The Willa Cather Archive in the Classroom

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When writers, even well-informed ones, begin confidently predicting the future, I grow suspicious. As a seven-year-old, I eagerly read in my Weekly Reader that by the time I was old enough to have a driver's license cars would fly. Still earthbound in my Toyota, I have learned that most forecasts beyond the immediate future are suspect because they fail to fully appreciate the complexity and chaos of human life; despite the vision of sages in the 1950s, twenty-first century women in flared skirts are not hosing off their all-plastic couches. So, with that lesson in mind, I will not begin this essay with prognostications about digital technology taking over our lives and our classrooms in the future. In fact, the future is not what I'm concerned with at all. Digital scholarship on Willa Cather is an available classroom tool right now, and it can have, and is having, an important influence on how students interact with Cather's texts and how teachers present her life and work. The implications of this interaction, however, are complex: what does it mean when a writer is discovered not just through a printed page, but also through a computer screen?

I write from the perspective of a teacher who has used digital scholarship in the classroom, but also as the editor of the Willa Cather Archive (http://cather.unl.edu); I am both a user and a builder. My comments, then, are influenced by my sincere belief that the web is and will continue to be an extremely valuable tool for readers, scholars, and teachers. I do not believe, however, that one should be overly jubilant; changes in the way we practice reading and teaching are neither inherently better nor inherently worse than the methods to which we are already accustomed. Instead, as our world and our teaching are transformed, we need to observe carefully and reflect upon the nature of the transformations.

This essay discusses many of the opportunities for teachers I believe are present in the Willa Cather Archive, particularly in the way the Archive makes new materials available or older materials available in a
new way. Additionally, this essay suggests some of the implications of the Archive’s digital presentation of resources. However, the place of digital scholarship in academic life is still evolving, and students and teachers are just getting accustomed to using the form. Given this circumstance, many of my thoughts are inconclusive, observations based upon preliminary understandings into how this resource affects our classrooms. I avoid confident pronouncements on the nature of these effects and instead articulate what I see as the most likely changes the Cather Archive might bring to the teaching of Willa Cather’s works.

I. Reading More of the Texts

Among the most profound transformations that digital scholarship brings to the classroom are increased access and a change in the nature of access. Specifically, the Cather Archive makes rare and unique texts and resources freely available to anyone with an Internet connection. Certainly, the most desirable texts are those written by Cather herself. At this writing, the Cather Archive presents nearly one hundred Cather works—including novels, stories, nonfiction, and journalism—in electronic form. Most of these works are presented as both text and image, so that one could read them as electronic text or from high-quality digital images of the original print publication.

The electronic texts open numerous possibilities to students and teachers, from the commonplace (the texts can be easily printed and read or just read from the screen) to the innovative (the texts can be searched, processed, and analyzed by computer software). Since they are electronic, these texts can be more easily transferred to a variety of programs and devices, giving creative classrooms the chance to play with and study the texts in ways unthinkable only a decade ago. For example, to help students consider the impact of design and visual context on works of literature or to help them make critical statements in nontraditional ways, a class could create its own distinctive presentation of Cather’s texts, altering font, layout, illustrations, and other features.

The page images of original publications the Cather Archive provides will allow teachers to illustrate and incorporate elements of Cather’s writing life that are obscured by the most common presentations of her work (print literary anthologies and paperback editions). With access to page images, teachers and their students can consider the original textual fields that existed in the first publication of many of Cather’s works. This is particularly important when the first publication offered an experience
that dramatically differs from most typical modern encounters of a Cather text. For example, the Cather Archive offers page images of the first publication of the well-known short story “The Enchanted Bluff.” Published initially in the April 1909 installment of Harper’s Monthly Magazine, the story is presented with four original illustrations by Howard E. Smith (see fig. 1). These illustrations can dramatically affect the way the text is understood. When reading the story in its original physical context, one is constantly confronted with idyllic images of boyhood seemingly inspired, in content if not in style, by the True W. Williams illustrations for Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Tom Sawyer: boys in straw hats hunting, fishing, and loafing. A quick glance through the pages of the magazine might lead one to assume that Cather’s story is an adventure in the style of Twain, or at least a sentimental, idealized story of youth.³

![Figure 1. An image from the original periodical publication of “The Enchanted Bluff” in Harper’s Monthly Magazine, April 1909. Available on the Willa Cather Archive.](image)
Understanding the original contexts of Cather’s publications is crucial to assessing her relationship to her times. As Charles Johanningsmeier argues, “the projection of modern values and desires onto literary texts can very easily skew our understanding of the cultural work that literary texts performed, and . . . if one wishes to accurately gauge such cultural work, one must be sure to carefully document the specific circumstances of any text’s publication and readership” (92). Certainly a key element of those circumstances is the design of the original publication. Until the advent of digital technology, reading the original periodical publications was impractical for classes. Original periodicals, even relatively mainstream titles like *Harper's*, are difficult to access in paper form. Students and teachers may be able to consult a single library copy (if the classroom is close to a major library with bound periodicals that circulate) or photocopies, but typically instructors use what is readily available to them: a modern reprinting of the story.

