

Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Newsletter

VOLUME XXXI, No. 3

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RED CLOUD, NEBRASKA

'The colour of an adventure': Pictorial Dimensions in Cather's *Archbishop*

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Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927) is one of the acknowledged "pictorial" experiments in narrative form which had challenged Willa Cather's imagination throughout her career. Both well-educated and sophisticated in her appreciation of all the arts, Cather was clearly sensitive to the proximity of painterly technique to narrative technique, as the language of her literary criticism often suggests. Like the painter, the writer had to attempt to make whatever subject was before him very real, by whatever means would be most effective. Cather's eye was sensitive to the nuances of painterly composition, arrangement, use of color and light, tonal contrast and the like, and she understood what effects an artist in control of these devices could achieve.¹ With such a capacity to "read" paintings with technical accuracy, Cather was able to manage the effects of visual, pictorial art in her own stories and novels.

Curiously counterpoised to this sophisticated recognition of technique is Cather's apparent interest in what might be called the narrative possibilities of pictorial art. Put simply, Cather seemed to like paintings that told stories, or around which she might create a story. This response to art is personal, often emotional, and perhaps sentimental, but it is usually the most immediate, and has a genuineness about it. The point is evident, I think, in Cather's comments on the Chicago Art Institute and the painting there which would later provide the title for her third novel:

It is not unlikely that the Chicago Art Institute, with its splendid collection of casts and pictures, has done more for the people of the Middle West than any of the city's great industries. Every farmer boy who goes into the city on a freight train with his father's cattle and every young merchant who goes into the city to order his stock, takes a look at the pictures. There are thousands of people all over the prairies who have seen their first and only good pictures there. They select their favorites and go back to see them year after year. The men grow old and careworn themselves, but they find that these things of beauty are immortally joy-giving and immortally young. You will find hundreds of merchants and farmer boys all over Nebraska and Kansas and Iowa who remember Jules Breton's beautiful "Song of the Lark," and perhaps the ugly little peasant girl standing barefooted among the wheatfields in the early morning has taught some of these people to hear the lark sing for themselves.²

Cather's own fictionalizing here, the rather folksy effect she draws from the simple scenario of a museum visit, reveals a disposition to extract from the visual encounter a fuller, somewhat ineffable, response. She identified a similar appeal in the work of seventeenth century Dutch painters, where along with incredible technical vir-

tuosity, she found a celebration of solid Dutch citizens and what would now be called their middle-class values. What is lacking in artistic discrimination — Cather herself later acknowledged that the Breton was a "rather second rate French painting" — is made up in the recognition of a different impact from the visual arts.³ This populist view in an artist as serious as Cather is perhaps a curious, though not necessarily uncomfortable, juxtaposition to her sophisticated appreciation for form and style. It is, in fact, a significant component of her creative process.

Death Comes for the Archbishop is a novel full of visual energy. Cather has reference in it, directly or indirectly, to several painterly styles, using them to evoke mood as well as to create scene for the narrative. Moreover, because the novel is the story of an artist, in much the same way that *My Antonia* is the story of Jim Burden as an artist, Cather has in *Archbishop Latour* an appropriate means for such development, and his aesthetic sense becomes the measure against which the values in the novel are set. He, like his creator, is a visual person. This man of refinement, taste, and sensitivity, who gives dramatic life to Cather's long-standing fascination with the story of the Catholic Church in the American Southwest, was drawn from a biographical account of Archbishop Lamy, the first Bishop of New Mexico, whom she had already identified as "a sort of invisible personal friend," a true kindred spirit. The writing of a story about Lamy provided her, she wrote, with "the pleasure of paying an old debt of gratitude to the valiant men whose life and work had given me so many hours of pleasant reflection in faraway places

where certain unavoidable accidents and physical discomforts gave me a feeling of close kinship with them."⁴ Her story would rise from his, but of course, the stories would not be the same. Lamy had become real to Cather, and in turn, and in her own artful way, she would make him real again as Jean Latour.

The narrative form of *Archbishop*, Cather had explained in a letter to *The Commonweal*, was to begin in the mannered mural style of Pierre Puvis de Chavanne (1824-1898). His is a curious position in the history of French painting, for he was almost completely at odds with the sweeping artistic developments emerging in the work of his contemporaries — the Realists and Impressionists — yet became an influence for the Moderns, most notably Seurat and Gauguin. Art history acknowledges Puvis' contribution as a muralist, though it does not always deal kindly. Historian John Canaday, for example, writes: "Puvis seems both sentimental and stuffy to contemporary taste; his allegories are obvious and his subject pictures have a synthetic sweetness which is tiresome."⁵ However, Canaday appreciates Puvis' compositional ability: "... it is a harmonious combination of simplified forms disciplined into delicate, but decisive, balance." Cather's sense of Puvis is quite different, and indeed, she might well have appreciated him as much for his tiresome sweetness as for his sense of form. It was, however, the form of Puvis' murals that Cather hoped to transform, at least in part, in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*:

I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment. Since I first saw the Puvis de Chavannes frescoes of the life of Saint Genevieve in my student days, I have wished that I could try something a little like that in prose; something without accent, with none of the artificial elements of composition.⁶

That art history and Willa Cather might well come to loggerheads over Puvis is not of our concern

here. Her interest was in overall artistic effect rather than in specific pictorial analogue.

The novel does not begin, however, in the Puvis manner at all; the Prologue is drawn from and in a more vigorous pictorial mode. Opening with a broad prospective view of Rome, Cather focuses on a genre scene of clergymen at dinner on a terrace as the sun sets splendidly over the Eternal City. James Woodress has identified a French painting entitled "The Missionary's Story" as the source for this scene, but the rendering in language makes it very much Cather's own vibrant picture:

It was early when the Spanish Cardinal and his guests sat down to dinner. The sun was still good for an hour of supreme splendour, and across the shining folds of country the low profile of the city barely fretted the skyline — indistinct except for the dome of St. Peter's, bluish grey like the flattened top of a great balloon, just a flash of copper light on its soft metallic surface. The Cardinal had an eccentric preference for beginning his dinner at this time in the late afternoon, when the vehemence of the sun suggested motion. The light was full of action and had a peculiar quality of climax — or splendid finish. It was both intense and soft, with a ruddiness as of much-multiplied candlelight, an aura of red in its flames. It bored into the ilex trees, illuminating their mahogany trunks and blurring their dark foliage; it warmed the bright green of the orange trees and the rose of the oleander blooms to gold; sent congested spiral patterns quivering over the damask and plate and crystal. The churchmen kept their rectangular clerical caps on their heads to protect them from the sun. The three Cardinals wore black cassocks with crimson pipings and crimson buttons, the Bishop a long black coat over his violet vest.⁷

Intense color, articulated shapes and forms, spatial relationships, light and dark contrast, — the catalogue of a painter — are the precise devices of description Cather uses with intensity. Under discussion in this scene is the appointment of a Vicar Apostolic for New Mexico, a man whose work will be to reclaim a Church in ruin and disarray. It is agreed that he must be a man "to whom order is necessary — as dear as life," and preferably he will be French, for as the Cardinal says, "... the French arrange! The French missionaries have a sense of proportion and rational adjustment. They are always trying to discover the logical relation of things. It is a passion with them" (DCFA, p. 9). Furthermore, it would be helpful if the candidate has some "intelligence in matters of art," so as to be able to recognize, reclaim, and presumably return, an El Greco portrait of St. Francis, a lost treasure of Cardinal Allande's family. That the painting, and not the living Church, is considered the lost treasure of New Mexico is but one of the many ironies embedded in this scene. The message is clear, however, that the new Vicar must have the ways of an artist, if he is to succeed, for he must shape the disparate parts of his Vicarate into a cohesive whole, just as the painter unites form and color to create meaning. This Prologue closes on another visual note, simpler and more modulated, somewhat in the Impressionistic line, as the day ends:

The long gravelled terrace and its balustrade were blue as a lake in the dusky air. Both sun and shadows were gone. The folds of russet country were now violet. Waves of rose and gold throbbled up the sky from behind the dome of the Basilica. (DCFA, p. 13)

Art, therefore, dominates the Prologue as theme, and controls its development. The drama of the scene is not in its action, but in visual intensity, which is sharply reversed by the second opening of the novel — that of Latour's arrival in the Southwest. Our introduction to this missionary with great sensi-

tivity occurs against a very different backdrop.

Book One is really where the Puvis experiment begins, and the effect Cather was able to achieve with the Puvis style in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has been capably examined by Clinton Keeler in his 1965 article "Narrative Without Accent: Willa Cather and Puvis de Chavanne."⁸ Keeler focuses on stylistic similarities, paying close attention to the delineation of light and space as the key elements in producing "the style of legend." For Keeler, "The distance, the detachment, with which [Cather] treats her historical subjects has the effect of the monumental style The manner in which the light and the space are used, the manner of stasis instead of accent, of distant vision instead of perspective, of suffusion of light instead of dramatic action, is parallel to what is 'monumental' in Puvis' frescoes." Book One actually recasts several of the artistic elements of the Prologue in the New Mexico landscape. Unlike the scene at Rome, this one has but the solitary figure of Latour, "pushing through an arid stretch of country somewhere in central New Mexico" (DCFA, p. 17). The indistinctive landscape lacks the depth of perspective and high color of the Italian scene — everything is the same shape and color, so that Latour seems to be "wandering in some geometrical nightmare," a tortuous experience to "the traveler, who was sensitive to the shape of things" (DCFA, p. 18). The portrait of Latour in buckskin, kneeling before the cruciform tree, a contrast to the elegance of the El Greco St. Francis, and the picture of primitive, domestic comfort contained in the story of his visit to Hidden Water are drawn quietly, without drama, yet suffused with a spiritual tone which gives the literal scene more mythic dimension. The simple life of the Mexican peasants, in a timeless, untouched and generally self-contained world, is counterpoised to the elaborate rituals of living played out by the clergy on the Cardinal's terrace, and cancels out the romanticized view of Indians the European clerics hold, "chiefly drawn from the romances

of Fenimore Cooper." Even the Mexican icons — the rough, hand-carved wooden figures of the saints, brightly painted and dressed — become simplified versions of their more sophisticated counterparts. The story of the miraculously produced painting of the Virgin of Guadeloupe, described in the inset story of Padre Herrera, proves moving to Latour, and we can probably surmise that it is far more effective in making religion and faith real to the Mexicans than the El Greco could have been. Book One ends with Latour's compelling statement on faith, which is, of course, no less a statement of his aesthetic sense:

Where there is great love there are always miracles One might almost say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love The Miracles of the Church seem to me to rest not so much upon faces or voices or healing power coming suddenly near to us from afar off, but upon our perceptions being made finer, so that for a moment our eyes can see and our ears hear what is there about us always. (DCFA, p. 50)

Cather's treatment of light, space and tone in the primitive landscape of New Mexico, and the fineness of the sensibility with which her leading character is endowed are both the reverse and the continuation of the prologue scene in Rome. Through this contrast, we start the novel for a second time, surer of the vision that will inform it, in both the literal and metaphorical senses, and aware of the manner of the telling. Removal of the clutter of life and the focus on a more elemental existence represent not only the impact of the Puvis style, but also remind us of a long-standing Cather dictum, borrowed from the elder Dumas: "to make a drama, a man needed one passion, and four walls."⁹

The simplification process of the Puvis manner of this novel does not lead to any greater subordination of detail than one finds elsewhere in Cather nor does it suppress visual energy. Moments of

violence and horror, of wonder and humor, are created in the various vignettes which make up the book, in that evocative manner of the novel *demeuble*. Graphic details of the degenerate Buck Scales, the gluttonous Fray Baltazar, vain Dona Isabella, profligate Padre Martinez, or the miserly Padre Lucero leave little to subtlety, and as they provide a test for Latour's mission, they also provide an opportunity for Cather to paint vigorous portraits for the panels of her legend. Cather incarnates sin in brief but vivid pictures such as Baltazar awaiting his hare *gardiniere* with its ill-fated sauce, or Lucero's murderous attack on the would-be thief. The challenging visage of Padre Martinez is as memorable as the not-quite-golden curls and the dainty slippered foot of Senora Olivares at her harp. Cather does not make heroes or villains of these characters, but only shows us what is most human — physically and spiritually — about them in the portraits she draws. In the way they live, in the small details of their lives, they reveal to us, as they do to Latour, their essential humanness. However they may serve an allegorical function, these are not the lifeless, pallid figures of an allegory.

The Southwestern landscape yields to more colorful treatment as Latour's missionary journeys proceed, and frequently becomes full of the contrast and light of Impressionism. The suffusion of bright light and the bold, vigorous use of vibrant color make clear that the senses do matter in this novel and that the invigorating order that comes with beauty is important to Latour and to Cather. The sky, above all else, overwhelms Latour: ". . . there was so much sky, more than at sea, more than anywhere else in the world . . . that brilliant blue world of stinging air and moving cloud" (DCFA, p. 232). The play of light — full of motion — across the landscape transforms the geometric patterns of the desert. The cycle of the seasons, the extremes of Nature's variety are all rendered with high color. Perhaps the most notable bit of Impressionist style comes with

the description of the Archbishop's flower garden:

He had one hill-side solidly clad with that low-growing purple verberna which mats over the hills of New Mexico. It was like a great velvet mantle thrown down in the sun; all the shades that the dyers and weavers of Italy and France strove for through the centuries, the violet that is full of rose colour and is yet not lavender; the blue that becomes almost pink and then retreats again into sea-dark purple — the true Episcopal colour and countless variations of it. (DCFA, pp. 267-68)

Sensory excitement pervades the physical world of the Archbishop, and delight comes with those moments when colors and air and light fill one's vision. Latour experiences it approaching Acoma under an ever-changing bright blue sky, or as he rides into Santa Fe for the last time, coming before the "open, golden face of his Cathedral." Such moments are a celebration of the visual, sensory facts of the world.

Interior landscapes are also artfully articulated and recall Cather's interest in genre scenes, borrowing the manner of the Dutch interiors she had spoken of with reference to *The Professor's House*. Cather had already used this technique widely and much earlier in her fiction, but it is no less effective or evocative in New Mexico than it had been in Black Hawk or Moonstone. Jacinto's pueblo house, with its fox pelts, strings of gourds and red peppers, and rich-colored Indian blankets, is a scene of great domesticity, elaborated with a delight in the visual and palpable qualities, and the arrangement, of the things which define that space. The Episcopal residence of Latour is drawn with the same care for detail, emphasizing the aesthetic pleasure derived from the rough beams and uneven adobe walls. Such details assure us of the human touch, of the realness of the place. The furnishings of that room, carefully itemized and described, are visually arranged so that the eye rests fully

on each object, noting its texture, shape, and composition — delighting, as it were, in the visual richness of the things themselves.

The order and beauty of such places underscore the importance of the life well lived, in spite of circumstances, as they serve to connect old and new worlds and to define the civilization Latour holds dear. It is comforting to him to return to his Santa Fe residence to die in his old study, where he finds it much as he left it: "The room was little changed; the same rugs and skins on the earth floor, the same desk with his candlesticks, the same thick, wavy white walls that muted sound, that shut out the world and gave repose to the spirit." Such detailing, while it relates thematic elements within the fiction, also serves to ground the work in a real world by providing a full and comprehensive visual experience.

Throughout *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, the consistent challenge to make real and palpable the longing of the human heart led Cather to the visual arts. Basic human desire is embodied in and gratified by something as small and simple as the little medal of the Virgin that Latour gives to old Sada — "the Image, the physical form of love" — just as it is in "the open, golden face of [Latour's] Cathedral." Cather had come to that story of the Church in the Southwest with the explicit feeling for the tangible reality of its history, which she had discovered first in its physical remains:

The old mission churches, even those which were abandoned and in ruins, had a moving reality about them; the hand-carved beams and joists, the utterly unconventional frescoes, the countless fanciful figures of the saints, no two of them alike, seemed a direct expression of some very real and lively human feeling. They were all fresh, individual, first hand . . . I used to wish there were some written account of the old times when those churches were built; but I soon felt that no record of them could be as real as they

are themselves. They are their own story, and it is foolish convention that we must have everything interpreted for us in written language. There are other ways of telling what one feels, and the people who built and decorated those many, many little churches found their way and left their message.¹⁰

Building the story of Archbishop Latour, Cather sought visual and pictorial modes to make real the people and places of his adventures. Painterly techniques of composition, color, and contrast create the fullness of the world Latour rides into, and they emphasize the fullness of the artistic vision that Cather shared with her complex Archbishop. In the pictorial dimensions of this novel, Cather found for herself "other ways of telling . . .," other ways to leave her message.

NOTES

¹See "The Novel Demeuble," "On the Art of Fiction," "My First Novels — There Were Two" in *Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949).

²Willa Cather, "The Chicago Art Institute," rpt. in *The World and the Parish*, ed. William M. Curtin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), II, pp. 842-843.

³Preface to *The Song of the Lark*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Sentry Edition, 1963), v.

⁴Willa Cather, "On *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," in *Willa Cather on Writing*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 12.

⁵John Canaday, *Mainstreams of Modern Art* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1959), p. 331.

⁶Cather, "On *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," p. 9.

⁷Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 4. All subsequent references are to this edition and are identified in the text.

⁸Clinton Keeler, "Narrative Without Accent: Willa Cather and Puvis de Chavanne," *American Quarterly*, 17 (Spring 1965), 119-126.

⁹Willa Cather, "The Novel De-meuble," in *Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 43.

