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Lyrical Measures: Cohesion and Sentence Endings in Cather's Prose

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Excerpted from a longer linguistic consideration of Cather texts.

When in "The Novel Démeublé" Willa Cather described high quality in a work of literature as an "overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it" (*On Writing* 41), she was alluding to music as the pre-eminent art form. As Richard Giannone has shown, Cather believed music was closest to pure expression, the condition toward which other significant art forms aspired (6). From the outset of her career, Cather assessed all the arts in terms of their musicality. Bernhardt's genius as an actress, she wrote, was in her ability to "phrase her lines as if they were music" (*Kingdom* 216). The fact that Bernhardt spoke in a foreign language in no way diminished her impact on Cather, for the emotional meaning of her performance communicated itself above the literal level of words. Cather's great passion for opera similarly hinged on the music, not the libretto, carrying the higher excitement. And in an article on Paul Verlaine, Cather writes, "his verses are like music . . . made up of harmony and feeling," and she singled out one of his volumes titled *Romances Without Words*, claiming that "[h]e created a new verbal art of communicating sensations not only by the meaning of words, but of their relation, harmony and sound" (*Kingdom* 393-97). For Cather, music transcended the literal limitations of words and came closest to giving expression to what she called variously "emotion" or "soul," or that "higher thing" (*Kingdom* 132).

Of course, as a fiction writer, Cather used words, and sometimes her novels were long, using many words indeed, but it was her highest goal nonetheless to achieve that "something else . . . for which language has no name" (*Kingdom* 120-21). To get the emotion right, to capture the feeling, was the way she often talked about her writing, discounting its denotative function. It has become a critical commonplace to talk about the lyrical quality of Cather's prose, to cite her comparison of the unique cadence and quality of voice in Sarah Orne Jewett's writing to a melody experienced in memory (*On Writing* 50). But how does she achieve this lyricism in her own writing? How does she bring us into the presence of "the thing not named" or, to continue the musical analogy, how does she let us experience "the overtone divined by the ear but not heard by it"?

In a lengthy examination of Cather's style, we have used linguistic analysis to account for her lyricism and for her theoretical pronouncement that the higher reaches of art lie beyond the meaning of words. As a pastoralist, Cather wanted to describe an aboriginal relationship to the universe that was pre-speech, that was more directly approached through the emotional resources of painting and music. In our study we have applied two concepts from discourse analysis — thematization and information status — to show how Cather endowed common speech with timeless resonance. A third type of discourse analysis — a study of cohesion — has allowed us to describe the larger designs and the echo effects which haunt Cather's prose. Here we shall look briefly at some examples of the echo effect and, by using syntactical analysis, consider the grammatical habits that are the footings for these higher designs. Our thesis is that Cather both instinctively and deliberately wrote sentences and designed paragraphs such that her "simple" prose would reach beyond words and echo, like music, a prefigurative mode of being.

The echo effect, that reverberation of something from the past, is one of the most obvious and accessible of Cather's literary techniques. Traditionally, critics have approached it through studies of repetition and parallelism: for example, Ántonia's children named after old friends and family is recognized as bringing a rush of nostalgia to both Jim Burden and the reader; the restless musical pleasure exhibited by Ántonia's self-taught, faun-like son is seen to have parallels in the earlier portrait of Blind d'Arnault. These echoes are not a matter of grammar or syntax, but more straightforwardly they are deliberate patterns of plot, character, and imagery. Echoes that are created by means of grammatical construction or by means of lexical cohesion are much more subtle; in a curious way they are more powerful, and if we have an ear for them they can bring us into the presence of things "not named."

Analysis reveals a striking instance of echo effect at the beginning of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

As we begin "The Vicar Apostolic," we might get a feeling that something has brushed past us — something familiar — for that beginning parallels the beginning of the "Prologue," which we have already read. In Europe:

> One summer evening in the year 1848, three Cardinals and a missionary Bishop from America were dining together in the gardens of the villa in the Sabine hills, overlooking Rome. (3)

In America:

> One afternoon in the autumn of 1851 a solitary horseman, followed by a pack-mule, was pushing through an arid stretch of country somewhere in central New Mexico. (17)

In each, an adverbial starts the sentence by positioning the event in time of day, season, and calendar year; the action takes a past progressive verb; a sentence-ending prepositional phrase locates the event in a place designated finally by a proper noun. Do we remember that we heard this construction before? Or, after a span of thirteen pages, is the parallel perceptible only as an inaudible echo? If we do feel the echo over intervening pages, would we then notice what develops out of these parallels as divergent?

Perhaps, at some level we experience the echo of this construction as something "felt upon the page without being specifically named there" (*On Writing* 41). It prepares us, without our being consciously aware, for a great shift taking place in the narrative, a shift hinged on point of view. The narrator of "The Prologue" is as aloof and mobile as a cinematic camera, capable of capturing the panoramic view, sighting the dome of St. Peter's in the distance, and then zooming in to focus on the cardinals' buttons. In "The Vicar Apostolic," on the other hand, the narrator anchors point of view with the horseman. After the first sentence locates the horseman on the plain, point of view descends to his eye-level, and, at the same time, the speaker introduces a syntactic feature entirely absent from the "Prologue," modal verbs:

> One *could not have believed* that in the number of miles a man *is able to sweep* with the eye there *could be* so many uniform red hills.
>
> He *must have travelled* through thirty miles of these conical red hills, . . . and he had begun to think he *would never see* anything else.

Modal auxiliaries in the phrases I've emphasized — *could, must, would* — condition our reception of the claim the sentence makes: it's no longer fact — as are all the claims in the "Prologue," where the eye scans settled territory governed by cultural and traditional certainties.

Technical measures make this modality conspicuous: six modals among this passage's twenty-eight finite verb phrases; none among the "Prologue"'s twenty-six finite verb phrases. As readers, we probably aren't going to notice the appearance of these modals. Yet "The Vicar Apostolic" has, stealthily, moved us a long way, from a villa outside Rome — a familiar setting in our cultural history — to a "stretch of country somewhere in New Mexico" — a remote and unfamiliar setting. We scarcely know how this transportation is accomplished or what it means. In fact, at first, the narrative voice, with its syntactic parallelisms, even suggests that we have made no long-distance move. But we have. The use of modals to convey Father Latour's perception of the land has plunged us into a world where we are "lost," without a sure sense of "direction." The echo or "overtone" we hear in the opening syntactical construction reverberates with the memory of a secure and ordered world (Rome at the center of Christendom), making the loss more disturbing. This echo in fact sensitizes us to the conflicted emotions at the heart of pastoral and the art of memory — that sense of a transcendent and immutable order on the one hand, and on the other a painful and bewildering sense of having been severed from secure reality.

The echo effect occurs not only in large grammatical constructions but within the cohesive patterns of language in Cather's prose. *Cohesion* is the glue that holds sentences together, that makes them depend on one another and join together. Linguists Halliday and Hasan have identified several types of cohesive tie, but Cather tends to use only two — *Reference* and *Lexical Ties*. In these first two paragraphs from "The Vicar Apostolic" we have emphasized words which illustrate these characteristic cohesive ties:

> One afternoon in the autumn of 1851 *a solitary horseman*, followed by a pack-mule, was pushing through an arid stretch of country somewhere in central New Mexico. *He* has lost *his* way and was trying to get back to the trail, with only *his* compass and *his* sense of direction for guides. The difficulty was that the country in which he found himself was so featureless — or rather, that it was crowded with features, all exactly alike. As far as he could see, on every side, the landscape was heaped up into monotonous red sandhills, not much larger than haycocks, and very much the shape of haycocks. One could not have believed that in the number of square miles a man is able to sweep with the *eye* there could be so many uniform red hills. He had been riding among them since early morning, and the look of the country had no more changed than if he had stood still. He must have travelled through thirty miles of these conical red hills, winding his way in the narrow cracks between them, and he had begun to think that he would never see anything else. They were so exactly like one another that he seemed to be wandering in some *geometrical* nightmare; flattened *cones*, they were, more the shape of Mexican ovens than haycocks — yes, exactly the shape of Mexican ovens, red as brick-dust, and naked of vegetation except for small juniper trees. And the junipers, too,

> were the shape of Mexican ovens. Every *conical* hill was spotted with smaller *cones* of juniper, a uniform yellowish green, as the hills were a uniform red. The hills thrust out of the ground so thickly that they seemed to be pushing each other, elbowing each other aside, tipping each other over.
>
> The blunted pyramid, repeated so many hundred times upon his *retina* and crowding down upon him in the heat, had confused the *traveller*, who was sensitive to the shape of things. (17-18)

One aspect of reference cohesion is a matter of pronouns, whereby a second sentence depends on the first. Thus, four times the second sentence in the first paragraph uses a reference tie to call on an item from the first sentence for its interpretation: the second sentence presupposes "horseman," and the referent of "horseman" is kept active in the reader's mind, while "afternoon" and "autumn" are left dormant, or out of focus. In the second sentence the writer could have chosen a different type of tie. She could have written "*The horseman* had lost his way . . ." or "*The rider* had lost his way . . . ." Both of these choices are reference ties depending on definite articles rather than pronouns. But in each of these substitute phrases, the noun head also forms a tie of its own — a lexical tie. These are of two different types: the first is a straight repetition while the second is a synonym. There are still other options among lexical ties. For example, in the paragraph that Cather wrote, "trail" is cohesive with "pack-mule" — a *Collocation* in that these two terms are liable to co-occur (as "shoe" would with "foot," or "pencil" with "eraser"). And sometimes a higher-level, more inclusive term (*Superordinate*) can form a cohesive lexical tie with a more specific term: in this passage "horseman" is eventually replaced with "traveller," and the replacement ties together, makes cohesive, the two sentences in which the words occur.

The "horseman"/"traveller" tie invokes another feature of cohesion: *Span*, the stretch of text across which the tie arches. This pair spans eleven sentences. Big spans can be risky engineering feats, but the writer who uses them can provide the reader with an experience different from that offered by a writer who uses them rarely.

In making her writing cohesive Cather tends towards the restatement of concrete items, using many straight repetitions. She is reluctant to move very far from the established track, the common foot-path, to develop synonymous or superordinate ties ("landscape"/"country"; "see"/"sweep with the eye"; "travelled"/"riding"). But she does sometimes depart with swift and short-lived changes in register: in the "geometrical" ties with all the occurrences of "cone" and its derivations; "retina" with "eye." These instances — where word choice brings into focus rarer or more abstract realms — almost escape notice but they are there.