Though the readily available reprintings of Cather’s works do accommodate many valuable classroom discussions and approaches to the material, those texts do not facilitate a cultural studies approach to the material, an approach that is becoming increasingly popular in classrooms, particularly college classrooms. The *Cather Archive*, though, can make such instruction more tenable, as it provides access to a good surrogate of the original that teachers and students can easily use independently or together in the classroom. Teachers can use the *Cather Archive’s* presentation of materials as a way to broaden students’ understanding of how texts are transmitted and received, which will complicate the common assumption of novice readers that texts are stable and consistent. In addition to illustrations that jar the reader, the original periodical publications also show the text’s proximity to advertising; what, for example, happens to our interpretation of Cather’s 1916 story “The Diamond Mine” when we read it next to advertisements for Reed and Barton’s Rembrandt silverware, the Whitman’s chocolate sampler, and Dr. Stall’s books that claim to answer “Sex Questions”? (see fig. 2).

The *Cather Archive*, unfortunately, is not complete. At this writing, we have some first editions and several dozen periodical publications online (including short stories, nonfiction essays, and early journalism). We will undoubtedly be adding many more—a project is under way to edit all of Cather’s early journalism, nearly 600 individual pieces, and more electronic editions of her fiction are currently being prepared—but my point is that the offerings are not, for the foreseeable future, going to
be comprehensive. The reasons for this are complex, but it essentially comes down to the restrictions of U.S. copyright law: we cannot digitally publish and freely distribute material that was originally published after 1922. Thus, the writings of Willa Cather represented on the site will be heavily weighted toward her early career, and the complete texts of her works will be heavily watermarked.

Figure 2. An image from the original publication of “The Diamond Mine” in *McClure’s Magazine*, October 1916. Available on the Willa Cather Archive.
major works of 1923 and after, which include such important books as *The Professor's House* (1925), *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), *Obscure Destinies* (1932), and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), will not be available.

In determining our scholarly goals for the *Cather Archive*, we have responded to this legal reality in several major ways, all of which have potential implications for the classroom. For example, we are working on ambitious editions of Cather’s early work, much of which has never been completely or satisfactorily edited and is relatively inaccessible in complete form. The Willa Cather Early Journalism project, co-directed by Kari Ronning, assistant editor of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition, and me, is an effort to collect, edit, and annotate all of Cather’s early journalistic writings—nearly six hundred articles written roughly over the course of a decade. Though portions of these articles have been made available in Bernice Slote’s *The Kingdom of Art* (1967) and William Curtin’s *The World and the Parish* (1970), scholars and teachers have never had good access to the full run of her articles. Furthermore, both volumes, though extremely valuable for many years, are heavily selective, often giving readers only excerpts of Cather’s full articles, focusing closely on her comments about art and artists. Cather’s other comments—on popular culture, local events, and other topics—are increasingly of value to teachers and scholars who seek to better understand Cather’s cultural contexts.