¹⁰Willa Cather, "On *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," pp. 5-6.

Con-Quest or In-Quest? Cather's Mythic Impulse in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

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*That from which these things are
born
That by which they live
That to which they return at death
Try to know that*

— Carolyn Forché
"Burning the Tomato Worms"

At the age of sixty, Willa Cather's *Archbishop* is a vigorous yet somewhat crotchety gentleman, at times inscrutable, and, like many of our elders, justifiably resistant to the efforts of young upstarts like literary critics to make him sit still in his episcopal chair in the corner. Sometimes we'd like to tuck that chair delicately between the grand old couch of romance and the well-polished coffee table of realism; at others, we seem determined to stuff it, more or less rudely, into the already crowded parlor of "minor" literature by American women. For the moment, though, in considering how Cather's mythic impulse is played out in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, I proceed with the hope and the assumption that we can find a place for this man of such refined sensibilities in a contemporary room with a view — with skylights, no doubt, an elegant garden just outside the door, and, off in the distance, the stark beauty of the rose-carnelian hills that both Jean Marie Latour and his creator held in such awe. And, if my discussion of the mythic re-invokes the terms suggested above (romance, realism, minor, major, American, woman), it does so because Cather's novel of 1927 — so rich and complex, so rife with possibilities and puzzles — has much to offer to recent efforts, particularly by feminist critics, to revise the notions most basic to the process of literary canon-formation in America.

"Myth" is a word practically impossible to avoid in discussions of Willa Cather, but, oddly enough, it has not so far served as a particularly adept guide across the vast and varied terrain of her fiction. Studies of the place of myth in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, for example, have resulted in the dutiful tracking down of Catholic sources, values, and images (by those whom I have secretly termed "Convent Critics" in notes to myself; or, in painstaking efforts to demonstrate the importance of the American Southwest in Cather's use of legend and landscape ("Postcard Critics," as I call them, and the proof that they exist is in an invitation I received last year to participate in a "Spring Expedition" to the sites of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in New Mexico). Finally and most recently, feminists have tossed their hats into the ring of myth criticism, and at least one has, I think correctly, explored *The Archbishop* as the story of the hero's regeneration through acceptance of the female principle.¹

Valuable as some of these earlier approaches are, each obscures the broader purposes of what I am calling Cather's mythic impulse. The aesthetic, epistemological, revisionary, romantic are traditions obviously mixed and occasionally crossed in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, but they all contribute in the largest sense toward a sustained exploration of how myth functions in any culture: as a source of meaning or as a purveyor of illusion, as sacred story or as crippling half-truth. Clearly, as both artist and thinker, Cather is attracted to the timeless ways of knowing and being that conventional definitions of myth

suggest. Indeed, in a now well-known account of how she came to write *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, she acknowledges that the story of the Catholic Church in the Southwest had struck her as "the most interesting of all its stories," and that her desire to write something in the style of a legend or a saint's tale was rooted in a fascination for lives lived "as though all human experiences, measured against one supreme spiritual experience [death], were of about the same importance."² Thus, the fluidity of the novel's vignette structure, with its attendant use of recapitulations and "digressive" tales of evil priests and troubled women, can to some extent be explained as an attempt to fuse mythic and narrative time, to demonstrate that all things are equally real and all events are co-incident with one another.

Nevertheless, as an educated woman of the early twentieth century, Cather was bound to be skeptical of myths that suggested a "naturalness" or "permanence" to the order of things. As early as 1895, when she was only twenty-two and working as a journalist, Cather argued in a Nebraska newspaper that, "The Bible undoubtedly teaches that woman should be subservient to man, but does it say that she was, is, or ever will be?" She goes on to explain that, "It began with Eve who wheedled Adam into eating more fruit than was good for him," and, after several more witty examples, she concludes that, "These are only a few of the hundred Biblical instances in which the women who were undoubtedly created subservient turned the tables. In theory the Jews maintained the superiority of man but in practice it did not always follow."³

This revisionary desire to "turn the tables" is quietly yet clearly at work in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, and it is what enables Cather to pick and choose so freely from the mythic traditions she explores. As a non-Catholic, a white, and a woman, she is relatively alien to all of these traditions — Catholic, Native American, and the largely masculinist Anglo-American myths of the frontier that

Annette Kolodny has analyzed in *The Lay of the Land*.⁴ Thus, she leaps delicately over the very real cultural boundaries that so sharply divided the world of nineteenth-century New Mexico, transforming the often violent "contest of cultures" that ethnohistorian James Axtell has documented⁵ into a brilliant though fragile tapestry of faiths, fantasies, and the cross-cultural desire to order one's world with a sense of beginning and of continuing. The action of the novel lies in the interaction of these various orders, in the quiet encounters of the European priest with the Mexicans, Indians, and Americans of his diocese. "What do you think about the stars, Padre?" asks Latour's Indian guide Jacinto in a meditative moment by their campfire. "The wise men tell us they are worlds, like ours, Jacinto," Latour replies. Cather continues:

The end of the Indian's cigarette grew bright and then dull again before he spoke. "I think not," he said in the tone of one who has considered a proposition fairly and rejected it. "I think they are leaders — great spirits."

"Perhaps they are," said the Bishop with a sigh. "Whatever they are, they are great."⁶

Clearly, Cather is far less interested in the disastrous collision of cultures that she knows actually occurred than she is in the co-existence of peoples and mythologies that might have been possible under different circumstances. The former lies in the province of realism, which Cather derided as limited in scope, unable to move beyond "the ugly skeleton of things"; but the latter is the province of romance, which she praised as "the highest form of fiction," a fiction "whose possibilities are as high and limitless as beauty, as good, as hope."⁷ Surely this is the territory — uncharted and undulating — we must explore in order to understand Willa Cather as myth-maker, myth-breaker, and as American woman writer.

Canonical definitions of the American romance describe it as a fantasy of the relationship between

a (usually male) self and a (without exception) female landscape.⁸ Given the privileged place of the romance in the established canon of American literature, Cather's adamant claim to and revision of this genre (essentially the last of the mythic traditions referred to earlier) is both interesting and important. The convergence of orders and the blurring of cultural distinctions discussed above are crucial aspects of Cather's revision of the romance, pointing as they do toward a degree of discomfort about literature as an instrument of nationalism and to a surprising degree of assurance about the fluidity of the self and of the meanings which selves create. Consciously opposed to the aesthetic of (geopolitical and sexual) *appropriation* that characterizes male romance fictions — from Emerson's claim that the poet would be "true land-lord! sea-lord! air-lord!"⁹ to Hawthorne and Melville's more fearful explorations of characters who use the imagination as a means of pursuit and possession — Cather posits instead a romance aesthetic of *accommodation*, an impulse imaged in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as the Indian's manner of "pass[ing] through the landscape, [rather than] stand[ing] out against it" (233). This aesthetic of accommodation, with concomitant principles of cooperation and reconciliation (these, by the way, are opposed to masculinist tales of conflict and repudiation — witness Ahab and his whale, Isaac McCaslin and the land he is so desperate to renounce), is the defining element of a (dare I call it) feminist revision of the American romance that was undertaken not only by Cather but by a number of her predecessors and contemporaries, including Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Edith Wharton. However briefly and sketchily, I would like here to consider *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as a representative and indeed central text to this body of work, keeping in mind that my secret ambition is to formulate a set of terms that will make possible a genuinely radical feminist re-

vision of the American literary canon.

"But wait!" I hear the skeptics muttering under their breaths. "How can you call this a 'feminist' text when the protagonist is not only a man but a priest who has renounced the company of women and is so skiddish about female physicality that he finds himself exceedingly annoyed when the dark shadow rolling across his bedroom in the night proves to be a 'bunch of woman's hair that had been indolently tossed into a corner when some slovenly female toilet' was made in this room (149)? And he's a missionary — How can you say that he isn't on the side of the New World con-quest and con-job?"

Okay, skeptics, I'll grant you all that, and I'll even add more fuel to your fire. Notice, too, that the prologue to the novel shows the missionary Bishop from America dining in Rome and handpicking Latour for the arduous task of saving a faith that has been drifting for three hundred years and which faces threats from within by profligate priests and from without by the American government. Recognizing Latour as a man "to whom order is necessary — as dear as life," the Bishop selects him to deal with New Mexico's "savagery and ignorance," and to live in the "peculiar horror" of a place where "the very floor of the world is cracked open into countless canyons and arroyos" (7). Furthermore, Latour himself appears to countenance this imperialistic description of his mission when he refers in a letter early in the novel to an uncomfortably holy alliance between his church and young corporate/military America:

"The kindness of the American traders, and especially of the military officers at the Fort, commands more than a superficial loyalty. I mean to help the officers at their task here. I can assist them more than they realize. The Church can do more than the Fort to make these Mexicans 'good Americans.' And it is for the people's good; there is no other way in which they can better their condition." (35-36)

One might say that Cather neatly circumvents these questions about Latour's character by subordinating the whole concept of "character" (a hangover, after all, from realism) to the textual abstractionism of a beautifully lyrical and impressionistic prose, her struggle to convey the shapes, colors, odors, and textures of a landscape in language. For the moment, though, let's take seriously the question of character by considering who Cather chooses as "heroes" and how she uses them. One of the complaints about *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is, of course, that it has no hero of the conventionally phallic frontier type, nor even an amazonian heroine in the mode of Cather's own Alexandra Bergson or Antonia Shimerda. Indeed, complains John H. Randall, one of *The Archbishop's* more vitriolic detractors, "Instead of feeling challenged by the land, as would a Cather pioneer, [Latour] is content to enjoy the beauties of the scenery, like any tourist."¹⁰ What Randall misses, among other things, is that the non-dramatic style in which the characters are drawn is consciously and utterly at odds with the imperialistic ethos of conquest implicit both in Randall's commentary and in the way Latour's mission is initially defined. Such expectations are delicately yet certainly undercut by the curious blend of knightly courtesy and maternal tenderness that marks all of the major figures in the novel. Latour, for example, is described as "a priest in a thousand," whose brow is "open, generous, reflective," and whose hands are marked by "a singular elegance" (19). Time after time he plays the mother to Vaillant, going to fetch him when he is stricken ill on his missionary journeys, tending happily to the garden while the impatient, child-like Joseph longs for recovery and his next departure. Equally important to note, however, is that, as the more socially and politically adept of the two, Joseph often plays the "wife" — cook, hostess, peacemaker — to Latour's more withdrawn "husband." The shifting nature of roles and boundaries in this central relationship could be the focus of a

fascinating study in and of itself, and other major characters in the novel conform to this unusual pattern. Cather's version of Kit Carson, for example, is a far cry from many of his rugged predecessors in American fiction, since even he demonstrates a kind of maternal solicitude toward the Mexican woman Magdalena, and he sheepishly (cooly?) confesses to Latour when they meet that he is "right shy, sir, and . . . always afraid of being disappointed." Physically, too, Carson is strangely feminine: "slight in frame" and with lips that are "full and delicately modelled," and a mouth that is "reflective, a little melancholy, — [with] something that suggested a capacity for tenderness" (75). Then there is Eusabio, the Indian guide who dresses very elegantly and whose "quiet way of moving" through the wilderness is so crucial to the evolution of Latour's understanding of New Mexico and his place there. The Indians, he realizes in the course of his travels with Eusabio, "seemed to have none of the European's desire to 'master' nature, to arrange and re-create. . . . The land and all that it bore they treated with consideration; not attempting to improve it, they never desecrated it" (234).

By the end of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, this evolution is complete, and the eclecticism that has marked Latour's sensibility from the beginning has been matched with a tolerance, a compassion, and a deep respect for all peoples and all systems of belief that indicates how fully he has turned away from his earlier vow to "make these Mexicans 'good Americans'." His statement in the final section of the novel that "his diocese changed little except in boundaries. The Mexicans were always Mexicans, the Indians were always Indians" (286) seems to reflect not so much resignation as the realization that he has fulfilled his mission without destroying the dignity of those he came to "save." Perhaps, in the final analysis, they have saved him, converted him out of the ideology of spiritual imperialism and into one of genuine pluralism. And, in the closing paragraph, as Mexicans,

American Catholics, and Indians gather to mourn Latour's death in the cathedral he had built, we realize how fully the American romance has been revised here. Instead of a story of fragmentation, isolation, and despair — because Dimmesdale must renounce Hester, because Ishmael will survive alone to tell the tale, because Huck can always be counted on to light out for the territories — Cather has held out to us instead the alternative possibility: of integration, of understanding, of hope. In an age grown cynical about miracles, surely this is one that even the most modern of us can admire.

NOTES

¹The particular feminist study I have in mind here is Susan Hallgarth's "Willa Cather and the Female Principle" (unpublished), although two other recent works — Susan J. Rosowski's *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) and Judith Fryer's *Felicitous Space: The Imaginative Structures of Edith Wharton and Willa Cather* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986) — offer major reconsiderations of Cather's use of space and landscape.

²*Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Knopf, 1949) 9.

³In William M. Curtin, ed., *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893-1902* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970) 1:127.

⁴*The Lay of the Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

⁵*The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁶*Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Vintage, 1971 [rpt.]) 93. Future references to this edition will be made parenthetically within my text.

⁷In Bernice Slotte, ed., *The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893-1896* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966) 269-270, 325.

⁸The formidable body of literary criticism that has established this definition of the American romance developed around the essential arguments of D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, first published in 1923 — shortly before Cather and Lawrence became acquainted in New York and, perhaps not coincidentally, the seeds of

Death Comes for the Archbishop began to germinate.

⁹"The Poet," in Stephen E. Whicher, ed., *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957) 241.

¹⁰*The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960) 292.

The Howlett Basis of Vaillant and Latour's Friendship

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In three of her last four novels — *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *Shadows on the Rock*, and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* — and in an unfinished novel of medieval France, Willa Cather faced the almost overwhelming challenge of writing about people and places far removed from her. No longer could she depend so completely on memory and affection as she had in writing her prairie novels. Now she found it necessary to immerse herself in the history, geography, and myths of the places she wrote about and to acquaint herself through historical documents with the people of those diverse regions. Her approach is especially evident in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, her first and most successful historical novel.¹

Although Cather wrote *Archbishop* rather quickly — finishing it in less than a year — her preparation for this work spanned more than a decade. After traveling to Arizona and New Mexico in 1912, she explains that during the next twelve years, "I went back as often as I could, and the story of the Church and the Spanish missionaries was always what most interested me."² But it was not until she happened upon *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf*, an obscure diocesan biography of the vicar and friend of Santa Fe's Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy, that she felt confident enough to begin writing *Archbishop*.³

Written by William Joseph Howlett, a priest who knew Denver's Bishop Machebeuf personally, this biography not only outlines Machebeuf's missionary experience in New Mexico and Colorado but treats in some detail his friendship with Lamy and contains translations of several letters Machebeuf wrote to his sister Philomene, a nun in France. Referring to Howlett's book, Cather says,

At last I found out what I wanted to know about how the country and the people of New Mexico seemed to those first missionary priests from France. Without these letters in Father Howlett's book to guide me, I would certainly never had dared to write my book. (*On Writing*, 8)

Surprisingly, except for Edward and Lillian Bloom, critics have paid little attention to Howlett's influence — this is partly because Howlett's volume, printed nearly eighty years ago, is quite difficult to locate. In their essay "The Genesis of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," the Blooms identify Howlett and other writers, such as J. B. Salpointe, J. H. Defouri, and Francis Palou, as historical sources for Cather's novel.⁴ The Blooms even list by page number significant parallel accounts between Howlett and Cather, but the understandably limited focus of their paper does not allow them to explore these parallels in much depth or to indicate the extent of

Cather's borrowings. The areas of the Howlett source that warrant more attention are numerous, but of particular note is the relationship of Machebeuf and Lamy, whose characters are to a significant degree the prototypes for Cather's portrayal of Vaillant and Latour.

My particular concern here is the Howlett basis of Cather's portrayal of the friendship between Vaillant and Latour — indeed even the love and ardor between them. To establish that this friendship had its genesis in Howlett's account, I will compare Howlett's and Cather's presentations of the early lives of the young priests, their years in Ohio, and their missionary labors in New Mexico. I have included generous excerpts from Howlett for the benefit of those not acquainted with this crucial but inaccessible text.

