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"He sat
in the middle of
his own consciousness . . ."

GEORGE GREENE

Death Comes for the Archbishop

OF THE WORKS OF WILLA CATHER PERHAPS THE MOST FAMILIAR TO THE general public, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* has, nevertheless, aroused conflicting response as to its merit. E. K. Brown, for example, has interpreted the text in terms of a "frieze." "The composition of this frieze," he writes, "in the grouping of its figures and their portrayal against a living background, is the most beautiful achievement of Willa Cather's imagination." David Daiches, on the other hand, while admitting the popularity of the book, has found himself less impressed, "perhaps because its qualities, though considerable, are rather obvious." Mr. Daiches pursues his suspicion of a "soft" quality, summarizing it as "a novel both sophisticated and elemental, both meditative and full of action, an epic success story with a brightly colored surface — such a novel could hardly fail to be acclaimed as her most effective work to date."

The temperate calm of the prose has impressed another critic as "a frank and even romantic submission to the past, to the Catholic order and doctrine, and the deserts of California and New Mexico in which the two priests . . . lived with such quiet and radiant perfection." Alfred Kazin, from whom this is taken, further characterizes Miss Cather's "secession": "Her characters," he explains, "no longer had to submit to failure; they lived in a charming and almost antediluvian world of their own."

It is my view, in contrast, that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* carries forward exploratory impulses notable as far back as *O Pioneers!* My conclusion is that it powerfully verifies the search for the moral self which energizes Miss Cather's finest achievements, its basic operative mode being one of discovery rather than recollection. It is a fitting

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precursor to *Shadows on the Rock*, which chronicles the local victories of an achieved order, however embattled. "The longer I stayed in the Southwest," Willa Cather has said, "the more I felt that the story of the Catholic Church in that country was the most interesting of all its stories." Formal elements in her book are anticipated by her response to native churches, some of them centuries old. "They were all fresh, individual, first-hand." Local craftsmanship, roughhewn and unself-conscious, connotes individual effort rather than organizational skills. Frontier settings provide dramatic contrast to Archbishop Lamy, prototype of her hero. "In his pictures," Miss Cather has explained, "one felt the same thing, something fearless and fine and very, very well-bred — something that spoke of race." She then sketches what was in all probability her initial creative impulse: "What I felt curious about was the daily life of such a man in a crude frontier society."

General outlines thus emerge: tribute to pioneer robustness and aesthetic sensibility, qualities which found partial expression in the modest loyalty, the unlettered courage of Alexandra Bergson and Antonia Shimerda. By 1927, however, individual stamina does not suffice, and our story, spanning approximately thirty years, develops the strenuous process by which a frontier area is cultivated by two men of God.

"I had all my life wanted to do something in the style of legend, which is absolutely the reverse of dramatic treatment." Thus Miss Cather explains her formal program. In the prologue, when the prelates discuss the new appointment, a French cardinal insists: "'He must be a man to whom order is necessary — as dear as life.'" It is in this area, dissemination of order based upon religious values, that Bishop Latour transcends the impasse torturing Godfrey St. Peter. Early in his residence in Santa Fe, the young man consecrated Vicar Apostolic of New Mexico awakens to the sound of a bell. "Before the nine strokes were done," he moves backward in time, "Rome faded, and behind it he sensed something Eastern, with palm trees — Jerusalem, perhaps, though he had never been there." Later, choosing stone for his cathedral, Bishop Latour is vividly conscious of history. "'When I look up at this rock,'" he says, "'I can almost feel the Rhone behind me.'" And he returns in memory to the pale brown color of the Palace of the Popes at Avignon.

Associated with this sense of the past and of a living culture emerging from that past, one finds stories, most of them dealing with Fathers Latour and Vaillant, which convey the legendary imprint Willa Cather

sought. Tensions in the lives of these missionaries, the dangers which they confront and overcome, reveal themselves with characteristic indirection. A typical instance occurs early. Bishop Latour returns to Santa Fe after traveling south for more documentation of his authority. Thirsty and hungry, he rests his eyes from the glaring sun and conical hills, which elbow one another in the stifling heat. His glance falls on one juniper different from the others. "It was not a thick-growing cone,

but a naked, twisted trunk, perhaps ten feet high, and at the top it parted into two lateral, flat-lying 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.

