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SPRINGING FROM THE SAME ROOT:
Religion and Art in the Fiction of Willa Cather

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Christopher Richards Carter

1991

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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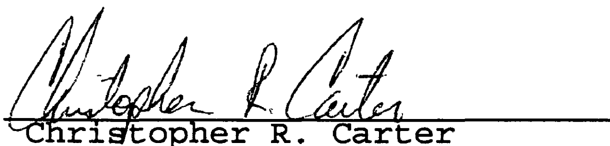

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Approved, December 1991

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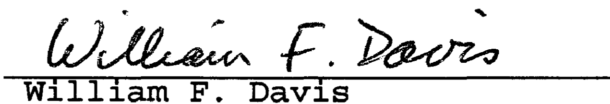

William F. Davis

Robert J. Scholnick

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DCA	Death Comes for the Archbishop
KA	The Kingdom of Art: Willa Cather's First Principles and Critical Statements, 1893-1896, ed. Bernice Slote
OO	One of Ours
SL	The Song of the Lark
SR	Shadows on the Rock
WCW	Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art

Abstract

This essay examines the relationship between art and religion in four novels by Willa Cather: The Song of the Lark, One of Ours, Death Comes for the Archbishop, and Shadows on the Rock. In each of these novels, the interaction between art and religion is of central importance. In the earlier novels, Cather describes the creation and enjoyment of art in a religious language, so that art is a spiritual experience. In the later novels, art is shown to further the cause of religion, tending to spring from religious devotion while simultaneously able to increase the faith of those who observe it. In all instances, the creation of art is linked to love and appreciation of the beauty of life.

SPRINGING FROM THE SAME ROOT:

Religion and Art in the Fiction of Willa Cather

Introduction

In a persuasive essay arguing that Willa Cather's Shadows on the Rock should be read as the depiction of a matriarchal Christianity, Susan J. Rosowski observes that literary scholarship traditionally analyzes a writer's work chronologically and that this affects the way we read all the writer's work. Regarding Cather, she says, "Were we to reverse that perspective and read Cather from her late works to her early ones, we might well associate her most closely with religious themes. . . " ("Magnificat" 74). I agree with Rosowski that we should associate Willa Cather with religious themes, but I do not think one needs to read her works in reverse chronological order to discern those themes. Though articulation and emphasis changed, Cather explored religious themes throughout her career.

Specifically, Cather linked religion to the creation and appreciation of art. In "Escapism," a response to the charge of some critics that literature such as hers was escapist, Cather observed that art never served a "practical" purpose in preventing social or political ills: "[T]he world has a habit of being in a bad way from time to time, and art has never contributed anything to help matters--except escape" (WCW 19). Yet Cather understands "escape" not as a form of flight or denial but as a means of refreshing and recharging the spirit (WCW 20). In a similar

vein, she later states in "Escapism" that "Religion and art spring from the same root and are close kin" (WCW 27). The "kinship" of religion and art refers to the power of art to fulfill spiritual needs in much the same way that religion does. Though Cather wrote "Escapism" with its explicit statement about the kinship of art and religion late in her career, that kinship had in fact been addressed in the journalistic writings of her college days and informs much of Cather's fiction from the early and partially autobiographical The Song of the Lark to the later and seemingly quite different Shadows on the Rock, the last of her novels to receive substantial critical and popular approval.[2]

I have chosen the four novels discussed in this essay for several reasons. The Song of the Lark (1915), One of Ours (1922), Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927), and Shadows on the Rock (1931) all have clergymen as characters; in the first two, Cather's attitude toward the protestant clergy, and the institutions they represent, is quite negative. In the second two novels, the clergy are Catholic bishops, and the attitude toward institutional religion is generally positive. In the first two novels, the main characters are artists, and it is the interaction between the artists and the clerics, and between what they represent, that is significant. In the two later novels, where bishops show artistic inclination, the interaction

between the roles of artist and priest within one man constitutes part, but not all, of the issue.

Cather's emphasis, in the works discussed here, shifts from the individual to the community. In The Song of the Lark, the interest, as Cather says in the Preface to the 1932 re-issue, lies in the artist and in her escape from the restrictions of the smug and provincial society into which she was born. In Shadows on the Rock, written after the death of Cather's father and while her mother suffered the debilitation of the strokes that finally killed her, Cather focuses on the preservation of the family and a traditional culture. In the earlier novel, the artist's personal artistic experience is a sort of religious experience described in a religious language, while in the final novel, the issue is how art can serve both the individual and the common good.

In an essay discussing religious expression in Cather's fiction, one may legitimately inquire of Cather's own religious beliefs. Both her grandfather William Cather and her grandmother Rachel Boak were deeply religious, and Cather's parents regularly attended the Baptist church throughout her childhood and into her adult years. Though she apparently claimed to be an atheist during her collegiate years at the University of Nebraska (Woodress 337), one may well question whether such statements are not examples of her rather frequent exaggeration and studied

outrageousness. Certainly she felt some of the scorn for institutionalized religion that she expresses in her early works, and she may have been less than fervent in her belief, but she also continued to attend church services while away from home, both in Lincoln and later when she worked in Pittsburgh. In 1922, Cather was confirmed in the Episcopal church in Red Cloud's Grace Church by the Rt. Rev. George Beecher, with whom she corresponded throughout her life.[3] Both the "Catholic" novels, with their more favorable depiction of institutional religion, were written after Cather's conversion and probably reflect the same shift in religious attitude.

Her biographer James Woodress believes that the stresses of middle age and disenchantment with post-war society explain Cather's conversion and her greater need for religion (335-37). Mildred R. Bennett, in her essay "Cather and Religion," characterizes Cather's faith by saying that "Cather's interest in religion, obvious from the time she began to write, signified more the mind of an inquirer than that of a devout religionist" (5). Of her confirmation in the Episcopal church, Bennett theorizes that Cather joined in part because the church had become fashionable in Red Cloud and because the rest of her family was joining or had joined it (11). Yet Cather's fondness for and correspondence with Bishop Beecher, who conducted a memorial service for her in Red Cloud on All Souls' Day, six months

after her death, indicate a greater substance to her faith and confirmation than Bennett's supposition implies. L. Brent Bohlke, noting that the letters to Beecher "express Cather's religious faith and devotion in a way that her other correspondence does not" (266) and that Cather relied more upon her Anglican faith as she grew older (267), terms Cather "a sacramentalist who saw the entire world as a possible vehicle for the action of God in his creation" (Bohlke 268).

Bohlke's use of sacramentalist is significant, for the Episcopal church and the Roman Catholic church which her later novels treat so favorably have in common a belief in the importance of the sacraments as experienced through liturgical worship, which strives for a more aesthetically pleasing worship experience than does the non-liturgical Baptist church in which Cather was raised. In both Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, church ornamentation and architecture, music, vestments and altar hangings all contribute to the worship in a way that must have satisfied Cather's own aesthetic sensibilities. Cather's first biographer, E. K. Brown, draws a similar conclusion when he theorizes that in the Episcopal church Cather found "no strain on the relation between religion and art, or the relation between religion and civilization" (Brown and Edel xvi). Aesthetically pleasing worship does not explain why Cather was a Christian, but it may explain why she was an

Episcopalian and held favorable attitudes toward Roman Catholicism. As John Murphy says, "[T]he [Roman Catholic] Church was rich in tradition and ritual, . . . and [was] the greatest patron of the arts" ("Catholic Themes" 57).

We will never know the exact nature of Cather's religious faith, which, it seems clear, changed, as personal beliefs are wont to do, over the years. Nonetheless, there is a strong body of evidence that Cather held religious convictions and was concerned with religious issues. As Bennett says, "I believe Cather to have been a deeply religious person, but not in any sense that would adhere to creeds or legalism" (Bennett 12). This study pursues Bohlke's and Bennett's points and examines the deep religious faith which Cather expresses in her novels, a faith which has little to do with creeds but rather with how people perceive and express the divine through various forms of art.

The Artist and Institutional Religion: *The Song of the Lark*

The Song of the Lark is not one of Willa Cather's great artistic triumphs like *My Ántonia* or *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, but it is an important book for Cather scholars.[1] Though Cather based Thea Kronborg upon opera singer Olive Fremstad, about whom Cather had written for *McClure's Magazine*, the novel is nonetheless highly autobiographical. Woodress believes the opening section, "Friends of Childhood," to be "the most autobiographical fiction she [Cather] ever wrote" (266). Rosowski, in her book on Cather's Romanticism, calls *The Song of the Lark* Cather's Prelude--what she considers to be a necessary autobiographical study of a Romantic who sees the self as the source of value in a meaningless world (*Voyage Perilous* 63). The novel is certainly a *küntslerroman* and is in some ways Cather's most explicit statement about the formation of the artist. *The Song of the Lark* addresses the relationship between art and religion by depicting the artist as in conflict with institutional religion while simultaneously suggesting a strong spiritual dimension to the creation of art.

