Summer 2011

Review of *Cather Studies 8: Willa Cather: A Writer's Worlds* edited by John J. Murphy, Francoise Palleau-Papin, and Robert Thacker

Derek Driedger
*Dakota Wesleyan University*

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Cather Studies continues to assemble and inspire the most well-informed writing on Willa Cather's life and literature. The twenty-three essays in this volume further elevate Cather's reputation for meticulous attention to detail when presenting various cultures in her fiction. As the collection derives from the 2007 International Cather Seminar cohosted in Paris and Abbey St. Michel de Frigolet, essays regularly draw from French history, including the period spanning from Cather's first visit in 1902 through World War I. Consequently, the most analyzed novel is One of Ours (1922), yet The Professor's House (1925), Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), and Shadows on the Rock (1931) also receive considerable scrutiny.

Most analysis of One of Ours appears in part one, “Cather and France, Cather and French Literature.” Several essays debate how the Great Plains influenced Cather as she explored other locales and cultures. Whereas the novel's Claude Wheeler overcomes the despondency he felt in Nebraska by finding a more cultured world in France, Elsa Nettles's essay considers how “[a] prairie childhood did not deprive Cather of the literature, the memory, and the power to preserve it in art.” Similarly, Julie Olin-Ammentorp suggests that Cather “thought of the whole United States as her home” and considered France “as a place to admire, to enjoy, to emulate, and of course, to visit extensively.” Several essays view Cather as an artist who never replaced or lost an influence as she read, traveled, and reflected on her relationships.

Five essays devoted to Cather's writing style appear in part two, “Great Facts and Aesthetic Techniques.” Readers interested in Cather's Nebraska fiction will appreciate Joseph C. Murphy's perspective on two key visuals in My Ántonia (1918): the electric storm and the plow set against the horizon. Murphy connects Cather's modernist visuals to Ruskin's landscape paintings in three novels to suggest “Cather's New World landscapes are palimpsests of geological, cultural, and sacred history.”

Two essays examine W. T. Benda's My Ántonia illustrations in part three, “Other Worlds, Other Places.” Within a larger discussion of Edith Lewis's role in framing and editing Cather's writing during World War I, Melissa Homestead proposes that Lewis introduced Cather to Benda's work while he contributed to Lewis's magazine, Every Week. Evelyn Funda analyzes Benda's illustrations within a discussion of Mikoláš Aleš, an artist Cather admired from her Red Cloud days. Funda suggests the illustrations insert a Czech “supplement” to the novel and disrupt Jim's romantic narrative.

Coeditor John J. Murphy's postlude offers a tribute to Cather's artistry by presenting concrete patterns in several works. Murphy suggests by using historical materials as a collage while offering characters private space, “Cather's superlative juxtaposition places the physical, the material, against the mental, the spiritual, allowing them to 'produce a reaction which neither of them will produce alone.'” Murphy effectively connects studying literature to a need for increased global awareness, fittingly closing a volume devoted to exploring how Cather's literary inspiration scaled no less than the world, at any time.

DEREK DRIEDGER
Department of English
Dakota Wesleyan University