Howlett provides no details about the initial meeting of the two friends. The first mention of Lamy comes in the following account of Machebeuf's seminary days in Montferrand:

For the choice of a diocese in which to labor, [Machebeuf's] teachers at the Seminary came to his aid. It happened providentially that Bishop Purcell of Cincinnati was then in Rome. Bishop Purcell had been a student under the Sulpicians at Paris, and his former spiritual director, Father Comfe, was now the Superior of the Seminary of Montferrand. The Bishop wrote to Father Comfe, asking him to find a few good young priests whom he might take with him on his return to the New World A little band of priests, all intimate friends, was thus made up, and, while Bishop Purcell was transacting his business at Rome, they made their own arrangements for departure. This first band was composed of Fathers Machebeuf, Lamy, Gacon, Cheymol and Navaron, of all of whom we shall have occasion to speak later on. (39-40)

Machebeuf debated for some time about leaving for America, and his

difficulties were far from over when he made up his mind. Besides having to settle pressing family problems, Machebeuf had to deal with his father's disapproval of his decision:

As yet he had said nothing to his father of his plans, for he knew well the stern will of his parent, as well as his affection, and that the two combined would result in a direct command against his leaving home. (42)

Unsure of the best course of action, young Machebeuf consulted his friends in the Seminary — Lamy among them — about what he should do:

by their advice [Machebeuf] determined to avoid this obstacle rather than attempt to remove it. His new plan was to leave home by stealth, and trust to Providence to soften the blow for his beloved father, and obtain forgiveness for himself for such a seeming flagrant violation of filial respect and duty. (42)

This decision set up the secret departure of the troubled young priest and his friend Lamy. The following is the account in Howlett of that departure as told many years later by a bishop familiar with the circumstance:

On the morning of the 21st of May, 1839, two young priests of the Diocese of Clermont, dressed as civilians, passed hurriedly along the streets of Riom before sunrise, and went out of the city by the main road leading towards Paris. Upon reaching the open country they stopped to await the coming of the diligence which was to take them over the first stage of their journey to the Seminary of Foreign Missions in that distant capital. Their departure resembled rather a flight, yet, in spite of its secrecy the young ecclesiastics were seen, and one of them was recognized by a brother priest and former fellow-student. A few words explained all, and, as this friend grasped the hand of the

young traveler in an affectionate farewell, he saw the emotion which shook the delicate frame of the voluntary exile as he cast a last tearful look back upon his native city. He realized that a terrible struggle was taking place in that heart whose tender sensibilities were so well known to him. In fact, a great and sublime sacrifice was being accomplished there at that moment. The young priest, in order to spare his family the heart-rending pain of a farewell, and likewise to escape their determined resistance to what he considered his vocation, had passed before the door of his father's house without stopping to enter. His young companion, whose own heart was still throbbing with the emotions of a similar sacrifice made only the day before, was scarcely less disturbed, but, drawing near to his sobbing friend, he lightly laid his hand upon his shoulder and pointed towards heaven. Silently they turned and continued on their way. The young fugitives were the Abbe Lamy and the Abbe Machebeuf. (43)

Howlett adds that

The reality of the event differed but little from this account, although some of the dramatic touches were wanting. [Machebeuf's] own account was that he passed his father's door in the diligence, and that he lay down on the floor of it in order to escape observation. (43-44)

Although her basic account is similar to Howlett's, Cather expands and alters the original material, shaping it to her own ends. She describes the priests as stealing "away disguised in civilian's clothes" (284), which closely parallels Howlett's description of Machebeuf and Lamy "dressed as civilians" (Howlett 43); however, when Cather describes them a second time, she says they are "disguised as if they were criminals" (Cather 285). This seemingly insignificant alteration serves to

heighten the drama of their running away. In a similar vein, Cather deepens the difficulty of the young Vaillant's departure by replacing the somewhat vague "a terrible struggle . . . taking place in [Machebeuf's] heart" (Howlett 43) with a more graphic depiction: "it seemed . . . that Joseph was suffering more than flesh could bear, that he was actually being torn in two by conflicting desires" (Cather 285). By making Vaillant's suffering more violent and immediate, Cather underscores his need for direction and support in this most difficult decision. The person to come to his aid is of course Latour, whom Cather paints in glowing heroic strokes: "Jean Latour, having made his decision and pledged himself, knew no wavering" (284). The strong, forthright Latour bears little similarity to the more doubting Lamy of Howlett's account, "whose own heart was still throbbing with the emotions of a similar sacrifice made only the day before" and who "was scarcely less disturbed" than Machebeuf (43).

Let us now compare the resolution of the dilemma. First, consider Howlett's account: Lamy "lightly laid his hand upon his shoulder and pointed towards heaven. Silently they turned and continued on their way. The young fugitives were the Abbe Lamy and the Abbe Machebeuf" (43). Here the young priests are portrayed as fellow sufferers, supporting each other in a difficult decision. Now consider Cather's version:

"What shall I do, Jean? Help me!" he cried. "I cannot break my father's heart, and I cannot break the vow I have made to Heaven. I had rather die than do either. Ah, if I could but die of this misery, here, now!" (285)

Just as the diligence approaches, Latour offers the perfect solution to the dilemma:

"*L'invitation du voyage!* You will accompany me to Paris. Once we are there, if your father is not reconciled, we will get Bishop F— to absolve you from your promise, and you can return to Riom. It is very simple." (285)

In this example, Cather replaces Howlett's portrayal of the priests as similarly suffering friends with her rendition of them as complementary opposites — Latour is strong and confident, Vaillant unsure and weak.

To emphasize this polarity further, Cather ignores certain "facts" about Lamy that might make him seem the weaker of the two, such as his tendency toward illness. Consider Machebeuf's comments in personal letters written before his trip to America: "I am happy to assure you that Father Lamy is well enough now to undertake the voyage" (51); however, this recuperation did not last long. A month later, this time during the voyage, Machebeuf again comments on Lamy's fragile health: "Bishop Purcell and Father Gacon were sick only three days, but that was not the case with Father Lamy, who was not strong when we sailed. He was sick nearly three weeks" (58). Though both historical priests suffer illness, it is solely to Vaillant that Cather attributes sickness and weakness of body:

Of the two young priests who set forth from Riom that morning in early spring, Jean Latour had seemed the one so much more likely to succeed in a missionary's life. He, indeed, had a sound mind in a sound body. During the weeks they spent at the College of Foreign Missions in the rue du Bac, the authorities had been very doubtful of Joseph's fitness for the hardships of the mission field. (286)

We soon come to associate Latour's health and evenness of temper with his rational mind, and Vaillant's wavering and sickness with his impetuous and passionate nature.

Not only does Cather alter Howlett's account of the priests' departure; she also presents it to us in three strategically placed flashbacks, so that instead of serving merely as a static commentary on the two priests, this incident becomes a recurring motif that helps unify and structure *Death*

Comes for the Archbishop. The first mention of the departure comes two-thirds of the way through the novel while Vaillant is convalescing at Santa Fe. He remembers that

It was in May that he had been given grace to perform the hardest act of his life; to leave his country, to part from his dear sister and his father (under what sad circumstances!), and to start for the New World to take up a missionary's labours. (204)

And he rightly recognizes Jean Latour's part in that decision:

It was because of what Father Latour had been to him in that hour, indeed, that Father Joseph was here in a garden in Santa Fe. He would never have left his dear Sandusky when the newly appointed Bishop asked him to share his hardships, had he not said to himself: "Ah, now it is he who is torn by perplexity! I will be to him now what he was to me that day when we stood by the road-side, waiting for the *diligence* to Paris, and my purpose broke, and, — he saved me." (205)

Although she mentions Latour's support in France, Cather concentrates here on Vaillant's ability to repay the devotion of Latour, "who [was] torn by perplexity." Cather further emphasizes this reversal of character strength, by showing Vaillant's independence: he prefers hunting "for lost Catholics" to remaining in Santa Fe with Latour (206). Understandably, Vaillant's request to leave Santa Fe,

brought Father Latour a bitter personal disappointment. There was but one thing to do, — and before he reached the tamarisks he had done it. He broke off a spray of the dry lilac-coloured flowers to punctuate and seal, as it were, his renunciation. (208-09)

Because Cather concentrates on Vaillant's aid to Latour, both in Vaillant's following him to New Mexico and providing him the friendship he needs, we begin to view Vaillant heroically, despite his impulsive nature and early vacillation.

Cather gives us the second flashback, the full account of the departure, some seventy-five pages later, this time from Latour's point of view. By saving the details of Vaillant's wavering and Latour's strength as they await the approaching *diligence*, Cather re-establishes Latour as the central character, the guiding force behind Vaillant's actions: "if Jean Latour had not supported him in that hour of torment, [Vaillant] would have been a parish priest in the Puy-de-Dome for the rest of his life" (286). Cather places the third flashback, which I will discuss at the end of the New Mexico section, in the final pages of the novel, where it reamplifies the first two flashbacks and further expands the departure motif.

Though Howlett allots nearly one hundred pages, or roughly one quarter of the biography, to Machebeuf's years in Ohio, Cather mentions Ohio only in passing. Of course, this is to be expected since *Death Comes for the Archbishop* focuses on the Southwest. Yet Cather is indebted to this portion of Howlett's account because it provides her with examples of the priests' friendship, which she develops throughout her novel. In these Ohio chapters Cather would have first recognized the unusual bond between these lifelong friends.

Upon arriving in the United States, the priests were sent almost immediately to work (63) — Machebeuf to labor in Tiffin, Ohio (62), and Lamy to Danville (68), some seventy miles away. Although they had little opportunity to see each other, one incident indicates the closeness they felt. Father Vaillant had been overseeing seven congregations, as well as a "new parish of Norwalk, where the unfinished church was about to be sold for debt" (139). He was overworked and needed an assistant, which had been promised him in the person of the French priest Peter Peudeprat, but Father Peudeprat remained at nearby Sandusky only a short time before being assigned to Toledo. However, Machebeuf's poor fortune was quickly reversed — or seemed to be:

Bishop Purcell consoled Father Machebeuf for the loss of his assistant by telling him that he would send Father Lamy to Sandusky as soon as he could find a priest to replace him at Danville. This rejoiced both Father Machebeuf and Father Lamy, for these two friends would then be together, and this for each of them was more happiness than they had dared to hope for. In the meantime Father Machebeuf went on alone with his work, cheered up by this hope which was sweet as long as it lasted, but it was never realized in Ohio. (141)

A later incident further establishes the mutual devotion of the two friends, although not exactly in the direction developed by Cather. During a time when Machebeuf's labors in Ohio seemed to bear little fruit, he received a visit from Father De Smet, "whose name has since become famed the world over as indicating the greatest missionary among the Indians of the Far West." Impressed by Machebeuf's "disinterested zeal" (149), De Smet invited him to labor with him in Oregon. The offer had a certain allure and Machebeuf's mind was "strongly turned towards this new idea, which appealed to him as the ultimate fulfillment of his missionary vocation":

Before [Machebeuf] had taken any decisive step, however, in the matter, a rumor of his intention reached Father Lamy, who lost no time in visiting him for the purpose of dissuading him from such a move. Their conference was long and earnest, and ended only when Father Lamy said: "My dear friend, when we came to America we made an agreement that we would keep together as much as possible. Now, if you go, I shall follow you!" This was more than Father Machebeuf had counted upon. He might do as he pleased with himself, but he could not force this alternative upon his best friend, so he gave up the idea. (150)

Later, when Lamy received his assignment to New Mexico it is not surprising that he asked Machebeuf to join him there. The following is Machebeuf's account of the matter as written to his brother and sister in France:

As soon as the [papal documents] arrived from Rome [Lamy] wrote to me, first to tell me the great news, but principally to propose to me that I accompany him in the quality of an intimate friend upon whom he could depend, as well as an assistant upon whom he could lay a part of his burden — in fine, he wished me to go as his Vicar General. With his usual simplicity and humility he said to me: "They wish that I should be a Vicar Apostolic, and I wish you to be my Vicar General, and from these two vicars we shall try to make one good Pastor." (153-54)

Although Cather does not use these specific examples in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, one can hardly ignore corresponding instances of deep friendship and loyalty in her novel. And if we analyze the above selections from Howlett closely, we see that they provided Cather with a model for subtly portraying differences in each friend's devotion to the other. Lamy felt a certain emotional necessity to work near Machebeuf; this is why he offered to follow Machebeuf to Oregon, even against his own will, and why he later called Machebeuf to assist him in New Mexico. Machebeuf was equally devoted to Lamy, though perhaps less dependent. He was willing to leave Lamy and Ohio for the prospects of a better ecclesiastical pasture in Oregon. Only after remembering his promise to Lamy and seeing Lamy's determination to follow him did he decide to remain in Ohio. Later, when the work in his own Ohio parish was finally beginning to blossom, Machebeuf did not want to follow Lamy out West. In fact the proposition of leaving "upset his mind and threw him into a state of uncertainty, hesitation and fear" (152). It was only after receiving two letters from Lamy and medi-

tating upon the decision that Machebeuf followed Lamy to the Southwest. Lamy, then, felt committed to working near Machebeuf, whereas Machebeuf was more absorbed by the work itself. In Cather, these attitudes are clearly seen when Latour recalls Machebeuf from Arizona, which I will consider below.

Of Cather's numerous Southwest borrowings from Howlett, three are especially helpful in understanding the friendship between Vaillant and Latour: the white mules episode, Lamy's recall of Machebeuf from Arizona, and Machebeuf's speech at Lamy's funeral.

The white mules and their acquisition by Father Vaillant came to Howlett through Father Ussel, the "cherished pastor of Walsenburg, Colorado" (211), who heard the story from Machebeuf himself while they were traveling together for several weeks. This is Ussel's report of Machebeuf's account:

Some four years ago, when I had so much traveling to do all over New Mexico, it happened that my saddle horse gave out near Albuquerque. There was the ranch of a rich Mexican close by, and I went there to try to borrow a horse to take me to Santa Fe. I was not acquainted with the proprietor of the place, but I introduced myself and made known my wants. "Certainly," said the owner, "but do you prefer a horse to a mule?" In a few moments both horse and mule were brought out, and I was told to take my choice. "No," said I, "you know more about them than I do and can make a better choice." "Very well," said he, "that bay mule is a good traveler, gentle under the saddle and in the harness — in fact, he is my favorite animal." "And how long may I keep him?" I inquired, "a week, a month or a year?" "Oho!" answered the man, "I think I see your point, Senor Vicario. Just wait a minute." And with that he sent a peon for another mule, which was a perfect match

for the first. "Now," said he, "there are two mules; do you think you need them both?" "Surely," said I, "Bishop Lamy needs a mule as badly as I do; but how long may we keep them?" "I leave that to you, Senor Vicario," he answered, "and I shall not object to your time." "Then," said I, "we need them for sixteen years!" "All right, Senor Vicario, you have said it," he returned, "you may take the mules, and I am happy to be able to do you this little service." (216-17)

Cather takes Howlett's "rich Mexican close by" and gives him a name, Manuel Lujon. She then spends an entire chapter endowing Lujon, his ranch, and his men and maid servants with life. Lujon becomes not just the man who gives the priest mules; he, along with his people, are like the "lost Catholics" of Arizona to whom Vaillant later dedicates his labors, "full of devotion and faith," but with "nothing to feed upon but the most mistaken superstitions" (206). Cather also develops the humor in the Howlett account. Eager to keep the mule indefinitely, Machebeuf said, with some guile, "And how long may I keep him? . . . a week, a month or a year?" Sensing Machebeuf's intent, and not wanting to separate the bay mules, the rancho left for a moment, then returned with the second mule. After assuring the rancho that Lamy could use the second mule, Machebeuf audaciously asked for a sixteen-year loan. Similarly, Vaillant, with "the craftiness of Odysseus,"⁵ obtains both mules from Lujon when only one is offered him. Feigning selflessness, Vaillant says:

"I cannot accept your present. I have thought upon it overnight, and I see that I cannot. The Bishop works as hard as I do, and his horse is little better than mine. You know he lost everything on his way here, in a shipwreck at Galveston . . . It would be inappropriate. I must ride away on my old mare." (62)

As he had hoped, both mules are offered him, and he immediately

accepts. Cather concludes with the rancho's reflections: "He believed he would be proud of the fact that they rode Contento and Angelica. Father Vaillant had forced his hand, but he was rather glad of it" (64).

Besides using the mules to entertain her readers and illustrate Vaillant's craftiness, Cather uses them figuratively in naming them Angelica and Contento and in establishing their inseparability. While the names of the mules amuse us, they also accentuate the characters of Vaillant and Latour. We associate the first mule, Contento, suggesting earthly satisfaction, with Vaillant, who is fond "of good eating and drinking" (226) and is the more earthy of the two priests. The second mule, Angelica, is appropriately paired with Latour, who is more refined, a man of "exceptional qualities" and "delicate perceptions," more artistic and reflective (253-254). The mules, then, become yet another means Cather uses to establish the complementary relationship of Vaillant and Latour. Cather also uses the inseparability of the mules as a comment on her priests. Consider what Lujon says of the mules:

"It seems that God has given them intelligence. When I talk to them, they look up at me like Christians; they are very companionable. They are always ridden together and have a great affection for each other." (60)

Susan Rosowski says that the mules provide an excellent example of doubling, a principle by which two people or things — in this case Vaillant and Latour — "appear to be magically joined" through similar images.⁶ The affection between the mules, which accentuates the doubling, becomes especially important later when Vaillant leaves for Colorado. In Howlett's description of the Colorado trip, the mules are mentioned only sketchily: "four mules, including the span of bay mules, furnished the powers of locomotion" (287). Cather uses this detail to emphasize again the priests' special friendship. Latour insists that Vaillant take both mules because "They have a great

affection for each other; why separate them indefinitely? One could not explain to them. They have worked long together" (254). At face value, Latour's insistence that the animals remain a pair is merely practical, but viewed symbolically, his insistence is an unconscious projection of his desire to remain with Vaillant. Though hundreds of miles would separate the two priests and Vaillant would never return "to share [Latour's] work in New Mexico" (257), spiritually the two priests would be laboring side by side, as the mules labored, two "Christians" with "great affection for each other."

Cather's borrowing from Howlett is even more extensive in the events surrounding Lamy's recall of Machebeuf from Arizona. In 1860, nine years after the two priests had left Ohio for the Southwest, Machebeuf spent two months recuperating from malaria in Santa Fe and then took a short missionary trip of four to five weeks before traveling to Arizona, some six hundred miles away, where he remained for several months. Howlett explains that

On the occasion of this trip his absence was more than usually felt by Bishop Lamy. They had been friends from boyhood, were in seminary together, came to America at the same time, and had labored as neighbors during all the years of their early missionary life . . .