Thea Kronborg is the daughter of the Rev. Peter Kronborg, the Methodist minister of Moonstone, Colorado.

The reader immediately views Mr. Kronborg critically because Cather first describes him from the point-of-view of Doctor Archie, Thea's friend and protector, who thinks the minister has "a pretentious and important air about him" (SL 4) and is annoyed by Mr. Kronborg's "nervous, ministerial cough" (SL 5). Mr. Kronborg is so excited about the birth of his seventh child that he neglects to tell the doctor that Thea is sick with what turns out to be nearly fatal pneumonia.

This non-malicious but nonetheless deadly failure of consideration epitomizes Mr. Kronborg's attitude toward his daughter's development as an artist--he simply fails to perceive Thea's significance. Mr. Kronborg understands music only in practical terms such as Thea's ability to earn money through quitting school to teach piano or to increase her (and, more importantly, his) respectability by playing the organ and leading the hymns at Wednesday night prayer meetings. His indifference to Thea and her abilities becomes obvious when Doctor Archie speaks to the minister about railroader Ray Kennedy's dying wish that Thea use his life insurance money to study in Chicago. Mr. Kronborg asks whether Doctor Archie would allow Thea to go if she were his daughter, and the doctor replies:

> I most certainly should. In fact if she were my daughter, I'd have sent her away before this. She's a most unusual child, and she's only wasting herself here. At her age she ought to be learning, not teaching (SL 138).

Doctor Archie clearly implies that Mr. Kronborg has been not merely negligent but has hindered his daughter's development.

Cather continues the negative portrayal of the Rev. Mr. Kronborg by calling into question his spiritual convictions:

> Mr. Kronborg was too fond of his ease and too sensible to worry his children much about religion. He was more sincere than many preachers, but when he spoke to his family about matters of conduct, it was usually with a regard for keeping up appearances. The church and church work were discussed in the family like the routine of any other business. Sunday was the hard day of the week with them, just as Saturday was the busy day with the merchants on Main Street. Revivals were seasons of extra work, and pressure, just as threshing-time was on the farms (SL 119).

Throughout the novel Cather depicts Mr. Kronborg as lazy and rather weak. Moreover, the church is a business and the most important part of that business is "keeping up appearances." Spiritual fervor seems unknown to Mr. Kronborg, and when Cather compliments Mr. Kronborg for being more sincere than many preachers, she certainly damns with faint praise. The faith of the minister, who should be a clear example of religious conviction, is arid and conformist, uninspired and uninspiring.

Later in the novel, Cather's description of the Rev. Lars Larsen, minister of the Chicago Swedish Reform Church for which Thea sings soprano, shows him to be as singularly lacking in religious conviction as Mr. Kronborg and almost

as much a hindrance to Thea's artistic path. Cather explains that "by the time [Larsen] graduated he had already made up his mind to study for the ministry because it seemed to him the least laborious of all callings" (<u>SL</u> 151). Larsen's father only allowed him to attend seminary as a means of concealing the boy's laziness from the neighbors (<u>SL</u> 151). Though Larsen plays the violin and gives Thea a job singing in his choir, his musical abilities are grouped with candy, children, and his energetic pursuit of "almost any form of play" (<u>SL</u> 152). Thus, Cather describes Larson as lazy and effeminate in his enjoyment of "the softer things of life" (<u>SL</u> 151). Moreover, just as in Moonstone Thea played and sang for prayer meetings filled with sick and dying people whose "every head said 'resignation,'" in Chicago the Rev. Larsen especially wants Thea to sing at funerals. It is fitting, given their spiritual aridity, that the ministers should want Thea to sing for the dead and dying, but it clearly depresses Thea, who always stays up late and feels "a stronger wish than usual to live and to be happy" after the prayer meetings (<u>SL</u> 115). In addition, singing for funerals in Chicago limits her practice time and energy for her studies with the pianist Andor Harsanyi and increases her frustration at not making greater progress.

Thus the two ministers who figure significantly in Thea's life, while not in any way evil, are among those "natural enemies" such as Mrs. Livery Johnson (<u>SL</u> 94) and

Thea's sister Anna (SL 217) who desire ease and conformity and hamper artistic growth. The church, like her family and the attitude of most Moonstone citizens, is something from which Thea must escape in order to fulfill her dream. Yet though Cather criticizes the narrowness of institutionalized Christianity in The Song of the Lark, she does not deny the faith underlying religion. Instead, she conveys a sense of the spiritual that can be achieved through art.

When Thea works with Harsanyi, first as a piano student and then as a voice student, her teacher notes that it often takes Thea a long time to understand a piece. She cannot work on particular passages but must see the music as a whole: "After she once had her 'revelation,' after she got the idea that to her--not always to him--explained everything, then she went forward rapidly" (SL 174). Cather's use of revelation implies an important spiritual dimension to Thea's art. Cather does not try to analyze the cause or meaning of Thea's "revelation," but she makes clear that the intense and spontaneous understanding is based upon emotions and feeling.

Later, when Thea attends her first concert and hears Dvorak's Symphony in E minor, she experiences an intense feeling which almost recalls the conversion experiences recounted by parishioners at Mr. Kronborg's prayer meetings:

> The first theme had scarcely been given out when her mind became clear; instant composure fell upon her, and with it came the power of

> concentration. This was music she could understand, music from the New World indeed! . . . .
>
> When the first movement ended, Thea's hands and feet were cold as ice. . . . Here were the sand hills, the grasshoppers and locusts, all the things that wakened and chirped in the early morning; . . . There was home in it, too; first memories, first mornings long ago; the amazement of a new soul in a new world; a soul new and yet old, that had dreamed something despairing, something glorious, in the dark before it was born; a soul obsessed by what it did not know, under the cloud of a past it could not recall (SL 181).

After this music "From the New World," Thea is a new person, with an understanding of dreams of despair and glory. The ability to concentrate on and understand the music "falls upon" Thea--like the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The narrator describes the music in a religious language, explaining that Thea feels "the amazement of a soul new and yet old." The old soul is the desire and deep feeling Thea has always felt, but the new soul is Thea's new understanding of how those desires might be realized in art; as Thea walks home, she realizes that she is a girl no longer but a woman who must strive for the heights of music and its power to create ecstasy (SL 183). Cather will describe art's power to create this kind of religious ecstasy several times in this novel.

After Thea's second year in Chicago, her friend and supporter, Fred Ottenburg, sends her to his father's ranch near Panther Cañon in the Southwest. There, Thea is

fascinated by the cliff dwellings of the Ancient People and by the relics of their civilization, especially their beautiful pottery. Reflecting on the importance of water to a cliff-dwelling desert people, Thea remembers being told that all the religious ceremonies of the Ancient People involved water and that artistic pottery had, therefore, a religious significance: "Their pottery was their most direct appeal to water, the envelope and sheath of the precious element itself. The strongest Indian need was expressed in those graceful jars. . . . " (SL 273). Later Thea realizes that this definition of the pottery applies to all art:

> [W]hat was any art but an effort to make a sheath, a mould in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself--life hurrying past us and running away, too strong to stop, too sweet to lose? . . . In singing, one made a vessel of one's throat and nostrils and held it on one's breath, caught the stream in a scale of natural intervals (SL 273).

Thea's thoughts about art spring from observing religious art, a type of art which would interest Cather greatly when writing Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock. Although the reference to "the shining, elusive element" of life is hardly the religion of Moonstone's Methodists, it nonetheless suggests a spiritual dimension to life and a sense of divine purpose which one thinks of as part of religion. As Rosowski says, "a divine creative

knowledge is granted to Thea. . . . She recognizes that as an artist she can intuit the abiding in the stream of life, and by holding it, can create universal truths (Voyage Perilous 66). This new understanding of the spiritual nature of art occurs while Thea is bathing in the stream in the bottom of the cañon, making the scene a symbolic baptism and furthering the association of art with religion.[4]

Rosowski believes that Panther Cañon allows Thea to understand the passion needed to create art and describes this passion as "an experience akin to religious ecstasy--boundless, intense, consuming" (Voyage Perilous 67). The intensity of Thea's passion is felt by almost all who hear her sing, and indeed that is her power as an artist--to make others feel the universal truths of art. As Harsanyi says when asked Thea's secret, "Her secret? It is every artist's secret . . . passion. That is all. . . . Like heroism, it is inimitable in cheap materials." (SL 409).