As readers, we may experience these swift gestures towards complexity as fleeting sensations. We would hardly bank on them, or invest in them efforts after larger, more stable meanings. They are only moments of suggestion, fading quickly as the text returns to its well-marked path. If we pursued them, we would risk losing our way. The story would have gone on without us, leaving us stranded. But sometimes we wonder if we shouldn't take the speaker up on her suggestion — no sooner offered than withdrawn. In "The Mass at Ácoma" section of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* there is a passage that may touch us in this way because of a spectacular instance of cohesive spanning. The passage extends over three paragraphs of landscape description:

> After early Mass the next morning Father Latour and his guide rode off across the low plain that lies between Laguna and Ácoma. In all his travels the Bishop had seen no country like this. From the flat red sea of sand rose great rock mesas, generally Gothic in outline, resembling vast cathedrals. They were not crowded together in disorder, but placed in wide spaces, long vistas between. This plain might once have been an enormous city, all the smaller quarters destroyed by time, only the public buildings left, — piles of architecture that were like mountains. The sandy soil of the plain had a light sprinkling of junipers, and was splotched with masses of blooming rabbit brush, — that olive-coloured plant that grows in high waves like a tossing sea, at this season covered with a thatch of bloom, yellow as gorse, or orange like marigolds.
>
> This mesa plain had an appearance of great antiquity, and of incompleteness; as if, with all the materials for world-making assembled, the Creator had desisted, gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together, on the eve of being arranged into mountain, plain, plateau. The country was still waiting to be made into a landscape.
>
> Ever afterward the Bishop remembered his first ride to Ácoma as his introduction to the mesa country. One thing which struck him at once was that every mesa was duplicated by a cloud mesa, like a reflection, which lay motionless above it or moved slowly up from behind it. These cloud formations seemed to be always there, however hot and blue the sky. Sometimes they were flat terraces, ledges of vapour; sometimes they were dome-shaped, or fantastic, like the tops of silvery pagodas, rising one above another, as if an oriental city lay directly behind the rock. The great tables of granite set down in an empty plain were inconceivable without their attendant clouds, which were a part of them, as smoke is part of the censer, or the foam of the wave. (94-95)

In a longer study of Cather's style, we demonstrate that this passage's *Sentence Themes* (Halliday) grip elements of the setting — earth and rock — which tie the sentences together, anchoring them in local materials: sea of sand/plain/sandy soil of the plain; *mesas/they*. Other items are introduced

— Gothic outlines, "cathedrals," city of "public buildings" and "smaller quarters," "waves," "a tossing sea" — and then retired as the passage focuses on *plain, mesa,* and *cloud* as cohesive ties. But then, in the final sentence, after six intervening sentences, items we have scarcely monitored part the curtains and return for an encore. "Censer" is cohesive (as collocation) with "cathedrals," creating a span that arches across nine intervening sentences. "Wave" is a lexical repetition cohesive with its earlier instance, after six intervening sentences. Nine sentences — and even six — constitute a long and risky span for items that are not thematized. The reader might not experience the cohesive tie at all. Or she might — and then wonder if she was supposed to. In either case, the span is not solid enough to carry interpretive machinery — only sensation, an imprint that blurs and recedes almost in the moment in which it impresses itself, "something felt upon the page without being specifically named there." Perhaps this is what Cather would call "unfurnished" writing where "the essence . . . is not to hold the note, not to use the incident for all there is in it — but to touch and pass on" (*On Writing* 9). Certainly the scope of this narrative, which is at once elemental and cosmic, is subtly evoked by these sustained intersecting gestures toward spirit ("censer") and matter ("wave"), yet the author never directly poses such difficult metaphysical issues for her readers. Instead we hear a refrain, although we would likely find it very difficult to identify the source of the echo.

The cohesive ties that may span long stretches of text are most often served by the same syntactic habit — Cather's construction of elaborate sentence endings. The speaker keeps the front of the sentence, and even its middle rooms, plainly decorated, with a folk architecture that employs only lightly modified noun phrases, and independent clauses with finite verbs from the plainest part of the lexicon and rendered in the most predictable tense and aspect. Then she puts at the ends of the sentences syntactic features — heavily modified noun phrases, participial adverbials, appositives, absolutes — which compress and elide the language, compact information, cantilever the sentence. (This makes one think of Professor St. Peter's old house with its homely front, not much respected by people, and its surprising garden in the rear.)

The noun phrases in Cather's sentences at first tend to decline ornament (and are always rather chaste in their premodifiers), and then, as the sentence progresses, begin to accept more and more modification, especially opening themselves to postmodification. We take our examples here and below from the "Prologue":

> 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 sky-line — 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.* (3)

As the modifying wings extend, the noun head ("sky-line"), which is the essential core or load-bearing element, loses some of its dominion over the phrase, and at the same time, the reader works harder to process the phrase's syntax. When a heavily postmodified noun phrase appears at the beginning of a sentence, it can make the sentence quite hard to read. Almost without exception, Cather puts these heavily postmodified noun phrases (in our example, "sky-line," then "the dome of St. Peter's") not at the beginning of a sentence but at the end — and then steadies or restores the reader with a bare noun phrase at the beginning of the next sentence: "The Cardinal had an eccentric preference . . . ."

And these sentence endings harbor not only the most amplified of the noun phrases but other elements rather rare in everyday speech. Sentence end is the site, for example, for participial adverbials: clauses without their own subject and finite verb:

> The table stood in a sanded square, among the potted orange and oleander trees, *shaded by spreading ilex oaks that grew out of the rocks overhead.* (3)

Lacking a subject and tense-carrying elements, the adverbial performs a kind of ellipsis. But another kind of sentence-ending feature in these passages is the opposite of ellipsis — appositions which pile up additional entries in a syntactic slot which has already been filled:

> It [the light] was both intense and soft, with a ruddiness as of much-multiplied candlelight, *an aura of redness in its flames.* (4)

Elisions, which permit a clause to drop its tense and subject and attach itself to an independent clause, and appositions which permit an accumulation of rewordings on the same syntactic spot, are sentence-ending features of these passages. Theoretically, they could go on forever. They don't, of course. The sentence finally closes, and when the next one begins, it's as if no liberties had been taken, as if grammatical limits hadn't been tested. Everything is back to normal. But, at the same time, it is sentence endings that are most often the locations of the material that touches the deeper reserves of knowledge — "the smoke" and "the censer" — and that provide the materials for the cohesive filament that overarches spans of text, and may strike a chord.

Let us look again at parts of the passage from "The Mass at Ácoma" (sentences 4-6, then sentence 13):

> From the flat red sea of sand rose *great rock mesas, generally Gothic in outline, resembling vast cathedrals.* They were not crowded together in

> disorder, but placed in *wide spaces, long vistas between*. This plain might once have been an enormous city, *all the smaller quarters destroyed by time, only the public buildings left, — piles of architecture that were like mountains*. The sandy soil of the plain had a light sprinkling of junipers, and was splotched with masses of blooming rabbit brush, — *that olive-coloured plant that grows in high waves like a tossing sea, at this season covered with a thatch of bloom, yellow as gorse, or orange like marigolds*. . . . The great tables of granite set down in an empty plain were inconceivable without their attendant clouds, which were a part of them, *as the smoke is part of the censer, or the foam of the wave*.

The first sentence ends in a heavily postmodified noun phrase introducing architectural items with a religious association that will be kept in focus by further architectural mentions in the following two sentences, but then withdrawn for a span of nine sentences, and then re-invoked by "censer." The next sentence starts out plainly but ends in a noun phrase followed by an absolute which at first reads like an elliptical postmodifier. (At the same time, "vista" is simultaneously in keeping with the wording of urban architecture and the wording of natural views.) Then, in the next sentence, a tidy independent clause gives way to two absolutes, the second of which leads to its own appositive noun phrase, whose postmodifier, with "mountains," returns to us a natural landscape. Finally, a grammatically ordinary independent clause blooms into a lush, massively postmodified appositive, introducing the sea that will be evoked again eight sentences later in the "wave."

In the opening chapter of the "Pierre Charron" section in *Shadows on the Rock* there is an instance of cohesion spanning the chapter's entire eight pages. In the first paragraph the following sentence occurs:

> When the sun came up over the Île d'Orléans, the rock of Kebec stood gleaming above the river like an altar with many candles, or like a holy city in an old legend, shriven, sinless, washed in gold. (169)

The sentence's end spreads into noun-phrase postmodifiers that elaborate the rock's illumination in the rising sun. Then, three pages further, at the end of a lengthy descriptive sentence, an intricately postmodified appositive noun phrase identifies coureur de bois Pierre with the sunlight:

> Though his figure was still boyish, his face was full of experience and sagacity; a fine bold nose, a restless, rather mischievous mouth, white teeth, very strong and even, sparkling hazel eyes with a kind of living flash in them, like the sunbeams on the bright rapids upon which he was so skillful. (172)

More than any overt statement, this mention of the sun identifies Pierre as the heroic and innocent embodiment of the place in which he lives. A further mention of light in this chapter, however, puts us truly in awe of the subtlety of Cather's craft. In the last paragraph Pierre has been talking to the Bishop and we are told at the end of the penultimate sentence that "he was rather overcast" (176). "Overcast" collocates as a lexical tie with mentions of sunlight, but in the context of the clergyman's presence, with its painful reminder for Pierre of the recluse Jeanne Le Ber, whom he had loved, it also has the power to revive for us the earlier phrase "shriven, sinless." Indeed, all the power of religious belief in the colony in conflict with earthly human love is contained in these seemingly inconsequential but haunting references to light. Chiefly, then, it is in the back-gardens of sentences that grow the evocative materials that set up the musical echoes in Cather's writing, that allow her to communicate, as she observed of Katherine Mansfield, "vastly more than she actually writes" (*On Writing* 110).

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Portraits of the Artist: Thea Kronborg and Margaret Laurence's Morag Gunn

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"But take it from me, no matter what she says, or how much she may lie about it, the real, the master revel is hers. She has her hour, when she can say, 'There it is, at last'" (512). In *The Song of the Lark*, Dr. Archie, Thea Kronborg's childhood friend and benefactor, speaks these words to Fred Ottenburg, her faithful suitor.They are as true of Cather herself as of Thea, and they are as true of Margaret

Laurence, the Canadian novelist who in important ways is Cather's descendant, as of Laurence's character Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*.

Margaret Laurence

On a hot night in August, 1969, Margaret Laurence arrived in Toronto from England to become Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto. In June I had visited her at Elm Cottage in Buckinghamshire, her home at that time, and she had agreed to come to us to stay until the Toronto house she had rented should be vacant. As we parted that first night, after a long evening of reunion and laughter, I offered her Willa Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, one of my perennially favourite books, for bedtime reading. She paused, looked at me strangely and then said, "How could you possibly know? It's something like that I'm trying to write just now. I began to write about a woman artist, but I've had to scrap all that and start over again with a woman writer. That's the only thing I know enough about." The book just beginning was, of course, *The Diviners*, and over the next five years I was fortunate to be on the sidelines of its making.

Over the years, in the course of our ongoing, never-ending conversations about writing, Willa Cather came up whenever Margaret talked about early influences on her work. She had read Cather when she was in her early teens. Her step-mother, her beloved "Mum," so important and positive an influence on her early development as a writer, had founded the Library in Neepawa, Manitoba, and their home was the way-station where all the new purchases were listed before shelving. Margaret liked to talk about encountering Cather this way and about Mum suggesting Cather's novels as an antidote to her temporary early enchantment with the practitioners of Harlequin-type romances — the works of Grave Livingston Hill, for instance. In *Dance on the Earth*, her memoir, Margaret writes of her early teenage reading of *Shadows on the Rock* and her subsequent herb garden and apothecary shop:

> I grew sweet basil, sage, summer savory, borage, horehound, dill . . . . Inspired again by *Shadows on the Rock*, I constructed, as I fancied, an apothecary shop in the loft . . . . We had jars of dried herbs on the makeshift shelves, plus jars of cheap, one-cent candies, bought with my meagre allowance, old candleholders, small brass postal scales that I'd found in the attic, an assortment of old chairs and apple boxes, and various other treasures. (67-68)

There are, of course, many specific language echoes to Cather in Laurence's works, as well as the broadly analogous areas that I began to chart long ago in the essay "Proud Lineage: Willa Cather and Margaret Laurence." In the timeless evocation of the West and of the men and, especially, the strong women who inhabited that land, Cather was Laurence's "mother-in-the-craft"; Laurence was always proud to have her name linked with Cather's, not only by me, but by the American scholars who wrote to her from time to time and about whom she talked, though not, in my remembrance, by name. I have continued to be teased, however, by that late-night exchange, and to see a kind of inevitability in Laurence's creating of Morag Gunn, a late 20th century development and progression in the concept of woman as artist.

