetings (Woodress estimates the eight weeks of June and July of 1913), Cather shaped McClure's dictation of his life to the page (248). She came to look forward to the rigor of these sessions, and McClure, according to Edith Lewis, "never forgot the deep pleasure of this experience—the story of

telling the story of his bitter struggles and his splendid triumphs to someone with an ear and an imagination for all it meant to him" (Lewis 71–72, Thacker 129). Cather was impressed by McClure's straightforward honesty (see *Complete Letters* no. 0283), an honesty she replicated in Paul Wanning. Lewis also recalled that McClure "used to come down to 5 Bank Street . . . and walk up and down the room, talking it to her. I do not think she made many notes; when he was gone, she would write down what he had said" (71–72, Thacker 129). Cather knew even less shorthand than did Annie Wooley. Trusting her capacious memory, the next day she transcribed McClure's speech in longhand, recreating his cadences and characteristic phrases (Woodress 248). Like Annie Wooley, she was gifted in sympathy as well as considerable art. Thacker argues that *My Autobiography* was "a signal act" for Cather as well as McClure, for it gave her extended practice in male-voiced autobiography, an "experiment" she told Will Owen Jones she was eager to try again in *My Antonia* (Thacker 124, *Complete Letters* no. 0462). Both texts, Thacker concludes, convey "a sense of intimacy based on *feelings shared* between two people over the same experiences and associations . . . of long connection and intimate friendship" (128; emphasis added). Were he alive, Tolstoy may have agreed these were ideal circumstances for the gestation of art.

My Antonia, of course, is the story of childhood friends who communicate through emotion even before they share a common language. The novel's introduction is not just a distancing device common to Russian and French authors, as Cather told Will Owen Jones (*Complete Letters* no. 0462), but also contrasts Jim's sincere, unaffected narrative with the counterfeit enthusiasms of his fashionable wife. As Thacker argues, the sincere, personal style of Jim Burden, a novice "literary lawyer," is cut from the same cloth as S. S. McClure's and Paul Wanning's autobiographies. Perhaps Cather had more than a "long talk" with Leo Tolstoy. Perhaps she could say of the Russian holy man, "You really are a part of me."

I am grateful to Matthew Hodges, Diane Prenatt, Bob Thacker, and Nalini Bhushan for their careful reading of early versions of this essay.

NOTES

1. In her introduction to *Uncle Valentine and Other Stories*, Bernice Slote observes that Paul Wanning's temperament and family dynamic prefigure those of Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor's House* (xv–xvi).



2. There are few clues to the fictive present of “A Gold Slipper.” The debate on the Pullman occurs five years before McKann’s death. The story is set some years after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Another clue to the time of the setting is Kitty’s electric taxicab, which were common in American cities, including Pittsburgh, in the 1910s.

3. Because Kitty toured Russia (as recalled in “Scandal”) it is plausible within this fictive universe that she met Tolstoy in his own country, as Jane Addams did in 1896 (Gibbon). In “Scandal,” Pierce Tevis confides a rumor he heard in Russia that Kitty had an eight-year-old son living in St. Petersburg from a liaison with Grand Duke Paul (*Youth and the Bright Medusa* 179–80). Mark Madigan discusses the various prototypes of Kitty Ayrshire, several of whom were rumored to have had affairs with Russian noblemen. Sibyl Sanderson, in particular, was betrothed to marry “Count Paul Tolstoi, a cousin of the novelist,” but she died of pneumonia before the ceremony could take place (341).

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“The End Is Nothing”: Death in Domestic Spaces in “Old Mrs. Harris” and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*

Matthew Hodges and Diane Prenatt

Willa Cather’s early reading of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) remained a touchstone throughout much of her writing life. As Bernice Slote notes, Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1878) received “some of Cather’s highest praise for a single novel,” and as early as 1891, in the *Lasso*, the campus literary magazine Cather helped edit in her first year at the University of Nebraska, she recorded her disappointment that Tolstoy had repudiated such imaginative work to devote himself to ascetic Christianity and social justice (*The Kingdom of Art* 377). She continued to argue against his newfound moralism in the *Nebraska State Journal* in 1896: “If God is at all a literary God,” she claims, “*Anna Karenina* will certainly do more toward saving its author’s soul” than “mak[ing] pea soup for Russian peasants” (reprinted in *The World and the Parish* 292). In 1922, Cather wrote to H. L. Mencken that “I . . . still sometimes wonder, whether my mind had got a kink put in it by the four shorter novels of Tolstoi, ‘Anna Karenina’, ‘The Cossacks’, ‘Ivan Ilyitch’, and ‘The Kreutzer Sonata’, which, in paper bindings and indifferent English, fell into my hands when I was about fourteen. For about three years I read them all the time, backward and forward” (*Complete Letters* no. 0577). In the same year, in her most important essay on writing, “The Novel Demeublé,” Cather singled out Tolstoy for praise as a realist who was “a lover of material things” like food, clothing, and furniture, but whose descriptions of those things in domestic space—“the haunting interiors of those old Moscow houses”—transcended mere “literalness” to inhabit “the emotional penumbra” of his characters (47–48).

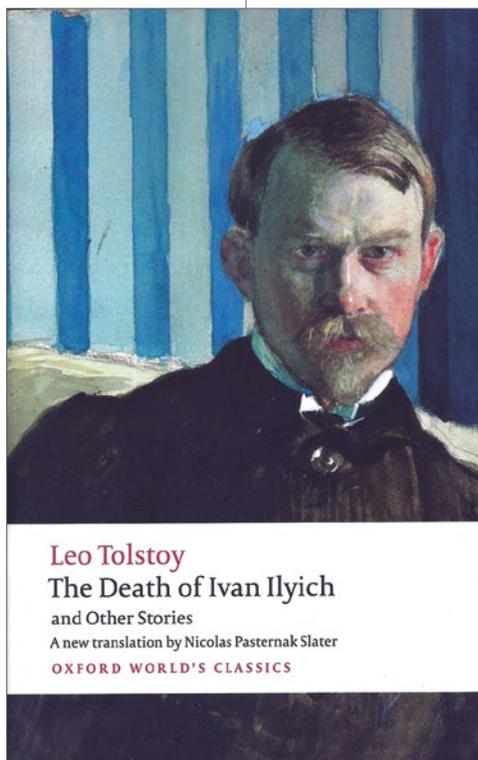
As David Stouck has shown, Tolstoy was chief among several Russian writers who exerted a “Slavic influence” (4) on Cather’s fiction.¹ Tolstoy, along with Turgenev, Lermontov, and Gogol, provided a model for Cather of “the artistic

treatment of great continental plains” (8) peopled with “a folk” living in relation to a peasant tradition (10).² Stouck contends that Tolstoy’s influence is evident not only in the landscapes and the ethnic characters of Cather’s early short stories and her Nebraska novels, but that Tolstoy’s deep belief in the spirituality of art informs such later novels as *The Professor’s House* (1925) and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) (17).

It is not entirely surprising, then, that Cather’s beautiful late story, “Old Mrs. Harris” (1932), should bear some meaningful relation to a Tolstoy novella that Cather read as a young girl—namely *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, published in 1886, when so much of his fiction had become didactic and moralizing. Both works depict death unflinchingly, with its attendant physical and existential suffering; central to both is the idea that death is but the sequel to life—that one dies as one has lived—and that to confront one’s mortality is to grow in the awareness of this truth. The deaths of Ivan Ilyich and Mrs. Harris occur in complex socioeconomic contexts of middle-class aspiration and

class consciousness, financial exigency, and normative community surveillance. Their deaths occur at home, expanding the social and cultural value attached to the domestic space they occupy and reflecting the historical realities of medical practice. Both stories, masterpieces of social realism, translate the mundane materials of everyday life into a philosophical reflection on the human condition; and both represent the moral obligation for caregiving and compassion.

Through different narrative structures, both Cather’s and Tolstoy’s stories compress the trajectory of the biological and social life cycle into fewer than one hundred pages. One of Cather’s most autobiographical stories,³ written at a time, as Ann Romines defines it, when Cather “became acutely attuned to the coming of age in her own life story” (“Willa



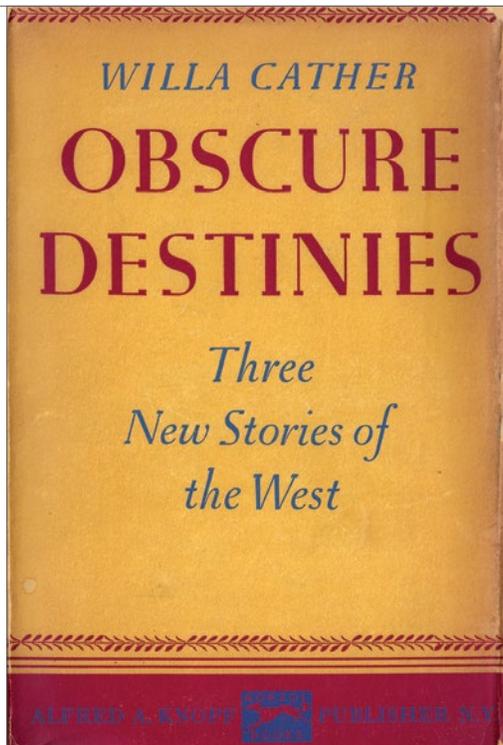
2015 Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*.



Cather” 396), “Old Mrs. Harris” paints a portrait of three generations of women in the Templeton family, a genteel southern family who has relocated to the frontier town of Skyline, Colorado. These three characters are positioned at different points in the arc of late nineteenth-century women’s lives and “experience their adjacent crises of aging, each alone” (“Willa Cather” 409): the youngest, fifteen-year-old Vickie Templeton, self-absorbed, intent upon entering college and escaping the constraints of family life; her mother, Victoria Templeton, no longer the courted belle, struggling with the burdens of middle-aged motherhood; and Victoria’s mother, Mrs. Harris, the matriarch of the family, who is responsible for the practical work of housekeeping and overseeing the care of the five Templeton children. By the end of the story, these three women will have moved forward to the ticking biological clock, Vickie on her way to the University of Michigan, Victoria unhappily pregnant with her sixth child, and Mrs. Harris dead of the illnesses of hard work and old age.