It was this friendship, in addition to necessity, which made Bishop Lamy bring him to Santa Fe, and now the bond, strengthened by closer association, made long separation a trial. Somehow Bishop Lamy felt the separation, and it wore upon him until he sent word to Father Machebeuf, asking him to hasten his return. To Father Machebeuf this was equivalent to a command, and he lost no time in making the 600 miles of the return trip.

Upon arriving at Santa Fe he was welcomed by the Bishop, who, however, made no allusion to the cause of this recall. Father Machebeuf

was obliged to ask for the reasons, when Bishop Lamy replied: "Oh, there was nothing in particular, but I wanted to see you. We have not been enough together, and you were so long away that I was lonesome for you and longing for your return. Just stay here with me now for a while and rest. It will be pleasant to talk over old times. We have not too much consolation of this intimate sort and I feel that we need some now. In a short time you can go again." (257-58)

In reshaping Howlett's account, Cather takes the passing reference to Machebeuf's malaria and develops an entire chapter, "The Month of Mary," around it. This chapter is important because in it we first glimpse Latour's desire to keep Vaillant nearby, a desire which Latour eventually renounces when he recognizes the selfishness of it:

"Your feeling must be your guide in this matter, Joseph. I shall put no obstacles in your way. A certain care for your health I must insist upon, but when you are quite well, you must follow the duty that calls loudest." (209)

In the section titled "Eusabio" Latour once again struggles with his separation from Vaillant. He spends three days in the Navajo country deciding "whether he would be justified in recalling Father Vaillant from Tucson," this time more permanently. In the end he recognizes that in addition to needing his "Vicar, who had so much tact with the natives, so much sympathy with all their shortcomings, . . . he missed Father Vaillant's companionship — why not admit it?" (223). And while Latour's motive for recalling Vaillant is partly loneliness, as it was for Lamy, Latour hesitates admitting this to Vaillant: "Father Vaillant had been in Santa Fe nearly three weeks, and as yet nothing had been revealed to him that warranted his Bishop in calling him back from Tucson" (239).

Cather follows Howlett closely in recording Vaillant's response to his recall:

Dearly as Father Machebeuf loved Bishop Lamy, he was not quite satisfied with this explanation. The work of God called him, and he looked at the good which he might be continually doing. Idleness was distasteful to him, and even friendship could not reconcile him to a long continuance in it. Time and again he thought of starting out, but the Bishop always restrained him, telling him it was too soon and asking him to wait a little while longer. (258)

Here is Cather's version, with Vaillant addressing Latour:

"Perhaps you have noticed that I am a little restless. I don't know when I have been two weeks out of the saddle before. When I go to visit Contento in his stall, he looks at me reprovingly. He will grow too fat." (240)

At this point Howlett inserts twenty-five pages of Colorado history before revealing that Bishop Miede of St. Louis, after consulting "the other Bishops of the Province," had "concluded to attach the Pike's Peak country temporarily to the Diocese of Santa Fe" (285). Cather follows the original closely here as well, but changes St. Louis to Leavenworth: "This new and populous community must, for the present, the Kansas Bishop wrote, be accounted under Father Latour's jurisdiction" (247). The response of the priests to this new development is again similar in both accounts. In Howlett, Bishop Lamy says:

"I see but one thing to be done. You have been complaining because I sent for you and have kept you here at Santa Fe, — now, don't you see that there was something providential in all this? I do not like to part with you, but you are the only one I have to send, and you are the very man for Pike's Peak."

In these simple words Father Machebeuf received his mission, and in as few words he accepted it. "Very well," said he, "I will go! Give me another priest, some money

for our expenses, and we will be ready for the road in twenty-four hours." (287)

And now Cather's version:

In the evening, after dinner, Father Latour read this letter aloud to Father Vaillant in his study

"You have been complaining of inactivity, Father Joseph; here is your opportunity."

Father Joseph, who had been growing more and more restless during the reading of the letter, said merely: "So now I must begin speaking English again! I can start tomorrow if you wish it." (248)

After following Howlett more or less faithfully thus far into the episode — borrowing words or phrases occasionally, condensing long, wordy passages, alluding rather than explaining — Cather now uses Howlett's account merely as a point of departure for developing her characters and dramatizing the significance of Vaillant's recall:

Sometimes there are mysterious feelings and longings which cannot be accounted for at the time, but for which a reason seems to appear later. It may be God's way of accomplishing His designs, or it may be merely a co-incidence which leads us to look for a supernatural explanation of the phenomena. These longings of Bishop Lamy to keep Father Machebeuf with him at this special time may have been but the outgrowth of their great affection, or they may have been given to him for a purpose then unknown, but which was a part of God's plans for the future. In any case, they seemed to have been the starting point for the turning of the life of Father Machebeuf in an entirely new and different direction, and one which logically led to the Bishopric of Denver. (258)

Cather wisely eliminates Howlett's intrusive and unnecessary editorializing but takes from it the two possible explanations for the recall

— miracle or coincidence — and matches them, respectively, to Vaillant and Latour. Vaillant, whom Cather earlier described as one who “must always have the miracle very direct and spectacular, not with Nature, but against it” (29), obviously chooses to see God’s intervention:

“I often think, Jean, how you were an unconscious agent in the hands of Providence when you recalled me from Tucson We were both acting in the dark. But Heaven knew what was happening on Cherry Creek, and moved us like chessmen on the board. When the call came, I was here to answer it — by a miracle, indeed.” (252-53)

On the other hand, Latour, who is more rational, finally reveals his motives for recalling Vaillant and explains the situation as a coincidence brought about by his own selfishness:

“Miracles are all very well, Joseph, but I see none here. I sent for you because I felt the need of your companionship. I used my authority as a Bishop to gratify my personal wish. That was selfish, if you will, but surely natural enough. We are countrymen, and are bound by early memories. And that two friends, having come together, should part and go their separate ways — that is natural, too. No, I don’t think we need any miracle to explain all this.” (253)

From these passages, we see that Latour, like Howlett’s Lamy, feels the need to be near his lifelong friend; and Vaillant, like Howlett’s Machebeuf, has a stronger impulse to serve those who need him than to be conveniently near his friend.

Because Howlett’s account is biography, it discusses only those events that affect Machebeuf directly. Predictably, the remaining 130 pages of the biography, which chronicle Machebeuf’s experiences in establishing the Catholic Church in Colorado, say very little about the relationship of the two friends; when Lamy is mentioned,

he is mentioned only in passing. Only one remaining event, Lamy’s death, further illuminates their friendship:

On February 13, 1883, Archbishop Lamy, [Machebeuf’s] lifelong friend and more than brother, was called to receive his eternal crown. The news of his death grieved and saddened Bishop Machebeuf, but he hastened to Santa Fe to pay his last tribute of love to all that was mortal of him who had been the sharer in his labors, in his trials, in his joys and in his affections for fifty years. At the funeral he spoke, if speaking it could be called, through tears and sobs, as only he could speak of the dear dead friend, and he uttered the unconscious prophecy that, as he had now seen the angel come to announce the term of that long life, which was even shorter than his own, his own call would come next, when he would be aggregated to the ever increasing number of those whom God was gathering on the shores of eternity. (404-05)

While the specifics of the funeral description do not find their way directly into Cather’s novel, the devotion of the priests for each other, as summed up here, can be felt throughout Cather’s portrayal of Vaillant and Latour. It is also possible that Cather found in this passage the metaphor she develops in the blessing scene, perhaps the climactic scene of the priests’ friendship.

Howlett writes that Lamy “was called to receive his eternal crown.” Howlett uses similar phrasing in describing the sisters of Loretto:

The memories that remain of the departed Sisters of Loretto prove their devotion to the great object of their order, so well carried out at the Motherhouse, at dear old Bethlehem — *the brightest star in the mother’s crown*, for it is nearest to the heart of [their] work . . . [my emphasis]. (185-86)

The similarity between these passages and Cather’s blessing scene seems more than coincidental:

“*Blanchet . . . you are a better man than I. You have been a great harvester of souls, without pride and without shame — and I am always a little cold — un pedant, as you used to say. If hereafter we have stars in our crowns, yours will be a constellation. Give me your blessing*” [last emphasis mine]. (261-62)

The crown imagery Cather uses here echoes not only Howlett but the Bible as well. In several places the riches of eternity are described as a “crown of glory” (Prov. 4:9), and Christ himself is sometimes described as wearing “a golden crown” (Rev. 14:14). The shape of the crown is also symbolic of eternity, without beginning or end, a point Cather further emphasizes at the close of that chapter by having the priests embrace each other in the present — “for the past — for the future” (262).

This imagery of eternity takes on added meaning when considered in conjunction with Cather’s final scene, at Latour’s deathbed. During his last weeks, Latour

observed also that there was no longer any perspective in his memories. He remembered his winters with his cousins on the Mediterranean when he was a little boy, his student days in the Holy City, as clearly as he remembered the arrival of M. Molny and the building of his Cathedral. He was soon to have done with calendared time, and it had already ceased to count for him. He sat in the middle of his own consciousness; none of his former states of mind were lost or outgrown. They were all within reach of his hand, and all comprehensible. (290)

In this state of consciousness, in which he is nearly “done with calendared time,” all his life transfers to the present. He murmurs and moves his hands, and Magdalena thinks he is requesting something,

But in reality the Bishop was not there at all; he was standing in a tip-tilted green field among his native mountains, and he was trying to give consolation to a young man who was being torn in two before his eyes by the desire to go and the necessity to stay. He was trying to forge a new Will in that devout and exhausted priest; and the time was short, for the *diligence* for Paris was already rumbling down the mountain gorge. (299)

By closing the novel with this motif, Cather reemphasizes the friendship Vaillant and Latour have developed. Once again, Latour is remembering a cold morning "in a certain field outside Riom" (284) and giving "consolation" to his lifelong friend, Joseph Vaillant (299). This pairing of Latour's early years with his old age helps bring the novel full circle, emphasizing equally the different stages of his life with Vaillant.

While this obvious reading of the paragraph is certainly aesthetically satisfying, I believe Cather purposefully left some nouns ambiguous to invite a second reading, which renders the departure motif richer and more in keeping with the crown imagery. The "young man," or "devout and exhausted priest," represents not only Vaillant but Latour himself, who is "being torn in two" by mortality and eternity, and the *diligence* "rumbling down the mountain gorge" signifies death (299). And finally, in "trying to forge a new Will" (299), Latour is not only helping Vaillant to make up his mind but also preparing himself to put off the tabernacle of clay. Not until this last scene does Cather fulfill the expectations created by her title and let the Archbishop die. In Latour's final hours, eternity changes from metaphor to reality, as the artificial distinctions between present, past, and future melt away, for the day has come for the Archbishop, as it will for all, in which "there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10:6).

NOTES:

¹Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York, Vintage

Books, 1971). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

²Willa Cather, *Willa Cather on Writing* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), pp. 6-7. Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

³William J. Howlett, *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf* (Pueblo, Colorado: Franklin Press, 1908). Subsequent quotations are from this edition.

⁴Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, "The Genesis of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*," *American Literature*, 26 (1955).

⁵Dorothy Tuck McFarland, *Willa Cather* (1972, New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), p. 102.

⁶Susan Rosowski, *The Voyage Perilous: Willa Cather's Romanticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 166.

Word Music in "The Ancient People," Part IV of *The Song of the Lark*

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In the "Kronborg" section of *The Song of the Lark* Dr. Howard Archie journeys in late February from Denver to New York in order to see and hear Thea Kronborg perform at the Metropolitan Opera House. Ten years have passed since he financed Thea's musical study in Germany and, as he seats himself that evening for the performance of *Lohengrin*, Archie feels "distinctly nervous" and "rather frightened" at the prospect of his seeing, for the first time, his younger friend perform professionally. When Thea finally appears on the stage as Elsa Von Brabant, Dr. Archie's "absurd" nervousness leads him into a paralyzing case of "buck-fever": she is before him but he cannot see her; she is singing but he cannot hear her; "whatever was there, she was not there — for him." Eventually, however, the buck-fever passes and he finds himself "sitting quietly in a darkened house, not listening to but dreaming upon a river of silver sound . . . drifting alone on the melody, as if he had been alone with it for a long while and had known it all before." In the end, Thea's powerful performance as Elsa chills his desire "to make the woman before him fit into any of his cherished recollections" of their past together, and, as he gets free during the opera's second act from both their personalities and their shared past, Dr. Archie feels something old dying in him, and "out of it something new was born."¹

What dies out of Dr. Archie is his implicit sexual desire and proprietary pride in Thea; what is born within him, as his own heaviness and anxiety slide away and dissolve as he drifts on a river of sound, is a more intense aesthetic appreciation of the performance's wondrous beauty, a more empathetic identification with its vital concept. Both the presence of water imagery and the mention here of getting free from one's public personality and personal past link Dr. Archie's regeneration, the curing of his buck-fever, to that of Thea's artistic birth in the earlier "The Ancient People" section, when she bathes in a canyon stream and ponders shards of pottery testifying to the efforts of anonymous ancient women artists. What is of additional interest here is how after situating both narrator and implied reader close to Thea for approximately three-fourths of the novel — as if the narrative voice urgently wants us to comprehend fully the formative influences of the difficult obstacles faced by a young woman from the provinces who craves an artistic life — Cather distances our first glimpse of Thea as a professional artist through Dr. Archie's eyes. This narrative strategy, along with the impersonal title "Kronborg" and the ellipsis of ten years between the novel's final two sections, serves obviously to separate us from Thea. Presumably, our own proprietary sense of her character is deflected through these strate-

gies so that as readers we can better appreciate, like Dr. Archie in the opera house who acts as our surrogate, the magical transformation of Thea into the artist Kronborg.

There is a metanarrative sense about this scene, since Dr. Archie's prescriptive gaze, being countered and eventually exhausted by the aural energies of Thea's voice, stands for the reader's potential liberation from personalities and from the temporal flow of history as a result of the aural power of Cather's words. Here we might recall how Cather, in attempting to define the special qualities of Sarah Orne Jewett's fiction, argued that every great story left "in the mind of the sensitive reader an intangible residuum of pleasure; a cadence, a quality of voice that is exclusively the writer's own, individual, unique A quality that one can remember without the volume at hand, can experience over and over again in the mind but can never absolutely define, as one can experience in memory a melody, or the summer perfume of a garden."² Since Cather centers the residual pleasure of great fiction on a quality of *voice*, imaged as a cadenced, melodious sound, and since the cure of Dr. Archie's buck-fever occurs as he drifts alone on "a river of silver sound," we are prompted to look for those moments in Cather's work when the text offers words as music. And it is precisely during such moments when the narrative's energies are converted from the visual to the aural that explains the residual pleasures to be found in *The Song of the Lark*, that locates the novel's aesthetic power. Just how this conversion takes place can be seen best in the novel's briefest yet most pivotal section, "The Ancient People."³ What I want to do in the rest of this essay, then, is discuss certain representative moments in which Cather's stylistic strategies reveal an increasing commitment to words as a combination of sounds and rhythms which interplays with and, during the section's climactic moment, triumphs over the desire first to see the world and then endow it with meaning.

"The Ancient People" dramatizes the crucial summer of Thea Kronborg's regeneration and renewed commitment to realizing her artistic potential. The plotting of her recovery from exhausting student life in Chicago proceeds through two major sequences: first, the initial two months she spends alone exploring Panther Canyon and its cliff dwellings located near Fred Ottenburg's family's ranch; second, Thea and Fred's time there from mid-summer to early September, a period marked by their deepening affection for each other. The section's opening paragraphs suggest that the summer's events will compose a threshold crossing for Thea, for her departure from the train at Flagstaff during sunrise in the spring of the year is described as a falling "from sleep directly into the forest" (p. 368). Moreover, the section opens with the traditional novelistic commitment to seeing and naming the world, for Thea's eye is "entice[ed] for a hundred miles across the desert" by the "blue slopes and snowy summit" of the San Francisco mountain of northern Arizona.

About its base lie the pine forests of the Navajos, where the great red-trunked trees live out their peaceful centuries in that sparkling air. The *piñons* and scrub begin only where the forest ends, where the country breaks into open, stony clearings and the surface of the earth cracks into deep canons. The great pines stand at a considerable distance from each other. Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone. They do not intrude upon each other. The Navajos are not much in the habit of giving or of asking help. Their language is not a communicative one, and they never attempt an interchange of personality in speech. Over the forests there is the same inexorable reserve. Each tree has its exalted power to bear.

That was the first thing Thea Kronborg felt about the forest, as she drove through it one May morning in Henry

Biltmer's democrat wagon — and it was the first great forest she had seen. (367-68)

The passage proceeds initially in a logical spatial and temporal sequence as Thea's vision moves progressively down from the mountain's snowy summit, through the intermediate levels of pine forest and desert vegetation, to noticing where "the surface of the earth cracks into deep canons." As the opening paragraph continues, the narrator's generalizations about Navajo customs, the event's vague temporal marker ("one May morning"), and the missing descriptive details about the person who picks Thea up at the train station signal further that this passage functions simply to locate the story in a different time and space from that of the previous section. Coming immediately after the previous section's densely-textured prose, this opening description's relatively uncomplicated diction, direct and concise syntax, and fluid grammar encourages an easy journey through this succession of visual images.⁴ Like Thea, the reader in a sense falls from the sleep of the previous section's thick descriptions into the bright openness of sentences that, like the pine trees in Navajo country, "do not intrude upon each other."