When Doctor Archie first hears Thea in New York, he feels taken out of his body:

> He felt apart from the others. . . . [H]e seemed to be looking through an exalted calmness at a beautiful woman from far away, from another sort of life and feeling and understanding than his own, who had in her face something he had known long ago, much brightened and beautified. As a lad he used to believe that the faces of people who died were like that in the next world; the same faces, but shining with the light of a new understanding (SL 359).

Here again Cather describes the artistic experience in a religious language, making Thea's singing quite literally a heavenly experience for Doctor Archie. Like Thea, who felt herself a "new soul" at the symphony, Doctor Archie feels a "new understanding" through the experience of hearing the opera. As when Thea heard the symphony or studied the pottery, the perception of the beautiful is a spiritually transforming experience; Cather does not merely depict art as like a religious experience but implies that it is one.

Cather develops the same idea of art's spiritual basis when Thea attends the Mexican Ball where the religious allusions are numerous. Girls are wearing first communion dresses, Thea's fair skin and blond hair remind the Mexicans of Easter's liturgical colors of white and gold, and the two Ramas brothers are called "los acolitos," the altar-boys, for their attendance upon Thea. As David Stouck says in his thorough analysis of the scene, "Thea momentarily has become their artist-priestess (192-93). Such a term would be appropriate as well when Doctor Archie hears her sing and experiences his own conception of the Divine.

Despite Cather's treatment of institutionalized religion in The Song of the Lark, it is not surprising that she should describe the artist herself in religious terms, for she had done so early in her career. In a column entitled "Moral Music," written for the Nebraska State Journal (Oct.7, 1894), she wrote that God loved beauty, that

in fact,

> The world was made by an Artist, by the divinity and godhead of art, an Artist of such insatiate love of beauty that he takes all forces, all space, all time to fill them with His universe of beauty; an Artist whose dreams are so intense and real that they, too, love and suffer and have dreams of their own (KA 178).

In making the Creator an artist, Cather makes clear that the creative power of the artist is in fact a divine gift and that this gift involves loving and suffering.[5] Such a description bears striking similarity to Thea's feeling "something despairing, something glorious" (SL 181) after the Dvorak symphony. In both these passages, Cather describes a dreamer who possesses intense feelings and links art to the spiritual. Bernice Slote, discussing Cather's early journalism, says that "[f]rom the beginning" Cather linked art and religion as part of her first aesthetic principles "not only in the allegorical kingdom of art but in her primary belief that man's creation shares in some divine power" (Slote 43).

In a Journal column praising John Ruskin (May 17, 1896), Cather claims to summarize Ruskin's views but actually reveals her own and again links the artistic and the divine, explaining his "creed"

> That beauty alone is truth, and truth only is beauty; that art is supreme; that it is the highest, the only expression of whatever divinity there may be in man. That the

> highest end of an individual life is to create, or, at least, to see and feel beauty. . . . Beauty was God revealed, [Ruskin] said; man's business was to find God (KA 402).

By this definition, one who limits or prevents artistic expression is actually working against God the divine artist. If Cather, or Thea, is critical of the religion of Mr. Kronborg or the Rev. Lars Larsen, it is not because she denies belief in God and the principles of Christianity, but because those she criticizes lack feeling for that belief--they fail to fill the world with beauty as the Creator has done. Moonstone religion, in its hostility toward the expression of art and beauty, is, by Cather's and Ruskin's definitions, godless.

Very early in The Song of the Lark, Cather writes that Mr. Kronborg has "no natural, spontaneous human speech" (SL 14) and can only express religious ideas in "a book-learned language, wholly remote from anything personal, native, or homely" (SL 15). Thea's revelations in and about art, however, are almost wholly spontaneous and intensely personal. Later, after a tramp who was told to leave Moonstone has taken his revenge by drowning himself in the standpipe and contaminating the water supply, Thea wonders about the professed religion of the town, saying, "There's not one person in Moonstone that really lives the way the New Testament says" (SL 125). Though Anna and the Moonstone Methodists question Thea's religious beliefs, it is she and

not they who feels remorse for her actions and the town's. Thus, Cather creates a dichotomy which not only implies criticism of narrow institutional religion but balances this with a picture of true spirituality based upon both moral and aesthetic sensibilities. In The Song of the Lark, as Cather writes in her Preface to the 1932 edition, she was concerned mainly with Thea's awakening and struggle to "escape from a smug, domestic, self-satisfied, provincial world of ignorance" (SL [Preface] xxxii). The negative and restrictive religion of Moonstone is what must be escaped; the realization of art's power to capture life and to imitate the divine creator is her goal.

An Unrealized Artist and Religion: One of Ours

One of Ours tells the story of Claude Wheeler--raised on a Nebraska farm, educated at a denominational college, married to a cold and loveless woman, and finally happy in dying for a cause in World War I. Cather received numerous unfavorable reviews for the novel, even from critics such as H. L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, who had previously praised her work. Woodress is probably correct in asserting that many reviewers simply could not review with an open mind a novel about a young man who finds happiness in the trenches of France: "It seems clear that the hostile reviewers wanted a protagonist who experienced boredom and disillusionment in his military service and lived to criticize the society that had sent him to war" (334). Contemporary readers, still not likely to consider One of Ours among Cather's greatest works, are more likely to see that she was not glorifying war but depicting the experiences of an idealistic romantic.[6] Despite the negative reviews, One of Ours won the Pulitzer Prize and was a best-seller, cementing Cather's position as a major author with both the reading public and the critics.

Though the basic plots differ greatly, One of Ours and The Song of the Lark share many similarities. One of Ours depicts institutional religion in an even more unfavorable light than the earlier novel yet affirms again a kind of

personal spirituality and indicates that art is a means of achieving such spiritual truth. Like Thea Kronborg, Claude Wheeler must escape the narrow confines of provincial life represented most vividly by the preacher, Brother Weldon, and Claude's wife Enid. Claude ultimately succeeds in his quest, in large part through his sensitivity to art and beauty.

Early in the novel, Claude clearly states his attitude toward the religion of his family when he seeks permission to attend the state university rather than the denominational Temple College, where he has studied for two years. He says that he cannot learn anything from the Temple professors, who are mostly "preachers who couldn't make a living at preaching" (OO 23). Claude's mother, however, wants him to stay at the Temple, and he cannot argue with her. As the narrator explains,

> According to her conception of education, one should learn, not think; and above all, one must not enquire. The history of the human race, as it lay behind one, was already explained; and so was its destiny, which lay before. The mind should remain obediently within the theological concept of history (OO 24).

Such an unquestioning and complacent attitude recalls the resignation Thea felt in the congregation of her father's prayer meetings, and it inspires in Claude the same desire to find more to live for.

Brother Weldon originally convinced Mrs. Wheeler that

Claude ought to attend the Temple. Claude calls Weldon a "little pin-headed preacher" (OO 23), and the narrator describes him as a lazy man who enjoys eating Mrs. Wheeler's fine meals (OO 28). Though Claude particularly dislikes Brother Weldon, he thinks most ministers are no different: "Young men went into the ministry because they were timid or lazy and wanted society to take care of them; because they wanted to be pampered by kind, trusting women like his mother" (OO 46). Like Mr. Kronborg and Lars Larsen in The Song of the Lark, Brother Weldon enters the ministry, at least in Claude's opinion, not out of strong religious conviction but because it seems a life of ease. In Stanley Cooperman's opinion, Weldon disgusts Claude not so much because of his religion but because of his effeminacy and unctuousness (171), but that is just the point--to Claude's mind Brother Weldon has no religion, and that is why Claude scorns him. As Woodress says, the sections concerning Weldon are an attack on bigotry and smugness (329). Stouck goes further, referring to the "hypocritical posturings of supposedly religious men" and noting that Weldon's smug character is suggested by his name--"well-done" (86).

Cather does not confine the attack on orthodox religion to Brother Weldon. In Lincoln, where Claude attends Temple College, he boards with Edward Chapin and his sister Annabelle, both of whom Claude finds tiresome. Edward is studying for the ministry and is apparently quite dim: "His

natural stupidity must have been something quite out of the ordinary; after years of reverential study, he could not read the Greek Testament without a lexicon and grammar at his elbow" (OO 29). The implication is devastating--those who do not enter the ministry out of sheer laziness are simply stupid. Chapin spends much of his time practicing his elocution, which, like Mr. Kronborg's non-spontaneous and book-learned speech (SL 14-15), calls into question the sincerity of his preaching and furthers the idea, first suggested by references to Brother Weldon's fastidious dress (OO 28, 176), that ministers are more concerned with appearance than with faith. Stouck identifies the Chapins' poverty as a reflection of their religion (86). In his despair at making headway and escaping the stifling atmosphere of Temple College and his family farm and religion, Claude resembles Thea, who felt, both in Moonstone and in Chicago, trapped in her association with the church that meant conformity and singing for funerals.