In addition to publishing the complete texts and page images of the original publications, the *Cather Archive* will also feature annotations for each article, complete with images of many of the people and places Cather writes about. As Ronning’s work has already demonstrated, these annotations will begin to make visible the complex culture that Cather was writing about, giving brief histories of hundreds of individual people, synopses of plays and books, explications of allusions and unfamiliar customs, and details of connections to Cather’s writing and biography. Because space is not a restriction in the digital environment, we can afford to be generous with our annotations: for the first sixty articles, Ronning wrote nearly 1,500 annotations. Digitization and electronic publishing make such an ambitious project feasible. This project would be completely untenable to a press, both because the enormous length would require a multi-volume edition and because the cost of production would not be viable given the relatively small readership of scholarly editions.
In making Cather’s early writing available, we hope to enable teachers
to use this material in the classroom in a way that was impractical before.
These vibrant writings are remarkably revealing of the talent, humor, and
erudition of their author. Willa Cather the journalist has a voice that is at
times consistent with and at other times at odds with her mature voice:
attitudes, ambitions, perspectives, and interests are familiar, but the bit-
ing wit, unflinching criticism, and exuberance are sometimes surprising
to readers. After all, superficial reading of Cather’s best-known novels in-
spire many to use words like “serene” and “classical,” while the journalism
is full of sentences as pointed and funny as these: “The Dramatic Mirror
announces that Maggie Mitchell will revive ‘Jane Eyre’ and ‘Fanchon’ next
season. Yes, but who on earth or in the waters under the earth is to revive
Maggie Mitchell?” (“With Plays”). And another: “She was quite pretty—
when she had her veil on” (“Amusements”). Many instructors could make
good use of these writings to provide a fuller picture of who Cather is as
a writer, demonstrating that the confident opinions and occasional sharp
humor of her mature work has deep roots. Teachers of more advanced
students also could use Cather’s early writings to give their students a
connection to the author: Cather wrote many of the articles while her-
self a student at the University of Nebraska. In short, the Cather Archive
hopes to give teachers the ability to include in their classes Cather texts
that are not already available in affordable paperbacks. In doing this, I
believe students will develop a broader understanding of Cather’s long
and complicated career.

II. Beyond Reading and Beyond Texts

In developing the content for the Cather Archive, I’m concerned that
too many students may learn about Cather from a site that, largely for
copyright reasons, highlights early work. In addition to the basic prob-
lem of a presentation that is an inaccurate representation of an author’s
body of work, the Cather Archive’s focus on the early writings could
present a “version” of Cather that is too centered on Nebraska. To put it
another way: Cather lived most of her life in New York City; she wrote
fiction about New York, Pittsburgh, Quebec, the American Southwest,
and France in addition to Nebraska; and she was a frequent traveler. Her
work, however, is so often characterized as being about “pioneers” on
the Great Plains that many novice readers don’t properly understand
her range and complexity. Many of her most successful fictions of non-
Nebraska locales were published in the last decades of her career, and
those are the very texts that the Cather Archive cannot legally present. Additionally, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln is the major sponsor of the Cather Archive and home of the Cather Project, and even the web address of the Archive has “unl” in it. Nevertheless, the Nebraska focus is neither politically motivated nor the product of ignorant scholarship. Rather, it is the result of practical decision-making: Nebraska is the most common locale of Cather’s early writing, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has the most extensive collection of Cather material in the world, and the University provides a range of support for the development of the Cather Archive.

Even so, steps are being taken to somehow represent Cather’s later work. Though it is illegal to present works published after 1922 without explicit permission, it is permissible, within the Fair Use provisions of U.S. copyright law, to quote part of the texts. In the summer of 2007, a new and distinctive tool was published on the Cather Archive that, for the first time, provides some access to Cather’s later texts on the site. Working with Brian L. Pytlik Zillig, the Cather Archive developed a customized version of TokenX (http://tokenx.unl.edu), Pytlik Zillig’s text visualization, analysis, and play tool. TokenX allows students and teachers to perform complicated computational analysis over the complete corpus of Cather’s fiction, and the tool is designed to accommodate a range of questions. For example, one can search out revealing language patterns over the course of Cather’s writing career. Does her use of important terms alter significantly over the course of her career? Can tracking patterns of word usage within a specific novel reveal something about its formal structure? Does Cather abandon certain words at some point in her career or begin using new words that had not previously appeared in her fiction? Students and teachers can use the tool to track linguistic and compositional patterns, to make discoveries about Cather’s vocabulary shifts as the culture changed around her, to visualize her text in new and pedagogically useful ways, to alter methods of textual interaction in order to facilitate new ways of reading, and much more. Essentially, the project is experimental; we provide a novel tool for a new kind of research, a tool that is designed on the principle that we must facilitate a wide range of researcher-driven queries. As a new endeavor, the details and functionality of the tool are likely to grow and change considerably as we respond to users’ needs for their research and teaching.

In addition to textual material on the Archive, the site features a large and growing amount of non-textual material: photographs, sound record-
ings, and film. These materials are some of the most popular on the site, and classrooms can use the materials to greatly enhance understanding of who Cather was. The site not only has a range of photographs of Cather from infancy until late adulthood, it also has hundreds of photographs of Cather’s family and friends, important locales in Cather’s life, and images of people and places referenced in Cather’s work (see fig. 3). Given the range of these images—from posed studio portraits to partly-out-of-focus family snapshots—students will be able to have multiple visual references for Cather. One should not underestimate the impact of such references, for an image of the author can communicate much to a new reader. Cather herself recognizes this when she remarks upon meeting Sarah Orne Jewett that she looks “very like the youthful picture of herself in the game of ‘Authors’ I had played as a child” (“148 Charles Street” 55). In recalling that “youthful picture” of Jewett, Cather acknowledges that her idea of “Sarah Orne Jewett” was intrinsically connected to the image of a face she encountered as a child.