What we should notice here is how Thea's conception of the forest (what she "feels" about "seeing" it) is simultaneous with or shortly follows her visual sighting of the landscape's elements. While this effort to render her thought processes helps account for the strange leaps of logic and semantics, the point is that the passage fosters the illusion that by seeing the world one can understand the world. Or, to put it differently, a *visible* world in the final analysis is an intelligible, not an enigmatic world.⁵ Dominated by the description's visual motive, the words for the most part do not arrest our attention but rather sublimate their properties as language in order to describe a recognizable external world beyond the page. Thus the illusion of real life is sustained here by situating language

use close to that of "ordinary" discourse, and by promoting causal, sequential logic and an unaltered chronology.

So accustomed are we to reading the text in linear sequence and so strong ordinarily is our desire for meaningful closure that we may resist pausing to consider evidence of other stylistic energies at work. We are not required to linger long here, but even in this highly-conventional sequence we can glimpse aural energies contending with the passage's primary orientation to seeing, naming, and knowing the world. There is a shift from the dominant visual motive in sentence five as the word "alone" is repeated three times, a shift highlighted by the elision of conjunctions between clauses ("Each tree grows alone, murmurs alone, thinks alone.") serving formally to suspend the connections between individual trees and the larger forest that comprises them. A stately rhythm and sententious tone emerge with this shift to a paratactic arrangement, and the variety of successive visual images Thea processes evolves into the measured rhythm of the authorial voice interrupting the sequence to generalize, however bizarrely, about the Navajo psyche. In addition, the use of the pronoun "that" in the second paragraph's first sentence means we must stop reading forward and instead return to the previous paragraph in order to discover exactly what it is that Thea is feeling. And even then, given the paragraph's leaps in thought while tracing the pine tree-Navajo analogy, we must reread several sentences before deciding that the "exalted power to bear" in the last sentence most accurately fits Thea's frame of mind (since she too has a "power" that has been and will be brought to bear upon her audiences, whether in Moonstone, Germany, or New York).

Although not stymied completely, our progress through the passage is slowed as the repeated words, sonorous cadence, and indefinite pronoun intrude and dispel the illusion of life generated by the succession of visual images. As "The Ancient People" continues

depicting Thea's summer at Panther Canyon, however, its more pivotal passages reveal not just the slight interruption of the visual, as we have here, but rather an intensifying dialectical interplay of the two different energies that builds until, during the section's climactic moment, the music of words overpower the visual sense. In chapter six, for example, there is a moment when the visual and aural, rather than opposing each other, blend together and activate each other. In this episode Thea and Fred journey to the canyon during the early pre-dawn hours and descend into it, all the while hearing in the darkness the canyon stream's primeval murmuring. While Fred prepares breakfast in one of the abandoned rock houses, Thea crouches in the doorway of the room she has made her own and watches the sunrise. The sullenness, indifference, and dullness she associates with nature's voice in the early morning hours is extinguished as she watches the golden light reach into the canyon:

At last a kind of hopefulness broke in the air. In a moment the pine trees up on the edge of the rim were flashing with coppery fire. The thin red clouds which hung above their pointed tops began to boil and move rapidly, weaving in and out like smoke. The swallows darted out of their rock-houses as at a signal, and flew upward, toward the rim. Little brown birds began to chirp in the bushes along the watercourse down at the bottom of the ravine, where everything was still dusky and pale. At first the golden light seemed to hang like a wave upon the rim of the canon; the trees and bushes up there, which one scarcely noticed at noon, stood out magnified by the slanting rays. Long, thin streaks of light began to reach quivering down into the gorge. The red sun rose rapidly above the tops of the blazing pines, and its glow burst into the gulf, about the very doorstep on which Thea sat. It bored into the wet, dark

underbrush. The dripping cherry bushes, the pale aspens, and the frosty *pinons* were glittering and trembling, swimming in the liquid gold. All the pale, dusty little herbs of the bean family, never seen by anyone but a botanist, became for a moment individual and important, their silky leaves quite beautiful with dew and light. The arch of sky overhead, heavy as lead a little while before, lifted, became more and more transparent, and one could look up into depths of pearly blue. (pp. 389-90)

Proceeding through the sighting of trees, clouds, underbrush, and birdlife, this visual sequence moves along energetically because of a series of concise verbs ("broke"; "began"; "stood") and, except for the opening mix of metaphors (flashing fire; boiling smoke), its loose, agile syntax. In other places the passage's forward momentum becomes emphatic as the sentence pattern pauses before cresting forward after the interrupting clause or simile and catapulting words into the main clause describing the canyon's renewed activity (thus, the equilibrium of "seemed to hang like a wave" is superseded by the motion inaugurated by the following sentence's "began to reach").

Any dismay we might have about reading what starts out as a typical descriptive treatment of sunrise vanishes because of the novelty of the visual sequence's elements. In particular, its detailed attention to the "wet, dark underbrush" challenges our interpretive powers and intensifies our desire to press onward, to confirm what we have already anticipated: there is more here than first meets the eye. What are we to make of the objects that Thea allows to enter her vision, her consciousness? Why is so much attention given the "dusty little herbs of a bean family" never seen except by a botanist? As we learn later in the section, Thea and Fred's romantic attachment intensifies, resulting in their "illicit" trip to Mexico prior to her departure for further operatic

training in Germany. Given this occurrence, the configuration of visual images and the particular diction here assume added importance in retrospect. That is, the "wet, dark underbrush" that is "bored" into by the "quivering" rays of sunlight, an image positioned next to the picture of Thea crouching on her doorstep watching the sun's rays reach to her feet, suggest that Cather has transposed her character's sexual passion into this landscape description.⁶ Moreover, we should note how the canyon world's brightening prospects here foreshadow the chapter's conclusion, when at day's end Thea similarly gazes upward and sights a wheeling and soaring golden eagle whose continuing presence in the canyon since the time of the ancient people serves as Thea's symbol for the "glorious striving of human art" (p. 399).

The description also invites us to note the repetition of its vertical spatial movement. With the sentence beginning "At first" the visual orientation underway returns to the canyon rim (just as the "At first" echoes the first sentence's "At last") and then repeats the downward spatial movement to the canyon floor, this time focusing on the foliage rather than the bird-life. The extended descriptive attention to the underbrush continues the procession of visual images and thus stands as a testament to Cather's sensitivity to and inventiveness with precise detail. Even so, such repetitious movement suggests that other textual motives are being displayed. For one thing, retracing the eye's movement emphasizes Thea's taking visual possession of the landscape, her seeing and re-seeing the canyon as an effort to prolong what for her is an incandescent moment. In turn, by re-telling the event the authorial voice of course distorts its actual duration, perhaps to get both the seeing and the telling right *this* time around. In any case, the point is that the text eludes, by repeating the eye's up-and-down motion, the domination of linear movement its diction and syntax are forwarding.

As was the case with the section's opening paragraphs, such repetition or backtracking draws attention to the description's presentation of recurring sounds, words, and rhythms. That Cather is perhaps as much interested in linguistic play as in reproducing a familiar visual event (sunrise) is substantiated at the passage's midway point. The recurrence of open vowel sounds, the repetition of participials and adverbs having the same "-ing" ending, and the alliteration created by the pairing of words ("began to boil"; "noticed at noon"; "rose rapidly"; "individual and important") clearly signal that the visual motive in detailing the sunrise's temporal progression is relinquishing authority to an aural motive unleashing language's musical qualities. As if the authorial voice wanted to sport with the music of language as much as to name what is in view, the passage surprisingly devotes a disproportionate amount of attention to the underbrush in two sentences beautifully illustrating Cather's developing word music: "The dripping cherry bushes, the pale aspens, and the frosty pinons were glittering and trembling, swimming in the liquid gold. All the pale, dusty little herbs of the bean family, never seen by anyone but a botanist, became for a moment individual and important, their silky leaves quite beautiful with dew and light." We should note how the boundaries between the human and natural and the real and the surreal are momentarily suspended: perceiving trees as "swimming in liquid gold" is not only a nearly-surrealistic image but one that personifies nature in terms foreshadowing one of Thea's first roles as a swimming Rhinemaiden. We should also note how the opening catalogue of items enumerated in the underbrush dissolves into the rapidly-massing liquid sounds of "glittering," "trembling," and "swimming." Further, the transformed status of the bean family, similarly reinforced by "l" sounds, is clinched by the rising iambic rhythm of the final monosyllabic "with dew and light" phrase.

Even though the passage invites us to listen to the words and enjoy their harmonious combinations rather than shift from the words to the reality they signify, its visual commitment is not overturned by such word music. Not only is the event an extremely visual one in the first place (the only sound Thea hears is the chirping of the birds), it also concludes with her seeing pearly blue skies. Thus, whereas the opening two paragraphs of "The Ancient People" seemingly alternate visual and aural energies, the text here rather weaves them together into dialectical interplay. The repetition of sounds and images described above *both* draws attention to the music of words *and* supplies the energy to propel our reading forward through the description. The repetition of participials creates a lingering resonance, yet they do not effectively stall our forward momentum or force us to backtrack for meaning for these same words designate the eruption of activity in the canyon. Sentences with grammars creating a distinctive forward momentum are varied with others whose closing clauses and phrases rather prolong the intensifying sounds of the moment. It is as if Cather realized how ending the sentences too often with emphatic main clauses would destroy the delicate equilibrium necessary to communicate fully the sun's kindly, magical touch. Rather than the visual lapsing into insignificance the moment is intensified by the word's vibrant beauty: as we oversee the canyon fill with light, as the sun rises higher in the sky, so too we hear the paragraph fill with airy sounds and liquid movement.

Whatever residual power the passage contains, then, can be traced to its interweaving of the pleasures associated with both seeing and hearing, a point prefigured in an earlier scene by Thea's response to the novel's titular painting. This dialectical interplay has its analogues in other memorable scenes from Cather's work, as when Alexandra Bergson realizes her love for the Divide in *O Pioneers!*, when Jim sights the black plough imaged heroically

against the setting sun in *My Antonia*, when in *The Professor's House* Tom Outland recounts his discovery of the abandoned cliff dwellings, or when Father Latour hears the flood of moving water under the crack in the cave in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Yet unlike the passages I've discussed previously or the moments in fiction mentioned above, Thea's epiphanic moment in "The Ancient People," one of the most-quoted passages from Cather's novels, develops in such a way that the visual *surrenders* to the aural. How this happens in the space of two paragraphs and what this signifies will be the burden of the rest of the essay.

As a result of her explorations of the canyon, Thea's power to think becomes converted into the power of sustained sensation, her singing proceeds without words, and her ideas are exchanged for "pleasant and incomplete conceptions" (p. 373). As the fretted lines which defined her former self are erased by the landscape's healing powers, Thea's intuitive sense expands, and — in a ritualistic flash of recognition — she realizes that art is not merely self-expression but instead a sacred obligation to all humankind swimming in the stream of history:

When Thea took her bath at the bottom of the canon, in the sunny pool behind the screen of cottonwoods, she sometimes felt as if the water must have sovereign qualities, from having been the object of so much service and desire. That stream was the only living thing left of the drama that had been played out in the canon centuries ago. In the rapid, restless heart of it, flowing swifter than the rest, there was a continuity of life that reached back into old time. The glittering thread of current had a kind of lightly worn, loosely knit personality, graceful and laughing. Thea's bath came to have a ceremonial gravity. The atmosphere of the canon was ritualistic. (p. 378)

At first the visual and aural qualities of the passage reinforce and

renew each other, as in the previously-discussed passage. Like the stream itself, which is both seen and heard ("laughing") moving swiftly across the canyon floor, the opening sentences progress in a rhythmic, fluid sequence thanks to the progressive grammar established by the participial phrases. Words with similar initial consonant sounds are paired up ("rapid, restless"); words with similar-sounding final syllables are emphasized. This word music does not inhibit our progress through the visual images but rather can be said to parallel or imitate the stream's continuous, flowing motion. Just as the stream's current is associated with continuity between past and present, so too the alliterative intonations and syllabic repetitions in the phrase "lightly worn, loosely knit" bridge the temporal rupture created by the comma. Indeed, the trope's layering together of creative process (how the thread is knitted) and product (how it is worn) reinforces the conjunction of past times and old times in the heart of the stream.

Nevertheless, the last two sentences of this initial paragraph transform the light-hearted musical sounds and easy rhythms of the previous sentences into a measured cadence that slows our progress through the description. This seems fitting for several reasons. Just as Thea's bath comes to have the ceremonial gravity of ritual, so too the repetition of sentence length and initial sounds gives this brief unit the simplified dignity of ritual chanting. Like any pronounced repetition, rituals resist both the flow of time and the desire for novelty and variety. This shared similarity becomes important as the next paragraph completes what has been set in motion here at the beginning of Thea's epiphany: her ritualistic bath in a pool of water outside of the stream's relentlessly onward flow evolves into the paired terms of the metaphor for art as a sheath in which life's evanescent experiences are arrested.⁷

One morning, as she was standing upright in the pool, splashing water between her

shoulder-blades with a big sponge, something flashed through her mind that made her draw herself up and stand still until the water had quite dried upon her flushed skin. The stream and the broken pottery: what was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself — life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? The Indian women had held it in their jars. In the sculpture she had seen in the Art Institute, it had been caught in a flash of arrested motion. In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals. (p. 378)

Cather's emergent metaphor suggests that art resists temporal flow and aspires to achieve the elusive, if not illusive, state of nontemporality associated with singing, listening to music, and carving and viewing sculpture, etc. Unlike the previous passages discussed, however, this one's final image does not rely on but rather departs from the visual (i.e., the sculpture "she had seen") by closing the final cluster of three sentences with an aural image. This final image of one catching the stream (of air, of water, of life) and singing "in a scale of natural intervals" contends against the visual sense. We are encouraged to imagine the produced sound moving vertically, up and down the scale, rather than visualizing the music proceeding horizontally in temporal sequence as measure succeeds measure.

This shift to the climactic aural image gains added power because the repetition of words, sounds, and patterns throughout the sequence draws attention to the text's inherent quality as music rather than for its effort to present a variety of visual images in a realistic style. Our progress through the passage and towards translating its meaning is stayed in several ways: there is the rhetorical question; there is the repetition of

verbs and participials; there is the rephrasing and refining of thoughts previously announced in a graceful series of closing phrases and clauses (e.g., "too strong to stop, too sweet to lose"). As was the case in the first paragraph, here too the final sentences echo each other's sound, their similar openers (the last two repeat an opening prepositional phrase pattern), syntax, and length creating a loosely-knit rhythm. Significantly, the resonant "I" sounds present throughout the entire selection are intensified in the final sentence as the individual force of the words "vessel," "nostrils," and "held" prepares for the combined aural energy of the phrase "a scale of natural intervals." This final phrase essentially recapitulates what has been underway in the entire sequence. That is, its addition to the opening main clause breaks the text out of the potential impass created by the repetitive syntactical pattern of the last three sentences, a tactic underlining the release signified by Thea's revelation and her eventual identification with the golden eagle who soars above the cliff rather than with the cliff swallows who remain within the canyon. But the phrase yet resists any renewal of the text's forward momentum since its content returns to refine the earlier phrase "held it on one's breath." And the melodious pairing of "natural" and "interval" swallows up the growing momentum established by the preceding seven monosyllabic words, the two words' closing unaccented syllables receding into the silence of the blank page.

What is impressive here is how the linguistic strategies announcing Cather's metaphor for art communicate an understandable concept with a convincing rightness that compels belief. Just as art is imaged as a vessel holding elements of the stream of life in arrested motion, so too the passage enhances the theory by holding us on the page in a moment of charged motionlessness. Like Thea, whose journey to Panther Canyon leaves her "completely released from the enslaving desire to get on in the world" (p. 369) and

results in her creative rebirth as she ponders the relics of the past in a pre-reflective state of being, we are released from the desire to read on, to see and pursue words in temporal flow across the page and then assess their correspondence with the real world. As its key verb "hold" suggests, this pivotal passage both *contains* meaning (the abstract theory of art) and *resists* the usual pressure to leave the text's language so as to translate or paraphrase its meaning. We instead are encouraged, while immersed in the aural energies of Cather's word music, to deepen the present moment and to blur temporal boundaries by entering the rhythm stream of words (the parallelism of the form of the last three sentences underscores how Thea's revelation grasps past and present and suggests future in a spontaneous moment of consciousness). Thea Kronborg, as her surname implies ("Kron," of or relating to time; "Borg," Old Norse equivalent to the Old English "burg" — shelter, fortress, borough), promotes a sense of stasis and authorizes through her body and voice a shelter from time.

In essence, Cather's stylistic strategies here promote a kind of logic of surrogacy since this response to the presence of aural energies is epitomized in the titular painting by Jules Breton of the peasant girl hearing the lark's song, by Thea hearing the Dvorak symphony in the novel's second section — and, as we have seen, by Dr. Archie hearing Kronborg sing in New York. As the sounds and rhythms of words resonate in our heads and overturn a visual orientation, we are "fooled," actually, in the same way Spanish Johnny is fooled when he listens to a seashell and mistakenly considers the capturing in it of the sea itself.⁸ Mrs. Tellamantez's anecdote in the novel's opening section regarding Johnny's misreading of the white conch-shell is intended to illustrate how his musical talents and his willingness to listen to the creative muse within him occasionally make him "crazy." The point also needs to be made that the imagery of this anecdote, like the narrator's description of the Mexican part of

Moonstone situated "on the edge of a deep ravine," creates a semantic network linking Mexicans and Native Americans with Thea, a network of connections (seashell/pottery shards; ravine/cleft in the heart of the world) which in the last section becomes metamorphosed into the cavernous opera theater, another one of the novel's "holes in the earth," in which Dr. Archie escapes from temporal flow and the visual motive.