More than some critics have been willing to admit, this narrative takes into account modes of error and self-deceit, as in the case of Padre Gallegos, who, though he "was ten years older than the Bishop . . . would still dance the fandango five nights running. . . ." "The Legend of Fray Baltazar," relating how an avaricious priest of the early 18th century is killed by Indians, finds a parallel in Padre Martinez, whose mouth "was the very assertion of violent, uncurbed passions and tyrannical self-will. . . ." He rejects unqualifiedly the ruling of the Church on celibacy. "'You are among barbarous people, my Frenchman,'" Padre Martinez insists, "'between two savage races. The dark things forbidden by your Church are a part of Indian religion. You cannot introduce French fashions here.'"

Yet this same man, with all his grossness and self-esteem, sings the Mass in a manner unsurpassed. "Nothing in the service was slighted, every phrase and gesture had its full value. 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." One never forgets his lecherous luminosity, just as one returns in memory to Padre Lucero, who joins his fellow priest to form a mutinous church. On his deathbed Padre Lucero confesses that he has stolen money left by his colleague for Masses.

Far from imposing any "soft" quality, any childish, monolithic world, this narrative of the mid-19th century conveys a varied series of characterizations. Rich Doña Isabella is tricked into revelation of her true age, while old Sada, a servant woman, suffers at the hands of bigoted employers. "Kneeling beside the much enduring bond-woman," Bishop

Latour verifies the holiness of simple things, "he experienced those holy mysteries as he had done in his young manhood." In this place of harsh tasks and sullen mysteries, the study of Pascal co-exists with the unbridled sexuality of Padre Martinez, just as the brutality of Buck Scales recedes to proper level before the idealism of Kit Carson, in whom one felt "a quick and discriminating intelligence."

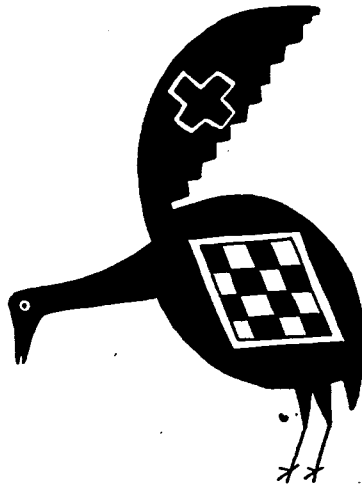
Middle sections of the text are largely committed to this diversity of human exchange. Book VII, on the other hand, is entitled "The Great Diocese," and here the resolution focuses more closely upon the two principals. "It was just this solitariness of love in which a priest's life could be like his Master's," the Bishop encourages himself. "It was not a solitude of atrophy, of negation, but of perpetual flowering." One recurs frequently to this note of discovery, of liberation beneath the permanent forces of nature. When Father Vaillant leaves to minister to new settlers in Colorado, we enter the final phase of the narrative, and comparisons make us conscious of the special hardships under which the two exiles have worked. The Bishop's final serenity is powerfully affirmed by his sensitivity to shape, color, sound, as when he acknowledges the spell of his cathedral. "Nothing sensational, simply honest building and good stone-cutting — good Midi Romanesque of the plainest. And even now, in winter, when the locust trees before the door were bare, how it was of the South, that church, how it sounded the note of the South!"

Phrasing here is symptomatic. The old man remembers his original intention of returning to France; then he fixes his attention on this new place, and rhythm communicates his conviction of ineffable presiding powers. "Something soft and wild and free, something that whispered to the ear on the pillow, lightened the heart, softly, softly picked the lock, slid the bolts, and released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning!"

Nothing better illustrates the author's concern for depth of characterization, for recognizable human beings reacting to one another, than her development of the two protagonists. Father Vaillant emerges most vividly in the middle chapters, which are dedicated largely to mundane chores. "Blanchet," with his hair the color of "dry hay," best handles average, tiresome details. This skinny, bowlegged human being possesses no refined tastes — in theology or art, that is to say: the stomach, rather, is his special province. "'Are we to eat dried beans and roots for the rest of our lives?'" he protests. Indefatigable courage glad-

dens his weathered face, "the lips thick and succulent but never loose, never relaxed, always stiffened by effort or working with excitement."