In "'Writ in Remembrance': Willa Cather, Margaret Laurence, and the Prairie Past," Susan Warwick of York University discusses the links between Cather and Laurence, the clearest bond being "their common concern with the past, both individual and cultural . . . . the exploration of ways of seeing and understanding their place, and by extension, man's place, in time and history" (35). Warwick points out their reliance on a common group of image patterns, of garden and wilderness, bird, water, landscape, house and cave, but in particular Morag's sighting of the Great Blue Heron in *The Diviners*, so unmistakably an echo of Thea's golden eagle in *The Song of the Lark*:

> Like a pterodactyl, like an angel, like something out of the world's dawn. Ancient-seeming, unaware of the planet's rocketing changes. The sweeping serene wings of the thing, unknowing that it was speeding not only towards individual death but probably towards the death of its kind . . . . (*Diviners* 292)
>
> O eagle of eagles! Endeavor, achievement, desire, glorious striving of human art! From a cleft in the heart of the world she saluted it . . . . It had come all the way; when men lived in caves, it was there. A vanished race; but along the trails, in the stream, under the spreading cactus, there still glittered in the sun the bits of their frail vessels, fragments of their desire. (*Song of Lark* 399)

The interrelatedness of the two texts is unmistakable, although the contexts for the sightings are quite different.

Cather's portrait of Thea as artist-in-the-making and then, finally, as consummate artist is the constant focus of *The Song of the Lark*. The sighting of the eagle becomes a climactic moment of revelation and affirmation of the timeless power and importance of art, and of Thea's dedication to it. Over and over again we are told by the all-seeing narrator and shown by the events of Thea's life that her development as a singer exacts great toll from other areas of her life. Cather's eventual capitulation to the conventional "happy ending" strikes the novel's single discordant note.

Morag, on the other hand, is an established writer when we first see her; her quest in *The Diviners* goes beyond the development of the artist. Full personhood is her goal, passionate love and children, community with the people and the land around her: "All I want is everything" (182). Her dilemma is how to achieve and hold such wholeness while fulfilling the imperious demands of her writing. The sighting of the heron is an epiphanic moment in her acceptance and reconciliation of the warring elements within herself, followed after a time by others — the dismissal of her imagined companion and mentor, the Canadian pioneer Catharine Parr Traill, and, finally, by her dawning understanding, through her water-divining neighbor Royland, of the meaning of "divining" itself, as applied to her own work and to others:

> "It's something I don't understand, the divining," Royland said slowly, "and it's not something that everybody can do, but the thing I don't usually let on about is that quite a few people can learn to do it . . . ."
>
> The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along, but not really known. The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else. (369)

For Laurence, as Susan Warwick concludes, "The act of writing requires faith above all else . . . . And the works written are manifestations of that faith, steps towards God's grace." For Cather, "Art was the realm in which time could be suspended, and a return made to an ideal world" (36). Cather's sense of the artist's pilgrimage describes a circular pattern, a return to an ideal world of innocence and simplicity. Laurence perceives both past and future as being forever in flux within us: the river that seems to flow both ways is the central image of *The Diviners*.

There is a strong under-stratum of shared conviction between these two writers about the twinned pain and joy of the artist's journey. Writing a preface to *The Best Stories of Sarah Orne Jewett* in 1925, Willa Cather made a firm statement of her artist's credo:

> If [the writer] achieves anything noble, anything enduring, it must be by giving himself absolutely to his material. And this gift of sympathy is his great gift; it is the fine thing in him that alone can make his work fine. He fades away into the land and people of his heart, he dies of love only to be born again. The artist spends a lifetime loving the things that haunt him, in having his mind "teased" by them, in trying to get these conceptions down on paper exactly as they are to him and not in conventional poses supposed to reveal their character. (*On Writing* 51)

Writing her "Preface" to *Long Drums and Cannons* some forty years later, Margaret Laurence voiced her central conviction about the writer's vision:

> Despite some current fashions to the contrary, the main concern of a writer remains that of somehow creating the individual on the printed page, of catching the tones and accents of human speech, of setting down the conflicts of people who are as real to him as himself. If he does this well, and as truthfully as he can, his writing may sometimes reach out beyond any national boundary. (10)

Allowing for the contrast between the high romantic style of Cather's statement and the plain practicality of Laurence's, the two writers are voicing the common compulsion and driving power of their art.

In her "Preface" to a revised edition of *The Song of the Lark*, dated New Brunswick, Canada, July 16, 1932, Cather confessed her dissatisfaction with certain aspects of her book while revealing a strong elitist bias and the pedestal on which she placed the artist:

> The life of nearly every artist who succeeds in the true sense (succeeds in delivering himself completely to his art) is more or less like Wilde's story, "The Portrait of Dorian Grey." As Thea Kronborg is more and more released in the dramatic and musical possibilities of her profession, as her artistic life grows fuller and richer, it becomes more interesting to her than her own life . . . . Her human life is made up of exacting engagements and dull business detail, of shifts to evade an idle, gaping world which is determined that no artist will ever do his best. Her artistic life is the only one in which she is happy, or free, or even very real. (vi)

This indeed is the high romantic, Kubla Khan concept of the artist:

> Weave a circle round him thrice
> And close your eyes with holy dread.
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of paradise. (51-54)

Margaret Laurence thought neither of herself nor of Morag as an artist in that elevated and isolationist sense, and she stoutly resisted Cather's implied superiority to the "idle, gaping world," or, as Cather calls it later in the same passage, "the smug, domestic, self-satisfied provincial world of utter ignorance." On the contrary, Laurence's antipathy to the notion of an artistic elite is climactically stated in *The Diviners* in a passage between Morag and her employer, Lachlan McLachlan, editor of the *Manawaka Banner*:

> "They [ordinary contributors and subscribers] make the *Banner* look like — well, like a smalltown paper."
>
> "They do, eh? Well, that is precisely what it is, Morag. And if you think your prose style is so much better than theirs, girl, remember one thing. Those people know things it will take you the better part

> of your lifetime to learn, if ever. They are not very verbal people, but if you ever in your life presume to look down on them because you have the knack of words and they do not, then you do so at your eternal risk and peril." (125)

Margaret once told me that the claiming of "artistry" was further than she could go without a sense of unwarranted arrogance, and in *The Diviners* we hear that Dan McGraith "calls himself a painter, not an artist. The word *artist* seems pretentious to him" (304). She readily admitted the gift, the mystery of the gift and its compulsion. Its presence, the responsibility for its use, and acceptance of its possible withdrawal are all integral to the fabric of Morag and her quest. But to the term "artist" with its connotation of special apartness neither Morag nor her maker would answer. Rather, to Margaret Laurence, writers were a collective, a "tribe," as she often called them, capable of the best of the kinship links she had found and admired in the 1950s, when she and her husband lived and worked in Africa, first in Somaliland, then in Ghana.

The core of Margaret Laurence's personality had been shaped in the Canadian West, where the resolutely leveling ethos of the powerful political reform movement known as the Social Gospel had first taken root. Its tenets had been built into her growing up, her schooling at United College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, her post-college involvement with the political adherents of the reformers of the so-called "Winnipeg Old Left," and her reporting for its mouthpiece, the *Winnipeg Citizen*. The lasting influence of this movement can be seen in her lifelong political and social activism, her care for the dispossessed of whatever race and creed, and, of course, throughout her writing. Margaret exerted herself constantly to obliterate the distance between herself and others; it was not possible or permissible in her mind to dismiss them as an "idle gaping crowd." Hence the deep and lasting psychological damage done to her by those fundamentalist zealots who from time to time sought, albeit unsuccessfully, to have *The Diviners* banned from high school courses — and hence, also, the other side of the coin: the love she inspired and the place she holds in the memory of thousands.

Looking back at *The Song of the Lark* with a critical eye, Willa Cather described its "chief fault" as being its "descending curve; the life of a successful artist in the full tide of achievement is not so interesting as the life of a talented young girl 'fighting her way' as we say" ("Preface" v). Because Morag is already in middle life and a writer when we meet her, and because Laurence so insistently makes her writing only one facet of her life — no more compelling than her maternity, sexuality, or community with others — both the shape and the theme of her book avoid the danger of the descending curve. But as Morag remembers and reconstructs her life in her journey to self-knowledge and peace we are given evidence, though indirectly, of the same all-consuming passion that directs Thea Kronborg's life. When an anonymous, importunate, and tactless telephone-caller asks her, "How did you actually get a *start*? What did you *do*?", she answers, "I worked like hell, if you really want to know" (20). Long before, the nine-year-old Morag "thinks of the scribbler in her top dresser drawer. She will never show it to anyone. Never. It is hers, her own business. She will write some in it tomorrow" (42). Later, "Morag is working on another story as well. In another scribbler. She does not know where it came from. It comes into your head, and when you write it down, it surprises you, because you never knew what was going to happen until you put it down" (70). Morag also becomes conscious in her early teens of the artist's obligation. When Miss Melrose urges her to submit her story "Wild Roses" to the school paper, Morag already knows for sure that she is blessed and also burdened with the writer's gift:

> "I can't," Morag says. "I just can't. Not right now." . . .
>
> Morag goes out of the room but not outside. Down to the girls' john. Locks herself in a cubicle. What a terrible world it would be without lockable johns. The thought is funny, which is just as well, because she is crying her eyes out. For what? She is not sad. She has known for some time what she has to do, but never given the knowledge to any other person or thought that any person might suspect. Now it is as though a strong hand has been laid on her shoulders. Strong and friendly. But merciless. (99)

"There's no secret," Morag says about her work to her insistent caller (20). There is, though, and both Morag's remembered life and her recorded works belie her words. Just as surely as Thea Kronborg, Morag Gunn knew that in a very real sense she was set apart — and so did her author. *The Diviners* is a transformation and transmutation of Laurence's own story, an artist's coming to terms with the gift, the "secret" and its consequences. In contrast, Willa Cather neither had inhibitions about the word "artist" nor hesitated to reveal the secret's true source:

> "What is it, Mr. Harsanyi? You know all about her. What's her secret?" [Fred Ottenburg asks Thea's former piano teacher near the end.]
>
> Harsanyi rumpled his hair irritably and shrugged his shoulders. "Her secret? It is every artist's secret" — he waved his hand — "passion. That is all. It is an open secret, and perfectly safe. Like heroism, it is inimitable in cheap materials." (570)

Though Margaret Laurence's readiness to reveal the dark side of the gift rather than its glory seems very Canadian, the glory moments were certainly there too, when she could and did say, "There it is, at last." Sometimes I heard the triumph in her voice, when, in the midst of writing *The Diviners*, she would call me and exult: "It's going wonderfully. All I have to do is to listen to the voices and write down what they say."

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The Church in *Archbishop*: A Session from the Santa Fe Seminar

Church and convento at Ácoma, about 1899.

The Apotheosis of Bishop Lamy Local Faith Perspectives

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If the Arab in the New Mexican *cuento* could so accurately describe a camel without ever having laid eyes on it by analyzing all the signs of the camel's passage, then perhaps we can be accurate in reconstructing historical figures we have never known personally by analyzing their impact. Accuracy should be the goal whether the effort to make contact with that figure is by means of a strict biography or a historical novel.

The key is to use all the available evidence; otherwise the historical figure we are trying to get in contact with may get distorted in the telling of his/her story. Which brings me to Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. I must confess that I am a Willa Cather fan, having read virtually all of her major works while in college. I am not a literary critic, but what most impressed me about her style was the uncanny ability to describe people and places in an almost enchanting manner. In reading her works, I often felt myself transported into the very scenes she was so magically describing. My attraction to her marvelous storytelling abilities began with *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. In fact, I can truthfully say that this great literary effort proved to be an inspiration for me to enter the seminary.

But that was at a different time in my life. I am a tenth generation New Mexican. I come from a long and glorious tradition of Hispanic settlers. As my father is proud of saying: "We never crossed the border, it crossed us one day." Curiously enough, however, there was a time in my life when I was much ashamed of my heritage, and wished nothing more than to be considered "American." This was a result of a lot of devaluing of our traditions by social institutions: educational and religious. It was at this time in my life that I read Willa Cather's masterpiece, and fell under its spell. I wanted nothing more than to be a priest in the mold of Fathers Latour and Vaillant. Perhaps I too could be a missionary to my own people.