The Cather Archive represents a distinctive confluence of circumstances that results in an unusual wealth of images of Cather. Inexpensive snapshot cameras such as the Kodak Brownie, which was introduced in 1900, became popular during Cather’s lifetime. Many photographs taken with those snapshot cameras were preserved by Cather’s family and friends including a series of poses in front of hollyhocks on Grand Manan; images of San Francisco Street in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and photos of Cather reclining in the grass. Large collections of photographs were donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society and to the Archives and Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, and now the Cather Archive allows public access to all the images in a free, searchable database. These images can be browsed, searched, and exported for use in the classroom or in educational presentations.

Easy access to the diverse images will allow for a visually complicated presentation of Cather, one that both fosters a better understanding of her complex identity and demystifies Cather as a “famous author.” The snapshot images in the collection at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln provide a particularly intimate view of Cather. Candid and unprofessional, these photographs show Cather on her travels, with her family, at her cottage on Grand Manan, and in a variety of poses. These are the photographs that populated Cather’s and Edith Lewis’s personal albums, and as such they lack the “Willa Cather as American Author” quality one finds in the publicity photographs taken during the same period, such as
the portraits by Edward Steichen and Nicholas Muray. These images allow students to understand Cather as a real person living a recognizable life, rather than as a remote, dead artist. Additionally, the clothes, buildings, cars, and other artifacts that fill the margins of the photographs let students see Cather in the material contexts of her time. The other multimedia files—a sound recording of a 1933 speech originally broadcast on NBC radio and a ten-second silent film clip of Cather talking and
laughing in the 1920s—also help humanize and personalize Cather for students.

III. Critical Resources

As I’ve already suggested, contextualization of Cather’s life and writings is a major goal of the Cather Archive, one we hope multimedia helps us reach. Over time, we plan to significantly build the contextualizing materials. For example, we would like to include sections providing information on and images of the regions of the world that influenced Cather and her writing: the Great Plains, the American Southwest, Quebec, New York City, Virginia, France, and other places. We also would like to present texts of Cather’s writings about music with links to recordings of the pieces she references. But these examples are just small glimpses into the possibilities: the digital environment can accommodate a tremendous amount of material. The limits are determined almost solely by time, money, and energy. As the technology and our familiarity with it mature, the Cather Archive could potentially support a broad community of projects that provide incredible and unprecedented amounts of information on Cather and her world.

With the support of the University of Nebraska Press, the most prolific publisher of Cather scholarship in the past four decades, we are fortunate to be able to offer several highly-valuable critical works and editions originally published by the Press. These online versions are an easily accessible place for students at a variety of levels to begin their research on Cather-related topics. For example, we have two volumes of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition, the complete text of James Woodress’s 1987 biography, Willa Cather: A Literary Life, all of the interviews, speeches, and public letters collected in L. Brent Bohlke’s Willa Cather in Person, and the complete run of Cather Studies. Additionally, thanks to a partnership with editors Steven Shively and Virgil Albertini we have all the back issues of Teaching Cather available.

In one case, the Cather Archive hosts an expanded, digital edition of a highly-valued Cather resource. Thanks to a partnership with the University of Nebraska Press and Janis Stout, the Archive published a new, digital edition of A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather (see fig. 4). As many know, Cather’s will prohibits the quotation of her letters, a prohibition that is still enforced by her executors, and no editions of her correspondence have been published. The letters themselves are scattered in approximately sixty-seven different repositories around the
United States. In 2002 Janis Stout, Texas A&M University Professor of English Emerita and American literature scholar, published A Calendar of the Letters of Willa Cather, a book that summarizes the contents of each letter while providing important information about addressee, date, and place. This volume is undoubtedly the best source of information on Cather’s correspondence for most researchers. Even so, the print volume of the Calendar was quickly rendered insufficient: nearly seven hundred and fifty new letters that have emerged in the past few years are not included (a roughly forty-percent increase in the known letters); the index is selective; and new research has revised or confirmed several editorial suppositions. Observing the need for a new edition and, particularly, an edition that could continue to grow as knowledge of Cather’s correspondence grows, the Cather Archive entered into a partnership that
produced an expanded edition in the summer of 2007. The digital edition is complete and updateable, searchable, and fully accessible to researchers at all levels.