Ivan Ilyich Golovin’s death at the age of forty-five, on February 4, 1882, is announced at the beginning of Tolstoy’s novella; his life, seen through flashback, forms the plot. The middle son of a civil servant who climbs the ladder of professional success in the ministry of justice, Ivan Ilyich is driven not by the pursuit of justice in the course of his legal career and only superficially by the kind of family relationships that are so integral to Cather’s story, but by his appropriation of the bourgeois lifestyle which his profession affords him. He is ambitious for success marked by influence and salary rather than for value-centered accomplishment; even his wife and children serve only as appurtenances of his social status. Tolstoy’s story is a critique of middle-class materialism, a reflection on the emptiness of lifestyle to which meaningful work and relationship have been sacrificed. The story chronicles Ivan Ilyich’s early education, his first professional position (obtained for him by his father), the subsequent promotions that support his increasingly expensive lifestyle, his marriage, and the births (and deaths) of his children. It ends in his wretched death of a misdiagnosed and inappropriately treated injury (or perhaps an illness precipitated by that injury).

In both works, the meaning of the title characters’ lives and deaths is conveyed in terms of the domestic space they occupy. The Templeton home and the Golovin home register the socioeconomic status of their occupants and generate the



Dustjacket to the August 1932 first edition of *Obscure Destinies*, which marked the first publication of “Old Mrs. Harris.” The story was serialized as “Three Women” in the September, October, and November 1932 issues of *Ladies’ Home Journal*.

tension that develops the plot, which not only concerns the title characters’ behavior as they live out their lives and face death, but the exercise of empathy and compassion toward them by others. The deaths of the title characters are not dramatic surprises in these stories; rather they become the occasion for philosophical and spiritual reflection.

In the Templetons’ Skyline home, the rigid division between the physical spaces of the kitchen and the parlor is modeled on the division of domestic space in the antebellum South, the way of living “back with us,” as Mrs. Harris puts it (73), that delineates women’s generational roles. Cather depicts the kitchen and Grandma Harris’s adjacent room as utilitarian in contrast to the parlor, which is meant for pleasure. “The kitchen was hot and empty, full of the

untempered afternoon sun” (66). Her room, which doubles as the children’s playroom, is “a hideous, cluttered room, furnished with a rocking-horse, a sewing machine, an empty baby-buggy,” an oilcloth-covered box with a tin basin for a washstand, her bed with its “thin mattress,” and a sawed-down chair “on which her darning basket usually stood” (69–70). In contrast to the makeshift, cast-off nature of the back room, in the front of the house, “the parlour was neat and comfortable” with “a faded, respectable Brussels carpet . . . a few easy chairs, and no hideous ornaments about” (96–97). Cather clarifies the distinction between the occupants of the parlor and those of the kitchen, stating that “Mrs. Harris, and the other women of her age who managed their daughter’s house, kept in the background. . . . They left the front porch and the parlour to the young married couple and their young friends; the old women spent most of their lives in the kitchen and pantries” (110). The Southern division of space between the front rooms and back rooms establishes a social foreground and background, a hierarchical structure different from that of a modest New England house, for example, in which the parlor and kitchen are traditionally divided by a democratic central hall, as Judith Fryer has pointed out in her analysis of Edith Wharton’s novel *Ethan Frome* (189).

The Templeton kitchen is the place of physical labor and production, and Mrs. Harris’s day is dictated entirely by the needs of the family. She wakes at dawn to wash and dress, then



prepares breakfast for the children before they go to school and for Mr. and Mrs. Templeton, who eat together later. She cares for the children after school and, at the end of the day, she prepares supper for the family, taking her place at the dining room table only after everyone else has eaten and left. She oversees the bound girl Mandy's dishwashing and sweeping; presumably the two do all the other household cleaning. In the evening, in her own back room, she darns clothes and entertains the children by reading to them. Her work in the back rooms ensures the welfare of the children and allows her daughter to enjoy herself socially, going to women's card parties and to the downtown ice cream parlor with her husband. In the front of the Templeton house, the parlor is Victoria's domain, where she and her guests are served by Mrs. Harris.

This, for Mrs. Harris, is respectability, which she values "above personal comfort"; despite the family's financial hardship—"the family went on increasing and Mr. Templeton's means went on decreasing"—"she could go on a good way yet if they always had a cool pleasant parlour, with Victoria properly dressed to receive visitors" (113). The Templetons' southern social model is one the narrator calls "feudal" (112), but it also corresponds to the socioeconomic model of capitalist society proposed by Karl Marx in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1857). Marx divided society into two fundamental components: the base and the superstructure. The base of society is concerned with material production, ensuring that the goods and services necessary for life remain in reliable supply. The superstructure of society consists of processes and behaviors not directly related to production, including (but not limited to) art, religion, media, politics, government, and philosophy. Marx asserted that while both sectors are capable of shaping the other, the predominant relationship is that the base enables the activities of the superstructure and the superstructure in turn develops according to the activity of the base. Thus, as Raymond Williams clarifies it, "piano-maker is base, but pianist superstructure" (n.p.). In the Templeton home, Mrs. Harris is not idly in the background; she manages the entire household from her position in the back. The incessant and uncomplaining attention to food and clothing by Mrs. Harris and Mandy (the base) allows for the rest of the Templeton family to hold circuses, attend an ice cream social, study for college exams, shop, and solemnly bury a cat, the kinds of activities—entertainment, education, and religion—that Marx defines as functions of the superstructure.

The formalized space of the Golovin home, too, declares the family's respectability, not in terms of the division of the space but in what it contains. In Tolstoy's novella, a specious respectability is achieved through the performance of a bourgeois lifestyle in which material environment and decorous behavior are "*comme il faut*"—as it should be. Having achieved his wished-for professional status, Ivan Ilyich "no longer adhered to any ministry, tendency, or kind of activity . . . but he had to have five thousand [rubles]" (17). Ivan Ilyich becomes preoccupied, almost obsessed, with demonstrating his worth by appearing *comme il faut*. He sets out to curate his house to advertise that he is a man of means and influence: "Ivan Ilyich himself took up the decoration, chose the wallpaper, bought furniture, especially antiques, which he had upholstered in an especially *comme il faut* style. . . . Looking at the as yet unfinished drawing room, he already saw the fireplace, the screen, the whatnot, and those little chairs scattered around, those dishes and plates on the walls, and the bronzes, when they were all put in place" (18).

Ivan Ilyich is a creature of the superstructure: that he produces nothing of utilitarian value is part of Tolstoy's critique of the bureaucratic middle class. His career in the law was initially gratifying to him; as legal reforms swept through Russia, he was one of the "new people" whose expertise was needed (11). But increasingly, he is gratified that "everyone, without exception, the most important, the most self-satisfied people—everyone was in his hands" (11). Ever ambitious, he becomes a caricature of the typical bureaucrat. As a prosecutor and judge, he flits from one



Count Tolstoy—wife—son and dog

"Count Tolstoy, wife, son, and dog," 1870–90, photographer unknown. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, control no. 95502975.



post to the next, not doing (or producing) anything particularly important but always making a comfortable salary: “during recesses he smoked, drank tea, conversed a little about politics, a little about general matters, a little about cards, and most of all about promotions” (20). His friendships are instrumental only, as is his marriage: “In order to fulfill one’s duty, that is, to lead a decent life approved of by society, one had to work out a certain attitude [toward one’s marriage] as one did to one’s work,” he realizes (14). By the time he secures his five-thousand-ruble position, his chief occupation is conspicuous consumption, thirteen years before Thorstein Veblen coined the term in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899).

Ivan Ilyich accomplishes his social purpose in outfitting his house: “it all grew, grew and approached that ideal he had formed for himself” (18). His home will be interpreted as he intends; he has studied the *comme il faut* look. He willingly submits himself to bourgeois normativity. The irony, as the narrator observes, is that his house “was the same as with all people who are not exactly rich, but who want to resemble the rich, and for that reason only resemble each other: damasks, ebony, flowers, carpets, and bronzes, dark and gleaming—all that all people of a certain kind acquire in order to resemble all people of a certain kind” (19).

This is what Veblen called “pecuniary emulation,” the practice of spending money to imitate one’s social betters, enacting “the desire of every one to excel every one else in the accumulation of goods” (21). Ivan Ilyich knows how to play this game; it is only at death’s door that he will discover it is a game no one can win. The Templeton home—and therefore the family, with its generationally defined women’s roles that support the

home—is also subject to a normative gaze, that of the Skyline residents who know nothing of the regional culture in which the Templetons’ domestic life is based. The Templetons are judged by neighbors like Mrs. Jackson according to criteria the family doesn’t understand. Unlike Ivan Ilyich, who is expert at reading the room, so to speak, Victoria Templeton constantly feels “hurt without knowing just why,” conscious of “thrusts from the outside which she couldn’t understand” (107). Even the little Templeton boys “realized that their household was somehow a queer one” (94). The surveillance of Skyline is a function of its identity as “a snappy little Western democracy” (112) that has rejected the aristocratic or feudal hierarchies that continued to define social relations in the South of the Templetons—which have, as Ann Romines points out, “fostered Victoria’s cruel self-absorption and permitted the exploitation of the dying Mrs. Harris” (“Admiring” 280). This western town represents a cultural shift in which much of Cather’s fiction participates, as Julie Olin-Ammentorp has recently discussed: the tendency, as the United States expanded westward, to view the “rough” West—as opposed to the “genteel” Eastern Seaboard—as the “real” America (154). One aspect of this new real and democratic America was the apparent effacement of social class; another was the newfound agency of women, who exerted themselves energetically and independently within the household and without, as did the “brisk housekeepers” of Skyline (112), who belonged to the Ladies’ Aid Society and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union.