As I grew older, I was introduced to the complete history of my people, and realized that they didn't need missionaries either then or in Bishop Lamy's time. You see, a missionary's task is to give to others what they don't already have: namely the faith. In portraying Father Latour as the missionary par excellence to New Mexico, Cather reflected the same attitude toward New Mexican Catholicism that American Protestant missionaries had after the war of occupation. Namely, that New Mexicans were barely Christian, steeped in error and superstition, and thereby needed to be "saved." It was all quite dramatic and good press, and was used to great effect by these Protestant ministers to secure grants from their mission societies back East. The same tactic also served Bishop Lamy quite well in securing funding for his diocese from the Propaganda Fide. And finally, this portrayal of New Mexican Catholics served Willa Cather admirably well in her efforts to make a heroic figure out of Bishop Latour.

Unfortunately, Cather's magical writing ability transformed her novel into historical gospel in the eyes of many who would not or could not take the time to analyze the whole picture. Bishop Lamy *became* Bishop Latour. Myth replaced fact. Bishop Lamy became superhero. Even subsequent efforts by serious historians to write the history of this period were influenced by the almost uncritical assumption that Lamy was the saintly missionary Cather portrayed him to be and the Hispanic flock he served as "children who played with their religion" (Cather 211). But was this the accurate portrait?

No. I have just reread *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. What struck me this time was Cather's lack of historical homework on the novel. Historical figures like Padre Gallegos and Padre Martinez are largely misrepresented. Hispanic names are almost always misspelled or replaced with Italian ones. And there is an overall paternalistic condescension present when treating of the Native American or the Hispanic populations. All this betrays a superficial treatment of the larger context into which Lamy entered as a relative latecomer. Perhaps Cather cannot be faulted too much, since she probably had to depend on American historians of New Mexico, who were less than objective at the time the novel was written (Howlett, Twitchell, Lummis). But one would think that an author who spent so much time researching the flora and fauna of the Southwest so as to create incredibly realistic scenes in the novel would have also spent more time researching the original sources on the principal figures in the novel.

It is my purpose to provide, however briefly, some of the other evidence necessary to complete the religious context in which Bishop Lamy labored, and thereby more completely describe the model for Cather's hero. I will concentrate on the unique nature of New Mexican Catholicism; the contributions of the Bishop of Durango, Mexico, during this period; the native clergy, and the lay leadership provided for the church by Hispanics themselves.

NEW MEXICAN RELIGIOUS CULTURE ON THE EVE OF BISHOP LAMY'S ARRIVAL

It has often been said that the Spaniards arrived in New Mexico for God, Glory and Gold. If indeed much of their original energy was spent looking for the last two, it can also be said that they remained for the first. The Franciscan friars labored mightily to plant the seeds of faith among Native American and Hispanic colonists alike. What resulted was a type of Catholicism suited for survival in this harsh environment. Moreover, as a consequence of the rugged isolation New Mexico existed in, this unique religious culture developed with an almost medieval emphasis. Its characteristics included: (1) Primacy of the divine (e.g. church most important building in the village). This was also reflected in the folk art and architecture. (2) Interpenetration of the divine with everyday life (e.g. story of Chimayo). (3) Importance of the extended family (e.g. marriage customs, *comadrazco*, respect for the elders, etc.). (4) Interchange with Native Americans (e.g. foodways, respect for nature, fatalism, intermarriage, arts and crafts). This showed marvelous adaptability. (5) Perseverance and long suffering (which explains identification with the sufferings of Christ).

This spirituality showed remarkable resiliency in the face of extraordinary difficulty on the frontier, especially when the institutional church was unable to support it, as in the case of its administration during the Mexican period (1821 to 1848), or when the official church misunderstood it, as in the case of Bishop Lamy importing French clergy. The faith was hardly dormant or dying, as depicted by Cather.

THE ROLE OF THE BISHOP OF DURANGO IN THIS PERIOD

Cather delights in making little of the Bishop of Durango, Mexico, in the novel, depicting him as old and not up to the task, given over to quarreling with Bishop Latour about boundaries, and altogether distant and uninterested in the spiritual welfare of his New Mexican flock (Cather 7-8, 22-23, 33). Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, someone should write a heroic novel of his life some day!

His name was Jose Antonio Laureano de Zubiria, and he assumed pastoral care of his diocese, including New Mexico, in 1833. Several problems of enormous import confronted him immediately: Loss of the Franciscans, financial inability to support the missions, and a lack of clergy.

The loss of the Franciscans occurred due to the Mexican war for independence from Spain, which terminated in 1821. Because of the animosity felt by Mexican patriots for anything Spanish, several laws were enacted in 1827 and 1829, expelling any Spanish-born person who would not renounce Spanish citizenship. Almost all the friars in New Mexico were Spanish-born since historically they had disdained recruiting or encouraging vocations from among natives. Most of these friars chose to return home to Spain rather than face the uncertainties of ministering under the authority of hostile officials. As a consequence, the number of ordained priests to serve the Catholics of New Mexico plummeted. Before the War of Independence, approximately thirty friars served the New Mexico missions. By 1832, only five remained. By 1840, none were left.

On top of this monumental blow to the church's ability to minister to its people, another befell it. While under Spanish rule, the New Mexican missions enjoyed the special position the Catholic church had vis-a-vis the state. The Spanish crown totally subsidized the work of the Franciscans in the missions, providing them with everything from building materials for their churches to underwear! But during the Independence War, all this support stopped. Moreover, the post-revolutionary Mexican Congress, dominated by liberals, abolished the compulsory tithes for support of the church. The missions of New Mexico were then forced to depend on the support of their parishioners. Since these were impoverished and unaccustomed to giving anything more than the first fruits of their harvest, the resources to support the church's activities dried up. The result was ruined churches, decreased catechetical activities, and the impoverishment of the few remaining clergy.

Bishop Zubiria did the best he could under these trying circumstances. He personally visited every parish in New Mexico in 1833, 1845, and 1848, making the laborious 2000 mile round trip while facing extraordinary hardships. He wrote pastoral letters, appointed local priests to be his vicars in the administration of so vast an area, and encouraged the laity to take more initiative in the maintenance of the faith. Perhaps more than anything, he encouraged the development of native vocations to the priesthood, and to this effect established a preparatory school for seminarians in Taos. Through these efforts, several sons of prominent New Mexican families were ordained.

Distances, few priestly vocations, the impoverished state of the Mexican nation after war, prevented Bishop Zubiria from realizing some of his fondest dreams for New Mexico, but given what he had to work with in comparison to Bishop Lamy, he accomplished much.

THE NATIVE CLERGY AT THE ADVENT OF LAMY

Some American writers shortly after the American conquest of the Southwest declared all the New Mexican priests immoral and very poor spiritual guides. [Robert V. Hine labels the 1850s as one of the "worst periods of . . . anti-Catholicism" in U.S. history, during which Mexicans were labeled "lazy and shiftless" (210).] While this can be said truthfully of a very few of them, the rest of the accusations can be dismissed as Protestant bias at best and racist at worst. Unfortunately, Cather uncritically took this position hook, line and sinker. Indeed, one can say that some of these priests were luminaries in an otherwise bleak period.

One example will suffice. Padre Antonio Jose Martinez was born in Abiquiu, New Mexico, in 1793. He was educated for the priesthood in Durango where he was imbued with zeal for Mexican independence founded on human rights and the radical equality of all. These ideals motivated his return to New Mexico (even though he was offered attractive parishes in Durango), where until his death in 1867 he labored for the betterment of his fellow *paisanos*, both spiritually and temporally. He sought to establish a public school system in New Mexico. He bought the first printing press ever seen in New Mexico, and used it to print not only religious catechisms, but also periodicals designed to keep New Mexicans abreast of current events. With Bishop Zubiria's blessing, he established a preparatory school for young men wishing to enter the seminary.

Like many of his fellow New Mexican clerics, Padre Martinez did not fear getting involved in politics for the sake of his people. He was so respected among his fellow New Mexicans that he was elected to represent them to the Mexican National Congress. Nor did his involvement stop with the American occupation. He was elected president of the Provisional Territorial Assembly in 1848, and one of his compatriots, Padre Gallegos of Albuquerque (also distorted in Cather's novel), was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1853 as New Mexico's first representative.

This Padre Martinez is very much at variance with the one immortalized in Cather's novel. Cather implies he was immoral, but Bishop Lamy made no such charge in his efforts to get rid of him (which by the way were canonically irregular and invalid). Cather intimated that he was the mover behind the Taos rebellion against American authority in 1847, but no credible historical evidence supports this.

Rather, he attempted to reconcile the various opposing elements. What is true is that Father Martinez, like many of his fellow New Mexican clergymen, was too much of a threat to the young, insecure French bishop. In order for Lamy to actualize and transplant his idealized Europeanized church, natives had to go — and they went, replaced with a more subservient foreign clergy.

THE EMERGENT LAY LEADERSHIP

Cather repeatedly makes allusions that Father Latour's New Mexicans were children who played at religion. And yet this ignores that their faith rose to the many challenges of the nineteenth century. The abandonment of the missions by the Franciscans and the subsequent inability of the Diocese of Durango to supply sufficient sacred ministers to serve the spiritual needs of New Mexicans left them to their own devices. If the official church was not going to provide adequate leadership for their faith communities, then New Mexicans were not about to let the faith which had nurtured them through centuries of hard existence on the borderlands die on the vine. Instead, they turned for leadership to the emerging lay confraternities in their midst.

Among these, the most influential was the *Fraternidad Piadosa de Nuestro Padra Jesus Nazareno*, popularly known as the *Penitentes*. This confraternity was, and is, a lay religious organization related to the Roman Catholic church, organized to support pious observances — especially in honor of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ — and render mutual aid.

The *Penitentes* provided the spiritual care the people were craving but had been unable to get due to the priest shortage. They gathered the people together for the celebration of solemn feasts, especially during Lent and Holy Week. These feasts were observed with dramatic rituals most often centered on the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. A unique form of sacred song, the *alabado*, and other elaborate prayers formed part of their religious observances. Furthermore, the brothers of this fraternity provided cradle to grave care, from teaching the youth basic Catholic doctrine to providing the deceased with burial services. In doing all this, these men did not seek to usurp the role of the ordained priesthood, or provide substitutes for the official sacraments of the Church. Rather, what they sought to do was supplement with popular piety the often unavailable ministrations of the institutional church.

In doing so, these *Penitentes* assured the survival of Catholic faith in New Mexico during the Mexican period and beyond. In filling the vacuum left by nonexistent clerics, these brothers developed a lay-led folk faith — a popular Catholicism paralleling the official one emphasized by the French clergy. In doing so, they enabled New Mexicans to take ownership of their church and destiny. Hardly a childish faith, I would say.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Hopefully, I have added to the available evidence that must be mastered towards a complete description of the context in which Bishop Lamy really labored. In this setting, his accomplishments will be seen in better perspective. He was a great builder of an institutional church beset by many problems not of its making. He was a great organizer of his diocese. But it can also be said that he was less than culturally sensitive to the people he served, and in this regard made many mistakes. He was a great man, in both his virtues and faults. Unfortunately, it has taken long really to get to know him because the lovely myth Cather created became bigger than the man, doing him and the people he ministered with a great disservice.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Quotes from *Death Comes for the Archbishop* are from the 1990 Vintage edition; Ted Warner's "*Death Comes for the Archbishop*: A Novel Way of Making History" (in *Willa Cather: Family, Community, and History*, Provo: BYU, 1990) reviews New Mexico's historians and Padre Martinez; Hine's volume is *The American West: An Interpretive History*, Boston: Little Brown, 1973.