Johnny's interpretation of the shell makes him "crazy," as well it should, for the shell images the perfect artform in which there is no gap or rupture between the referential "there" (the coast) and "here" (Moonstone), between the sound's origin (the ocean) and reception (the ear), between the acoustic image (the oceanic roar) and meaning (the ocean's presence) — all this without the shell's calling attention to its presence. The aesthetic power accruing from such immediacy is figured, as we have seen, by the equivalence posited between the thread that is knit and the thread that is worn in the personified image of the canyon stream. Further, all the artistic media in the novel — Mexican folk music, the Anasazi pottery shards, Thea's voice — achieve, however briefly, the same power as the white conch-shell, that of bridging separateness and instilling instead a sense of "ecstasy." I am here thinking of the older sense of the word as meaning withdrawal from or being beside oneself so as to achieve enlightenment. Thus, Johnny forgets he is listening to a shell; Thea loses the fretted lines of her old self while holding pottery shards; Dr. Archie forgets he is watching his Thea. Such imaginative release from the limiting claims of everyday selfhood also defines how we forget. In the presence of Cather's word music in "The Ancient People," we become immersed in the restitutive beat of the world's continuity across successive lines. For the reader of *The Song of the Lark*, the layered increments of word music serve in the final analysis as the analogue to the shards of ancient pottery that Thea reflects on, the crafted arti-

fact that — like the white conch-shell — arrests our attention, its insistent aural presence intensifying Cather's romantic assumption that language can provide a residuum of pleasure redeeming everyday life.⁹

NOTES

¹Quotations in this paragraph are from the 1937 revised edition of Cather's *The Song of the Lark* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), pp. 498-502. Further quotations from this edition will be designated by in-text notation of page numbers.

²See Cather's "Preface" to Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955).

³I am generally indebted to the insights of James Guetti on the interplay of visual and aural motives in fiction and its resulting impact on the reader. See his *Word-Music: The Aesthetic Aspect of Narrative Fiction* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980). While other critics have discussed the novel's musical allusions and its use of musical structures, no discussion of the rhetorical, grammatical, and syntactical features of Cather's style has focused on the moments when aural energies triumph over seeing. See Richard Giannone, "The Lyric Artist," in *Critical Essays on Willa Cather*, ed. John J. Murphy (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984), pp. 130-144; Robert Roulston, "The Contrapuntal Complexity of *The Song of the Lark*," *Midwest Quarterly*, 17 (July 1976), 350-368. See also Loretta Wasserman, "The Music of Time: Henri Bergson and Willa Cather," *American Literature*, 57 (May 1985), 226-239.

⁴There are only four words in this passage with more than three syllables; eight of the ten sentences quoted repeat the basic subject-verb-object sentence pattern; simple sentences abound, the major variation being the inversion "Over the forests there is" near the end of the first paragraph.

⁵This representation of the passage's major impulse can be extended to other elements of the

novel, The novel's narrator poses several enigmas regarding Thea's career as the plot proceeds — but suspense is never intensified because the enigmas are always resolved within a few pages. In the "Kronborg" section, for instance, as the opening episodes gather the major characters together in New York, we are filled in as to what occurred during the ten years between the "Dr. Archie's Venture" section and "Kronborg." Thea's career is in a sense a conflict between the enigmatic and the intelligible, and this conflict is grounded in the novel's chief image oppositions of surface and depth, external and internal, public and private. Thus, Thea achieves artistic success to the degree her private, internal, and enigmatic creative self "surfaces," becomes public and communicable to others.

⁶Seeing this description as a trope for Thea's surfacing sexual attraction for Fred is further supported by the novel's description of their first meeting in Chicago. Not only does Thea note his yellow hair and beard; she is described also as looking up into his blue eyes. At the end of this passage, of course, she lifts her eyes up into the pearly

blue arch of sky, another subliminal linking of Fred with the environment. In this regard the dangers to Thea posed by Fred's sexual attractiveness (and his fake proposal) are figured by the thunderstorm imagery in the section's later chapters.

⁷For more general remarks on this pivotal passage see David Stouck, *Willa Cather's Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), pp. 194-195; Ann Moseley, "The Dual Nature of Art in *The Song of the Lark*," *Western American Literature*, 14 (May 1979), 19-32; John Ditsky, "Nature and Character in the Novels of Willa Cather," *Colby Library Quarterly*, 10 (September 1974), 391-412; Susan J. Rosowski, "The Pattern of Willa Cather's Novels," *Western American Literature*, 15 (February 1981), 243-263.

⁸See *The Song of the Lark*, pp. 54-57.

⁹My thanks to colleague Robert Caserio for helpful comments, and to the University of Utah Research Committee for the award of a research leave that enabled this essay to be completed.

Shadows on the Rock and To the Lighthouse — A Bakhtinian Perspective

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This essay will analyze Willa Cather's *Shadows on the Rock*,¹ published in 1931, in terms of a work that appeared four years earlier and has become a showpiece of literary modernism, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*.² Woolf and Cather should at first seem a most unlikely comparison, one an outspoken critic of patriarchy and a radical experimenter in form, the other a steadfast adherent to tradition whose novels often begin with an emphatic assertion of time and place. But Cather herself considered her novel about seventeenth century Quebec to be experimental. She wrote that what she was trying to express was "hard to state . . . in language; it was more

like an old song, incomplete and uncorrupted, than like a legend . . . I took the incomplete air and tried to give it what would correspond to a sympathetic musical setting . . ."³ Cather called the structure of the text mainly "anacoluthon," a technique that temporarily suspends completion. The concept of anacoluthon, though classical, is not unlike the aesthetic that Woolf and other modernists forwarded, though many of their works extend incompleteness and relativity to depths which violated Cather's sensibilities. *To the Lighthouse*, however, is a more formally controlled novel, with a tripart structure that Leon Edel suggests might even be a borrowing

from Cather's *The Professor's House*.⁴ In it one finds situations, techniques, and themes remarkably similar to those in *Shadows on the Rock*, some of which could stand as evidence for direct literary influence of Woolf on Cather. My interest, however, is not direct literary influence but to bring Cather's relatively rather neglected novel into the light of a more celebrated work, and to suggest that what Cather and Woolf share at root might outweigh their differences.

The window that *To the Lighthouse* offers into *Shadows on the Rock* is best opened through the terminology of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who characterizes two kinds of discourse, or communication: "monologic" and "dialogic."⁵ A monologic discourse privileges one absolute version of reality over all others; people are separate from one another because there is no merging of perception. The dialogic discourse, by contrast, is based on dialogue among differing perceptions in which no one perception is valorized. Recently critics have used Bakhtin to characterize Woolf's fiction as feminist. According to this interpretation, the patriarchal tradition is monologic and the alternate and defiant vision is dialogic. However, Bakhtin's terms can be applied as readily to *Shadows on the Rock* and here the implications are quite different: the dialogic discourse rests in the traditions that give meaning to life on the isolated rock, traditions upheld by male society, and anything that threatens these rituals is monologic. Bakhtin, then, offers a fruitful meeting place for Woolf and Cather, one which will show the full scope of his theory to be, while not inconsistent with a feminist interpretation of Woolf, broader than just that, and in fact completely consistent with the cultural tradition that Cather celebrates in *Shadows on the Rock*. My approach will be to characterize: (I) the monologic context of each novel; (II) the dialogic structures that make meaning against the monologic background; (III) factors that threaten to change dialogic discourse back to monologic; (IV)

the imagery pertaining to each form of discourse, and finally, (V) other significant parallels.

I.

Woolf's and Cather's novels both take place on fragile outposts of civilization surrounded on all sides by chaos, a monologic force that threatens to overpower human life. At times the beat of the waves against the island shore in *To the Lighthouse* "made one think of the destruction of the island and its engulfment in the sea" (28). Mr. Ramsay considers it his fate "to stand on his little ledge facing the dark of human ignorance, how we know nothing and the sea eats away the ground we stand on" (68-69). In *Shadows on the Rock* the monologic landscape is the forest stretching to the west "no living man knew how far. That was the dead, sealed world of the vegetable kingdom, an uncharted continent choked with interlocking trees The forest was suffocation, annihilation; there European man was quickly swallowed up in silence, distance . . ." (6-7). If the forest closes in on the west, to the east lies the vast ocean separating the New World from the Old: "The settlement looked like something cut off from one of the ruder towns of Normandy or Brittany, and brought over" (6). The novel opens with the departure of *La Bonne Espérance* from Quebec, leaving the rock "entirely cut off from Europe, from the world" (3-4). Cather's language echoes Minta's exclamation in *To the Lighthouse* as the tide closes in on her grandmother's brooch, "the sole ornament [Minta] possessed" (116): "We shall be cut off!" (117, italics added). One of the later descriptions of Quebec in *Shadows on the Rock* captures well the settings of both novels: "a crag where for some reason human beings built themselves nests in the rock, and held fast" (226).

II.

For both Cather and Woolf these nests of life are maintained by dialogic relationships that counteract the surrounding monology. Such relationships actually take place in the "nest," that is, in the domestic realm. At Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party the characters create order

by participating together in a meal: "Some change at once went through them all, . . . and they were all conscious of making a party together in a hollow, on an island; had their common cause against that fluidity out there" (147). The security Mrs. Ramsay experiences arises "from husband and children and friends," who, eating her food and sharing each other's company, form "the still space that lies about the heart of things" (158). For Woolf the essence of the domestic is dialogic vision: a merging of various perceptions in everyday experience. At the dinner party, for example, Mrs. Ramsay's and Augustus Carmichael's eyes meet in an arrangement of fruit, each from a different perspective, but "looking together united them" (146).

Woolf envisions a continuity between the domestic and the aesthetic, between meaning attained through the sharing of the commonplace and meaning embodied in art. Mrs. Ramsay's dream of visiting the Lighthouse, conceived from a domestic perspective — she plans to bring its keepers a stocking, old magazines, some tobacco, and other trifles — is fulfilled after her death in an expedition that inspires the artist Lily Briscoe's painting. In the midst of her struggle on the canvas Lily remembers the order that Mrs. Ramsay accomplished in the home: "Mrs. Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) — this was the nature of revelation . . ." (241). Later Lily espouses a domestic aesthetic by seeking "to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet at the same time, it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy" (300).

An aesthetic that accommodates two visions of an object at the same time is, as we have seen, dialogic. In the end Woolf brings Lily and Mr. Ramsay, and the distant and close-up perspectives of the Lighthouse that pertain to each, into dialogue through rapidly alternating scenes. By merging perspectives Woolf approaches truth, for, as Ramsay's son James

realizes on the boat, "nothing was simply one thing" (277). The power of this realization, which pertains finally to a bridging of perspectives across a sea that had once appeared insurmountable, derives from the fact that it had its first expression among the commonplace objects of home. The significance of the domestic to the aesthetic is most tangibly evident in Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast, the two old women who revive the Ramsay house after its abandonment in "Time Passes." Without this central domestic act, the novel, Woolf's own artistic achievement, could not continue.

In *Shadows on the Rock* domestic order is also a refuge from chaos, but its final conclusion is not art, but culture. It is in the household that the traditions of the Old World first take root in the New. Cécile's mother diligently reproduced the ways of Paris on the rugged Canadian earth, and before her death she entrusted their maintenance to her daughter. The elusive center of being that Mrs. Ramsay captures at her dinner party is also the thing to which Cécile's mother dedicated her life: "something so precious, so intangible; a feeling about life that had come down to her through so many centuries and that she had brought with her across the wastes of obliterating, brutal ocean" (25). Like Mrs. Ramsay, who is knitting a stocking in the first and last scenes in which she appears, Cécile knits stockings for her orphaned companion Jacques. Knitting becomes a symbol for all domestic habits that give life integrity by interweaving tradition and experience. Cécile performs these duties out of obligation to her mother until her alienating stay on the less civilized Île d'Orléans brings to light their true significance: "These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and brushes, were tools; and with them one made, not shoes or cabinet-work, but life itself. One made a climate within a climate" (198).

The traditional domestic climate, struck within the chaotic outer climate of the New World, is the model in *Shadows on the Rock* for all attempts to analogize Eu-

rope and Canada. Near the end of the novel Auclair and Count Frontenac, who is dying, are transported through their immediate surroundings to a distant place:

Both were thinking of a scene outside the windows, under the low November sky — but the river was not the St. Lawrence. They were looking out on the Pont-Marie, the hay barges tied up at the Port-au-Foin. On an afternoon like this the boatmen would be covering the hay-bales with tarpaulins, Auclair was thinking, and about this time the bells always rang from the Célestins' and the church of Saint Paul (250).

In the face of impending death (the Count has just made arrangements to have his heart sent back to France) the two men achieve a dialogic vision that subsumes two places in one moment, like the simultaneous perceptions of the Lighthouse in Woolf's novel which, as here, bridge the intervening sea. The emotional power of dialogic vision, apparent but subdued in the scene between Auclair and the Count, surfaces fully in the description of the ships enacting the physical counterpart of this vision: "Worn, battered old travelers they looked. It brought tears to the eyes to think how faithful they were, and how much they had endured and overcome in the years they had been beating back and forth between Canada and the Old World" (208). The impulse to create a climate within a climate that fashions Cécile's domestic work forms the basis of an entire cultural project, and a new kind of imagination.

The dialogic imagination is active not only in spanning the Atlantic, but in merging the various spheres of Canadian life. In setting up the crèche, Cécile extends the climate within a climate a step further to embrace the wilderness within the household: "Cécile spent the morning covering the window and the new shelf with moss and fir branches until it looked like a corner of the forest" (107). Likewise, the repercussions of political change are symbolically absorbed in the domestic

when Auclair places the case containing the dead Count's heart on the mantel. The language of the backwoods colors Pierre Charon's telling of his encounter with Jeanne Le Ber in the chapel: "Well, I hid myself in the church and saw her. It is not difficult for a man who has lived among the Indians . . . I knew when it must be near midnight, you get to have a sense of time in the woods" (182). A more extreme spatial juxtaposition occurs when Cécile extends the stone church Notre Dame de la Victoire into an eternal context: "Cécile had always taken for granted that the Kingdom of Heaven looked exactly like this from the outside and was surrounded by just such walls" (64). On the Île d'Orléans Cécile tries to connect the island to home by remembering that the rising moon is "the same moon that was shining down on the rock of Kebec" (192). Quebec, then, though a rock, allows great fluidity of perception to those who make life on it.

The river is the central symbol of fluidity, "the one thing that lived, moved, glittered, changed" (7), and its champion is Pierre Charon, who straddles the extremes of Canadian life, from the wildest to the most civilized. He fulfills within Canada the function the sailors perform crossing the Atlantic, shooting "up and down the swift rivers . . . in his canoe" (171) in a pattern that echoes the "deep rhythmic sound" (186) of the river itself, and also the motion, in his own realm, of Bishop Laval "up and down the sanded paths" (175) of the Seminary garden. When Pierre returns from his travels he swings Cécile's hands "back and forth in a rhythm of some sort, so that though they were standing still, they seemed to be dancing," thus translating the tenor of his outdoor life into a mode befitting the household.

Another aspect of dialogic perception in *Shadows on the Rock* is the integration of stories into everyday life. The novel is, like many of Cather's works, built around the stories of various characters which bring the wilderness, the Old World, and the past to bear on the present experience. The an-

gels' appearance to Jeanne Le Ber achieves dialogic power in the form of a story: "the experience of a moment, which might have been a lost ecstasy, is made an actual possession and can be bequeathed to another" (137). On two occasions Auclair applies stories to problematic aspects of life. He compares the miserable Blinker to Queen Dido in the *Aeneid*, and his sense of "misplaced heroism in the Canadian missions" (155) to the disciples who thought the box of precious ointment should have been used other than for Christ. The "solution" (155) that enables Auclair to fall asleep yields his irresolution to a larger and consistent set of events, the narrative counterpart of the dialogue among the various spheres of Canadian life.

III.

In both *To the Lighthouse* and *Shadows of the Rock* certain characters fall away from dialogic structures by seeking meaning on their own terms, separate from other people. In one kind of private encounter with reality a character seeks stability deep within the inanimate world. Knitting at sunset, Mrs. Ramsay, entranced by the spectre of the Lighthouse, attaches herself "to one thing especially of the things one saw; and this thing, the long steady stroke, was her stroke. Often she found herself sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at — that light, for example" (97). By equating herself completely with something outside herself Mrs. Ramsay loses connection with her humanity, hence her conclusion: "Not as oneself did one find rest ever" (96). The stability she finds in this scene is of a different order than the epiphany at her dinner party. Her experience is well glossed by an excerpt from the middle section of the novel: "some crystal of intensity, remote from the known pleasures and familiar virtues, something alien to the processes of domestic life" (199).