As damning as Brother Weldon and the Chapins are to the image of religion in One of Ours, Claude's wife Enid is even more so. A cold woman who takes more interest in serving the missionary and temperance causes than in supporting her husband, she locks him out of their sleeping car compartment on their wedding night and later leaves him to travel to China and nurse her sick missionary sister. Claude finally acknowledges her smugness when he thinks to himself that

"Enid never questioned the rightness of her own decisions" (OO 189). After her decision to leave, Claude, understandably displeased, says, "It's not only your going. You know what's the matter with me. It's because you want to go. You are glad of a chance to get away among all those preachers, with their smooth talk and make believe" (OO 191). Even more than Brother Weldon, Enid, who had considered being a missionary also, symbolizes the hypocrisy that characterizes institutional religion; ready to proclaim the Gospel of Christian love in another hemisphere, she has no love for her own husband. Her religion is merely a set of restrictions--yet vegetarianism and Prohibition hardly seem the marks of faith and spirituality.

As a contrast to Enid's failure to love, Cather places a short but important scene after Claude's arrival in France. Claude's friend Victor has gone seeking prostitutes, and Claude has stayed behind. Sitting alone, he sees a couple walk by; the man has had an arm amputated and is clearly disturbed and anxious. Claude sees the couple walk to a church where they sit on the steps of the doorway, he with his head in her lap:

> The girl bent over her soldier, stroking his head so softly that she might have been putting him to sleep; took his one hand and held it against her bosom as if to stop the pain there. Just behind her, on the sculptured portal, some old bishop, with a pointed cap and a broken crozier, stood holding up two fingers (OO 284).

The display of real affection without Enid's fear of male flesh (OO 180) and the symbolic blessing of the church imply that Cather does not criticize religion itself but religion that takes all feeling and expression from life.

Just as Claude's antagonistic relationship with organized religion resembles Thea Kronborg's, Claude also has his own unorthodox belief, which parallels the true religious feeling that Thea displayed upon the tramp's suicide:

> Though he wanted little to do with theology and theologians, Claude would have said that he was a Christian. He believed in God, and in the spirit of the four Gospels, and in the Sermon on the Mount. He used to halt and stumble at "Blessed are the meek," until one day he happened to think that this verse was meant exactly for people like Mahailey; and surely she was blessed! (OO 46).

Like Thea, Claude is concerned with the real spirit of the Gospel, not merely with appearances. Though Enid thinks Claude unchristian because he does not conform to her standards, Cather makes clear that Enid is wrong.

Cather also clearly implies, through Claude's friends and acquaintances, that Claude is an undeveloped artist. Though he does not perform or have any particular talent and indeed feels himself unmannered and lacking in knowledge about music and art, he is attracted to other artists, and they in turn are sympathetic to him. When the Erlichs,

Claude's friends in Lincoln, are preparing to host a dinner party for their cousin, the opera singer Wilhelmina Schroeder-Schatz, Mrs. Erlich invites Claude as her guest. The boys protest, saying that Claude will be out of place in such a social setting, but Mrs. Erlich replies, "[Y]our cousin Wilhelmina will be more interested in that boy than in any of the others!" (OO 52). In fact, Mrs. Erlich is right, for the singer does like Claude, and even tells Mrs. Erlich that it is a shame there are no Erlich daughters to marry him (OO 54). Much later, when Claude arrives in France, he becomes good friends with David Gerhardt, who has given up his career as a concert violinist to enter the A.E.F. Claude admires Gerhardt and envies his great talent, feeling that he himself has none. Gerhardt likes Claude in return; he arranges a room for Claude at his own billet and later takes Claude with him to visit friends when they both have a leave. Finally, though not himself an artist, Mr. Royce, Claude's father-in-law, acknowledges Claude's aesthetic sensibilities when he says that he knew Claude would be the only person to care that the old mill was being converted from water power to an engine (OO 129). Claude's negative attitude toward machinery had been established early in the novel through his scorn for the machines that his brother Ralph always bought; Mr. Royce reiterates that point and gives it a basis in Claude's appreciation of and desire for beauty.

In addition to providing characters who recognize Claude's artistic nature, Cather provides examples of Claude's actually displaying an artistic aptitude. During the period before his marriage to Enid, Claude takes great pride in building their new house and shows aesthetic sensibilities in his architectural design and his landscaping plans. His care and joy in building for the future presage Bishop Latour's building the cathedral and similar joy in gardening in Death Comes for the Archbishop. Both men have refined sensibilities, and we have seen that, though in conflict with religion as he knows it, Claude is nevertheless a religious man.

Other events attest not only to Claude's artistic inclinations but also to a spirituality altogether foreign to the religion of his wife and Brother Weldon. Cather links these spiritual experiences to specific aesthetic experiences similar to those of Thea Kronborg or those who hear her sing.

One warm night a year and a half after his marriage, Claude undresses and climbs into the horse tank to cool off and relax. Looking at the moon, Claude thinks about distant times and far-off lands upon which the moon has shone, and of the prisons from which captives sought to see the moon.

> Inside of living people, too, captives languished. Yes, inside of people who walked and worked in the broad sun, there were captives dwelling in darkness,--never seen from birth to death. Into those prisons the

> moon shone, and the prisoners crept to the windows and looked out with mournful eyes at the white globe which betrayed no secrets and comprehended. . . . The people whose hearts were set high needed such intercourse--whose wish was so beautiful that there were no experiences in this world to satisfy it. And these children of the moon, with their unappeased longings and futile dreams, were a finer race than the children of the sun. This conception flooded the boy's heart like a second moonrise, flowed through him indefinite and strong, while he lay deathly still for fear of losing it (OO 179).

This reflective passage demonstrates that Claude recognizes his difference from others and extends the theme of his desire to escape entrapment. The moon, an emblem of the Romantic imagination and of which Claude thinks himself a child, symbolizes Claude's natural understanding of beauty, an understanding that must characterize the artist. Cather's placement of this experience within the context of bathing adds the religious dimension of a symbolic baptism and recalls Thea's revelation in Panther Cañon, where spiritual insight also occurred while bathing. Claude feels here a sense of otherness and of an Other that ought to characterize all religious figures. Moreover Cather links this religious experience to a desire for expression and for escape from the prison of "the children of the sun," thereby emphasizing that Claude's religion is one of expression as opposed to Enid's religion of repression.

A similar epiphany occurs when Claude is in Rouen. Though he had intended to visit the cathedral, where Richard

the Lion Hearted lies buried, he instead happened into the Church of St. Ouen.

> When he reached the choir he turned, and saw, far behind him, the rose window, with its purple heart. As he stood staring, hat in hand, as still as the stone figures in the chapels, a great bell, up aloft, began to strike the hour in its deep melodious throat; eleven beats, measured and far apart, as rich as the colours in the window, then silence, . . . only in his memory the throbbing of an undreamed-of quality of sound. The revelations of the glass and the bell had come almost simultaneously, as if one produced the other; and both were superlatives toward which his mind had always been groping--or so it seemed to him then (OO 291, ellipsis Cather's).

The significance of the passage is twofold. Taking place in a church, it makes clear yet again that Claude is not really in conflict with religion, only with religion as he has known it in Nebraska and as exemplified by his wife and Brother Weldon. Significantly, Cather uses the term revelations, a word which Andor Harsanyi used to explain Thea's sudden understanding of how to sing or play a work of music and which carries connotations of sudden spiritual knowledge. Claude's revelations are superlatives, implying a goodness which cannot be exceeded. Clearly, Claude has perceived some manifestation of the Divine, and it is the beauty of the stained glass and the ringing of the bell that inspire this experience, demonstrating not only Claude's artistic psyche but that the experience of perceiving art can itself be a religious experience, much as the expression

of art is for Thea. The French stained glass and bell indicate the power of art to inspire religious experiences and the use which religion can (but in Nebraska does not) make of art. It should be noted that this experience occurs in a Catholic church. As Hermione Lee says in her analysis of the religious implications of Claude's experience, "Though Claude does not become a Catholic in France, in his pilgrimages there he finds what he needs: idealism to replace materialism. . . . " (177). This experience in Rouen is another foreshadowing of the more explicit relationship between art and religious understanding which Cather develops in Death Comes for the Archbishop.

Cather creates one more strong association between religion and art in the character of David Gerhardt. While staying with M. and Mme. Joubert, David asks Claude whether he believes in immortality. When Claude confesses not to be certain, Gerhardt responds,

> Oh, don't bother about it! If it comes to you, it comes. You don't have to go after it. I arrived at it in quite the same way I used to get things in art,--knowing them and living them before I understood them. Such ideas used to seem childish to me (OO 348).