San Ildefonso church from the northwest in 1899.

Mariology and Christology in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*

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My approach to *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is not that of a literary critic — which I do not pretend to be — but, rather, is that of a Roman Catholic theologian and psychologist of religion. My interest is in how Willa Cather presents Catholic beliefs and how Cather, not a Catholic, was able to write a "Catholic" work. My thesis is that another writer theoretically as skilled and knowledgeable as she might not have been nearly so successful or convincing, for reasons I shall attempt to explain.

Sigmund Freud and Willa Cather were contemporaries, but it is highly unlikely that he ever read her works. Not only did Freud consider the United States a cultural backwater, but he was impatient with anyone who took religion seriously, as he explains in

The Future of an Illusion and *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Had he read *Death Comes for the Archbishop* he would have found ample justification for his conviction that religion is a childhood neurosis, wishful thinking and a faltering in reality testing. He would have found it incredible that an intelligent woman would have written of Mary, miracles and martyrdom.

Carl Jung, early on Freud's disciple and later his competitor, would have taken a very different approach to Cather's portrayal of faith. He likely would have approved the saints as examples of the hero archetype and the Blessed Virgin as a needed corrective to the exaggerated *animus* of patriarchical, monotheistic religions. Instead of superstition or infantile dependency, Jung would have found, on many different levels, a prime example of the process of individuation, the integration of *anima* and *animus*, conscious and unconscious, reason and feeling.

Freud and Jung had diametrically opposed understandings of religion, but a similar polarity exists within the larger tradition we call religious. For simplicity's sake, we might refer to these two approaches to religion as *iconic* and *aniconic*.

The aniconic tradition strictly forbids any pictorial depiction of deity or the numinous. Judaism, and her daughter religions of Christianity and Islam, shared this conviction in common. The story of the golden calf in Exodus 32 and Islam's absolute prohibition against visually portraying Allah or the prophet Muhammad stress this aniconic severity. Early Christianity was aniconic as well, but three crucial factors led it away from its Jewish moorings and towards an iconic future.

First of all, Christianity left its Jewish matrix and entered the Greco-Roman world even before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Converts to Christianity were predominately gentiles by the end of the first century, and these converts were accustomed to depicting their deities in statues, pottery or murals. Secondly, and more importantly, Christians believed in the Incarnation. God had assumed human form in the person of Jesus, and the ancient Jewish prohibition against imaging or imagining God gradually weakened. Catacomb art tentatively depicted Jesus symbolically and then, more daringly, in portraiture. Thirdly, there was the development of a theology of sacraments, however unsophisticated, in the Christian consciousness. The sacraments made visible the invisible reality of God, and common substances like water, oil, bread and wine became vehicles for the divine presence and grace.

Simply stated, an aniconic religious tradition emphasizes the transcendence of God, a deity over and above creation, and one who prefers communication through the events of history, chosen spokespersons, a Book or a Law. The iconic religious tradition favors a more immanent God, one who is present in all things created and most breathtakingly, in Christian belief, in the flesh and blood of Jesus of Nazareth. In the sacramental confessions of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy the numinous is encountered in persons, places and things in an abundance that horrifies the aniconic mentality. Statues, icons, stained glass windows, cathedrals, shrines, etc. can all be triggers for entering into the presence of the numinous. As well, a natural theology that moves to God from the starting point of our senses and reason is part of the iconic heritage. Francis of Assisi would be comfortable here. John Calvin or Jonathan Edwards would be less so.

With the advent of the Protestant Reformation there was a radical reemergence of the aniconic tradition, a return to the original Jewish roots of early Christianity. In its evolutionary expression, Protestant reform destroyed statues and shrines, replaced altar with table, liturgical vestments with academic robes, and shifted attention from sacrament to pulpit. Luther reduced the seven sacraments of Catholicism to two, Calvin to one, and the radical Reformation, represented most especially by the Baptists, abolished sacraments completely. Sacramentalism was judged rank superstition; the complex, elaborate and often jumbled fabric of Roman Catholic faith was replaced by the single thread of the word of God, read and preached. Luther's dictum that our hope for salvation rested on *sola Scriptura, sola fides, sola gratia* formed the basis for almost all of Protestant Christianity.

This split within Christianity into iconic and aniconic streams led to major aesthetic differences. Philosopher John E. Smith states:

> The fact is that Protestantism fostered the arts of the "ear" — music, poetry and rhetoric — which might be called the "rationalistic" arts because of their appeal to significant form which must be grasped in thought. On the other hand, Protestantism tended to neglect the arts of the "eye" — painting, architecture, and the plastic arts — which have often been identified as "art" *par excellence*. (196)

Smith suggests that an "aesthetic divide" separates Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity, a point made at the turn of this century by William James. Catholicism, he wrote:

> offers a so much richer pasturage and shade to the fancy, has so many cells with so many different kinds of honey, is so indulgent in its multiform appeals to human nature, that Protestantism will always show to Catholic eyes the almshouse physiognomy. The bitter negativity of it is to the Catholic mind incomprehensible. (359)

The correlation between temperament and religious preference and expression has been well documented by many psychologists of religion, but the point I wish to make is this: I suggest that Willa

Cather converted from a rigidly aniconic, Bible-centered Baptist church to the Episcopal church — the most iconic and sacramental confession on the Protestant spectrum — at least in part for aesthetic reasons. I believe, from reading the magnificent yet simple descriptions of scenery in *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* that she was more at home in a religious community that tutored the eye as well as the ear, one that maintained so many of the "popish" practices that Oliver Cromwell railed against in the seventeenth century.

So empathetically and respectfully did Cather deal with Catholic perspectives in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* that many Catholics easily assumed that she had to be a Roman Catholic. I believe that Cather was so adept at imagining the world through the eyes of Bishop Latour and Father Joseph, as well as through those of the Native Americans and Mexicans, because she had a sacramental sense of reality, an awareness of the numinous in the most mundane of settings. Let us briefly look at what she saw and portrayed.

MARIOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF THE SAINTS

In Book One, Bishop Latour enjoys the hospitality of the Mexican family which welcomes him into its home after he had become lost in the desert, a subtle religious symbol as well as a dramatic episode. The young daughter, Josepha, named for the spouse of the Virgin Mary, greets him with the salutation, *Ave Maria Purisima*, proof of earlier Spanish missionaries in this area. Her father, Benito, simply affirms that the Blessed Virgin had led Latour to them in order to provide the sacraments, which Latour does the next day. In their religious world apparent accidents become epiphanies. As Latour would later say to Father Joseph at the conclusion of Father Escolastico's rendering of the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, "One might say that an apparition is human vision corrected by divine love" (50).

As Latour examines the various wooden figures of the saints he is intrigued by the familiar manner in which these simple folk had painted and personalized the images. Obviously these Mexican peasants are not at all dealing with a threatening or distant God. Santiago, or St. James, was a disciple of Jesus, martyred about 44 CE. Legend had it that James had traveled to Iberia to preach the Gospel, and his shrine in northern Spain, Santiago de Compostela, was a famous medieval pilgrimage site. Cather draws an obvious parallel with Latour, the itinerant missionary. Latour is surprised to learn from the young Santiago that his patron saint is a guarantor of fertility for horses. In Catholic tradition it was not uncommon for saints to be gradually transformed by the local needs of the faithful and consequently to assume varied expectations.

Not so with the Virgin Mary, for she remained always the mother sensitive to those in need. She might, as in the case of Guadalupe, also serve to comfort a conquered people by speaking to them, in their Aztec dialect rather than in the Spanish of their rulers, but she was first of all their protector. Latour notes that the statue of the Madonna is clothed like a poor Mexican woman, and he expresses pleasure in an acculturation much like that evident in the stone carvings outside of the churches in French villages. When later, in Book Seven, Latour encounters the victimized Mexican woman, Sada, he is gratified to learn that she has kept her simple faith by praying the rosary to the Blessed Virgin, in spite of the fact that she had not been inside a church in nineteen years. Sada had entrusted her fate to the care of her "Holy Mother" (216) and had somehow survived.

By observing the deep faith of this tortured woman praying in the Lady Chapel, Latour has his own profound religious experience. He knows with more than his mind that Mary is the Mother of Pity and her love embraces all of God's creatures. Sada, the Marian devotee, is the catalyst for his regaining his original fervor:

> Kneeling beside the much enduring bond-woman, he experienced those holy mysteries as he had done in his young manhood. He seemed able to feel all it meant to her to know that there was a Kind Woman in Heaven, though there were such cruel ones on earth. Old people, who have felt blows and toil and known the world's hard hand, need, even more than children do, a woman's tenderness. Only a Woman, divine, could know all that a woman can suffer. (217)

Father Joseph was even more dedicated to Mary. While still a young seminarian, he informs Latour that he had flirted with joining the military but had recanted and determined "to dedicate his life to the service of the divine Mother" (225). An illness allows him to celebrate the month of May in Mary's honor, an ancient Catholic custom, and he remembers his days as a young curate in France when the pastor had initially forbade such a devotion. Father Joseph reflects that the pastor was "not untouched by Jansenism" (203), a kind of Catholic Calvinism that flourished in seventeenth-century France. Opponents of this dour influence fostered devotion to Mary and to the Sacred Heart as a means of lessening the image of a vengeful God. We can infer much about the gentle and pastoral nature of Father Joseph by Cather's passing reference to this heretical rigorism.

Marian devotion often substituted for doctrinal understanding of the faith, as both Bishop Latour and Father Joseph knew, but it also sustained these two men throughout an arduous apostolate, and further provided the basis upon which to deepen the Catholic experience in the lives of the local peoples.

CHRISTOLOGY

Although Cather thought of Mary as the "leading lady" of her narrative, it must be pointed out that the missionaries in her work were priests of Christ, in whose service they labored. The Christology here is only implicit, but it needs to be understood if we are to make sense of certain sections of the narrative.

The Mexican family at the beginning had their saints and Madonna, but it was only with the arrival of Latour that they felt they had access to the fullness of their faith. The priest was the one who could baptize, hear confessions and regularize marriages. In short, he was the provider of the sacraments, the *alter Christus* in their midst. Denial or inaccessibility of the sacraments is for Catholics a very serious matter, because they believe that these are so many opportunities to commune with Christ in an intimate and immediate manner. The missionaries had come into New Mexico to preach the faith within the Catholic context, and that especially meant the saying of Mass. The Eucharist is the central sacrament, and the priests journeyed with their vestments, altar stone, and chalice as they went on their rounds.

This point cannot be made too strongly, because it helps us appreciate why the people tolerate the likes of Padre Lucero and Padre Martinez. As disreputable as these two were, they had sacramental orders and what they did *qua* priests did not depend upon their personal qualities but upon the salvific action of Jesus the Christ. As repelled as Bishop Latour is by the sensuous Martinez, he is forced to admit that the reprobate priest was yet "priestly" during the Mass at Taos: "At the moment of the Elevation the dark priest seemed to give his whole force, his swarthy body and all its blood, to that lifting-up" (150). For all of that, the bishop was determined that his priests not only represent Christ in their actions but also in their attitudes. Ordination, once conferred, could not be retracted by bishop or pope, so the bishop determined to counter the early experiences of Kit Carson regarding Catholic priests (75-6) by carefully monitoring future appointments. Bishop Latour understood that the future of the Catholic church in the New World depended upon the quality of her priests, and devotion to Mary or the saints would not suffice in the absence of such men.