Though we by no means have a thorough representation of the varied and extensive critical studies of Cather and her writings, these critical materials do offer students a solid and easy-to-use foundation for research projects. Hopefully, teachers who include Cather research in their courses, particularly in classes with students unfamiliar with scholarly research or in educational institutions with limited library facilities, can point to the *Cather Archive* as a useful research tool. If our goals are reached, the depth and breadth of the critical research materials offered will only continue to grow.

IV. The Computer as Reading Medium

Willa Cather wrote in the pre-digital world, and one might argue that a “true” experience of her writing requires that one read her materials on paper. Some scholars have even gone further. Noting that Cather believed “that a book’s physical form influenced its relationship with a reader” and “selected type, paper, and format that invited the reader response she sought,” Susan Rosowski and the editorial team of the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition claim that “printing and publishing decisions that disregard her wishes represent their own form of corruption, and an authoritative edition of Cather must go beyond the sequence of words and punctuation to include other matters: page format, paper stock, typeface, and other features of design” (ix). Such ideals make intuitive sense—we do want to understand the authorial intention—but are ultimately impossible to achieve. Even the Willa Cather Scholarly Edition had to concede this reality as it surrounded Cather’s texts with elaborate critical apparatus (definitely not part of the original authorial intention), used different covers and bindings, and relied on a different typesetting technology altogether. Our world is decades displaced from Cather’s, and any attempt to recreate her cultural moment, even in publishing and bookmaking, will ultimately fail. We do not mind teaching Shakespeare as written text (rather than exclusively as performance) or watching a silent Chaplin film with pre-recorded sound on a television monitor (rather than projected on a big screen with a live orchestra) because such compromises help us accomplish a larger goal: bringing important works of art into the lives of students. We must acknowledge that compromises with our ideal of an “authentic” reading experience must also be made.
with modern fiction.

But more profound than displacement from the original publication, which has been an eternal fact of life for classrooms, is the way the shift in medium affects the very way the students encounter the text. From a very young age, today’s students grow accustomed to reading in ways completely foreign to previous generations. Though it would be an overstatement to claim students no longer know how to read printed text, it is true that the Internet and other media have accustomed many to reading texts full of hyperlinks, to words continually juxtaposed with graphics and animations, and to smaller self-contained divisions of text (the practice commonly known as “chunking”). Students’ reading skills are greatly influenced by the digital culture most of them regularly navigate. This means that young students often have very limited experience reading sustained narratives over a sustained period of time. In other words, many young people have rarely, if ever, read a complete printed book.

This problem is neither new nor directly attributable to digital culture, but, according to some research, it is growing. The National Endowment for the Arts’s rather alarming (or, according to some, unnecessarily alarmist) 2004 report, Reading At Risk, claims that the percentage of 18-44 year olds that engaged in literary reading during leisure time dropped from 60 percent to 43 percent between 1982 and 2002 (26). One problem with this assessment of reading, though, is its rather narrow definitions of “literary reading.” The surveyed group was asked about the reading of “any novels or short stories, plays, or poetry” (1); though the report acknowledges that literature “can be found in sources other than books,” the alternative forms mentioned only include “magazines,” “literary journals,” and “subway and bus placards” (2). In other words, the report is concerned with a very traditional and highly valuable form of reading, but it does not reflect the reading of Americans in general. It certainly seems that other kinds of textual interactions are far more common for young people today than they were in 1982. For example, with the advent of electronic mail and text messaging, today’s students are almost certainly more accustomed to social communication in written form than the previous generation. Though sometimes this familiarity leads to an awkward absence of professional decorum expected by an even slightly older generation—a recent e-mail I received from a student I did not know was full of inattentiveness to punctuation and grammar—it at least provides students some sustained experience with thinking through reading and writing.
In general terms, I see this shift in reading culture to be good justification for both inclusion of assignments based on print-based, book-length texts and inclusion of digital scholarship. I reject the notion that students ought to be treated as a demographic that teachers need to sell their product to, as typified by the following sentiment I heard recently: “College students really like cell phones; how can we use cell phones in our classrooms?” After all, students ought to come to class to learn and grow, not to be indulged and pacified, and exposing students to the experience of book-reading is unquestionably appropriate. However, scholar-driven resources in media more comfortable for many young people—like digital media—do give teachers an opportunity to effectively communicate content to students while maintaining high standards in the classroom.