Mrs. Rosen alerts us to the anomaly the Templeton household poses in Skyline through her initial observation of the rigid division of space within the home. It is through Mrs. Rosen’s eyes that we encounter the contrast between “something easy, cordial, and carefree in the parlour that never smelled of being shut up,” where “one felt a pleasantness in the human relationships” (94) and the hot kitchen. “Puzzled” (93), Mrs. Rosen notices the production, circulation, and consumption of material goods within the Templeton home, which define Mrs. Harris as a worker. She waits until Victoria leaves the house to take coffee and cake over to Mrs. Harris and sends cookies designated for her alone. She gives a torn sweater to Mrs. Harris, privately, so that she alone might use the soft yarn; Mrs. Harris “slipped it under her apron . . . and concealed it under her mattress” (81). Mrs. Rosen comes to



“IT’S THE DISTEMPER. I WISH I’D KEPT MY WORD AND NEVER HAD A CAT AGAIN!”

Illustration by Frederic A. Anderson from the October 1932 *Ladies’ Home Journal* serialization of “Three Women” (“Old Mrs. Harris”).



understand that “Victoria couldn’t bear to have anything come into the house that was not for her to dispose of” (81)—in other words, she recognizes the hierarchical female economy of the household. Her own parlor and kitchen, on the other hand, are integrated. Mrs. Harris notices that Mrs. Rosen “managed to be mistress of any situation, either in kitchen or parlour” (113). In one sense, the Rosens’ parlor, like the Templetons’ and like Ivan Ilyich’s drawing room, represents the social superstructure. With its “great many unusual books,” “engravings in pale gold frames,” “a number of water-colour sketches,” and “deep chairs . . . upholstered in dark blue velvet” (87), the Rosen parlor functions as a hub for learning, the arts, and social exchange; “it was the nearest thing to an art gallery and a museum that the Templetons had ever seen” (87).

But unlike the “dark and gleaming” items of pecuniary emulation that Ivan Ilyich displays, the objects in the Rosen parlor bear witness to an authentic cultural life. The Rosens have read deeply in the German, French, and English books on their shelves, and some of the watercolors “were made in Italy by Mr. Rosen himself when he was a boy” (87–88); in fact, these objects exist in the Rosens’ “emotional penumbra,” to use the phrase Cather applied to Tolstoy’s material world. The Rosen kitchen is fully functional, yet unlike the Templeton kitchen, it is “shining” (86), “in a state of such perfection as the Templetons were unable to sense or admire” (89) with “beautiful dishes” (86) and a floor “like a marble pavement” (65).

It is Mrs. Jackson, that snappiest of democratic Skyline housewives, who delivers the critique that works as a “poison” (107) on Mrs. Templeton at the Methodist ice cream social. When Victoria accepts Mrs. Jackson’s offer of a piece of Mrs. Harris’s coconut cake, and Mrs. Jackson remarks, “I don’t know but I’d like my cakes, if I kept somebody in the kitchen to bake them for me” (106), her remark points to the difference in labor relations between the Templeton home and the rest of Skyline. Mrs. Jackson’s meanness isn’t rooted in class envy, despite her implication that Mrs. Harris is a kitchen servant (she is not equally rude to the sophisticated Rosens, for instance); rather, Mrs. Jackson reveals her animus when she states that she does not “forget I had a cook-stove, like Mrs. Templeton” (106). In a community where the women bake the cakes they bring to socials, where those who participate in social affairs are also intrinsically linked to the labor that enables them, Victoria is an anomaly. She does not bake the Templeton cake; she does not even carry it to the social. Instead, Mrs. Harris bakes the cake (as she bakes and cooks everything else for the family) and Vickie takes it over to the Holliday place. Victoria graces the ice cream social in her beautiful dress and with her lovely manners, socially fronting the Templeton family as she might in their parlor at home. Mrs. Jackson criticizes Victoria’s separation from labor as something contrary to the democratic domestic culture of Skyline. To do your own work

as a housewife—to shake out your own rugs in your curling-kids and to bake your own cake for the social—is the new western America. Little Francie Maude, enjoying the ice cream social with her betters, would recognize that it is “how folks do” (104). It is *comme il faut*.

Like the Methodist ice cream social, Ivan Ilyich’s social events are performative. He gave “little dinners, to which he invited ladies and gentlemen of important social position . . . similarly to the way such people usually pass the time, just as his drawing room was similar to all other drawing rooms” (21). Dinners, card parties, and teas in the Golovin home are performances of the way “life ought to go: easily, pleasantly, and decently” (20). The stage for those performances begins to preoccupy Ivan Ilyich to the exclusion of his professional work: “During [court] sessions he had moments of distraction: he was pondering what sort of cornices to have for the curtains, straight or festooned” (19). And he has his own problems with cakes: intent on impressing guests at an evening party, he insists on purchasing “cakes and sweets” from “an expensive pastry shop” (presumably rather than having them made at home) and is then so upset because “there were cakes left over and the bill from the pastry shop was for forty-five roubles” that he quarrels with his wife to the point that he “said something about divorce” (21).

Importantly, in “Old Mrs. Harris” and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, the depiction of domestic space in the context of social norms is tied to the development of community empathy. In “Old Mrs. Harris,” the Skyline housekeepers—who “had no charm, no gentleness of manner, were like hard little machines, most of them; and some were grasping and narrow” (94)—and “the hard old money-grubbers on Main Street” (95) cannot see themselves in the Templetons, who remain isolated in the community. Only the Rosens bridge the cultural divide to discern that the family’s “feelings were so much finer than their way of living” (93), that the children are really sweet and courteous despite the mess they make playing in the yard, and that Vickie is an interesting, hardworking child even if she seems “so dense, so utterly unperceptive” (92). It is Mr. Rosen—not American-born, a Jew at a Methodist social—who empathetically registers the cruelty and stupidity of Mrs. Jackson’s cutting remark to Victoria Templeton.

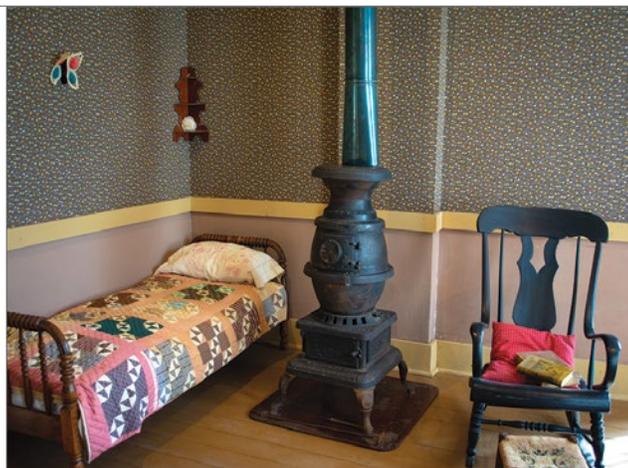
Unlike the Templetons, who were always considered somewhat “other” from the rest of Skyline, Ivan Ilyich is only expelled from his community once he no longer conforms to social norms in appearance or behavior. The friendships he might have formed in the course of his work are only professional, not personal; he begins “separating the official side, not mixing it with his real life” (20) and his status in court and parlor declines as his undetermined illness worsens, the consequence of an injury he suffered falling from a ladder while “show[ing] the uncomprehending upholsterer how he wanted the drapery done” (19). Much like antique furniture and bronzes, good



health in the world of Ivan Ilyich is *comme il faut*. The tether between social status and health is exemplified in Ivan's colleague Schwartz, who "especially irritated him with his playfulness, vitality, and *comme il faut*-ishness, which reminded Ivan Ilyich of himself ten years ago" (27). As his illness progresses and his body weakens, his meticulously arranged drawing room falls into disarray. A table is scratched by the metal decoration on a carelessly handled album, "here a torn page, there some photographs turned upside down"; and Ivan Ilyich in his illness is unable to restore order to the drawing room "for the arrangement of which he had sacrificed his life" (34). Ivan Ilyich, who has strived to comport with social norms—to be, in fact, their exemplar—suddenly feels "all the weakness of what he was defending. And there was nothing to defend" (50). Instead of being seen by his colleagues as an equal, he is viewed as "someone who would soon have to vacate his post" (27). In this space, where so many relationships are estranged—by the disapprobation of the community and the self-absorption of other family members in "Old Mrs. Harris" and by Ivan Ilyich's failure to develop family bonds and genuine friendships—the exercise of compassion falls to the servants, Marx's base.

The context of exercising compassion in "Old Mrs. Harris" and *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is more significant than the behavior itself. On the surface, the therapeutic acts in both texts are very similar. Mandy massages Mrs. Harris's legs with warm water; the peasant manservant Gerasim elevates Ivan Ilyich's legs onto his own shoulders. Gerasim and Mandy share a number of traits: both are social subordinates in the household, simple yet perceptive, capable laborers. The acts they perform share a common therapeutic function. Elevating and massaging the legs relieve painful swelling caused by venous congestion. The two texts depict similar acts performed by similar characters for similar reasons. Yet Gerasim raising Ivan's legs is explicitly an act of pity and Mandy massaging Mrs. Harris's legs is "one of the oldest rites of compassion" (80).