These comments on the place of Mary and the saints, and on the understanding of the sacraments and priesthood will strike many as superstitious, but I think Cather was able to see the spiritual nuggets in the swirling stream of passion, piety, violence and hardship that was the New Mexico of the nineteenth century. That she was able to shine a sensitive light on two extraordinary men doing rather ordinary things is impressive. That she could present so balanced a picture of customs and personalities from a world far removed from hers is indeed rare. Willa Cather not only wrote an engaging narrative but she — at least to my Catholic eyes — entered an alien, iconic landscape, and gently explored it. She crossed the "aesthetic divide" in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and, in so doing, made accessible to her readers an understanding of the vision and dreams sustaining her two French missionaries.

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The Sandia mission ruins in 1901.

On the Precipice of a Caesura: *Death Comes for the Archbishop* and Vatican II

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I take my title from within and outside Cather's novel. *Death Comes for the Archbishop* depicts many precipice pauses: Latour and Vaillant view Santa Fe from high ground before they enter for the first time and years later when Vaillant begins his journey to Colorado. Latour looks down upon Hidden Water during his journey to Old Mexico and pauses on the vast mesa plain before Acoma. The most graphic portrait is of Vaillant on the brink of the chasm setting of Arroyo Hondo, where "the men and mules walking about . . . or plowing the fields, looked like the figures of a child's Noah's ark" (165). This anticipates Latour and architect Molny above the Indian Garden of Eden, the green pastures and streams of Canyon de Chelly. And we recall Latour leading Vaillant to the ridge over the Rio Grande to show him the gold stone for the cathedral. Perhaps the most strategic precipice is the one above Rome in the Prologue, where Bishop Ferrand tries to interest some indifferent cardinals in the vast New Mexican territory they attempt to administer in ignorance and from afar.

It is two years since the death of Pope Gregory XVI, and Pius IX, "the new Pontiff," is believed by

Cardinal Allande to have embarked on reforms "impractical and dangerous" (5). As an aristocratic conservative, Allande disapproves of Pius's initial and brief liberal phase and "had withdrawn from politics." The church at this period saw conflict between liberals and conservatives, the former pressuring it to welcome the new order with youthful energy instead of foolishly embracing a dying system (Bokenkotter 312). The conservatives or integralists, faithful to the spirit of Gregory XVI, "wanted the Church to declare all-out war on the principles of the French Revolution, which they saw as the work of Satan." By mid-century the church everywhere in Europe was divided along these lines, each group regarding the other with suspicion — the integralists detecting heresy in the liberals, and the liberals suspecting the integralists of constantly reporting them to Rome.

The election of Pius IX seemed good news for the liberals. The new pope issued general amnesty for political prisoners in the Papal States, provided for sharing the governing of these states with laymen, and granted his subjects a constitution that set up a council by indirect suffrage (Bokenkotter 314). The deputies, however, caught up in the Italian liberation and unification movement, declared war on Austria and forced the pope to use his veto and flee into exile. When the French put down the revolt and returned Pius to Rome, he "resolved to show no more leniency toward liberalism. The happenings at Rome had proven for him beyond the shadow of a doubt that liberalism meant only anarchy and persecution of the Church" (Bokenkotter 315). These events are the context of the elegant dinner discussion in Cather's Prologue and of Latour's dizzy wandering among the triangular sand hills in "The Cruciform Tree." They are referred to implicitly near the end of the Prologue: "their talk touched upon many matters, but they avoided politics, as men are apt to do in dangerous times. Not a word was spoken of the Lombard War, in which the Pope's position was so anomalous" (13-14). The issues at stake throughout Latour/Lamy's and Vaillant/Machebeuf's Southwestern mission, during which Pius crowned his condemnation of modernism with the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864 and the definition of papal infallibility at the Vatican Council in 1870, reflect church issues during our present era, which brings me to the "outside the novel" source of my title.

The late Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, in an address at the Weston School of Theology in 1979, outlined Christian history into three great epochs: "First, the short period of Jewish Christianity. Second, the period of the Church in a distinct cultural region, namely, that of Hellenism and of European culture and civilization. Third, the period in which the sphere of the Church's life is in fact the entire world. These three periods signify three essential and different basic situations for Christianity and its preaching" (721). The transition from the first period took the church from a proclamation within and to Israel to a Christianity of Gentiles sown on the soil of paganism. "Whatever Paul brought about when he declared circumcision . . . superfluous for non-Jews," says Rahner, "the transition of Christianity from one historical and theological situation to an essentially new one did happen *once* and now in the transition from a Christianity of Europe (with its American annexes) to a fully world religion, it is starting to happen for a second time" (721-22). Thus, the church presently sits on a precipice before another caesura or break in her history. "The third period of Christianity has only just begun," observes Rahner, "and made itself observable officially at Vatican II."

What happens in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* relates, I think, to this beginning, making the novel prophetic according to E. M. Forster's definition of prophecy in fiction when he compares George Eliot and Dostoevsky, labeling the former a preacher, whose "God and the tables and chairs are all in the same sphere," and the latter a prophet, "to which our ordinary standards are inapplicable" (132-33). The vast, vague, mysterious new territory neither Cather's cardinals in Rome nor her missionaries on site are able to comprehend completely resembles the future epoch of church history, in which comfortable concepts will be blown away by more universal ones. Rahner recognizes that while the church was always a world church "in potency," its actual activity relative to the world outside of Europe was in fact that "of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the world together with the rest of the culture and civilization it considered superior" (717). But in a world church in actuality, reciprocal influences exercised by all components would have replaced such conquest and triumphalism.

Rahner challenges the contemporary church with several questions: "Will the new code of Canon Law being prepared in Rome avoid the danger of being once again a Western Code that is imposed on the world Church in Latin America, Asia, and Africa? Do not the Roman congregations still have the mentality of a centralized bureaucracy which thinks it knows best what serves the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls throughout the world, and in such decisions takes the mentality of Rome or Italy in a frighteningly naive way as a self-evident standard? . . . Must the marital morality of the Masai in East Africa reproduce the morality of Western Christianity? . . . Must the Eucharist even in Alaska be celebrated with grape wine?" (717-18). These issues recall the circumcision controversy of Paul's mission, which elsewhere I have paralleled to Latour's (see "Missions," *L & B*). More directly they recall Padre Martinez's challenges to his European bishop: "Nothing is decided once for all. Celibacy may be all very well for the French clergy, but not for ours" (146). "You know nothing about Indians or Mexicans. If you try to introduce European civilization here and change our old ways, to interfere with the secret dances of the Indians . . . or abolish the bloody rites of the Penitente, I foretell an early death for you. I advise you to study our native traditions before you begin your reforms . . . . the dark things forbidden by your Church are a part of Indian religion. You cannot introduce French fashions here" (147-48). Despite his authority problem and inflated ego, Padre Martinez is "right on," and Cather thinks so too, for his warning is echoed by the sympathetically drawn Senora Carson: "I often say to my husband, I hope you will not try to [put a stop to the extravagances of the Penitential Brotherhood]. It would only set the people against you. The old people have need of their old customs . . ." (155).

The challenges facing Latour and our post-Vatican II age include more than theoretical hurdles within the Christian community; they involve the world beyond the Judeo-Christian heritage. Starting revelation with Abraham in the Old Testament "does not exactly propagate a concept of revelation that is easily accessible for African and Asian cultures," writes Rahner, "especially since hundreds of thousands of years between primordial revelation and Abraham remain unfulfilled" (720). In Vatican II's "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," a positive evaluation is initiated for the first time in the doctrinal history of the church: "The documents . . . on the missions, and on the Church in the modern world proclaim a universal salvific will of God which is limited only by the evil decision of human conscience and nothing else. This implies the possibility of a properly salvific revelation-faith even beyond the Christian revelatory word" (Rahner 720). Furthermore, since the divisions in Christendom retard and even defeat Christianity's becoming a world religion, ecumenical fellowship is encouraged.

Now let us return to Latour. Note his reaction in Hidden Water when Benito's grandson Jose condemns Americans as infidels. The bishop insists that many Americans are Catholics; then, when the young man accuses Americans of wanting to destroy Catholicism, "Father Latour began to tell [Benito's family] about his friendly relations with Protestants in Ohio, but they had not room in their minds for two ideas; there was one Church, and the rest of the world was infidel" (27). Throughout his mission Latour is cautious and accommodating, as when he hesitates helping Sada because "for the present it was inexpedient to antagonize [her owners]. The Smiths were the leaders of a small group of low-cast Protestants who took every occasion to make trouble for the Catholics" (216). Similar hesitancy disappoints Manuelito, who hopes that Latour will plead in Washington for the Navajo people before they are destroyed. Although his meeting with the outlawed chief is indiscreet, the bishop tries to explain the difficult position of a Roman priest in a Protestant country, but Manuelito "did not believe him" (296). What we might label as expediency in Latour is actually prudence, preventing further division in an already factioned culture potentially explosive. It is evident in Latour's diffusing Vaillant's agitated protest about delaying the removal of Martinez from Taos: "I do not wish to lose the parish of Taos in order to punish its priest, my friend" (157).

Such prudence develops from Latour's most important quality, sensitivity. The clue to Cather's apotheosized Lamy is found in Vaillant's evaluation of him before departing for Colorado: "To man's wisdom it would have seemed that a priest with Father Latour's exceptional qualities would have been better placed in some part of the world where scholarship, a handsome person, and delicate perceptions all have their effect; and that a man of much rougher type would have served God well enough as the first bishop of New Mexico. Doubtless Bishop Latour's successors would be men of different fibre. But God had his reasons . . . . Perhaps it pleased Him to grace the beginning of a new era and a vast new diocese by a fine personality" (253-54). The feeling of defeat Latour experiences at Acoma, a feeling climaxed in Stone Lips cave, reveals his unusual sensitivity. "He felt [at Acoma] as if he were celebrating Mass at the bottom of the sea, for antediluvian creatures; for types of life so old, so hardened, so shut within their shells, that the sacrifice of Calvary could hardly reach back so far" (100). The "sense of inadequacy and spiritual defeat" here anticipates his disagreeable sensations in the cave and the dizzying effects of the river of darkness flowing "under ribs of antediluvian rock" (130). Latour has Jacinto repeat a *Pater Noster* with him here, as he had earlier, at Laguna, where he reaches another impasse with his guide during their discussion of stars. We remember these scenes later, when Padre Martinez warns, "the dark things forbidden by your Church are a part of Indian religion." But Latour is sympathetic rather than defiant when he is at a loss: "There was no way in which he could transfer his own memories of European civilization into the Indian mind, and he was quite willing to believe that behind Jacinto there was a long tradition, a story of experience, which no language could translate to him" (92). Latour's insight here resembles Rahner's recognition of "salvific revelation-faith . . . beyond the Christian revelatory word," and it prepares us for Latour's genius for accommodation.

Marilyn Arnold singles out the Navajo story concluding *Death Comes for the Archbishop* as affirming the "expansion of one man's perception to encompass spiritual and material opposites in a final design that joins Indian and Christian faith in a united vision of heaven and earth" (39). Susan Rosowski is a bit more theological when she refers to the bishop's "sacramental power of symbolization," in which "apparently alien forms participate in Christian fellowship" (166). Latour not only detects his belief in natural forms like the cruciform tree and the carnelian-hued Blood of Christ mountain range, but in Indian life itself. He universalizes the rock of Acoma by fusing the Jewish concept of God and the Catholic concept of church with the Indian yearning for permanence and sanctuary. He sees the restored life of the Navajos in the Canyon de Chelly as scriptural: the crops, the sheep "grazing under the magnificent cottonwoods and drinking at the streams of sweet water; it was like an Indian Garden of Eden" (297). Such accommodation does not depend entirely upon Latour, however; as Rahner notes, the church always had it "in potency," although it takes a sacramental perception like Latour's to actualize it. The artist of the Laguna church altarpiece had such perception, depicting gods of wind and rain and thunder, sun and moon, linked together in a "geometrical design of crimson and blue and dark green" (90). Christian and Indian cultures come joined for Latour here, but he makes another connection, perhaps to Islam: the altar wall seemed "hung with tapestry," recalling the "interior of a Persian chieftain's tent he had seen in a textile exhibit at Lyons" (90).