In some respects, the Willa Cather Archive, with its presentations of many electronic texts that were originally printed, is not going to produce a radically different reading experience for many people. After all, one way to use the site is as a way to access texts, print them out, and read them. But our goal is to create a site that allows for many different kinds of user experiences, from traditional linear reading of text to following hyperlinks within texts enhanced with multimedia to searching and computationally analyzing resources. Students will access material on the Cather Archive differently: they will enter the site at different points, they will travel around the site in different paths, and they will see different material. This quality is, admittedly, something that would make Cather, who “selected type, paper, and format that invited the reader response she sought,” quite uncomfortable. Still, experiencing a text in divergent ways is not something digital culture has introduced. The notion that any technology can inspire a consistent response from a variety of readers is faulty. Though a group of people can all read the same words in identical copies of the same physical book, no one reads the same book, for each reader brings unique circumstances, associations, conclusions, and prejudices to his or her reading.

Digital technology, however, intensifies and materializes differences that, though real, might be internal or theoretical in print culture. Through search engines and hyperlinks, the Internet takes the user to just what she or he seeks, virtually destroying any chance of a common textual experience in digital media. For the Willa Cather Archive, this means that one visitor to the site could spend hours carefully reading the short fiction as it was published in periodicals and read current scholarship on those stories; another visitor could look at some pictures, glance
at the brief chronology of Cather’s life, and listen to the recording of her voice. The version of “Willa Cather” obtained by a student visiting the site might be informed by the design of the first edition of *April Twilights*, or it might be informed by the photograph of Cather wearing a fedora and riding a handcar in Wyoming.

The lack of control might be frustrating to a scholar or teacher who has an agenda to promote a predefined notion of who Willa Cather was, but it is the goal of the *Willa Cather Archive* to, as much as possible, present materials without such an agenda. We are an “archive” because we present a wealth of diverse resources, and we hope that we are useful and valuable to a range of scholars, teachers, and students with a variety of goals. Certainly, the *Archive* is not and, for the foreseeable future, cannot be absolutely comprehensive, and this lack of comprehensiveness could potentially skew a reader’s understanding. Though it is on a different scale, the compromises inherent in the Archive’s selection of materials is analogous to those an editor of an anthology must make. “Representative” choices must be made, and they must be made not only on theoretical grounds, but also on practical ones: What can we legally reproduce? What can we afford? What is best suited to the medium? Any selection, even the most thoughtful, provides limited access to the truth of an author’s life and work.

The responsibility for the quality of the research, though, is finally with the researcher, not with the research tool. The *Willa Cather Archive*, though large in scope, is not one-stop shopping for Cather research. It is but one resource among many, and the good researcher will know that, will take what it has to offer, and will recognize what it does not have. A teacher using the site in the classroom will do the same: the *Cather Archive* is consciously undogmatic, preferring to present resources without heavy-handed suggestions as to how they may be used. At this stage in our development, we have prioritized making the basic resources available rather than guiding users on a specific path through them. We aim to make the materials as useful as possible, as we hope the *Cather Archive* fulfills practical needs in the Cather community. Yet we do not want to prescribe the specific ways the material will be useful. Instead, we hope the interactive methods possible in a digital environment will be exploited by individual people in ways that surprise us, that the students and teachers who visit the site will teach us about the different ways the materials can be used to better understand—and better teach—the life and writings of Willa Cather.
Notes

1 The Willa Cather Archive is a collaborative enterprise, and I would like to acknowledge the following people for contributing to the creation of the digital materials discussed in this essay: Ekaterina Apostolova, Zach Bajaber, Brett Barney, Beth Burke, Mary Ellen Ducey, Hannah German, Aaron Hillyer, Liz Lorang, Vicki Martin, Brian L. Pytlik Zillig, Guy Reynolds, Stacy Rickel, Kari Ronning, Sabrina Ehmke Sergeant, Katherine Walter, Tom Wattenbarger, Laura Weakly, and Jennifer Welsch. I would also like to thank Brett Barney, Traci Robison, and Laura Weakly for their good advice and helpful feedback during the writing of this essay.

2 “Textual field” is a term which refers to the interplay of text with other bibliographic elements (fonts, layouts, paper quality, illustrations, etc.), coined by Jerome McGann (15).

3 Also of note in the illustrations is the displacement of Cather’s Great Plains landscape: the rich foliage and plentiful trees suggest the moister climate of the American South, subtly making another potential reference to Twain’s boyhood adventure stories.

Works Cited