The setting and understanding of the characters involved distinguishes compassion from pity. Mandy's act of compassion toward Mrs. Harris occurs in the kitchen, in the part of the Templeton home designated for labor where the two commonly work together. This location is functional and intentional: the



Grandmother Boak's room, "rather like a passage-way," in the newly restored Childhood Home. The character of Mrs. Harris was based on Rachel Seibert Boak, Cather's maternal grandmother. Photograph by Tracy Tucker.

pair stays in the kitchen because "Victoria didn't like anybody slopping about" (79). Both characters are exhausted from a day of shared work, both are accustomed to the same lifestyle, and the act comes together silently as a gesture of healing through shared understanding. The therapeutic act in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* occurs in Ivan Ilyich's overdecorated rooms where the rustic peasant Gerasim is out of his element. Equally out of place is all the illness-related "slopping

about" that occurs surrounded by Ivan Ilyich's chic drapes and antique knickknacks. "Special arrangements were also made for his stools," for example, with their "uncleanliness, indecency, and smell" (35). These tasks are performed in a space that was never intended for labor, by a laborer for the benefit of someone who is a stranger to this sort of work.

Cather draws a clear line between pity and compassion. For Mrs. Harris, pity is a tragedy to be avoided at all costs. In her eyes, "to be pitied was the deepest hurt anybody could know" (83). Ivan Ilyich, on the other hand, craves pity in a way that is almost primal. Far from viewing pity as "the deepest hurt," Ivan Ilyich "wanted most of all . . . to be pitied by someone like a sick child. He wanted to be caressed, kissed, wept over, as children are caressed and comforted" (38). Moreover, mere one-size-fits-all pity wasn't sufficient. It is "tormenting" to Ivan that "no one pitied him as he wanted to be pitied" (38). This is consistent with Ivan Ilyich's established inability to reconcile the universality of suffering with his own perceived exceptionality. Pity soothes the ego and reminds him that he, Ivan, is still special. Mrs. Harris has no desire to be coddled or infantilized, nor does she have any desire to feel singled out or different. Like Tolstoy, Cather highlights singularity as a prerequisite of pity. Cather even roughly equates "unusual" and "pitiful," implying that in order to be pitied, one must be in an exceptionally lamentable position. Mrs. Harris considers her lot in life to be "not exceptional, but perfectly regular" and her aging, suffering, and dying to be simply the human lot (109). In fact, the aging of Mrs. Harris is normalized and her aching feet, damaged by work, are like the feet of all old workers. "Nobody did anything about broken arches in those days, and the common endurance test of old age was to keep going after every step cost something" (114). Mrs. Harris knows she is not the first old woman to have aching feet and she will not be the last, just as she knows the signs of her approaching death. However, Mrs. Harris does not ignore the suffering brought about by aging and dying, either. She is aware of the process, and it is awareness that shapes how she dies and how she experiences compassion.

Mrs. Harris tells her grandchildren, distraught over their cat's death from distemper, "Everything that's alive has got to suffer" (118). The *Caius* syllogism in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is the moral equivalent of her statement. Throughout his dying process Ivan struggles with a basic logical truism: *Caius* is a man, men are mortal, therefore *Caius* is mortal. Ivan understands that death is inevitable for all humankind, but cannot accept his own mortality. His difficulty in generalizing this syllogism is reflective of his core philosophy of individual exceptionalism; that through his pecuniary emulation and conspicuous consumption he could set himself apart from the rest of his species, thus shielding himself from the logical inevitability of the *Caius* syllogism. For Ivan "was not *Caius* and not man in general, he had always been quite, quite separate from all other beings" (32). He lists memories of his childhood toys, the fabric of his mother's dress, and the food he consumed in law school, as if these material memories were the things that distinguished him from *Caius* and elevated him above the rest of mankind. This belief is not unique to Ivan Ilyich; rather it is the dominant philosophy in the social circles he occupies. He laments that "I and all my friends understood that things were quite otherwise than with *Caius*" (33). Thus the central irony in Ivan's built environment is mirrored in his identity. Just as his meticulously crafted parlor came to resemble all other parlors, his desperate attempts to distinguish himself from the rest of humankind only assure his pitiful and unremarkable death.

Mrs. Harris shares none of these delusions. "Everything that's alive has got to suffer" is a truth that Mrs. Harris has lived with her entire life, a truth borne out by her experience as a healer; she sees no exception to it as an afflicted person. Unlike Ivan Ilyich, she doesn't imagine she is somehow an exception to this existential truth. Everyone suffers; everyone deserves compassion; if one receives it, it is right to be grateful. In this way, she is like the peasant Gerasim. He understands that "he was bearing [the burden of care] for a dying man and hoped that when his time came someone would go to the same trouble for him" (38).

Mrs. Harris's sense of identity, developed long before she faces death, is derived from social consciousness. Cather explicitly portrays Mrs. Harris not as an individual but as a component of a larger, cohesive organism. For example, when she hears the sound of the twins getting up in the morning, Mrs. Harris "ceased to be an individual, an old woman with aching feet; she became part of a group, became a relationship" (114). Mrs. Harris yields her identity to her role within her community. She is aware that in the past she was a part of the superstructure. She is also aware that in old age her position within that same societal model has shifted to the base, that "when a woman was a

widow and had married daughters, she considered herself an old woman . . . and became a housekeeper. She accepted this estate unprotestingly, almost gratefully" (110–11). In all instances, Cather depicts Mrs. Harris as a knowing component of a larger, unstoppable narrative that started long before she was born and would continue after she "slipped out of the Templetons' story" (156). This is very different from Ivan Ilyich's months of trying to rationalize his exceptionalism; his three final days of existential howling, which more closely resemble the death of Blue Boy the cat from distemper, are a sharp contrast to Mrs. Harris telling Mandy "I expect it's about time," and quietly taking to her bed and whispering the twenty-third Psalm (154–56).

These two deaths, occurring at home as was typical in both the United States and Russia in the late nineteenth century, thus use middle-class domestic space to illustrate an existential truth: that one dies as one has lived, that, as Mr. Rosen tells Vickie, quoting Jules Michelet, "The end is nothing, the road is all" (131). In his account of his father's twentieth-century home death, the physician Siddhartha Mukherjee constructs an analogy between physiological homeostasis—the body's capacity to maintain a "functional equilibrium" through circulation, respiration, kidney function, etc. (34)—and a kind of social and psychological homeostasis that, through the "little rituals" of daily life maintains "dignity" and "constancy" in the face of the "cosmic bargain" we all lose (32). Care for his father at home, after long hospital stays, enacted domestic rituals of feeding, bathing, and clothing that maintained the constancy of his healthy life and thus allowed him to die peacefully. As they approach death, Cather's and Tolstoy's title characters, too, maintain constancy with their domestic lives, Mrs. Harris accepting her lot, Ivan Ilyich aspiring to exceptionality. Both characters, however, undergo last-minute reversals: After serving her family for years



"It felt good to him when Gerasim held his legs up, sometimes all night long, and refused to go to sleep. . . ." Drawing by Liliias Buchanan, 2011.



and claiming no luxuries for herself, Mrs. Harris, unconscious, is moved from her own back room to Victoria's front bedroom—from the kitchen to the parlor—and dressed in one of Victoria's best nightgowns; she “never knew that she was the object of so much attention and excitement” (156). For his part, Ivan Ilyich experiences an epiphany in the hour before his death, when “it was revealed to him that his life had not been what it ought” (52). He thinks with new concern of those who will survive him and no longer finds in himself any fear of death, only “light” and “joy” (53). Ivan Ilyich experiences a Christian conversion—or a recognition and reversal in the tradition of Greek tragedy—whereas Mrs. Harris's reversal is merely circumstantial; she has spent a lifetime enacting the understanding Ivan Ilyich gains only in his final moments. In both stories, the community itself returns to homeostasis: After a life of futile materialist pursuits, Ivan Ilyich is laid to rest in the best *comme il faut* manner under a “silk-brocaded coffin lid with tassels and freshly polished gold braid” (3) according to “the very boring obligations of decency” (2); “the first thought” of his colleagues “was of what this death might mean in terms of transfers or promotions” (2). In a kind of epilogue to Mrs. Harris's death, the narrator states that Victoria and Vickie will “go on, to follow the long road that leads through things unguessed at and unforeseeable” and “their lot will be more or less like hers” (156–157). That road, for both Mrs. Harris and Ivan Ilyich, wound its way through kitchens, drawing rooms, bedrooms, and parlors and ended there—in the domestic space of materiality and social relationship—where one might finally say, in Cather's concluding words, “now I know” (157).

NOTES

1. Stouck misreads Cather's “praise” for *Anna Karenina* as “the greatest book ever written to instruct [society]” (2). In the 1894 article for the *Journal* he quotes, Cather is actually criticizing, facetiously, “drawing-room critics” and “parlor people” who praise *Anna Karenina* for its moral lesson (that is, an adulterous woman is punished by death), just as they view *Camille* as a play created (only) to amuse. These judgments, Cather writes, are so wrongheaded that “one would think Mephistopheles' sides would ache with merriment over the satire of it” (*The World and the Parish* 47–48).

2. In light of current events, it seems appropriate to note that the Cossacks, the steppes, and the “wheatlands” of the “Russian” stories that thrilled the young Cather are specific to Ukraine, rather than to all of Russia. This, however, is not a distinction that would have been made in Cather's lifetime, since the Ukrainian language, folk culture, and economy had been suppressed throughout the nineteenth century by the czars and, after the Bolshevik Revolution, by the government of the Soviet Union, especially under Stalin. Ukraine did not achieve independence until 1991, the year after Stouck's essay was published.

3. Cather's maternal grandmother, Rachel Seibert Boak (1816–1893), and her mother, Mary Virginia Boak Cather (1852–1931), are the prototypes for Mrs. Harris and Victoria Templeton, respectively (Ronning 209, 212). Like Vickie, Cather was an oldest child—she had six younger siblings—and the Cather family, like the Templetons, had left a genteel Southern life (in Virginia) to move west (to Nebraska). Cather's grandmother Boak died in 1893, while Cather was a student at the University of Nebraska.