Here we have an artist expressing belief in immortality, perhaps the most basic underlying component of traditional Western religion. The faith at which Gerhardt "arrives" came as art did--through feeling, rather than through anything rational. He seems to say that the expression of

art is merely another way of expressing religious concepts: art and religion act as different signifiers for the same, ultimately unsignifiable, signified. One recalls Cather's words in the essay "Escapism": "Religion and art spring from the same root and are close kin" (WCW 27). For David Gerhardt, religion and art seem not only to spring from the same root but one from another.

Cather ends this novel that initially expresses such scorn for Protestant institutional religion with strong affirmations of personal faith. Though Claude dies perhaps deluded about the ultimate goodness of the war mission, "believing his own country better than it was, and France better than any country can ever be" (OO 391), he nevertheless decides "he [has] no quarrel with Destiny" and is happy "that men [can] still die for an idea" (OO 357). Like his friend Gerhardt, Claude seems to have come to a new understanding or spiritual awareness through the war and has escaped the Nebraska religion without giving up religious faith itself.

After Claude's death Cather shifts back to the farm on Lovely Creek to end with a short scene describing Mrs. Wheeler and Mahailey after Claude's death. Though Mrs. Wheeler's faith was constricting to Claude, he never believed it empty, cold, or hypocritical; and Mahailey's beautiful simpleness allowed Claude to accept that the meek may be blessed. The reader can trust that their faith is

real and acceptable to both Claude and Cather:

> Mrs. Wheeler always feels that God is near, --but Mahailey is not troubled by any knowledge of interstellar spaces, and for her He is nearer still,--directly overhead, not so very far above the kitchen stove (OO 391).

This strong affirmation of faith simply reinforces other such statements earlier in the novel and, expressed in the context of the two women's domestic chores and mutual affection, heightens the contrast with the religion of lazy Brother Weldon and heartless Enid.

Rather than being simply a war novel which Cather, as a woman who saw nothing of the war, was unqualified to write, One of Ours is a novel about the nature of religious faith. Cather's exposition of this theme through an unrealized artist makes the book a bridge between the earlier The Song of the Lark, with its artist heroine whose art is itself a religious experience, and the later Death Comes for the Archbishop, in which religious figures gain greater spiritual insight through art. Claude Wheeler, who initially appears to possess neither artistic nor religious inclinations, actually possesses both, and the one reinforces the other.

The Religious Artist:
Death Comes for the Archbishop

Nearly all critics agree that Death Comes for the Archbishop is one of Cather's finest novels. She herself recognized its quality and requested an extra one percent royalty from her publisher, telling Alfred Knopf that his son would be paying royalties to her niece after both author and publisher were dead (Woodress 391). The American Academy of Art and Letters awarded Cather its Howells Medal for the novel, and reviews were uniformly favorable. The novel tells the story of a French missionary bishop, Jean Marie Latour, and his vicar, Joseph Vaillant, as they organize the vast Diocese of Santa F with its Indian missions, Mexican villages, and new American settlers. The use of Catholic clergy as sympathetic main characters makes clear that the attitude toward institutional religion differs in Death Comes for the Archbishop from that displayed in the previously discussed novels. Also in contrast to The Song of the Lark and One of Ours, Cather's emphasis shifts away somewhat from the artist and the people who hinder the artist to the spiritual nature of art itself. Susie Thomas's analysis of the novel states the issue quite simply:

> [I]t seems to me the novel is fundamentally about art. Not only is this one of the major themes, but Latour is both an artist and a priest, and in construction and style the

novel owes much to painting (Thomas 148).

Thomas's point that Latour is an artist and priest makes clear that not only does the institutional religion of this novel not hinder the creation of art, it is firmly linked and almost equated with art. Most of the novel's art is a specifically religious art, the creation and appreciation of which furthers religious feeling.

Though Cather drew heavily on Catholic tradition in Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock, which followed it, she herself, of course, was not Catholic, though she was clearly sympathetic to Catholicism. Some critics have claimed that her interest in the Catholic church was wholly aesthetic, but a careful analysis of the "Catholic novels" shows such a charge to be unfair, though it is true that she was not a religious author whose interests lay in proselytizing.[7] Though Cather's interest in Catholicism was more than just aesthetic, John Randall is correct when he writes that Cather "associated Catholicism with beauty and Protestantism with the deprivation of Beauty . . . " (304). What Randall does not seem to understand, but The Song of the Lark and One of Ours clearly demonstrate, is that Cather's affirmation of beauty springs from the power of beauty to elicit a sense of the spiritual. Her interest in and favorable treatment of Catholicism springs from the Catholic church's recognition and encouragement of the aesthetic experience as a valid means

to spirituality. Her negative treatment of Protestantism in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours derives from its failures to appreciate the power of art and to encourage the artist.[8]

The first reference which Cather makes to Bishop Latour occurs in the Prologue, when an American missionary bishop dines with three cardinals and discusses the appointment of a new Vicar Apostolic for New Mexico. When the Spanish cardinal expresses a hope that the new man will be an artist, Bishop Ferrand replies, "No, I can't promise you--I do not know, I have noticed that he is a man of severe and refined tastes, but he is very reserved" (DCA 13). Bishop Ferrand's statement is important, because although the most immediately noticeable difference between Latour and the clergy in the Nebraska novels is his work ethic (Manuel Lujon thinks that it is "not to their discredit that [Latour and Vaillant] worked like a pair of common parish priests [DCA 63]), the more important distinction is that Latour not only has refined tastes, but, in building a cathedral for Santa Fé, is an artist. Certainly in this respect Latour stands in contrast to the clergymen of The Song of the Lark and One of Ours. Though the Rev. Lars Larsen fancies himself a musician, Cather makes clear that with his laziness and his taste for candy and sentimental novels, Larsen is not an artist, nor do Mr. Kronborg or Brother Weldon have any aesthetic sensibility. Latour's refined

tastes, however, form an important part of his character and affect the nature of his spiritual life.

Jean Marie Latour, as a number of critics have commented, is the character through whom Cather can present the spiritual power of art.[9] Many characters in the novel acknowledge the Bishop's refinement and artistic sensitivity. Antonio and Isabella Olivares are a wealthy and sophisticated couple who enjoy music, fine food and wine, and beautiful furniture and decorations. The couple are very fond of Bishop Latour and Father Vaillant. They give the Bishop a silver hand-basin and pitcher with toilet accessories which he uses and enjoys throughout his life: "Do a Isabella once remarked that her husband always gave Father Vaillant something good for the palate, and Father Latour something good for the eye" (DCA 179). Just as Father Vaillant draws nourishment from food, Latour takes his strength from that which is beautiful.

Shortly before his death, the Bishop's "eye" again gives him strength when he approaches Santa F in the evening and sees for the last time the cathedral which he planned so carefully:

> Wrapped in his Indian blankets, the old Archbishop sat for a long while, looking at the open, golden, face of his Cathedral. . . .
>
> No one but Molny [the architect] and the Bishop had ever seemed to enjoy the beautiful site of that building,--perhaps no one ever would. But these two had spent many an hour admiring it (DCA 271-72).

In this passage Cather describes the Bishop and an architect as aesthetic equals and superior in aesthetic sensibility to the general population. Cather also tells us that the Bishop has a fine garden which he planned and works himself. Interestingly, building and gardening were the means by which Claude Wheeler expressed his artistic feeling in One of Ours. As in The Song of the Lark and One of Ours, then, Cather has written a novel with an artist as the protagonist, and throughout the novel she shows that Bishop Latour's spiritual leadership follows from his aesthetic sensibilities.

The reader first views Jean Marie Latour as he travels to his new diocese and finds himself overwhelmed by the uniform landscape of conical red hills--"some geometrical nightmare" (DCA 18). The traveller, described as "sensitive to the shape of things" (DCA 18), finally sees a juniper tree, the trunk of which splits into two horizontal branches, "with a little crest of green in the centre, just above the cleavage. Living vegetation could not present more faithfully the form of the Cross" (DCA 18-19). Latour dismounts to pray and arises refreshed. This incident reveals perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Latour, what Marilyn Arnold calls his "Integrating Vision": "Seen through Latour's eyes, this tree and a multitude of other images . . . acquire a spiritual character beyond their

ordinary meanings" (43). Arnold explains that in times of stress and reflection "Latour is especially likely to reach from an object to a religious thought" (44). Though Latour often finds inspiration from an object in nature, as he does before the Cruciform Tree, even more often works of art lead him to heightened spiritual consciousness.