Shadows on the Rock describes a situation strikingly similar to Mrs. Ramsay's loss of personality in the Lighthouse stroke. One of the early

manifestations of Jeanne Le Ber's vocation is her infatuation with a silver lamp, made in France, that burned perpetually before the Blessed Sacrament in the church near her house: "When everyone was asleep and the house was still, it was her custom to kneel beside her casement and pray, the while watching that spot of light. 'I will be that lamp,' she used to whisper. 'I will be that lamp; that shall be my life'" (131). From these beginnings Jeanne Le Ber cuts herself off from the world and abrogates her identity in the human family, rejecting even her own mother's dying request to see her. Significantly, her one remaining tie to the real world — knitting stockings for the poor (as suggested earlier, an act symbolic of dialogic discourse and engaged in by Mrs. Ramsay as well) — is the one thing that keeps Jeanne from freezing in the winter: she lights a fire not for personal comfort but to keep her fingers working. The other redeeming aspect of Jeanne Le Ber's entombment is, of course, the miracle, which, as a story passed through the region, becomes part of the human gain.

Shadows on the Rock is pervaded by other examples of community lost through total absorption in objective reality. Colonists with a hunger for culture tend to fetishize objects from Europe, like the lamp in Jeanne Le Ber's church. The deprived child Jacques is infatuated with the copper lamp in Madam Pommier's chapel, and with Cécile's personalized cup. In the latter case his fixation is so strong that it outweighs his concept of Cécile as a living person: "even if you died, it would still be there, with your name" (87). Nature also provides objects for fixation. On the *Île d'Orléans* Cécile finds reprieve from the uncivilized Harnois family in "a beautiful harp-shaped elm" in a grassy field: "She felt she had escaped for ever from the Harnois and their way of living" (193). Cécile transcends temporality ("for ever"), but in so doing she, like Mrs. Ramsay, finds rest not as herself: "she felt rested and happy, — though unreal, indeed, as if she were someone else" (194). The anti-societal,

monologic aspect of such objective fixation emerges as Cécile gazes back on her private discovery: "She didn't want the children to come to that place in their search for her. She hoped they had never been there!" (194). The valuing of physical objects over temporality and community life is usually innocent enough, but its potential evil lies in Auclair's account of the unjustly condemned Bichet: "The Law is to protect property, and it thinks too much of property. A couple of brass pots, an old saddle, are reckoned worth more than a poor man's life" (93). By contrast, an example of a law that tempers its objectivity to accommodate human life is the Church's consideration of the beaver as a fish so that trappers in the woods can eat on Fridays.

If one monologic aberration in Woolf's and Cather's novels is objective obsession, another is total separation of the human mind from objective reality. This vision loses human content by seeking the general and distant to the exclusion of the particular and immediate. After the family embarks for the Lighthouse in the third section of Woolf's novel, "the little distance they had sailed had put them far from [the shore] and given it the changed look, the composed look, of something receding in which one has no longer any part" (247). As with objective fixation, temporality is lost in the distant view. Looking at the remote sandhills, Lily Briscoe and William Bankes are saddened "because distant views seems to outlast by a million years . . . the gazer and to be communing already with a sky which beholds an earth entirely at rest" (34). Closely tied to physical distance, then, is an abstracted view of time that occludes the redemptive potential of new experience. Before returning to work in "Time Passes," Mrs. McNab "seemed to say how [life] was one long sorrow and trouble," a view she implicitly overcomes by resurrecting the Ramsay home. In short, the remedy for the abstracted view on both the domestic and artistic levels is hard work and, as Mr. Ramsay experiences when Lily praises his boots, "that sudden recovery of

vitality and interest in ordinary human things" (233).

The problem of lost objectivity also abounds in *Shadows on the Rock*, functioning here toward Cather's specific cultural interests. In a situation that echoes the voyage to the Lighthouse, Cécile sails with Pierre to the Île d'Orléans, leaving Quebec increasingly abstracted in the distance: "the rock of Kebec lost its detail until they could see only Cap Diamant, and the Chateau, and the spires of the churches" (186). Simultaneous to the physical abstraction of Quebec, Cécile, like Mrs. McNab, adopts a generalized view of life: "Such a stretch of lost opportunity as life seemed just then!" (186). These suddenly distant conceptions of her life and home forbode the cultural deprivation Cécile will experience on the island. The torment of distance is at the heart of the sorrow of All Soul's Day, which for the older citizens is a time of physical and temporal abstraction: "Fears for the sick and old so far away, sorrow for those who died last year — five years ago — many years ago, —" (96, italics added). The most graphic rendering of this abstract fear is the unspeakable horror surrounding the cobbler's wooden last of Robert Cavalier de La Salle, the foot that will not return because it "went too far" (82).⁶

In face of the tendency for particularity to be lost in distance, the nuns of the convent offer a solution. For them, the physical world is always invested with mind because they carried their world of the mind with them across the Atlantic. When one transports one's gods to a "remote and savage country," Cather writes, "[i]ts history will shine with bright incidents, slight perhaps, but precious, as in life itself, where the great matters are often as worthless as astronomical distances, and the trifles dear as the heart's blood" (98). The nuns respond to uncontrolled abstraction by returning to particulars — not fixating on one object — but committing themselves to their belief, which resolves distance into everyday experience. This dialogic admonition is the heart of Cather's novel, as it

is of Woolf's and it provides coherence to many remarks emphasizing the importance of detail. Consider Antoine Frichette's description of how to find one's way in the chaotic wilderness: "There are many *little signs*; put them all together and they point you right" (141, italics added); or the final and subtle indication of change in Saint-Vallier: "Sometimes a neighbour whom we have disliked for a lifetime for his arrogance and conceit lets fall a *single commonplace remark* that shows us another side, another man, really" (279, italics added). Truth is most closely approximated by the merging of the distant perspective with the commonplace detail. This, anyway, would appear to be the *ethos* of the colonial experience, in which the new is filtered through the old, the immediate through the remote, and neither foregoes its distinctive nature completely. Ultimately, the dialogic perspective upon which change, growth, and beauty turn in Cather's novel originates in Quebec's physical and cultural situation: "a goal so *tiny*, out of an approach so *vast*" (208, italics added).

IV.

The imagery that accompanies the dialogic imagination intermingles light and dark, ethereal and solid, and is evident even in the titles of these works. In *To the Lighthouse* such imagery conveys the epiphany at Mrs. Ramsay's dinner table: "Now all the candles were lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candle light, and composed . . . into a party round a table, for the night was now shut off by panes of glass" (146-47). Similarly, Mrs. McNab's return to domestic chores necessitates an influx of light into the solidity of darkness: "Some cleavage of the dark there must have been, some channel in the depths of obscurity through which light enough issued to twist her face grinning in the glass" (197). In Cather's novel the imagery of light interfused with darkness abounds in instances too frequent to exhaust here: from the beginning when we follow Auclair home to his shop "lit by a single candle" and into his living room

illuminated from the fireplace; to Auclair and Cécile's night walk in which the pillars of society are represented by lights burning late at the Chateau, the Bishop's Palace, and Laval's Seminary; to the neighbor's lights on each side of the hill that Cécile pulls Jacques up in the second afterglow, like the two candles that sit on Auclair's table at home; to the culminating description of Kebec itself as "an altar with many candles" (169). In contrast to this last image, in which light transforms not only the darkness of chaos but also the very constitution of the rock, a good example of a monologic image is that of Jeanne Le Ber's candle *exposing*, rather than transforming, her stone face: "The candle shone up into her face. It was like a stone face; it had been through every sorrow" (182). In *To the Lighthouse*, an analogous image is Mrs. Ramsay's fixation on the single stroke of the Lighthouse, separating it from a continuum of light and dark and making it, in effect, solid.

The interaction of light, darkness, and solidity creates shadow. Shadow is a powerful image because it combines the basic elements of temporal experience and because it attributes motion to solidity, perhaps the highest act of the dialogic imagination. In *To the Lighthouse* shadow is part of the imagery of Mrs. McNab's return to the Ramsay's, the wavering of the shadow echoing the resurgence of life in the household: "[T]he shadow wavered . . . and Mrs. McNab . . . came as directed to open all windows, and dust the bedrooms" (196). Once again in Woolf's novel, the household butresses the artistic; their imagery is consistent. William Bankes ponders the theory behind Lily's painting of Mrs. Ramsay and James: "[I]f there, in that corner, it was bright, here, in this, she felt the need of darkness . . . Mother and child then . . . might be reduced . . . to a purple *shadow* without irreverence" (81, italics added).

Shadow imagery is, of course, also central to Cather's novel. The title *Shadows on the Rock* conveys the contrast between the monolithic solidity of Kebec and the

relatively elusive quality of the characters who live it, never fully visualized at one time but emerging gradually through Cather's delicately embroidered narrative. Shadow also conveys motion in the midst of solidity, and all the elemental ways of expressing this, as, for instance, Woolf's Lighthouse piercing the darkness in steady strokes. The "French stronghold" of Quebec is first described "flashing in the rich autumnal sunlight" (4, italics added). Before recovering Jacques from the darkness, Bishop Laval "stopped and flashed his lantern this way and that" (72, italics added). To young Cécile the sorrows of All Soul's Day do not foreclose opportunity but rather seem "strong and moving colours in the grey stretch of time" (95, italics added). During her illness Cécile feels the concentric circles of support extending out from her bed to the edge of the eternal forest: "All of these things seemed to her like layers and layers of shelter, with this one flickering, shadowy room at the core" (158, italics added). Cécile's sickness draws to a close with her sighting of the returning swallow in the dead of the winter: "Suddenly there was a movement up there, a flicker of something swift and slender in the grey light" (164). The emotional power of motion in the midst of stillness comes forward in this scene through Cécile's tears, which flow from the same source as those evoked by the motion of the ships crossing the Atlantic.

The consistent use of words suggesting unsteady light, like "flicker," lends significance to the name of the servant Blinker, who confesses to having been a torturer in the King's prison at Rouen. The imagery latent in "Blinker" seems to suggest the redemptive potential of the character's suffering. Auclair says of Blinker's suppurated jaw: "When God sent you that affliction in your face, he showed his mercy to you" (162). One could even speculate a connection, given the placement of this scene immediately before the rejuvenative appearance of the swallow, between the words "flicker" and "affliction." "Affliction"

would thus suggest, consistent with Auclair's statement, that personal suffering contains dialogic potential within itself, even as the frozen winter landscape contains the wings of a swallow. Along these lines, Blinker compares well with Mrs. McNab in *To the Lighthouse*, another grotesque servant (both their faces are described as "twisted") who literally redeems the novel through her suffering. Taken together, Blinker and Mrs. McNab indicate that the root of imagery involving inconstant light is human suffering and limitation.

V.

An extended parallel between *To the Lighthouse* and *Shadows on the Rock* remains to be glossed. A period of darkness descends on both novels: in Woolf's, the middle section "Time Passes," in which the home is abandoned, the war intervenes, and several characters die; in Cather's novel, the death of the Count and the possibility of Auclair and Cécile returning to Europe. Both periods of darkness are described from the perspective of the forsaken objects in the household, which, devoid of human content, fall into disarray. In both cases meaning transfers to the natural world, which upholds the dialogic principles until humanity returns. In "Time Passes" Woolf describes the dialogic action of nature in a looking-glass devoid of human faces: "Only the shadows of the trees, flourishing in the wind, made obeisance on the wall, and for a moment darkened the pool in which light reflected itself or birds, flying, made a soft spot flutter slowly across the bedroom floor" (195, italics added). Likewise, in *Shadows on the Rock* Cécile seems to find the shades of feeling once intrinsic to the household in the varied shades of autumnal gold: "The spirit of peace, that acceptance of fate, which used to dwell in the pharmacy on Mountain Hill, had left it and come abroad . . ." (229). In both novels life returns to the household in the form of domestic practice — Mrs. McNab and Mrs. Bast's work, and the dinner Cécile, Auclair and Pierre share after the Count's death — and with the sympathy of

natural phenomena. At the end of "Time Passes," "Messages of peace breathed from the sea to the shore. Never to break its sleep any more" (213). In Cather's work, Woolf's unstated Biblical allusion becomes overt when Cécile observes the afterglow: "The rainbow, she knew, was set in the heavens to remind us of a promise that all storms shall have an ending. Perhaps this afterglow, too, was ordained in the heavens for a reminder" (234).

The Bakhtinian terms "monologic" and "dialogic" go far in revealing the depths that Virginia Woolf and Willa Cather held in common when they wrote their respective novels. They also suggest that the ideals behind *To the Lighthouse*, alien to the patriarchal society that causes the war and impedes Mr. Ramsay's enlightenment, can be enacted in a traditional society like the one Cather depicts. For both Woolf and Cather, dialogic meaning subsists in any action or structure that opens into the eternal while maintaining its intrinsic role in the human world, in multiple perspective, and in change. The culture of *Shadows on the Rock*, viewed with a nostalgia that could only come from the twentieth century, is by no means perfectly dialogic: monology arises in Cécile's provincial attitude toward the Harnois, in the society's generally shallow view of the neighbouring Indian culture, and in Saint-Vallier's self-gratifying ministry. Still, the act of creating a New World, Cather's underlying obsession in this novel, offers clear outlets to the imagination, and to culture, that Cather, like her radical contemporaries, saw threatened in her own day. Her project, then, links the concerns of the twentieth century with those of another time and place, thereby embracing all attempts at dialogic thought, whether the context be domestic, political, religious, or artistic. Not confined to either the twentieth century or the seventeenth, *Shadows on the Rock* is, in true dialogic fashion, inclusive.

NOTES:

¹*Shadows on the Rock* (New York: Random House Vintage Edi-

tion, 1973). Subsequent references are to this edition.

²*To the Lighthouse* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1955). Subsequent references are to this edition.

³*Willa Cather on Writing* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), p. 15.

⁴"Homage to Willa Cather," in *The Art of Willa Cather*, ed. Bernice Slote and Virginia Faulkner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), pp. 200-201.

⁵For a full explication of these terms, see Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁶Those familiar with the Woolf canon will be reminded of the ending of *Jacob's Room* (1922) where all that remain of the departed Jacob are his shoes.

I use that adjective in its proper as well as popular sense. My students come in asking questions and making comments: "How come he killed himself?" "I didn't like the guy much, but he didn't have to do that." "I liked him a lot; I felt sorry for him." As teenagers, they often deal with literature first on a very basic level. They are concerned primarily with the reality of the story, and I confess I find that exciting. They speak about Paul with great interest as if he's a person they know. Afterward we speak of diction and syntax and theme and symbol, but in the beginning, for them there are only Cather's characters.

And so my discussion with them centers around the characters. I ask them as a preliminary matter to tell me about a time when they have felt alienated, isolated, or out of place. Their responses are classic — teenagers are among the loneliest people in the world. Sometimes they don't feel as smart as their peers, or they never seem to wear the right clothes, or they are never quite thin enough, but always that comes from perceiving themselves to be different, so different as to be desperately unhappy. Paul, too, they say feels unlike his fellows, and frequently finds himself excluded: they mention Paul standing outside the Schenley looking in, or his father using the young drudge on Cordelia Street as a role model for Paul.

We have a lively discussion of Paul's teachers. My students are strangely kind to them, suggesting that their meanness, their vindictiveness comes from their frustration at being unable to reach Paul. They ask me what I would do with Paul if he were in our class. Good question. I confess to understanding how Paul's teachers feel; he is a student who chooses deliberately and consistently not to use his ability. Nothing they do seems to be able to break through to him. Their impotence in the face of his arrogance makes them angry. Their traditional roles of authority mean nothing to Paul. And they can't stand that.

Paul's father is important to the story. They see him as failing absolutely to understand his son.

"Paul's Case" in the High School Classroom

By MELLANEE KVASNICKA

South High School, Omaha, Nebraska

Willa Cather wrote in *My Ántonia* of "what a little circle man's experience is." In my case that's especially true. I graduated from the high school in which I now teach, so I, like Jim Burden, have a real sense of "coming home to myself" every time I face an English class at South High School. In describing my experience of teaching "Paul's Case," several factors are important: the nature of the community in which I teach, personal approaches to the literature, and student responses to the short story.

My first experience with Willa Cather came in high school. Our teacher, a gentle, but somewhat addled woman, reportedly loved *My Ántonia*, having taught it for a hundred years or more. I have two distinct memories of that first reading. One was an interminable list of vocabulary words which we were to define and use correctly in sentences, and the other was her strict admonition not to read Book 2, Chapter 15. It deals, you recall, with Wick Cutter's attack on Jim. We, of course, read it immediately, and then wondered why she had been so worried. It wasn't until I returned to South High School to teach that I discovered how traditional the study of Cather has been in South Omaha.

South Omaha has great diversity in its ethnic background. Its demography includes large Polish, Czech, Hispanic, Black and German communities. Largely blue collar beginnings in meat process-

ing and packing house industries produced serious, hard-working families with traditional religious and moral values. Teaching in South Omaha has been a joyful experience as this diversity in ethnic background lends solid parental support to the value of education and the importance of teachers. Often my students are the children of second generation, even first generation immigrants. For them reading *My Ántonia* is not so much a matter of fiction as a matter of paging through the family album or hearing grandparents describe their own adventures. The Cather experience is very close to my students. In fact, Miss Cather's niece, Margaret, attended South High School, and according to our school newspaper archives, she also wanted to be a writer.

Our English curriculum at South High School now includes more Cather than *My Ántonia*. In addition, students in American Literature 5-6 read "The Sentimentality of William Tavener," "The Sculptor's Funeral," and "Paul's Case." Students in 12th grade Advanced Placement English read "The Novel Demeuble" from *Not Under Forty* and *A Lost Lady*, which they have told me every year is their favorite work. And so I'm pleased to report that Willa Cather is very much alive and doing well at South High.

