1988

Review of Cather's Kitchens: Foodways in Literature and Life.

John P. Anders

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly

Part of the Other International and Area Studies Commons


This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

As a cookbook, Cather's Kitchens is unexpectedly delightful. As a commentary on Cather's work, the Welsches could not have selected a more appropriate subject, as domestic art for Cather was art of the highest order. The authors expand upon Cather's domesticity by interpreting foodways as a pervasive motif in her plains fiction. For them, understanding Cather means understanding her food.

With a folklorist's enthusiasm, Roger Welsch examines the cultural and historical context of much of the food in Cather's Nebraska writing, whether it is in the kitchen, outside in the garden or orchard, or stored in an underground cellar. And like Cather's fiction, Cather's Kitchens glows with the warm storytelling surrounding the table such as Welsch's recollection of "ambrosial grazing," his attempt to enjoy the freshest asparagus possible by dropping to his hands and knees and biting the tips directly from the stalks. Such stories, along with unusual recipes ("corncob jelly") and vintage photographs, provide a rich source of prairie folklore.

While the authors' image of Cather as a "peasant at heart" invites argument, Cather's admiration for the ethnic diversity on the Plains is undeniable. Cather's Kitchens celebrates that admiration with a refreshingly new and useful approach to her work, for the heart of the home so often is the very heart of Cather's fiction.

JOHN P. ANDERS
Department of English
University of Nebraska-Lincoln