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From the New York Milieu: Willa Cather's Modernist Mosaic of Colonial, Missionary, and Indigenous Histories

John J. Murphy

Setting the June 2023 Willa Cather seminar in New York City suggested more universal than local associations. Arguably, a defining quality of Cather's modernism is its historical and cultural variety and inclusion, doubtlessly influenced by her years in a vibrant metropolis of diverse peoples and world involvement. Instances of such breadth, if merely touching on a major subject or developing it, distinguish her fiction. If unaware of the masterful structuring of her art, one could complain that Cather is all over the place. What follows are examples of the inclusive nature of several works merely intoning or prolonging notes relative to the interaction of colonialism, missionary effort, and the engagement of Indigenous peoples.

In spite of the apparent dismissal in the celebrated passage in *O Pioneers!* suggesting that Alexandra Bergson's might have been the first "human face" since the high land of the Divide "emerged from the waters of geologic ages . . . set toward it with love and yearning" (64), Willa Cather had demonstrated interest in pre-Columbian populations in her 1909 story "The Enchanted Bluff." Perhaps she lacked interest in Great Plains Indians, whom Jim Burden acknowledges briefly in *My Ántonia* during a first snow, when "a great circle where the Indians used to ride" appears "like strokes of Chinese white on canvas" (60). In the 1909 story, however, we glimpse a preview not only of the Southwestern peoples that occupy much of Cather's fiction, but also of the colonial invasions that continue to create the culture we share today.

This legend of the "peaceful" and "handsome" people who "made cloth and pottery" in the village high atop a virtually inaccessible, monumental rock "down in New Mexico somewheres" is dated "hundreds of years ago, before the Spaniards came" ("The Enchanted Bluff" 416–17). The tragic tale of massacre of its braves by a warlike tribe during a hunting expedition and subsequent starvation of its women, children, and elderly is prefaced by references to Columbus following the North Star and Coronado's later search for gold further north. The "Pilgrim Fathers" are mentioned, as well as the Mormon trek west, and the group of boys conversing about such is startled by the rising of the moon, coming up "like a galleon in full sail;

an enormous, barbaric thing, red as an angry heathen god" (415)—a symbol turned on its head, suggesting the coming of European navigators and colonizers.

Cather returned to the Coronado saga in *My Ántonia*, where Jim tells the hired girls about "Seven Golden Cities" and the Spanish sword unearthed in Nebraska and identified by the local Catholic priest as made in Cordova (235–36). Legendary pre-Columbian cities, like the bluff village, Tom Outland's Cliff City in *The Professor's House*, and Panther Canyon's "dead city" (327) in *The Song of the Lark* contain evidence of sophisticated cultures: beautifully proportioned towers, delicate tools, and pottery. Father Duchene in Tom's story detects similarities between the pottery found in Cliff City and early pottery from Crete. The abandonment of such communities was not the result of European invaders but of Indigenous struggles and environmental factors. But the pueblos that developed along the Rio Grande and continued the traditions of the Anasazi were invaded by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, resulting in bloody revolts and conversion to Christianity, as Cather notes in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

When Father Vaillant visits Santo Domingo pueblo, the Indians refuse Baptism because "the Spaniards had treated them very badly long ago, and they had been meditating upon their grievance for many generations" (56). Padre Martinez informs Bishop Latour of the San Juan leader Popé's planning of the 1680 Pueblo revolt against the political control of the colonizers and suppression of Native religion, resulting in the slaying of several hundred Spaniards and twenty-one missionaries. The recapturing of Santa Fe by de Vargas in 1692–93, supposedly empowered by the Virgin, whose image he carried into battle and was eventually installed in the cathedral there, is muted by Cather's paean to Mary: "Her who was all the graces . . . and Queen of Heaven," and the little wooden figure of her, whose "rich wardrobe," sewn by the women of the parish, recalls the "costumes" that "Raphael and Titian had made . . . for Her" (268–69). Of course this was not the end of Native revolt. In 1847, a group of Taos Indians and Mexicans turned against the American colonizers, and, as Cather notes, "Bent, the American Governor, and a dozen other white men were murdered and scalped" (146).



Two matters need consideration here. The first, U.S. Manifest Destiny and ambitious development as a colonial power. The Taos rebellion coincides with the Mexican War, 1846–48, instigated by the annexation of Texas and U.S. designs on California, which it was feared might be acquired by France or Great Britain. Influential American imperialists had the support of Southerners intent on expanding slaveholding territory—Cather of course later recalled American slave owners' cooperation with European slavers from the African Gold Coast in the story of Jezebel in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (92–99). U.S. expansionist mentality is suggested in Thea Kronborg's recollection in *The Song of the Lark* of a visit to "a ridge up in the hills called Laramie Plain," from which she views "to the west . . . range after range of blue mountains" and hears an old rancher repeat the first telegraph message to cross the Missouri River: "Westward the course of Empire takes its way" (59–61). This passage is fraught, incorporating the prairie landscapes defining Cather's fiction for many. The "social strata in the prairie States," we are told in *A Lost Lady*, "included homesteaders and handworkers . . . and the bankers and gentlemen ranchers who came from the Atlantic seaboard . . . to 'develop our great West'" (7–8), Captain Forrester being one of the latter. The westward course of empire was catastrophic for Indigenous populations—violent, confining, displacing. In the *Archbishop* Cather inserts the story of the Navajos being driven from their Canyon de Chelly home and forced three-hundred miles east to Bosque Redondo: "Hundreds of them . . . perished from hunger and cold on the way. . . . None ever went willingly; they were driven by the bayonet" (308).

The second matter to be considered here is the missionary outreach of the Roman Church in tandem with Spanish and French colonial ambitions. This is evident in both *Shadows on the Rock* and the *Archbishop*. Late last March the Vatican repudiated the "Doctrine of Discovery," which the *New York Times* described as "a legal concept based on 15th-century papal documents that European colonial powers used to legitimize the seizure and exploration of Indigenous lands in Africa and the Americas, among other places," the Vatican statement insisting that these documents "have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith" (Povoledo A7). They would be distortions of Jesus's mandate to his Apostles, as in Matthew 28: 19–20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition). The mandate was never to conquer, to exploit, to abuse, or to profit. There were good and bad colonial missionaries, and Cather presents a balanced view of them, if we place her portrait of Fray Baltazar, the tyrant

of Acoma in *Archbishop*, against that of Noël Chabanel, the conflicted Jesuit martyr in *Shadows*.

Baltazar is fictional, although his legend combines historical sources. He was a colonist, "from a religious house in Spain. . . noted for good living," and he lived "upon" his flock rather than "for" it. He drafted Indian boys to garden, help in his kitchen, and travel far distances for supplies, brandy, rabbits, etc., to satisfy his gourmet tastes, and generally "make himself comfortable." He demanded the Pueblo women to carry water up from the plain to his cloister garden, although it severely drained the water supply. In short, notes Cather, "It was clear that the Friar at Acoma lived more after the flesh than the spirit" (110–12). Although he didn't force the Gospel on his flock, he was there to exploit because of it. There's an element of Catherian sympathy in Baltazar's "instinct of compassion" (118) in removing the roasting turkey from the spit to keep it from burning as he awaits execution after killing an Indian boy in a fit of rage, and his own death has semblance of the heroic: "the Acoma people told afterwards that he did not supplicate or struggle; . . . he retained the respect of his Indian vassals to the end" (120–21).

The story of Noël Chabanel, one of the seventeenth-century North American martyrs, is told in *Shadows on the Rock* by fellow Jesuit Hector Saint-Cyr. Both narrator and subject, as well as the novel's Montreal recluse Jeanne Le Ber, are Counter-Reformation baroque figures, historically based but problematic to present-day sensibilities. Cather is sympathetic to both devout and secular responses, and after Hector's poignant narrative has the apothecary Auclair question if such heroic missionary zeal is "misplaced" (180). As a foil, Chabanel has little in common with Baltazar. Father Hector believed that "his martyrdom was his life, not his death" (175).

A professor of rhetoric in Toulouse before being sent to the Huron mission in present-day Ontario, Chabanel enjoyed "the decencies, the elegancies of life" in France. His problem was lack of fitness as a missionary. He was unable to master the Huron language and was repulsed by the Huron "mode of life." Yet he tolerated their cruelty and ridicule. "They were contemptuous of his backwardness in their language, and . . . his excessive sensibility" (175–76). Also, he endured "an almost continual sense of the withdrawal of God," a common anguish of missionaries. To counter his longing "to return to France and . . . find again that peace of soul, that cleanliness and order, which made him the master of his mind and his powers" (177), he made a solemn vow to remain among his flock, to disobey himself, as Father Mapple preaches in his sermon in *Moby-Dick*: "all the things that God would have us do are hard for us to do. . . . And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves" (Melville 47–48). "Having made up his



mind to die in the wilderness,” Chabanel “had not long to wait. Two years later he perished when the mission of Saint Jean was destroyed by the Iroquois. . . .” Admittedly, the efficacy of such a life is questionable, although less so if viewed as a mystery, a source of wonderment for those left behind. Only then does Father Hector’s evaluation that “no man ever gave up more for Christ than Noël Chabanel” (178) have meaning.