When the Bishop returns from his trip to Durango, he awakens to hear a bell ringing the Angelus and has a remarkable experience:

> He recovered consciousness slowly, unwilling to let go of a pleasing delusion that he was in Rome. . . . Full, clear, with something bland and suave, each note floated through the air like a globe of silver. Before the nine strokes were done Rome faded, and behind it he sensed something Eastern, 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 (DCA 43).

Here, an aesthetic experience--hearing a bell with a lovely tone--creates for Latour a sense both of Rome and Jerusalem, the two holy cities of the Catholic church. The depiction of art's power to take one out of oneself to a new spiritual awareness recalls Doctor Archie's first experience of hearing Thea sing in The Song of the Lark (SL 359) and Claude's revelation at the church of St. Ouen, in which he is inspired not only by stained glass, but also by the ringing of the church bell (OO 291-92). In all these instances, beauty momentarily and unexpectedly creates for

the perceiver a spiritual experience which Cather can suggest but not explain.

The novel's most explicit linking of art and religion occurs in a chapter entitled "December Night," in which Latour, whom we know to have the instinctive ability to use the physical as a path to the spiritual, consciously addresses the issue. Unable to sleep and overcome with self and spiritual doubt, the Bishop determines to go pray in the church. In the door of the sacristy, he sees a poor Mexican woman, the slave of a cruel American family, crying because the door is locked; normally prevented from attending Mass or even seeing priests, she had slipped out of her room in hopes of entering the church to pray. The Bishop opens the church and enters with her, escorting her to the Lady Chapel.

> Old Sada fell on her knees and kissed the floor. She kissed the feet of the Holy Mother, the pedestal on which they stood, crying all the while. But from the working of her face, from the beautiful tremors which passed over it, he knew they were tears of ecstasy.
>
> "Nineteen years, Father; nineteen years since I have seen the holy things of the altar!"
>
> "All that is passed, Sada. You have remembered the holy things in your heart. We will pray together" (DCA 214).

The "holy things" are not, of course, holy in themselves but because of what they represent. When Latour says she has remembered them in her heart, he indicates that the faith,

not the devotions to a particular physical object, is what matters, that the physical objects are a way of fostering faith. Because of Sada, the Bishop becomes more aware than ever of the power of art:

> Never . . . had it been permitted him to behold such deep experience of the holy joy of religion as on that pale December night. He was able to feel, kneeling beside her, the preciousness of the things of the altar to her who was without possessions; the tapers, the image of the Virgin, the figures of the saints, the Cross that took away indignity from suffering and made pain and poverty a means of fellowship with Christ (DCA 217).

Once again, the Bishop makes clear that the images and beautiful decoration are a means and not an end. The end is that "deep experience of the holy joy of religion." Beauty and art contribute to the religious experience but are not the experience itself, in the same way that Claude perceives something more than light and sound in the Church of St. Ouen, though those physical properties allow him to perceive that something else.

When Sada leaves, Bishop Latour gives her a silver medal that has an image of the Virgin on it and has been blessed by the Pope. He thinks, "[F]or one who cannot read--or think--the Image, the physical form of Love!" (DCA 219). Yet, as Latour himself demonstrates, the "Image" is not just for those who cannot read, for he also feels a renewed love in his experience with Sada before the altar. Throughout the novel, Latour is as sensitive to manmade

religious images as to the landscape which so often inspires or repels him. In the early incident at Agua Secreta he takes an interest in the statues of the sorrowing Virgin and the equestrian Santiago. Later he reflects upon a wooden figure of the Virgin in Santa Fé, for which the people make beautiful costumes and jewelry: "She was their doll and their queen, something to fondle and something to adore, as Mary's Son must have been to Her" (DCA 257). Latour understands that these images are expressions of love, much as Thea understood that art finds its basis in feeling rather than intellect. And though art springs from love and feeling, its power is to inspire those same feelings in others, which is why the Church encourages the use of art and images in worship.

Though Cather most often addresses the relationship of art and religion through Latour, she does not do so exclusively. In the story of Juan Diego's vision of the Blessed Virgin, told by the narrator, Cather again links religion to art and shows both as a function of love. As proof of her appearance, the Virgin gives the poor Diego roses, though it is December, and tells him to keep the flowers bundled in his tilma. When the man opens the tilma and strews the roses before his bishop, a beautiful painting of the Virgin is displayed upon the poor garment. The painting, for which a shrine is built and to which miracles are ascribed, has lasted three centuries on poor flimsy

material (DCA 46-49). Cather describes a work of art that not only depicts a religious image but that inspires religious faith and devotion in the people who see it. Vaillant explains that all the poor Mexicans take great comfort in knowing that the Virgin has appeared in their own country. They show their devotion to the Virgin and the saints through making statues and other works of art, and they see the Virgin return their affection by giving them a miraculous painting.

Cather uses the story of the Virgin's appearance to address the nature of miracles by juxtaposing the interpretations of Father Vaillant and the Bishop. The former contrasts a miracle to doctrine as "something we can hold in our hands and love" (DCA 50). The more artistically inclined Latour, however, responds,

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

Latour's definition of a miracle as improving perception links the miracle to art, which is a form of expressing perception. His emphasis on momentary understanding of a true essence echoes Thea's definition of art as an attempt

"to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself . . . " (SL 273). Interestingly, the Bishop explains a theological concept in terms of perception after a story about religious art; Thea gains an understanding of art after thinking about the religion of the Ancient People and reflecting upon the religious implications of their pottery. Yet bishop and singer are both interested in capturing an ultimate truth which springs from feeling and can be experienced but not understood. An artist may alter the reality of a landscape or portrait in order to make a more beautiful painting--or to make obvious the beauty which is often not perceived--much as the miracle, through divine love, "corrects" human vision so that one may see or hear the beauty which is always present but too-little perceived. As Merrill Skaggs says, "Both art and religion are forms of miracle. In fact, a central theme of this [novel] is the nature of miracle" (Skaggs, "Death Comes" 406). Religion and art are forms of miracle because both spring from love--of others and of the beauty of life itself.

Near the end of the novel, when Archbishop Latour begins to make plans for his death, a young priest of whom he is fond says that one does not die of a cold such as the Archbishop has. The old man responds, "I shall not die of a cold, my son. I shall die of having lived" (DCA 269). Art and religion spring from and increase love, and these two

principles are the guiding forces in Latour's life. The Archbishop could well say that he will die of having loved. And as the novel shows when the whole Mexican population of Santa Fé and many others fall upon their knees at Latour's death (DCA 299), his love is returned. More than the first two novels discussed, Death Comes for the Archbishop addresses, through the relationship of art and religion, the power and nature of love. Cather will continue this emphasis in Shadows on the Rock, the other "Catholic novel" which immediately followed Death Comes for the Archbishop.

Artistic Religion: Shadows on the Rock

The final novel of this study may appear at the outset to be most un-Catheresque. The story of daily life in seventeenth century Quebec, told from the point-of-view of a pre-adolescent girl whom most critics find at least somewhat unrealistic, may strike one as a far cry from Thea Kronborg's epic striving to break away from the constricting life of a small-town existence and become an artist. Cather said of Shadows on the Rock that she wished to depict "the curious endurance of a kind of culture, narrow but definite" (WCW 15). Though several of the characters in the novel are artistic, Cather's admitted interest in the endurance of a culture, rather than in any specific individuals of that culture, marks an important difference in this novel. Yet different as the novel is in style and plot from The Song of the Lark, Shadows on the Rock shares with the other novels that have been examined an interest in the relationship between the aesthetic and spiritual experience. In Shadows on the Rock, art is depicted as serving religion, Catholicism, and Cather, continuing the theme she had treated in Death Comes for the Archbishop, shows both to be a function of love.

Perhaps even more than in Death Comes for the Archbishop, Catholic tradition is integral to Shadows on the Rock.[10] In Skaggs's words, "The crucial importance of the

church to this enterprise is a matter Cather stresses repeatedly, not only through locational or geographic symbol, but also through direct statement" ("Good Girl" 30). Time itself is measured by the liturgical calendar and by the church bell ringing for mass and prayers. The clergy in this novel are not central and sympathetic characters like Latour and Vaillant, nor figures of scorn such as Brother Weldon; instead, in Bishop Laval (often called Monseigneur l'Ancien), Cather depicts a strong-willed and not altogether likeable man who nonetheless strives to serve the people and God. As the narrator says, "He [Laval] was a stubborn, high-handed, tyrannical, quarrelsome old man, but no one could deny that he shepherded his sheep" (SR 74). Laval's successor, Bishop de Saint-Vallier, described as vain and impulsive early in the novel, by the end has repented and determined to imitate Laval's example of self-sacrifice. Whatever their faults, these men are not lazy like Mr. Kronborg, the Rev. Lars Larsen, and Brother Weldon, nor does Cather imply through the Bishops' faults that the Church itself is at fault.