Such accommodation to this new world around him is not abandonment of Europe, as Jean Schwind seems to argue in trying to radicalize Latour's church into a schismatic one. Rather, it is a gathering or unifying instinct, evident when he hears the bell of San Miguel, which combines Moslem and Christian, Asian and European traditions in calling the faithful to Mary in globes of silver sound. The strategic description of this sound suggests the blending of cultures rather than eclipse of one culture by another: "Before the nine strokes were done Rome faded, and behind it he sensed something, with palm trees, — Jerusalem, perhaps, though he had never been there. Keeping his eyes closed, he cherished for a moment this sudden, pervasive sense of the East" (43). The fading of Catholic Rome merely acknowledges its debt to the East, to Jerusalem and Byzantium. Rome's "potency" for universality, although it "could only be actualized in the course of an extensive historical process . . . [going] back to the beginning of European colonialism" (Rahner 717), had existed in the church which produced Latour.

The church for Thomas Aquinas, traditional Catholicism's "official" theologian, was the Christ-centered economy of a varied humanity's return to God. In the third part of the *Summa*, Thomas acknowledges Christ as containing "all the effects of grace which are to be later spread abroad in the Church, as the white flame enfolds all the brilliancies of colour analyzable into the spectrum . . . . The return of humanity to God . . . operates twice: once in Christ . . . when human nature . . . was united to God in Him . . . [and] a second time . . . in its harvest, the riches of God, humanized in Christ, scattered over all humanity so that they may return once more to their source and principle" (Congar 105). The spectrum and scattering concepts not only allow but encourage variety in the economy of grace. Thus the bell, Father Vaillant's soup, even the blending of furnishings in Latour's study, embody the natural variety of the harvest, the return to God. "Man is of such nature that he rises to spiritual things through the mediation of those that are bodily," writes Avery Dulles, and "the physical and sacramental mediation of Christ corresponds to man's nature as a spirit-body composite" (156).

The church of Thomas Aquinas is the paradigm operating in Cather's novel. "Born on Calvary, appearing under the form of water and blood, . . . formed of . . . Christ sleeping in death, like Eve formed from the side of the sleeping Adam. . . . [the church] is no longer the Body of Christ simply, but also the means of realization and construction of that Body; [it] is the Mother . . . [it contains] the means of begetting [the faithful], of nourishing them, and of making them grow and flourish in Christ" (Congar 114). Latour's mission begins at the cruciform tree, before a figure of the cross on which the church was born, but his prayer is to Mary, who throughout the novel as throughout church history is the symbol of Mother church. As "he lay in comfort and safety [at Hidden Water], with love for his fellow creatures flowing like peace about his heart," the new bishop acknowledged that "the Holy Mother, to whom he had addressed himself before the cruciform tree, had led him hither" (29). Service to her is service to the church, which gives significance to her request to neophyte Juan Diego at Guadalupe: "Seek out thy Bishop and bid him build a church in my honour on the spot where I now stand" (47). It will be a sacramental church, "a household word with [the people] . . . . something [they] can hold in [their] hands and love" (50).

And this traditional church, although it "looked upon dioceses as administrative districts . . . rather than as churches in the theological and sacramental sense of that word" (Dulles 167) and therefore would not please Padre Martinez, enfolds like the white flame of Christ the full spectrum of colors. It includes the "actual members of Christ's body — whether they be Christians or non-evangelized believers . . . . Christ may be called head of all who ever will be united to Him . . . [or] are at least in potency to be incorporated into Him" (Dulles 156). So the vast, mysterious territory the cardinals discuss and the missionaries travel can represent the world, the challenge to church to actualize universality through integration with and diffusion through the world.

The lines drawn between liberals and conservatives during the pontificate of Pius IX were the lines drawn nearly a century later between those with a fortress, authoritarian mentality and those who would integrate the church and the world. Pope John XXIII identified with the latter. "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations," he said in 1962. The church must demonstrate the validity of her teaching rather than condemn errors, must spread everywhere the fullness of Christian charity, "than which nothing is more effective in eradicating the seeds of discord, nothing more efficacious in promoting concord, just peace and the brotherly unity of all" (McBrien 667). The old church is represented in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* in the warlike ruin at Acoma, with its two stone towers: "Gaunt, grim, grey, its nave rising some seventy feet to a sagging, half-ruined roof, it was more like a fortress than a place of worship" (100); and in the ruin at Pecos: "The great red earth walls of the mission . . . yawned gloomily before [the bishop], — part of the roof had fallen in, and the rest would soon go" (119-20). Gloom and depression characterize these places, just as disgust and annoyance characterize the "Old Order" of Martinez and Lucero, who are defensive, tyrannical, and possessive.

Willa Cather made a mistake when she used native priests to represent the old church, and compounded it in naming them after historical figures. But it might be our mistake not to see beyond this, and beyond the obvious Gallicanism of a Midi Romanesque cathedral, which is meant to represent the new church, a church of the morning, of a world still being created, as if, her Latour contemplates as he overlooks his diocese, "the Creator had . . . gone away and left everything on the point of being brought together . . . . The country was still waiting to be made into a landscape" (95). And as his flock's shepherd, wrapped in an Indian blanket and regarding the "open, gold face of the Cathedral" (271), how much is this bishop like the recent pope who insisted he was not a prince, but "a priest, a father, a shepherd," and who assembled his church in Vatican II in what he called a "beginning [that] rises in the church like daybreak, a forerunner of most splendid light. It is now only dawn" (McBrien 666-67).

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Poverty As Myra's Mortal Enemy

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What does the title of Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy* signify? Who or what is Myra Henshawe's mortal enemy? This question has been a puzzle since the book was first published in 1926. Most readers have been guided by what was apparently authorial intention. James Woodress records that in at least two letters Cather identified Myra's husband, Oswald Henshawe, as "the enemy of her soul's peace" (384-85). Critics have suggested other possible answers: some see Myra as her own mortal enemy (Stouck 121), others her disease, cancer, which is slowly killing her (Yongue 116). Even the narrator Nellie Birdseye has been named in a reading which questions the novel's narrative strategies (Skaggs 14). But these are all psychological readings of the novel without reference to the social and economic order it portrays. To a reader like myself from a socialist political and economic system, *My Mortal Enemy* is most strikingly a drama of capitalist discord, and the enemy that Myra Henshawe identifies as destroying her life is poverty. This reading of the novel in China is hinted at in a short piece by Jean Tsien of the Beijing Foreign Language Institute.

Tsien discusses Myra Henshawe's avarice and her "bias towards wealth" (23), then modifies this negative view by arguing that Myra ultimately uses money to attain spiritual fulfillment. I will argue to the contrary, that Myra's quest is not finally a religious one but a secular one, a desperate yearning to return to her childhood of wealth and privilege.

Myra's story from the outset turns on questions of class and money. While innocent of the world's materialism, the young Myra Driscoll is carried away by her passion and gives up her inheritance to marry handsome but penniless Oswald Henshawe for romantic love. However, Myra's childhood as the spoilt niece of the wealthy Irish-Catholic John Driscoll has already formed her aristocratic nature. After the marriage, Myra attempts, as a vain and dramatic woman, to live aristocratically on her husband's limited income, most of which is spent on sustaining domestic elegance and satisfying her expensive tastes. Their tasteful apartment, her clothes and jewelry, her expensive presents to friends, her extravagant giving away of Oswald's shirts, and her generous tips to cab drivers and delivery boys indicate her aristocratic vanity — her desire to "show off." However, Myra is never happy. She admits of herself, "I am a greedy, selfish, worldly woman; I wanted success and a place in the world" (91). She no longer has "everything" she used to have before she broke away from her uncle. She wishes "for a carriage — with stables and a house and servants" (52) to sustain the "loftiest and most challenging manner" (50), but her marriage to Oswald has robbed her of "the first power to back it up" (97). So her remark "it's very nasty, being poor" (53) echoes her uncle's motto "Better to be a stray dog in this world than a man without money" (22). Myra clearly regrets her marriage and youthful romantic commitments, for she warns Nellie quite early, "love itself draws on a woman nearly all the bad luck in the world" (38). To Myra, the power of money is stronger than that of love. Her failure to maintain a luxurious life and satisfy her vanity makes her more aware of the limitations of love and the privileges of aristocratic status.

By the second half of the novel, this nobility, in Patricia Lee Yongue's words, "turns to bestiality as Myra grows incapable of supporting her expensive, albeit aristocratic, habits" (116). The Henshawes are living now on the West coast. "Oswald ha[s] a humble position, poorly paid" (84); his small income can only afford them a "shabby, comfortless" room in a hotel "wretchedly built and already falling to pieces" (72), and they are "under obligation to the management." Now Myra is a sick old woman, and illness has only increased her hatred of poverty; she becomes more conscious than ever of the wealth she gave up to marry Oswald. Myra's bitterness makes her "acutely sensitive to sound and light" (86), and the noise of her neighbors upstairs becomes a most painful and rancorous experience. She says bitterly, "Oh, that's the cruelty of being poor; it leaves you at the mercy of such pigs! Money is a protection, a cloak; it can buy one quiet and some sort of dignity" (83). Poverty has become Myra's mortal enemy and turned her into an eccentric and brutal woman.

Each tramping from upstairs makes Myra's features become "tense, as from an attack of pain" (81). It seems as if she is living in hell, suffering through infernal torments. Myra uses violent, neurotic language to curse the people upstairs, calling them "animals," "cattle" (82); the woman of the family becomes an "adder" (90). Myra can't tolerate being "tormented" and "despised and trampled upon" by her enemy, which has made Nellie realize "how unable she was to bear things" (81), because, as Oswald says, "she isn't people! She is Molly Driscoll . . . . she can't endure . . ." (92). The root of her being is more than ever associated with her former aristocratic self.

At this point, we can see clearly that Myra totally regrets her marriage. When talking with Nellie, Myra says, "I've no patience with young people when they drift. I wish I could live their lives for them; I'd know how! But there it is; by the time you've learned the short cuts, your feet puff up so that you can't take the road at all" (79). And later: "I wakened up in the night crying, and it did me good. You see, I was crying about things I never feel now; I'd been dreaming I was young, and the sorrows of youth had set me crying!" (95). "Oh, if youth but knew!" (90). She wishes that she could undo her rejection of her uncle's wealth, and that youth could see into the future and appraise its actions from this perspective.

As she cannot be young again, she must fight her enemy by whatever means she can find, and Oswald has become the target of her attack. She accuses him of insufficient effort and blames him for her situation; she even attributes the noise overhead entirely to him because it is he who has dragged her into such poverty: "'Ah, there he's beginning it again,' she would say. 'He'll wear me down in the end'" (109-110). "You ought to get me away from this, Oswald" (89), she cries, knowing that they cannot afford a better place. She locks out Oswald, though entirely dependent on him. Her ferocious treatment of Oswald shows that reconciliation between her and the enemy introduced to her by Oswald is impossible.

But the reader must not forget that Myra loved Oswald fervently for many years and that Oswald is still devoted to her and self-sacrificing. What has happened to her own great capacity for love and friendship? The answer is that poverty has destroyed her grand passions and romantic commitments. "It's been the ruin of us both," she complains sadly. "We've destroyed each other. I should have stayed with my uncle. It was money I needed. We've thrown our lives away" (91). The romantic passion of youth unsustained by money is short-lived. Myra and Oswald are drawn apart "from that long embrace." The poorer they become, the more she hates him for his inability to meet her demands. An interesting incident in Myra's battle against poverty is her hiding gold pieces from Oswald for fear that he might steal them away. Just as many years ago her uncle tried to keep Oswald from getting his wealth by threatening Myra with its loss if she married Oswald, now, in Myra's eyes, Oswald is a criminal who has robbed her wealth. She will not let herself be robbed a second time.