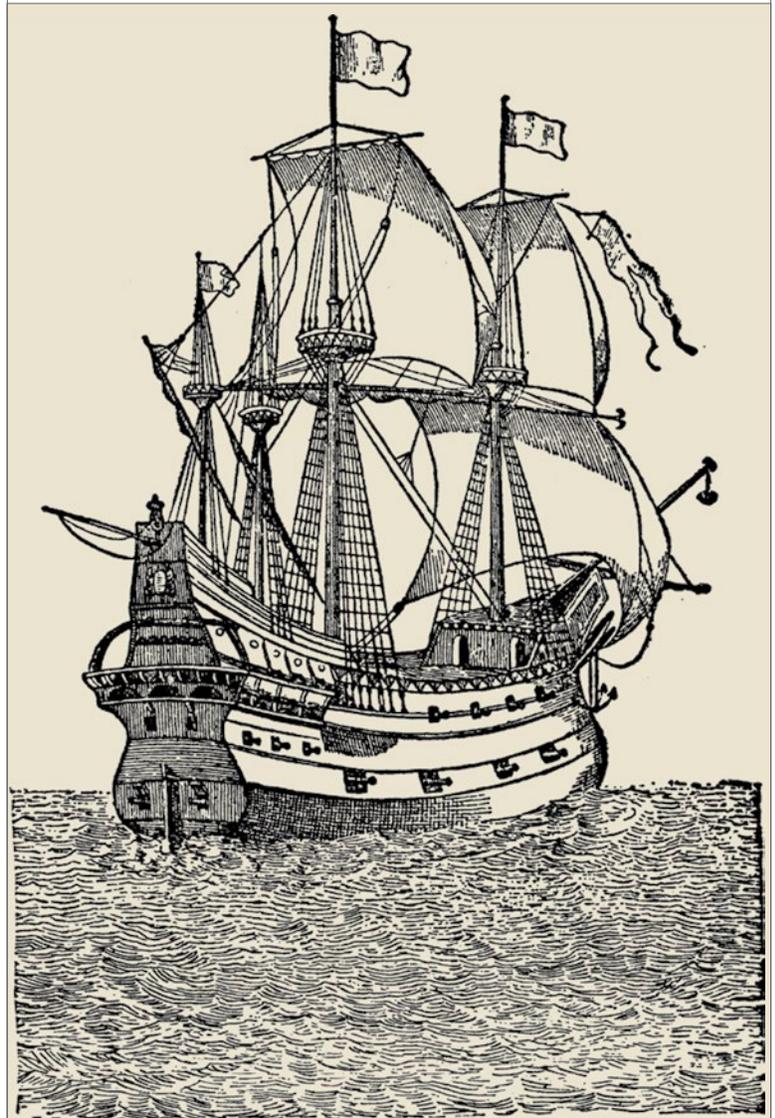
The colonial conquests in the “New World” were complicatedly driven by opportunities for plunder and power, by religion, by sheer adventure, by a wilderness perceived to be inhabited largely by inferior peoples to be swindled, conquered, exterminated, or saved. In a recent *New York Times* review of a study by Jenny Odell, *Saving Time: Discovering a Life Beyond the Clock*, a distinction is made between European colonialism’s imposition of order on apparent chaos, and “Indigenous thinkers,” who, according to Daniel R. Wildcat, a member of the Muscogee Nation of Oklahoma, “not only acknowledge contingency and humans’ lack of control in the world; they also see it as empowering and humbling, not something frightening” (Schlossberg 17).

Willa Cather craved order, making that clear throughout her fiction, especially in *Shadows*, when Madame Auclair instructs Cecile to preserve domestic order: “Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages. At home, in France, we have learned to do all [our household duties] in the best way . . . and that is why we are called the most civilized people in Europe. . . .” (32). Yet Cather has the surrounding wilderness provide rescue for order. When Father Hector and the woodsman Antoine Fichette are lost and starving in a blizzard while bringing the Sacrament to Fichette’s dying brother-in-law, they meet a “kind Indian,” who cooks his catch of hares for them, leads them to their destination, stays with them until the man dies and is given Christian burial, and then takes the priest back to his mission (168). This episode recalls the legends in the *Archbishop* in which Junipero Serra is rescued in the wilderness, first by “a mysterious stranger” and then by “a young horseman,” who provides “three ripe pomegranates” (292), a Spanish import, and because of its numerous seeds symbolic of the fertility of the Word of Christ.

Odell’s take on order imposed on natural rhythms illuminates Bishop Latour’s unsettling experience in “Stone Lips,” in the ceremonial cave to which his Indian guide, Jacinto, takes him for shelter during a blizzard. Latour watches his guide close off the hole in the cavern wall and then has the priest put his ear over a crack in the floor to listen to “one of the oldest voices of the earth,” an underground river—something “terrible” (137–38). Later, Latour awakens to glimpse Jacinto

flattened, “his arms outstretched,” against the plastered-over hole. The priest has Jacinto repeat the “Lord’s Prayer” with him in this cave, a retreat into Western formula in the midst of an experience “he remembered with horror. . . . [N]either the white men nor the Mexicans,” he concludes, “understood anything about Indian beliefs or the workings of the Indian mind” (138–41).

Older and much experienced, Archbishop Latour no longer fears, admitting, “I do not believe, as I once did, that the Indian will perish. I believe that God will preserve him” (313). Yet in building his cathedral he favors traditional order. The good-cut native stone is arranged in “Midi Romanesque of the plainest” (283). This reflects Cather’s sympathies regarding the complexities of our “New World.” I’m reminded of a chapter titled “The Expansion of Europe” in my sixth-grade history text. Above the title, a line drawing of “a galleon in full sail; an enormous, barbaric thing,” like the rising of the moon in “The Enchanted Bluff.”



“A galleon in full sail; an enormous, barbaric thing.”



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"Willa Pilla" Donated to the Foundation

In 1981, at its annual meeting in Boise, Idaho, the Western Literature Association (WLA) began awarding the "Willa Pilla," a tongue-in-cheek recognition. Initially connected to a panel called "Literary Sins," one bent on highlighting bad writing from the West or, equally, mocking good writing, the "pilla" was more fun at an annual gathering of scholars who always had great fun when meeting. I began going to WLA in 1978 and have gone most years since, also serving the association



The author in full Willa Pilla regalia (Pilla in right hand), Spearfish, South Dakota, 2009. Photograph by Sabine Barcatta.

in a variety of capacities. Cather, as one of those offering great writing, appeared in that first "Literary Sins" panel through a paper titled "Cather's Confounded Conundrums in *The Professor's House*" by James C. Work of Colorado State University. Cather's presence and name there owed also to her ubiquity at WLA, for through the always daunting efforts of the late Susan Rosowski of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, each meeting of WLA featured numerous Cather panels during the 1980s. She was *just* the author to both lend her name to the award and send up through the "Willa Pilla." Indeed, while chairing a Cather panel during

those years, an incoming president of the association, not a Cather scholar, wryly remarked that it was impossible to assume that office without having participated in a Cather panel!

Over the years the meaning of the "pilla" morphed—it came to be given to the funniest presentation at each meeting, mostly, and in a couple of instances was given to a person on the basis of "lifetime accomplishment." Me, I won the award in 2009 in just that way (see photograph). For many years it came with

an outlandish hat, one I am wearing there, a hat that proved very hard to transport on a plane, so that hat is already in our archives. Now the WLA has decided to retire the award, so the hat is being joined in our archives by the actual "Willa Pilla" itself. This fact is singular, for the "Willa Pilla" still embodies Cather's important presence in Western American writing and, celebrated and wryly questioned at WLA, it also embodies the joys of the literary life in the West. We should all be proud to have it. I certainly am.

Robert Thacker



Richard Stout's *Songs of Correspondence* Makes Cather's Letters Sing

Andy Jewell

When, some years ago, I began working on various projects to edit and publish Willa Cather's letters, I had certain ambitions for what might come of the efforts: enriched scholarship, delighted readers, perhaps some singular classroom experiences for students. Pretty standard hopes and dreams for an editor, really. But I've learned over time that one cannot always anticipate what comes back to you from this work. Sometimes, there are results that surprise and delight.

April 23, 2023 presented such a surprise. That day on the campus of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln I was able to hear the world premiere of a new piece of music, Richard Stout's *Songs of Correspondence*, a suite of eleven songs composed for mezzo-soprano and string quartet and based on the letters of Willa Cather. The Willa Cather Archive in the University Libraries and the Cather Project in the Department of English collaborated on commissioning the piece in honor of the (near) completion of the *Complete Letters of Willa Cather*, a major project to edit and publish all of Cather's letters online (open access).

As I heard the music performed by the Omni Quartet and world-renowned singer Nancy Maulsby, I was mesmerized by the way the music transformed and vivified words I had read so many times; I knew those letters, but I didn't know them this way. I was not fully prepared for the power of this new piece of art. I had talked often with Stout and knew a bit about what was brewing, enough to be very optimistic, but I had also cautiously moderated my expectations. I didn't need to. My friend and coeditor on *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (and Richard's mother) Janis Stout, whom I sat next to at the performance, said it best when she whispered to me as soon as it concluded: "I didn't dare to dream it would be this good."

The eleven songs in *Songs of Correspondence* are each titled by the name of the recipient of the letter (or letters) featured in the



At the reception for the premiere of *Songs of Correspondence* at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln: (L to R) Emily Rau (Editor, Willa Cather Archive, UNL), Liz Lorang (Dean of Libraries, UNL), Melissa Homestead (Director of the Cather Project, UNL), Richard Stout, Janis P. Stout, Claire Stewart (former Dean of Libraries, UNL), and Andy Jewell.

song: "Mariel," "Elsie," "Alfred," "Edith," "The Twinnies," "Zoë," "Mrs. Austin," "Dorothy," "My Namesake," "Viola," and "Roscoe." The letters to these folks—friends, colleagues, and family members, mostly—vary considerably, and one of the joys of the composition is the way Stout has brought such a range of moods to the piece, a range that wonderfully echoes the variety of the letters themselves. *Songs of Correspondence* wittily presents Cather's hardheaded business tone in letters to publisher

Alfred Knopf in the song "Alfred," which features lyrics like, "Of course if we can get serial publication / I would like it because of the money." Other songs evoke the heartbreaking emotion of Cather's late letters, when she was struggling with both personal grief and despair at another world war, such as "Viola" to longtime friend Viola Roseboro', which begins, "I have been thinking of you in connection with the death of the world / that beautiful old world which we thought would last forever."