Though the bishops are neither central characters nor artists per se, Cather links both to religious art and aesthetic sensibilities in her description of midnight mass on Christmas Eve:

> Monseigneur de Saint-Vallier would doubtless wear the aube of rich lace given him by Madame de Maintenon for his consecration at

> Saint-Sulpice, in Paris, ten years ago. In one matter he and the old Bishop always agreed; that the services of the Church should be performed in Quebec as elaborately, as splendidly, as anywhere else in the world. For many years Bishop Laval had kept himself miserably poor to make the altar and the sacristy rich (SR 113).

It is not enough merely to follow the proper liturgical forms--they must be performed with beauty. Beautiful vestments, altar hangings, cruets, patens, and chalices all make worship itself more beautiful. Almost all the people attend mass at the Cathedral, not as a duty but as a treat. Though Cather does not describe the mass itself, one senses that it will be as moving an experience as hearing the New World Symphony was for Thea or seeing the rose window of the Church of St. Ouen was for Claude.

Woodress notes that Shadows on the Rock "is preoccupied with time and eternity," that its central symbol, the rock, symbolizes order and stability (434). Another symbol of order and of time is the bell, which, as in One of Ours and Death Comes for the Archbishop, links human and spiritual time. Cather frequently mentions old Bishop Laval's ringing the bell for early mass. The bell rung in the cold before dawn inspires people who would rather sleep to go to church: "Because they thought of the old Bishop at the end of the bell-rope, and because his will was stronger than theirs" (SR 74). On All Souls' Day, the Bishop rings the bell hourly from one in the morning until early mass:

> It called out through the intense silence of streets. . . .
>
> "<u>Priez pour les Morts,</u>
> <u>Vous qui reposez,</u>
> <u>Priez pour les tré-pas-sés</u>!"
>
> it seemed to say, as if the exacting old priest himself were calling (<u>SR</u> 94).

Though the message of Laval's bell is different from that of the Angelus bell which causes Bishop Latour to think of Rome and Jerusalem, in both instances the tolling of the bell reflects the Catholic use of symbolism, in which physical objects and aesthetic experiences reflect and inspire religious devotion.

In addition to the Bishops' work to beautify church and worship, the religious whom Cather presents also display artistic impulses. The Reverend Mother Juschereau, Superior of the Hospitalières, on the rare occasions when she rests, makes artificial flowers from cloth and colored paper for poor rural parishes without altar decorations. The Recluse, Jeanne Le Ber, embroiders "those beautiful altar-cloths and vestments which went out from her stone chamber to churches all over the province" (<u>SR</u> 134-35). Both women have artistic talent, but these talents are directed to the use of the Church so that even the poorest parishes may have beautiful altars. For both these women, so different in all but their faith, the creation of art is not merely a personal spiritual experience but one which, by lending

beauty to the corporate religious experience, can increase the faith of others also. Whereas institutional religion in the persons of Mr. Kronborg and Brother Weldon hampered the expression of art, in Shadows on the Rock it fosters art. Indeed all the artistic objects and creative experiences in the novel are ultimately a function of religious devotion.

Although the clergy and religious of Quebec are important in the link between religion and art, the specific objects of religious art serve this purpose even more fully. One day, after being caught in a downpour, Cécile Auclair and her young friend Jacques dash into the Church of Notre Dame de la Victoire, which was formerly the Church of the Infant Jesus. The High Altar of the church has a reredos carved like a feudal castle; the arched gateway serves as a tabernacle for the Host, and in the towers are statues of the various members of the Holy Family. This unusual sculpture fascinates Cécile and Jacques:

> Cécile had always taken it for granted that the Kingdom of Heaven looked exactly like this from the outside and was surrounded by just such walls; that this altar was a reproduction of it, made in France by people who knew, just as the statues of the saints and of the Holy Family were portraits. She had taught Jacques to believe the same thing, and it was very comforting to them both to know just what Heaven looked like,--strong and unassailable, wherever it was set among the stars (SR 64-65).

Cécile does have a tendency toward credulity, as her unquestioning belief in the miracles ascribed to Jeanne Le

Ber and Mother Catherin de Saint-Augustin demonstrates, and one rather hopes that she will gain a bit of her father's skepticism as she matures. Nevertheless, her belief in the power of art to depict the heavenly and saintly indicates the general attitude toward art in the novel. The Church uses something which the people have seen--a feudal castle not unlike the Château of the Count de Frontenac--to symbolize the unseen and difficult to conceive--the protecting and ordering power of the Kingdom of Heaven. As the narrator explains, the thought that Heaven is something they can understand is "comforting." And because it comforts, it increases the faith of those who behold. Just as beautiful churches and vestments increase the awe and devotion of people during worship, the decorations and pictures both inspire and provide a sense of surety and order, particularly for the settlers in Quebec, striving to create a new civilization in a clearly hostile environment. In her explanation of the effect of the artwork upon the children, Cather essentially confirms Latour's belief in the image as the physical form of love; it is as though Cather had presented the point-of-view of Old Sada, ecstatic at the sight of the "holy things."

Another important object of religious art is the cr che that Cécile's aunts in France sent her to open on Christmas Eve. Cécile builds this with the help of little Jacques and Blinker, the deformed and normally reticent man who minds

the baker's ovens at night. Cécile had planned long for this occasion, and Cather describes the arrangements of placing the crèche and the individual objects in it in great detail. For both Jacques and Blinker, preparing the cr che is a moving experience; Jacques is afraid to touch the objects except when Cécile tells him to, and Blinker leaves crying (SR 107,09). Later in the evening, Jacques returns with a present for the baby Jesus in the crèche, a carved beaver given him by one of his prostitute mother's clients:

> "He isn't new," Jacques went on anxiously. "He's just my little old beaver the sailor made me, but he could keep the baby warm. I take him to bed with me when I'm cold sometimes, and he keeps me warm" (SR 111).

Cécile is confused about the propriety of placing a North American beaver in a crèche, but Madame Pommier tells her not to worry: "Our Lord died for Canada as well as for the world over there, and the beaver is our very special animal" (SR 111).

The words of both Jacques and Madame Pommier demonstrate the nature of art as a link to religious devotion and understanding. Jacques's beaver, simple though it is, represents his desire to give something to Jesus. Young though he is, Jacques does understand that the doll in the cr che is not real, but he also understands that his beaver can express symbolically his hope that the baby was warm in its manger--if the baby were real, he, who has known

the cold, would want it to be warm. Similarly, the older Madame Pommier understands that little Jacques's beaver can symbolize the universality of Christ's sacrifice. Thus, the little piece of carved artwork symbolizes both human and divine love. The physical objects of the cr che make the story of the Incarnation more meaningful to the children and provide a means of expressing their religious devotion, much as the Mexicans in Santa Fé express their love for the Blessed Virgin by making clothes and jewelry for their Madonna doll (DCA 257). As with Sada's ecstasy at the altar things with Bishop Latour, it is not the images themselves which merit devotion but the concept which the image represents. As Latour said and Jacques's gesture proves, the image can become a physical form of love.

In describing both the church altar and the crèche, Cather is careful to emphasize the beauty of the objects, but she focuses on the appreciation of the art rather than its creation. In fact, the artist is of no consequence; what matters is the religious implication of the artwork. Rather than giving a spiritual quality to the experience of beauty, Shadows on the Rock gives an artistic dimension to religious concepts and feelings. As in the earlier novels, religion and art are still linked, but the individual expression and perception of art does not lead to the non-sectarian spiritual awareness of Thea or Claude but to a greater understanding of specifically Christian theology.

Art is seen as a means of achieving religious faith but is not equated with that faith. Rather than making the search for beauty a divine mandate (KA 402), the later novel mandates that the search for the divine be beautiful.

Cather does present one form of artwork which is not specifically related to the Church, yet this art is, in some ways, the most religiously oriented art in the novel. More than in the previously discussed novels, the domestic arts take prominence as a creative and ordering force in Shadows on the Rock. Twelve-year-old Cécile has kept house for her widowed father for two years when the novel opens. Before her death Madame Auclair had instructed Cécile on how to keep the house in order to please her father: "You will see that your father's whole happiness depends on order and regularity, and you will come to feel pride in it. Without order our lives would be disgusting, like those of the poor savages" (SR 24). The order which is so important to Madame Auclair is that of a well-kept house with traditional foods served in the traditional way. In this sense, the rituals of the home are not unlike the rituals of the Church in creating regularity in one's life. Yet housekeeping results in more than just order; it is an art that actually allows one to enjoy life, as Cécile learns when she travels with her friend and future husband Pierre Charron to the Île d'Orléans.