Teaching "Paul's Case" to my Honors American Literature class has been a terrific experience, and

There is no communication between them, no sympathy. His solution is to get Paul a job. Some students say Paul's father is much like their own; others pity him for his frustration. It isn't, they say, that Paul's father is mean deliberately; he just doesn't have any notion of what his son is really like. He is part of Cordelia Street — he represents all that to which Paul must ultimately return — "the hopeless feeling of sinking back forever into ugliness and commonness . . ."

Ultimately there is Paul. First we try to identify Paul's problem. They speak of the two worlds he inhabits, the world of Carnegie Hall and the theatrical company and the world of Cordelia Street. He cannot, they say, reconcile these, nor can he always distinguish between what they represent, illusion and reality. In this regard, students recall Biff and Happy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*. I ask them to identify the cause of Paul's problem. They suggest that since he doesn't have a mother, he's missed real love. I warn them to look closely at the text for support of such a contention. They point out that nowhere in the story does Paul have real contact with any human being. So his isolation is very real and complete. One very astute student reflects that the cause of the problem is not important. What Cather wants to do is present us with a case history. Students recognize the similarities between Harvey Merrick ("The Sculptor's Funeral") and Paul, both glaringly sensitive people in an insensitive world, rather like Paul's red carnations or the hot-house flowers which cannot survive the winter environment. The difference is that Harvey Merrick is a real artist. Paul does not even have that consolation. I tell them that "Paul's Case" was included in an anthology called *Youth and the Bright Medusa*. We talk about Medusa and what that myth has to do with Paul. Someone finally suggests that maybe Paul is the "youth" who stared at Medusa head on and was turned to stone. We talk about Cather's notion of artistry and particularly her idea of the art of living.

Finally we deal with solutions — Paul's and our own. There is this year a certain tension — an uneasiness when we talk about that which I found quite touching. They speak of Paul as someone they really know. "He didn't have to kill himself," someone says. "I don't know why he did that," another responds vaguely. I believe the rise in teenage suicide and media coverage of that certainly affects my students. "He should've gotten help," one states. One student comments, "He couldn't face going to jail." Another points out, "But he wasn't going to jail; his father has fixed all that, so it isn't jail he cannot face. Did Cather do that deliberately?" Soon they come to the fact that it's not just this incident, but a lifetime on Cordelia Street that Paul cannot face. Someone else says, feeling very wise, "But that's what life is all about. Sometimes it's dull, but sometimes it's great. I think Paul's a coward." Another responds quickly, "It's not that simple. Remember Mr. Shimerda?"

At this point I'm on the verge of complete euphoria because somebody remembered and made this connection. "Remember when he killed himself, what Grandfather Burden said?" Nobody remembers exactly, so I help them. At Mr. Shimerda's funeral, Grandfather Burden says, "Oh, great and just God, no man among us knows what the sleeper knows, nor is it for us to judge what lies between him and Thee" (*My Ántonia*, 117). They also recognize other similarities: the sensitive person in an insensitive environment. I remind them of Mr. Shimerda's artistry: music and weaving. His environment is a harsh, unforgiving one, at least that first winter, and there is little call in Black Hawk for a violinist or a weaver of tapestry. They point out that Mr. Shimerda feels a failure in the art of being a father; his children are hungry; they sleep in a hole. After his visit to the Burden house, as much a haven as New York is to Paul, Mr. Shimerda cannot go back and he cannot go on.

I ask them what they could offer as a solution to Paul's case. Their answers are poignant: "He should

join clubs at school." "He should make more friends." "His father should give him more money." But one student replies, "It's just not that simple. Paul is in this mess because he can't do those things to begin with. Maybe what the author wants us to see is that for this character suicide, at least in his own mind, is the only answer." Dangerous stuff, though very perceptive. Here I am careful. Having a student in class who has attempted suicide, I proceed as if walking on glass. I try to explain that since most of us are very life-affirming, Paul's suicide seems an alien act, one which today might possibly be prevented. Artistically and even aesthetically we might understand suicide, but not necessarily on a realistic level. I follow this statement with another question: What would you do if you were Paul's father? "Then or now?" they ask. "Now."

Today, they say, Paul's case would be recognized as one which required professional help — he's not just lazy — he has a very real problem. I ask them if Paul should have tried to return to Cordelia Street. Someone says, "Returning to Cordelia Street and all that it stands for — he just can't do it and survive emotionally." There is some anger at Paul: "He didn't have to kill himself. He was a jerk." Ultimately I ask them what they felt for Paul. They have compassionate answers; they believed that if Paul attended South High School, he wouldn't be treated so poorly. Today, there is help for someone like Paul; there is also room for greater acceptance of differences in people. My student who has attempted suicide comments that Paul's absolute pessimism about life, his inability to see anything good or beautiful in the ordinary was very sad.

And so we go on, discussing Cather's techniques, use of symbol, the importance of clothing to the story, the last line which recalls the line from *My Ántonia* that an "accident of fortune . . . predetermines all that we can ever be," always wrestling with the problem of motive. We are, after all, concerned when a friend is in trouble, whether our friend is flesh and

blood in our lives, or a phantom which inhabits our thoughts.

Willa Cather is very much at home at South High School. I can't help but believe she would have been pleased that young people see her characters not just as

literary creations, but as people who inhabit the real world, who have real problems which sometimes have no solutions. The "little circle of man's experience" does surround us neatly, reminding us always of our humanity.

"velvet white and glossy blackness, and here and there a faint smear of blue door, or a tilted patch of sage-green . . ." (211). These are the colors of the night sea — Whitman's "shadows," "obscure shapes" and "white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing" (64-66).

Cather's "Two Friends" as a Western "Out of the Cradle"

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In preparing an article on Cather's *O Pioneers!* for the 1982 Western Literature meeting in Denver which I eventually included in *Critical Essays on Willa Cather*, I surveyed what I called "The Whitman Dimension" of that novel. Not only did Cather take her title from Whitman's "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" but her prose approximates his free verse in lyric passages devoted to what he describes in paragraph 3 in "Song of Myself" as "The procreant urge of the world. / Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase, always sex" At the beginning of "Neighboring Fields" in *O Pioneers!*, for example, air and earth "are curiously mated and intermingled, as if the one were the breath of the other"; also, the responsive earth "yields itself eagerly to the plow; rolls away from the shear, not even dimming the brightness of the metal, with a soft, deep sigh of happiness." This creative urge explains heroine Alexandra's sensation of germinating soil, her fantasy of being carried across the fields by a gigantic earth figure, and her spiritual communion with the Genius of the Divide. The "love and yearning" she feels for the "free spirit which breathes across" the land resembles the intercourse between poet and soul in Whitman's paragraph 5, which concludes with the insight that creation is one, "that the spirit of God is the brother of my own," and relates the universal spirit to the common grass "sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones . . ." I must confess taking some hints for this from Bernice

Slote and James Woodress, both of whom, as Whitman scholars, had noted the Whitman in Cather.

Some time later I assigned "Two Friends," the final story in *Obscure Destinies* (1932), to a freshman class while I was rereading Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" for a nineteenth century American literature survey.² Parallels in the two works immediately became apparent. Cather must have had the popular Whitman poem in mind when she wrote this relatively late story. The poem had always been a favorite of mine because I grew up about a dozen miles from the Whitman birthplace in West Hills, Long Island, and know the expansive white Long Island beaches very well. Cather's dusty Nebraska town at once recalled these beaches where the temporal land mingles with the eternal sea. They are places of death, of joining and separation, and joining and separation lie at the heart of both poem and story. The road in front of the sidewalk where the narrator as a child sat and listened to the two friends was "ankle-deep in dust, and seemed to drink up the moonlight like folds of velvet. It drank up sound, too; muffled the wagon-wheels and hoof-beats; lay soft and meek like the last residuum of material things, — the soft bottom resting-place. Nothing in the world, not snow mountains or blue seas, is so beautiful in moonlight as the soft, dry summer roads in a farming country, roads where the white dust falls back from the slow wagon-wheel" (211-12). Beyond this road, as beyond Whitman's beach, are immaterial shapes of

Each work is framed by the mature writer's recollection of a scene of what proved for him/her in childhood a momentous experience, something like what Joyce meant by an epiphany, "a sudden spiritual manifestation" from what otherwise is a "triviality."³ Whitman's grown-up poet revisits the Long Island beach in September, and a mocking-bird's song, the sands and fields beyond, the halo of the moon transport him back in time from the figurative September (ninth month) of his life to the figurative May (fifth month) — the time of his boyhood experience on this beach. To use Whitman's images, he flocks back, revisits the scene

As a flock, twittering, rising,
or overhead passing,
Borne hither, ere all eludes
me, hurriedly,
A man, yet by these tears a
little boy again[.]

Cather's narrator, suffering the upheaval of the Great War ("just a hundred years after Waterloo" [194]), thinks back to the security of her smalltown childhood, a security that is her rock. Her return to the childhood scene is also imaged as flocking; it is like "seagulls . . . [going] back to something they have known before; to remote islands and lonely ledges that are their breeding-grounds" (193-194).

Now to the pictures in these frames. The mature poet recalls his boyhood experience on a beach of "Paumanok," the fish-shaped island in the sea, where he discovered "Two feather'd guests from Alabama," two mocking-birds, and delighted in their nest and the four green eggs they guarded and by turns kept warm in anticipation of life (26-29). He approached them, fascinated, but never close enough to disturb them (30). Most of all he was inspired by their love for each other

as they basked in the sun; there was a timelessness, an eternity about their love. Day and night, "singing all the time, minding no time" (39), they too kept together. In the Cather story the two friends are smalltown businessmen, who to the impressionable child have a worldly romance about them — they traveled on business to St. Joe and St. Louis and even Chicago, and took in plays in these places and talked of famous stars like Edwin Booth and Mary Anderson. Dillon, the quick-tongued wiry little Irishman, resembled the Democratic donkey, and Trueman, perhaps a mite less intelligent but possessed of better breeding, "looked a little like the walking elephant labelled 'G.O.P.' in *Puck*" (208). These men and the brick store wall and sturdy sidewalk beside it where they sat were the only substantial things in the little dusty town: "I liked the store and the brick wall and the sidewalk because they were solid and well built, and possibly I admired Dillon and Trueman for much the same reason. They were secure and established" (197). It is the stability of lasting friendship seemingly safe from changes of fortune that these material securities represent. Like Whitman's Long Island boy, Cather's young girl approaches without disturbing: "I was very quiet. I often sat on the edge of the sidewalk with my feet hanging down and played jacks by the hour when there was moonlight. On dark nights I sometimes perched on top of one of the goods-boxes . . . on the sidewalk against the red brick wall" (207). Where Whitman's boy listens to a song, the duet of the birds, Cather's girl listens to a duet of spoken words, to Dillon's varied "cool; sparkling" voice playing against Trueman's "thick and low . . . rather indistinct" monotone (205-206).

The crisis point in both works is when the satisfactory equilibrium of love — romantic love or friendship love — is disturbed. Whitman's female bird flies out to sea, never to return, and the boy is rapt with the sorrowful lament of the lonely he-bird. The boy is unsettled; the bird brings tears, and the ma-

ture poet the boy has become can now put words to the bird's lamentable pleas for the return of its beloved. But the "lagging, yellow, waning moon / . . . [drooping] almost down into the sea" (102-103) forecasts the heartbreaking permanent separation. Recalling the happy basking and anticipation of previous, sunny days, the bird through the mature poet's sensibilities accepts the inevitable:

O past! O happy life! O songs
of joy!
In the air, in the woods, over
fields,
Loved! loved! loved! loved!

But my mate no more, no
more with me!
We two together no more.
(125-129)

In Cather's story a moon drama forecasts the death of Dillon and Trueman's friendship. The child and the two men witness an occultation of the planet Venus, a passing of the moon between Venus and Earth. The way it appears from the sidewalk, the big star approaches, is held within the moon's disk for a time, then appears as a wart on the moon until it separates. This parallels the coming together of the friends for a thirteen year friendship (they had been friends for ten years before the child knew them), and their eventual separation due to a disagreement over the candidacy of William Jennings Bryan. Dillon becomes a "Pop," clamoring for the silver standard, and the Republican Trueman draws his money from Dillon's bank. It was, the narrator reflects from her maturity, "a quarrel of 'principle.' Trueman looked down on anyone who could take the reasoning of the Populist party seriously. He was a perfectly direct man, and he showed his contempt. That was enough. It lost me my special pleasure of summer nights . . ." (226). Nothing now goes right for the separated friends. Dillon is soon dead, and Trueman sells out and goes to live in a hotel in California, a place (to Cather) without stability of any kind.

There is no real parallel in Cather's story to the dramatic resolution of Whitman's poem, where the sea whispers the delicious word

"death" to the young poet to ease the restlessness he has experienced through the he-bird's anguish and loss. That word becomes the key — joins human love on earth to the final absorption of the individual by the Universal, the final love act. This insight (the joining of love and death) is the boy's call to the poet's life:

My own songs awaked from
that hour,
And with them the key, the
word up from the waves,
The word of the sweetest
song and all songs[.]
(178-180)

Cather's narrator merely contemplates the loss she and her two great men experienced. Actually it is more than contemplation; it is capable of rewounding her, this tragic waste of something fine, something necessary — an equilibrium of two men prophetic of final, universal harmony:

The breaking-up of that friendship between two men who scarcely noticed my existence was a real loss to me, and has ever since been a regret. More than once, in Southern countries where there is a smell of dust and dryness in the air and the nights are intense, I have come upon a stretch of dusty white road drinking up the moonlight beside a blind wall, and have felt a sudden sadness. Perhaps it was not until the next morning that I knew why, — and then only because I had dreamed of Mr. Dillon or Mr. Trueman in my sleep. When that old scar is occasionally touched by chance, it rouses the old uneasiness; the feeling of something broken that could so easily have been mended; of something delightful that was senselessly wasted, of a truth that was accidentally distorted — one of the truths we want to keep. (229-230)

NOTES

¹John J. Murphy, ed., *Critical Essays on Willa Cather* (Boston: Hall, 1984), pp. 91-109. I have not included the subsequent passage

in quotation marks because I made some clarifying additions to my text.

²The Cather text is from the Vintage Books edition of *Obscure Destinies* (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 193-230. The Whitman text is from the Norton Critical edition of *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 246-

253. Subsequent references are given in my text, page numbers for the story and line numbers for the poem.

³James Joyce, excerpt from *Stephen Hero* as quoted in *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, 3rd ed., edited by X. J. Kennedy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), p. 388.

In Rose Time

*Oh this is the joy of the rose;
That it blows,
And goes.*

Winter lasts a five-month
Spring-time stays but one;
Yellow blow the rye-fields
When the rose is done.
Pines are clad at Yuletide
When the birch is bare,
And the holly's greenest
In the frosty air.

Sorrow keeps a stone house
Builded grim and gray;
Pleasure hath a straw thatch
Hung with lanterns gay.
On her petty savings
Niggard Prudence thrives,
Passion, ere the moonset,
Bleeds a thousand lives.

Virtue hath a warm hearth —
Folly's dead and drowned;
Friendship hath her own when
Love is underground.
Ah! for me the madness
Of the spendthrift flower,
Burning myriad sunsets
In a single hour.

*For this is the joy of the rose;
That it blows,
And goes.*

Poem by Willa Cather
from *April Twilights*
(1903)

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Willa Cather: A Reference Guide (Arnold)	\$35.00
The World of Willa Cather (Bennett) paper	7.50
Willa Cather in Person (Bohlke)	17.95
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Cather Christmas Cards

John Bergers' paintings will be available as Christmas cards this December. We are having "Painted Windows" imprinted with the text

*The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:
The LORD make his face shine upon thee,
and be gracious unto thee:
The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee.
and give thee peace.*

Numbers 6:24-26

With this message the card could be used for Christmas, Easter, Birthday, Condolence or Thinking of You.

The other painting "On Lovely Creek" will have no printed text. Each person may write his own message.

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(Members, \$22.50 plus postage and handling \$3.00)

The volume, *The Life of the Right Reverend Joseph P. Machebeuf*, has been re-issued as *The Life of Bishop Machebeuf*, edited by Thomas J. Steele, S. J. and Ronald S. Brockway. Publishers: Regis College, Denver, 1987.

From the Guest Editor John J. Murphy

Diverse approaches to Cather distinguish this special literary issue of the *Newsletter*. The Cather session on *Death Comes for the Archbishop* at the Northeast MLA convention in Boston in April furnished the two essays by Kevin Synnott and Marilee Lindemann. She takes a reasonable feminist approach, and Synnott explores the novel from the perspective of visual art. His paper complements

Steve Tatum's, which explores transitions from visual to aural participation in *The Song of the Lark*. Aspects of both approaches materialize in Joseph Murphy's attempt to apply Bakhtinian forms of discourse common in Woolf criticism to the more traditional territory of *Shadows on the Rock*. We enjoy generous samplings of the obscure diocesan biography in the genesis of *Archbishop* in Lance Larsen's analysis. Mellanee Kvasnicka has let us print her commentary on teaching "Paul's Case" at South

Omaha High which brought her a standing ovation at Spring Conference in May. The collection is rounded out by my own suggestions on using Whitman to teach "Two Friends." We hope these essays will generate others and contribute to the growing body of significant Cather scholarship.

**Read My *Antonia*
for
Spring Conference 1988**

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