The song that was a highlight for many in the audience, however, was "Edith," a setting of the only surviving full letter from Cather to her partner, Edith Lewis. Indeed, it was this letter in particular that Stout credits with inspiring the whole cycle. He wasn't sure letters could effectively be set to music, but when he read Cather's 1936 letter to Lewis, which features a beautiful description of Jupiter and Venus in the night sky ("they are of a superb splendor—deepening in color every second, in a still-daylight-sky guiltless of other stars, the moon not up and the sun gone down behind Gap-mountain; those two alone in the whole vault of heaven"), he felt the project could work.

A trombonist with the Cleveland Orchestra and a faculty member at Baldwin Wallace University, Stout told me that *Songs of Correspondence* emerged from a season in his life when pandemic shutdowns gave him time to compose, and he began looking for inspiration for a new piece of vocal music that would



suit a collaboration with mezzo-soprano Nancy Maultsby. Initially he thought he might go where composers typically go in such moments: lyric poetry. But while considering his options, he picked up *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* and began to imagine what might be possible with these words.

Imagining at first that Cather's letters to other famous people might be a place to focus, he quickly learned that those letters, though fascinating, didn't have the emotional depth of Cather's correspondence to friends and family. Letters to eminent figures are included, but primarily when those figures—like Zoë Akins, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Alfred Knopf, and Elizabeth Sergeant—were also real friends. The heart of the suite, as evidenced by where it begins (“Mariel”) and ends (“Roscoe”), is on Cather's relationships with, and words to, folks like Edith Lewis, her brother Roscoe Cather, and her college friend Mariel Gere.

Musically, Stout decided to compose in a style that honored the music of Cather's own time. Though he did not want his music to be intentionally anachronistic, he wanted it to be “believably traditional enough to sound like music Cather could have heard in her own mind.” He wasn't interested in a “compositional exercise,” he told me, but hoped to create music that would resonate with Cather's life and interests, and with those who love her work.

One of Cather's great gifts as a writer is that she creates pieces of great nuance and depth that are also accessible to a wide variety of readers; Cather doesn't delight in being obscure and difficult, as many of her contemporaries did. Stout's *Songs of Correspondence* echoes this quality. Though there's a lot going on in it, it is easy to love. One doesn't need to know the composer used counterpoint techniques to depict archaic musical forms while setting text about the “death of the world” to feel the dark emotions in “Viola.” The music is rich and beautiful to hear. The composition connects immediately with listeners, just as Stout wanted it to.

Most composers hope, as Stout told me, that new music will not be just “premiered and forgotten.”

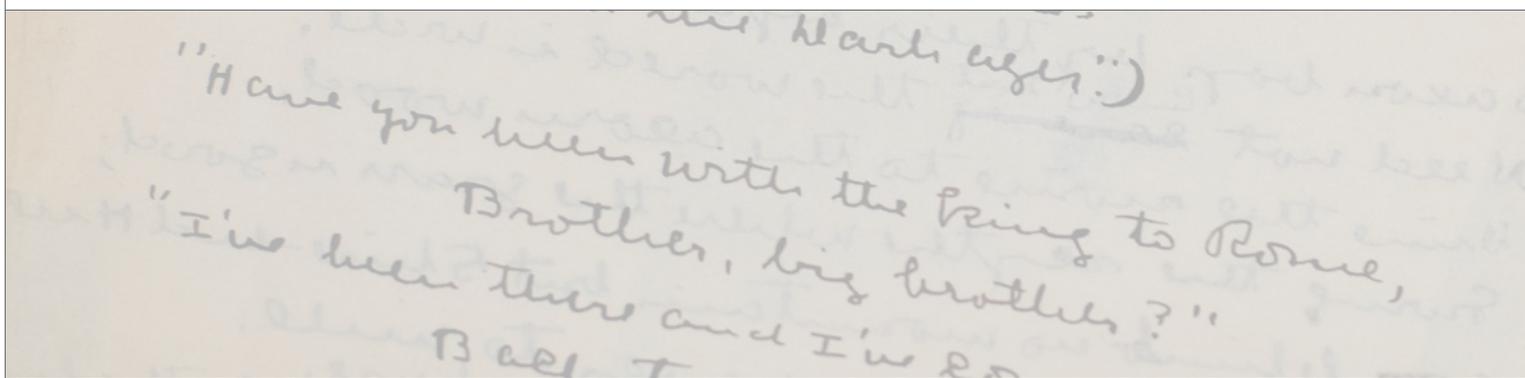
Indeed, this composition has already lived beyond its premiere in Nebraska in April 2023. In September 2023, performed by Maultsby and the Poiesis Quartet, the piece opened the Rocky River Chamber Music Society season in Cleveland. More performances are in the works, and there are plans to record *Songs of Correspondence* as part of an album to be released in 2024.

Stout acknowledged that being in the audience for these early concerts has been “terrifying,” as he knows first performances of pieces tend to have imperfections. But the responses that he has heard after both performances have been wonderfully reassuring and rewarding. He has heard from lifelong Cather readers who were moved by the music and from music fans unacquainted with Cather who now are inspired to read her work. Such a combination of results is his goal: “I hope that the cycle gives Cather fans a new way to hear the words of their favorite author reflected,” he says, “but also that it gives music lovers a new favorite author.”

As one of those Cather fans, I can attest that hearing Stout's *Songs of Correspondence* was an energizing and emotional experience. My sense that I “knew” Cather's letters was shaken up as I heard them sung to me with new inflections and new contexts. I can hardly wait to hear it again.



Moments after the premiere of *Songs of Correspondence* at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, with applause in the air: composer Richard Stout, Amy Lee Rosenwein (violin), Alicia Koelz (violin), Nancy Maultsby (mezzo-soprano), Joanna Zakany (viola), and Tanya Woolfrey (cello).



Joan Acocella

Joan Acocella, a significant cultural critic whose writing about Willa Cather animated many conversations, died in New York City on January 7, 2024. Her title at the *New Yorker* was dance critic, but she was never limited by that role. Her books included a popular psychology textbook, a biography of choreographer Mark Morris, an exposé of multiple personality disorders, and, most significant for readers of the *Review*, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism* (University of Nebraska

Press, 2000). Beyond her books, she was a prolific writer of reviews and commentaries on a wide range of topics including children's literature, Agatha Christie, the MacDowell Colony, and Susan Sontag. Much of her work appeared in the *New Yorker* but she was also frequent in the *New York Review of Books*, the *Village Voice*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other publications. Acocella is one of the commentators in the 2005 PBS American Masters production, *Willa Cather: The Road Is All*. Her work on Cather has been read and discussed, reviewed and argued over, often quoted, but never ignored. That work broke through the barriers people frequently feel when confronting literary criticism, and she certainly brought new readers to Cather.

Acocella's Cather book is an expanded version of her 1995 *New Yorker* article, "Cather and the Academy," which was included as well in the 1996 edition of *Best American Essays*. As the titles of her Cather works indicate, Acocella was primarily concerned with Cather and her work in the hands of academic critics, especially those who analyzed Cather through sexual and multicultural lenses; she argued that such approaches are more concerned with politics than with the quality of the writing itself. Succinctly and directly—her powerful little book is just 127 pages including index—Acocella sought to reclaim Cather for those who value authorial imagination achieved in impeccable writing.



Joan Acocella in 2011 announcing the winner of National Book Critics Circle's Nona Balakian award for excellence in reviewing. Photograph by David Shankbone. Creative Commons.

Responding to Acocella's book, some scholars still argue that her approach was counterproductive since she gave more attention to critics she disliked than to Cather's texts; few, however, failed to recognize her erudite and often entertaining style. Well-researched and sharply focused, Acocella's writing demonstrated that she knew both Cather and her critics well, and that she genuinely valued Cather's writing. In *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*, Acocella wrote that

"there have not been that many better American writers," and she specifically noted "the profundity of her vision, her originality, her *ear*, probably the best in American fiction." Acocella acknowledged too that "good books on Cather, some of them feminist, have come out in recent years." No cynical pessimist, she wanted to change the direction of Cather criticism, not shut it down.

There is no question that Joan Acocella's influence on Cather studies has been significant, but I want also to include a personal note here. In 1994, she took me on as a researcher for her Cather essay when I was a very naïve graduate student at the University of Nebraska. Things were not digitized in those days, so she would send me a list of articles and other resources she wanted and I would locate them, make copies, and send them to her. We developed a good working relationship through this, and I looked forward to a personal meeting when she asked me to drive her to Red Cloud after she arrived in Lincoln. That could have been a long car ride for two people as different as we were, but the liveliness of her personality and her natural curiosity made it a wonderful trip. I still remember when she pointed at a corn field and said, "What are those?" She recognized corn plants, of course, but she was puzzled by the center-pivot irrigation systems. She was full of questions about my growing up in Nebraska and my experiences as a teacher, student, and reader. She knew that she needed to understand Nebraska, especially Red Cloud and Lincoln, to write about Cather.



The next year I traveled to New York for work on my dissertation, and Joan agreed to show me some sites. She was the best tour guide I could have found. I can still picture Joan walking down Fifth Avenue to meet me outside my NYU dormitory, her energetic and purposeful stride epitomizing New York City. Joan took me to the notorious Cedar Tavern, still a hangout for the avant-garde. She introduced me to sushi and filled my head with sites I should not miss. She gave me a tour of her loft home in the Flatiron district, showing off the imprinted zipper marks on the wood floors

from the home's days as a factory. Best of all, she took me to the Rainbow Room atop Rockefeller Center, gently making sure I knew a jacket and tie were required.

After her Cather book was published, Joan sent me two large boxes of Cather-related books. She said she wanted to keep her Cather-authored books but wanted me to have the secondary works. Joan was a wonderful writer and thinker, but I remember her most for modeling an intellectual life grounded in curiosity and generosity.

Steven Shively

IN MEMORIAM

Priscilla Hollingshead

For those in the Cather community, the first visit to Red Cloud—whether for the purpose of research or for pure literary pilgrimage—remains an inspiring and cherished memory. For many, that first visit included a warm welcome and tour from Priscilla Hollingshead.