Disgusted by the dirty house and linen, Cécile recalls

her mother, who "had always made everything at home beautiful, just as here everything about cooking, eating, sleeping, living seemed repulsive" (SR 192). That Madame Auclair made things beautiful which might not otherwise be so and thereby makes others happy indicates that housework is an art. Like art in the earlier novels and the religious art of this novel, fine housekeeping is an expression of love that enables one to appreciate beauty in life which might otherwise go unnoticed.

Thea Kronborg distinguished between merely fulfilling needs and doing so with beauty in her examination of the water jars of the Ancient People (SL 272-73). The water jars had religious significance because they contained life-giving water, and for this reason their makers created works of art, not merely jars. The association of art with the life-sustaining is developed in Shadows on the Rock when Cécile returns home from the le d'Orl ans and begins to prepare dinner:

> These coppers, big and little, these brooms and clouts and brushes, were tools; and with them one made, not shoes or cabinet-work, but life itself. One made a climate within a climate; one made the days,--the complexion, the special flavour, the special happiness of each day as it passed; one made life (SR 198).

Here domestic work is an act which does more than make life orderly or even enjoyable--it creates life itself to be lived. Rosowski rightly comments that in a sense, Cécile's

art, seemingly commonplace, as described by Cather is radically more powerful than Thea Kronborg's singing, which could contain life for a moment: "Creation for Cécile involves bringing life into existence where it did not exist before, and in that is similar to the theological ex nihilo creation of God" ("Magnificat" 72). When C cile "makes days and climates," recalling the first creation story of Genesis, she is not an artist seeking the divine, nor discovering the divine, but literally imitating the divine. Moreover, as Rosowski observes, Cather furthers the association of Cécile with both the religious and the life-giving by making her a surrogate mother to Jacques. In fact, Rosowski reads the novel as a re-creation of the Holy Family with Cécile as the Virgin, Euclide as Joseph, and Jacques as Jesus (Voyage Perilous 184-87, and "Magnificat" 70-71). Certainly Cécile is pious, and she strives to inculcate religious feeling in all she does. Perhaps more important though is simply that by making life beautiful and orderly for those around her Cécile expresses her love, just as the church bells and holy days serve to express divine love and ecclesiastical care, thereby ordering and beautifying the communal life.

In discussing Cather's interest in relocation and settling, whether to Nebraska from Virgina or to Quebec from France, Sharon O'Brien states that throughout her life and in her fiction Cather esteemed the role of women and

domestic work in preserving life:

> The rituals of domesticity--preserving, cooking, gardening, housekeeping--are the bearers of culture in her fiction, where establishing a home signifies the human ability to transform an empty world into an inhabited one (74).

O'Brien's description of the transformation of an empty world into an inhabited one echoes Rosowski's explanation of Cécile's ex nihilo creation in Shadows on the Rock. Thus, the importance of domestic rituals in Shadows on the Rock is not new to Cather, though the emphasis given it and its association with religious rituals are perhaps. Yet if Cécile is an artist, then, given the pictures we have of Thea Kronborg, Claude Wheeler, and Bishop Latour, one expects a spiritual dimension to her art, and in this she is not so different from Thea Kronborg after all.

In the early journalistic writing with which she began her career, Cather linked art and religion, calling the Creator an artist and terming the creation of art an expression of the divine in man (KA 178, 402). In Shadows on the Rock, written over thirty years later, we see her continue to link art with religion. Art expresses and increases religious feeling, the creation of art is an expression of love, and Cécile is an artist who imitates the Creator by creating life for others. In a sense, very little has changed. Yet Cather's method of treating the relationship between art and religion changed as her own

understanding of that changed. The early scorn of institutional religion accompanied an interest in artist-heroes such as Thea Kronborg and Claude Wheeler. The older Cather, who has settled herself comfortably into the Episcopal church and begun to face the deaths of family and friends, turns her attention to the community, examining the various groups of inhabitants of the American Southwest and the French settlers of Quebec. That movement in Cather's fiction accompanies the shift in emphasis from the spiritual dimension of art to the aesthetic dimension of religion. Put another way, one might say that in the earlier novels, art precedes faith, while in the later two it results from faith, but the dynamic between the artistic and the religious remained an issue throughout her career. Bohlke believes that "Willa Cather's religious life [was] one of pilgrimage--a quest that was consistently accompanied by discovery" (268). In a sense each of the four novels which have been discussed is a part of that quest, expressing Cather's anger with the narrow and anti-aesthetic Protestantism of her youth, her sense of the spiritual essence of art, the potential of art to lead to faith in the individual, and her later interest in the power of art to express the beliefs of organized religion and ultimately to create and preserve civilized society. Cather was always an artist and always religious, and much of the power of her fiction derives from her quest to understand and depict the

nature of the interaction between the these two powerful forces in her nature. In all the novels, the creation of art is linked to love, and art is a means of expressing love for others, God, or life itself. Although the emphasis in Cather's fiction shifted from the spiritual basis of the artist's experience to the power of art to depict and, more importantly, inspire religious faith in both the individuals and communities, she does not argue for specific religious doctrines, but depicts the importance of faith and love and affirms that both are part of art and religion. Thus Cather said in "Escapism" what she had been demonstrating for so long in her novels--that religion and art "spring from the same root and are close kin."

NOTES

[1]Harold Bloom in the introduction to his collection of essays on Cather rates My Antonia, A Lost Lady, and The Professor's House as her three best novels, adding that Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock are "[e]qually beautiful and achieved, but rather less central," with O Pioneers! "only just short of this grand sequence" (1). I believe, however, that Death Comes for the Archbishop and Shadows on the Rock are very central to the Cather canon because both examine so closely the nature of art and its relationship to religion.

[2]L. Brent Bohlke's excellent account of Cather's relationships with Bishop Beecher and the Rev. John Bates, rector of Grace Church in Red Cloud, draws largely upon the Beecher correspondence and is highly informative.

[3]Though initial reviews were generally favorable most modern critics agree with Cather's English publisher, who thought the novel overwritten (Woodress 272-73). Cather cut many passages in a 1932 re-issue and expressed in her Preface to that edition a degree of dissatisfaction with her work.

[4]Cather herself seems to have had the same interest in Indian art, especially pottery, that Thea has. In the essay "Escapism" she uses Indian pottery to explain her idea that art does not--and should not--serve utilitarian purposes and again ascribes to art a spiritual basis: "Anyone who looks over a collection of prehistoric Indian pottery dug up from old burial-mounds knows at once that the potters experimented with form and colour to gratify something that had no concern with food and shelter. The major arts . . . sprang from an unaccountable predilection of the one unaccountable thing in man" (WCW 19).

[5]Edward and Lillian Bloom, in their discussion of Cather's identification of art and religion, note that the artist and the devout man must each suffer, the one learning sympathy, the other, compassion (Bloom and Bloom 138).

[6]Hermione Lee cites a letter from Cather to her friend Dorothy Canfield Fisher in which she compares Claude to Henry Fleming in The Red Badge of Courage; Lee also notes the gap "between the idealistic hero and the deflating, realist language" (169-70). See also Stouck (82-96) and Schwind ("The Beautiful War"). Like Lee, Stanley Cooperman makes the case that Cather is not really treating war but is examining the psychology "which helped fashion the bold journey to war" (175). David Stouck (88-89) and Woodress (329) both discuss the structural and thematic similarities of One of Ours and T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, another work which was not appreciated when first published.

[7]John Randall is particularly critical of Cather's use of Catholicism, finding the novel only "incidentally Catholic" (306). Harold Bloom's stance is similar in his discussion of "Cather's quite Paterian religion of art" (2). David Daiches does not think religion is particularly important in the novel (113) and questions the "aesthetic appropriateness" of Cather's use of Catholicism (126). Lionel Trilling erroneously states that from the start of her career "the Church had occupied a special and gracious place in Willa Cather's mind" (Murphy 11).

[8]Merrill Skaggs denies that the Catholicism of the novel is merely aesthetic, explaining that because "religion itself comes to seem, by the end, the highest art of any culture[,] . . . the novel leads to a deep respect for all religion, as for all sincerely functional and indigenous forms of art" (Skaggs, "Death Comes" 406).

[9]See Arnold; Doane; Lee 268; Randall 268, 279; Schwind, "Schismatic Church" 80; Stouck 143-44; and Synnott 11-12 for a variety of readings and opinions which all begin with the premise that Latour either is an artist or has highly developed aesthetic sensibilities.

[10]Edith Lewis, Cather's companion of nearly forty years, believed that the "Catholic theme" was one reason Cather so enjoyed Quebec and the book about it: "[I]t may have been in part a reluctance to leave that world of Catholic feeling and tradition [in Death Comes for the Archbishop] in which she had lived so happily for so long that led her to embark on this novel" (155).

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