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**Review of *Willa Cather: New Facts, New Glimpses, Revisions*
Edited by John J. Murphy and Merrill Maguire Skaggs**

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Willa Cather: New Facts, New Glimpses, Revisions. Edited by John J. Murphy and Merrill Maguire Skaggs. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008. 345 pp. Illustrations, notes, works cited, index. \$65.00.

In 2005 Drew University's Library opened its newly developed Willa Cather Collection to a national Colloquium of Cather scholars. At the request of the Colloquium's organizer, the late Merrill Maguire Skaggs, each selected some interesting object—a manuscript fragment, an exchange of letters, an illustration—as the point of departure for further research, analysis, or speculation. *Willa Cather: New Facts, New Glimpses, Revisions*, a set of twenty brief essays and a meticulously annotated

"Willa Cather Collection Finding Aid," is the project's result.

Unsurprisingly, the essays present a broad, disorderly range of approach and subject matter. They include few very startling discoveries: the "new facts" are mainly modest (and probably for many readers esoteric) contributions to Cather's already well-detailed biography. Mark Madigan confirms and explains the tension between Cather's partner Edith Lewis and literary friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher. Suzi Shulz and John Yost identify "Trix" Florance, Cather's Red Cloud neighbor, schoolmate, and correspondent, as a possible model for her fictional heroine Lucy Gayheart. In separate essays, Steven Shively, Richard Harris, and Ashley Carter explore Cather's late-life friendship with Yehudi Menuhin and his family. Other "glimpses" consider Willa Cather as a youthful literary illustrator; as an observer of the energized, urbane New York ballet scene of the early 1910s; as the rigorous editor-in-chief of her own work and her public persona; as a gleeful baiter of literary scholars themselves.

These materials may be of greatest interest to the most specialized of Cather critics. Their value to that fairly small community will be considerable, filling in some old gaps in the scholarly record and opening a few tantalizing new ones. But the essays also tell another compelling story, not so much about Willa Cather as about the contributors themselves and their obvious love for their subject matter. "It must be challenging to be the significant other of a collector," begins Jessica Rabin, wryly contemplating her own delight at Drew University Library's "astounding eleven copies of *April Twilights*." Challenging, perhaps, but not dull, and all of these scholars are passionate collectors, enchanted by the romance of archival discovery. With some of the contributors—Ann Romines on reading a discarded draft chapter of *Shadows on the Rock*, or Janis Stout on the "keen anxiety" of biographical writing—Cather and her work are dislodged slightly from the foreground, as the essays refocus momentarily on the illuminating, confusing moment of immediate literary encounter. And this moment's disclosure and celebration are perhaps as valuable for Cather

studies as the encounter's scholarly products themselves.

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