Priscilla was born in Webster County in the Walnut Creek community south of Inavale. She often shared memories of her early childhood there, particularly the events of the 1935 Republican River flood. After her marriage, she and her husband Harold moved to California; Harold was a musician and Priscilla worked for a time at Lockheed and then the state of California. Their two daughters, Pam and Christy, were born in California. In 1993, following Harold's death, Priscilla moved back to Inavale, living on the old family place.

Priscilla was proud of her Webster County and Cather connections. Her maternal great-grandmother was Webster County's first woman homesteader, and through marriage, she was related to the Burden family, for whom Cather had named her *My Ántonia* narrator. Her connections to literature and history gave our guests an inimitable experience of stepping into Cather's seemingly small Nebraska world, and they always remembered the genuine interest Priscilla took in their own lives and families.



Priscilla worked as both a volunteer and a tour guide, provided office support, and contributed her creative talents to our organization for more than twenty years. She was the keeper of the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial scrapbooks, which documented our programs and activities and became the core of the WCPM organizational archives. You might have purchased a Willa Cather tea towel in the bookstore that was created and stitched by Priscilla, or you might have received a crocheted cup cozy as a gift, as I did. Many of you

will have received a note or an invitation that featured Pris's distinctive calligraphy.

Priscilla was part of the Willa Cather Foundation through our biggest changes: through years following Mildred Bennett's death, through the renovation and opening of the Red Cloud Opera House, through the addition of the Cather Second Home and the Moon Block and the creation of the National Willa Cather Center. Pris hung up her tour keys ten years ago, but she was a fixture at Opera House shows and was a stalwart supporter of our work. She died February 3, 2024, and was buried at Riverton Cemetery. We'll certainly miss her, and we're grateful for the many wonderful memories she made with us and the thousands of guests she met along the way.

Tracy Tucker



Contributors to this Issue

Timothy W. Bintrim is professor of English at Saint Francis University in Loretto, Pennsylvania. He has published widely on Cather's writings about Pittsburgh, codirected the International Cather Seminar there in 2017, and coedited *Cather Studies 13: Willa Cather's Pittsburgh* (2021). Recently he served with Kelsey Squire as issue editor of the *Willa Cather Review*.

Matthew Hodges is a medical student in his final year at the Indiana University School of Medicine. While in medical school, he completed his Master of Science in clinical research with a concentration in the medical humanities. His clinical research focuses on community-based care at both the beginning and end of life. After graduating from medical school he will pursue a career in rural family medicine.

Andy Jewell is professor and chair in the University Libraries and codirector of the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. From 2005–2022, Jewell was the editor of the Willa Cather Archive (cather.unl.edu) and now serves as advisory editor. He is coeditor of *The Selected Letters of Willa Cather* (2013) and the ongoing digital scholarly edition of *The Complete Letters of Willa Cather*.

John J. Murphy, Brigham Young University professor emeritus, served on the Foundation Board of Governors 1985–2017, edited the *Willa Cather Newsletter and Review* 1990–2000, directed the first international seminar in 1981, and codirected the 2007 and 2013 seminars. He edited the Scholarly Editions of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1999) and, with David Stouck, *Shadows on the Rock* (2005), and coedited *Cather Studies 8* and *11*. His numerous publications include Twayne's monograph *My Antonia: The Road Home* (1989) and the apparatus for Penguin's 1994 edition of *My Antonia*. His major interests since college lie in the later novels and Cather's artistic, cultural, and historical complexities, as suggested in his presentation at the 2023 New York seminar, published in this issue.

Diane Prenatt is professor of English emerita at Marian University and a faculty mentor in the Medical Humanities Scholarly Concentration at Indiana University School of Medicine. She has published essays in the *Willa Cather Review* and *Cather Studies*; her conference presentations include a recent paper on Cather's depiction of diphtheria in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. She is working on a biography of Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant.

Willa Cather REVIEW

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The *Willa Cather 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.

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Hotel Garber Takes Shape

Rehabilitation of the 1902 Potter-Wright building is breathing new life into an important downtown structure that has been vacant for more than twenty years.

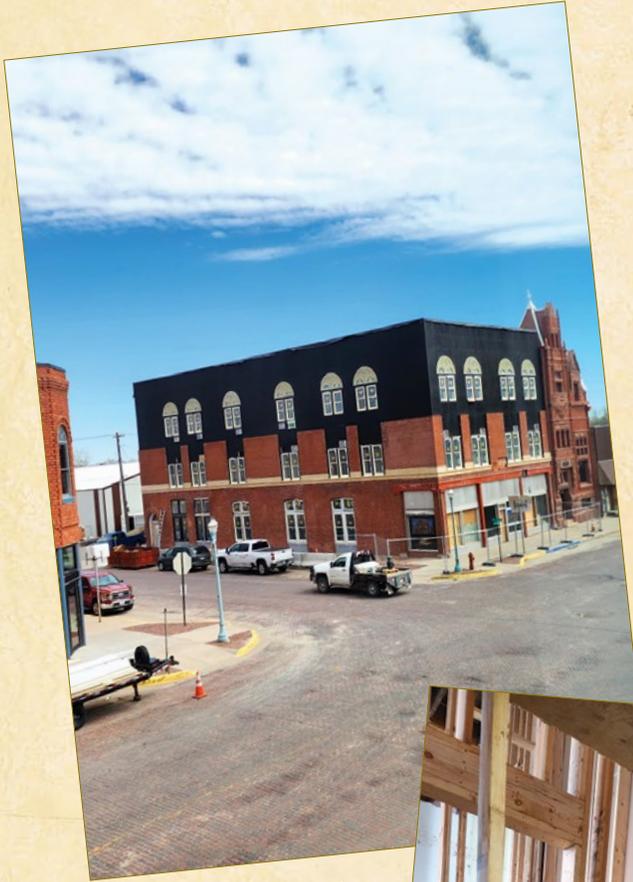
As restoration work continues on the 1902 Potter-Wright building, the handsome structure's next life is taking form: the Hotel Garber. A new hotel in Red Cloud has been a priority for many years, and the Potter-Wright Building's rehabilitation will provide twenty-seven guest rooms, a spacious lounge and dining area, and meeting rooms with catering facilities. The hotel will allow us to better fulfill our mission, providing visitors, students, and families a place to stay longer to enjoy our historic sites, the Cather Prairie, and other scenic places.



The 1902 Potter-Wright building (left) and the 1888 Farmers and Merchants Bank building (center) pictured some years before the 1917 work to brick Webster Street. M. L. Zercher Photo. PHO-4-W689-1121, WCPM Collection at the National Willa Cather Center.

Onlookers lined the streets during the 1961 fire at the Potter-Wright building. City Water and Light Superintendent Kenneth Schwartz captured dramatic home movie footage of the fire, which has been included in our latest exhibit, *Making a Place: A Lost History of Red Cloud*, in the recently restored Farmers and Merchants Bank. PHO-379-001, Kucera Collection at the National Willa Cather Center.





Progress on the restoration of the Potter-Wright building, the future home of Hotel Garber.



Once complete, the elevator will connect Hotel Garber with the Farmers and Merchants Bank, bridging the brick wall that is nearly three feet thick.



This flame mahogany chair survived the August 5, 1961, fire in the Potter-Wright building. The damage from the fire's heat and the water used to fight the blaze cracked the seat. OBJ-4-3560-1924, WCPM Collection at the National Willa Cather Center.

Fundraising for the Potter Block rehabilitation into the Hotel Garber is 85% complete. We're currently working to qualify for a \$500,000 challenge grant that must be matched 2:1. Donations are payable over five years, and all gifts of \$1,000 or more will be recognized on a donor wall.



“One cannot divine nor forecast the conditions that will make happiness, one only stumbles upon them by chance, in a lucky hour, at the world’s end somewhere, and holds fast to the days, as to fortune or fame.”

Willa Cather in Europe: Her Own Story of the First Journey

Leave Your Mark on the Future

Join the Cather Legacy Society



Our work at the National Willa Cather Center enriches lives in many ways: students encounter Willa Cather’s writing for the first time; dedicated scholars conduct and share their research; aspiring artists find inspiration and solitude to create new work; readers visit the settings conjured in their imaginations. These opportunities derive from our supporters and the rich legacy Willa Cather left behind.

How can you create a lasting impact? Make a gift arrangement to benefit the Willa Cather Foundation beyond your lifetime. Your estate planning attorney can include a provision in your will that leaves a lasting gift to us: a specific asset, a dollar amount, or a percentage of your estate. A bequest can also be made from the residue of your estate or what is left after all gifts have been made to your heirs.

You can decide how your gift is used! Preservation of historic sites and collections, conservation of 612 acres of native prairie, and development of educational resources are only a few examples of how your support can advance our mission. Planned gifts also help us seize new opportunities that are connected to the aspect of our mission that matters to you.

We’re telling Willa Cather’s story. Let us share yours, too.

For more information about the Cather Legacy Society and how to ensure our programs benefit generations to come, please contact Jeniffer Beahm at 402-746-2653 or jbeahm@willacather.org.



Continue Your Journey...

The Willa Cather Childhood Home is a must-see stop on your literary pilgrimage

Now Open for Tours
Tuesday – Saturday | 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Book your tour at the National Willa Cather Center or online at www.WillaCather.org

You will enjoy unprecedented access on your “no-ropes” guided tour to one of the country’s most important literary heritage sites. This National Historic Landmark recently reopened and features sensitive restoration and hundreds of Cather family artifacts on display—including the wallpaper applied to the attic walls by Willa Cather herself!

Dedication and Ribbon Cutting
June 8, 2024 | 1:30 p.m.

Followed by small-group tours of the Childhood Home, the Farmers and Merchants Bank, and a hard-hat tour of Hotel Garber.