If Myra Henshawe is so obsessed with money, what then is the significance of her return to religion? According to Hermione Lee, "the religious feeling of *My Mortal Enemy* is disconcerting. For all her speeches about absolution and renunciation, Myra goes on clutching and wanting till the last" (221). John H. Randall asserts that "in returning from worldly satisfaction to religious ritual she shows no real understanding of either . . . . In dying she is as self-centered and selfish as she was in living; she leaves life without having begun to understand it" (237). He concludes "that the book has no religious overtones whatsoever, but is a brute glorification of the power of money" (237). Even John J. Murphy, who sees Myra undergoing an authentic religious experience in her final days, concedes that there is "tension between what appears to be Christian service to Myra on Oswald's part and the socially cruel, vertical mysticism of her conversion" (13). All of these critics, in varying degrees, see Myra's religious reversion as contradictory, paradoxical, even negative. What then does her return to religion signify? In the remainder of this essay I will argue that Myra's deathbed return to her great-uncle's Catholicism forms an important part of her fight against, and attempt to escape from, poverty. In her religious reversion she may be attempting to complete a journey of spiritual ascent, but unconsciously she is trying to return to her childhood of wealth and privilege, symbolized by the forms of her uncle's Roman Catholicism.

Before we can fully understand what I would call Myra's religious "reversion," we should, first of all, try to assess her nature. Besides the cancer, Myra is suffering from a kind of spiritual and psychological "infection"; as she herself admits: "I've two fatal maladies" (89). She has suffered this spiritual "infection" since she separated herself from her wealthy childhood. This relates directly to one of Willa Cather's consistent themes — the desire to return to childhood and youth. Relative to Carl Jung's psychological analysis of the human soul (79), Myra's behavior in the second part of the novel originates from the estrangement of herself resulting from the split of her soul from the security of her childhood and youth. Her psychological domain is made up of two halves: her former childhood self and her married self. Her real soul is deeply rooted in her former aristocracy, and her false soul is temporary and floating. Myra's loss of her real soul (self) was a traumatic experience resulting in despair. Her return to Catholicism is at once a restoration of this soul, the security of childhood, and her socially and economically privileged status.

Through Myra's naive identification with Catholicism, in reality a nostalgic longing for childhood and youth, we can detect more clearly her true nature. Under the cover of a pious quest, there is a constant deep and pathetic wish for something else — the chance to have a complete and fruitful reconciliation with her uncle: "I'd go back to him and ask his pardon" (82), she confesses. Her secular and religious motives become confused. As John J. Murphy has observed, "in [Myra's] mind and in the novel's iconography, Old Driscoll, who withdrew his favor and made her poor, was like God" (11).

What is significant in psychic life is always below the horizon of consciousness, and when we speak of Myra's spiritual quest we are dealing with things that are barely visible and rendered even less visible by Cather's "unfurnished" style. We cannot tell whether Myra is intentionally reconciling herself to her religion for the sake of recovering her wealth, although the association of religion and money creates this suggestive sub-text. When Nellie is asked to have a mass said for the repose of Modjeska's soul, Myra reveals the gold pieces she has been hoarding, money, she says, kept for "unearthly purposes." We are reminded here of her constant wish for money to shelter herself from common people like the Poindexters overhead. And when she thinks about religion, where "seeking is finding," she uses language that has connotations of greed: "seeking," "desire," "fighting," "rewarding" (111-12).

Other details in what might be called Myra's religious "reversion" become significant in this monetary light. Her peremptory retrieval of the crucifix from Nellie's hand is usually attributed to her intense suffering, but the very rudeness of the gesture suggests the old grasping Myra, not the contrite penitent. For both Christ and Myra poverty was a condition of suffering, but while for Christ it was a condition of humility, sacrifice, and spiritual growth, for Myra it is a bitter struggle for survival. Myra's journey to the headland where she dies seems to be the final act of penitence in her quest for forgiveness and absolution, but it can also be read as a last desperate attempt to be released from poverty. She leaves the shabby hotel room and her husband, both symbols of her impoverishment. Afraid Oswald might find her and drag her back, she leaves a note saying, "Don't follow me. I wish to be alone" (115). It is the only way now that she can triumph over poverty, her mortal enemy.

Myra seeks to ritualize her death and to bring herself closer to her uncle. Nellie remembers his magnificently elaborate funeral, a showcase of his worldliness and wealth: "Driscoll did not come to the church; the church went to him" (26). We are told that at his funeral "the high altar blazed with hundreds of candles" (26), and it seems that "he had gone straight to the greater glory, through smoking censers and candles and stars" (27). It appears to Nellie that he bought his way into heaven. Perhaps Myra is thinking of this when she asks, "Why is it, do you suppose, Nellie, that candles are in themselves religious? Not when they are covered by shades, of course — I mean the flame of a candle" (111). She asks Nellie and Oswald to use candles for light during their watches, even saying accusingly, "At least let me die by candle light; that is not too much to ask" (110). And Myra has hoarded gold, so that she might have masses said and perhaps like her uncle buy her soul's peace. She remembers so well old Driscoll's belief that "a poor man stinks, and God hates him."

All these scenes suggest that Myra's desire for redemption is rooted in her irrational desire to return to her uncle's shelter, not the one he ironically provided for her in his will (the home for aged and destitute women in Chicago), but the one that surrounded her lavishly in childhood. Theodore S. Adams points out that "[i]n the second section we ask how a woman so disloyal and cruel can yet be a saint . . . . But angels and devils warring for possession of her soul present an eternal human paradox. *My Mortal Enemy* dramatizes but does not resolve this paradox" (148). However, it seems to me there is no real paradox here. It is Myra's eager craving for the wealth and power of her youth, intimately connected in her mind with the church, that makes her put on the look of a saint in front of the priest, Father Fay, but towards her husband, the source of her physical poverty, the face of a disloyal and cruel woman. Her return to religion and simultaneous ferocious treatment of Oswald come as no surprise because her religious gestures are motivated by material and psychological rather than spiritual needs.

To conclude, Myra is not attempting to escape from the commercialism of the world, nor is she developing a profound desire for spiritual things; she is attempting to escape from poverty. Her last-minute return to the church and her repentance are not a spiritual triumph but a final testimony to her confused feelings of greed and nostalgia. The truth of this American novel, like the truth of *The Great Gatsby*, is an economic and psychological one; to this reader Myra's journey is one of a materially saturated soul.

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Willa Cather in Japan: A Sequel

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At the international seminar at the University of Nebraska in 1973, I read a paper titled "Willa Cather in Japan" (included in *The Art of Willa Cather*). My purpose was to analyse Japanese attitudes towards Cather's works. I tried to suggest which of her ideas were interesting to us and why. I mentioned her attitude towards nature, her idea of family, and her conception of art and civilization. I predicted that the "long-lasting enthusiasm for Willa Cather" would continue. Though the present article is intended as a sequel, my main purpose is to survey Willa Cather studies in Japan during the past two decades.

I feel a slight embarrassment about my prediction of 1973, for our enthusiasm for Cather seems to have died down, especially on the academic level. However, Willa Cather is still attractive to the general reading public in Japan. During the past few years, such novels as *Alexandra's Bridge* and *My Mortal Enemy* have been translated, and a new and better translation of *My Ántonia* came out in 1987. Recently I was requested to write an article on *My Ántonia* for the Sunday edition of *Sankei Shimbun* (a daily paper); and judging from the responses people are still quite interested in Cather's novels.

In the field of Cather criticism, however, the efforts of the past twenty years are nothing to boast of, especially in the 1980s. In the late 1970s, two book-length studies were published: Mamoru Omori's *Willa Cather's Novels* (1976), and my own *Willa Cather: A Priestess of Beauty* (1977). Omori's book is a kind of biographical criticism, analyzing Cather's works in chronological order. For the convenience of readers, he also provides plot summaries and character analyses. His main point is that Cather regards the process of life as a regression from the brilliance of youth to a desolate, flowerless death, while her characters, resisting the current, try to regain "the radical self" possessed in their youth. Omori sees Cather's life as overlapping her characters'. This book can be regarded as the conclusion of a certain trend in Cather criticism in Japan, one which had been dominant since the publication of E. K. Brown's historic book.

On the other hand, my own book should have been the beginning of new developments in Cather criticism. My starting point is to regard Cather's novels from the point of view of spaces (garden, house, room, and tomb) and to analyse her characters in terms of their types of movement — either cyclical or linear. In this way, I try to read her novels as an attempt at the preservation and transmission of the aesthetic ideals she cherishes. This book received favorable reviews as a new trend. However, nothing of note has followed; speculation about the reason for this inevitably indicates the present state of Cather criticism in Japan.

Before examining the problem, though, I'd like to make an exception. In 1984, Takahiro Masuda's article "O Pioneers!: Willa Cather's Use of Classical Myths" appeared in *Studies in American Literature* (21). This was followed three years later by another paper, titled "A Study of *My Ántonia*: On Its Content and Form as a Dream of Time" (*Studies in English Literature* 64). Masuda applies the typology of biblical, Greek, and Roman myths to both novels and tries to place Cather's farmers in a vast historical panorama. He points out two kinds of time in Cather: eternal time and chronological time. For example, Jim Burden is clearly conscious of these kinds of time and applies them in his assessment of Ántonia's way of life, thus giving her universal value. Masuda's argument, supported by careful reading of the text, is solid and convincing, if a bit too orthodox for some.

In 1980s we were deluged by new critical theories, and scholars have been kept busy exploring Post-structuralism, Semiotics, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Feminism, Cultural Materialism, etc. These theories have been widely applied, and quite a large number of interesting works have appeared on Hawthorne, Melville, and the women writers of domestic fiction. However, no such critical work on Willa Cather has appeared. Some literary works seem to accommodate these theories with more brilliant results than others; Willa Cather's works seem to fall in the latter category.

Feminist books on Cather like Sharon O'Brien's *Willa Cather: The Emerging Voice* and Hermione Lee's *Willa Cather: A Life Saved Up* have been introduced here with extensive reviews. I myself explored O'Brien's book for *Studies in English Literature* (1988 English Number). However, feminist criticism remains on the level of political and economic sexual conflict and has not embraced the level of aesthetics. In Cultural Materialism or New Historicism we foreigners cannot compete with Americans, though I can see new developments in Cather criticism toward placing her novels in the cultural and historical context of the time of their writing.

Even though Cather criticism in Japan has been ebbing, I am quite hopeful of future development. Several interesting BA and MA theses in my hands are evidence for optimism. Tomoyuki Zettsu's thesis "Circle and Line: A Study of Imagery in *My Ántonia*", (presented to the University of Tokyo) is very original work. When we deal with circles in *My Ántonia*, "circle" is usually considered to refer to cyclical movement of time and season, something with an affirmative significance. Zettsu, however, points out Cather's use of Ántonia's ring, the coils of the snake, the circle in the snow, and the ferris wheel and argues that these circles indicate something confining, something working against the linear westward movement. Kazuko Sakuma's thesis "Willa Cather's Portrayal of Seductive Women in *A Lost Lady* and *My Mortal Enemy*" (presented to Sophia University) is an attempt at a psychological approach to two of Cather's most controversial novels. Sakuma notices the disappearance in them of the contrasting pairs of women in earlier novels. Cather does not create Marian Forrester and Myra Henshawe with doubles; rather, what before would have been their "doubles" seem now to be absorbed in themselves. In this way Cather succeeds in making her heroines more interesting, paradoxical, complex.

As these papers indicate, young scholars' interest in Willa Cather has been increasing. If my present report sounds discouraging, I'm sure subsequent reports will have more hopeful substance.

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