During their early days in New Mexico Joseph refers to his wish, never accomplished, of ending his career in monastic seclusion. "'One day you will release me,' " he declares jokingly, "'and I will return to some religious house in France and end my days in devotion to the Holy Mother.'" No one better appreciates the fierce energy concealed by Father Vaillant's near-sighted eyes than Bishop Latour. "There was certainly nothing in his outer case to suggest the fierceness and fortitude and fire of the man, and yet even the thick-blooded Mexican half-breeds knew his quality at once."



Bishop Latour embodies a more subtle form of spirituality. At our first encounter three words display his characteristic note: "brave, sensitive, courteous." It is just, one feels, to speak of this man as Willa Cather's most finely matured hero. One notes immediately his regard for viable formalities. "He had a kind of courtesy toward himself, toward his beasts, toward the juniper tree before which he knelt, and the God whom he was addressing." Jean Marie Latour does not come easily by this selflessness. His bearing, even when alone in the desert, was "distinguished." Yet this very aristocratic reserve, significantly, guarantees his position. The Bishop makes no effort to translate all his personal traditions. "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 . . . which no language could translate to him."

Refinement of spirit, communicating itself both to Indians and to outstanding whites like Kit Carson, derives its central impulse from an innate reserve. Miss Cather has been accused, as her hero accuses him-

self, of being un *pédant*. As the book nears its close, however, we learn that it was Jean, the *pédant*, who sustained his friend when the latter was faltering. "In a moment they were off, and before long Joseph had fallen asleep in his seat from sheer exhaustion. But he always said that if Jean Latour had not supported him in that hour of torment, he would have been a parish priest in the Puy-de-Dôme for the rest of his life." And it is Jean who verifies the goal most indispensable to Willa Cather. "To fulfill the dreams of one's youth," he reminds Joseph, "that is the best that can happen to a man. No worldly success can take the place of that." We sense the yea of vigorous souls, beginning with Alexandra and continuing with men like old Captain Forrester.

"Character," R. P. Blackmur has observed, "requires the sense of continuous action to show continuously." This is what I have in mind when I speak of the dramatic effect of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, notwithstanding the non-dramatic mode Miss Cather has selected. At the very start individual sentences project this urgency. "On his arrival at Santa Fe, this was what had happened," and we move directly to the Bishop's forced march back into Old Mexico. In the course of this trek the most significant scenes focus on the hidden village of Agua Secreta. We advance into this isolated place, with its saint's statue in the costume of a *ranchero*, "velvet trousers richly embroidered and wide at the ankle, velvet jacket and silk shirt, and a high-crowned, broad-brimmed Mexican *sombrero*."

One recalls Padre Herrera, nearly seventy, so timidly anxious to convey the apparition of the Virgin, whose mind "was still full of the sweetness of his late experience." In more humble vein Padre Jesus de Baca keeps birds with one wing clipped because "parrot feathers were much prized by his Indians as ornaments for their ceremonial robes. . . ." This old man, "poor, and too soft-hearted to press the pueblo people for pesos," reports an Indian tribe atop their solitary plateau. "At Acoma," he assures his Bishop, "you can see something very holy. They have there a portrait of Saint Joseph, sent to them by one of the Kings of Spain, long ago. . . ."

This reference expands when, pages later, we begin the account of Fray Baltazar, who was "of a tyrannical and overbearing disposition and bore a hard hand on the natives." Not a carnal man, Baltazar spares no extravagance to make his existence more comfortable. "The difficulty of obtaining an interesting and varied diet on a naked rock seemed only to whet his appetite. . . ." During a party, in a fit of temper, Baltazar kills a servant. The guests escape, the remaining servant runs away, and

that night the Indians bind their tormentor, carrying him to the edge of the vast rock. "The four executioners took him up again from the brink where they had laid him, and, after a few feints, dropped him in midair." Thus two stories, separated by a century in time, work together to dramatize the good and evil, the childish faith and savage retaliation, observable in an apparently limited locale. The contrast between the ingenuous benignity of Jesus de Baca and the fatal gluttony of Fray Baltazar owes a major debt to their intensified, beautifully foreshortened presentation.

Bishop Latour at length gains access to levels free from time. "He was soon to have done with calendared time," he reminds himself, "and it had already ceased to count for him." One then confronts what may well be the most decisive lines of the text: "He sat in the middle of his own consciousness; none of his former states of mind were lost or outgrown. They were all within reach of his hand, and all comprehensible." We begin to recognize the value of the heterogeneous experiences which enter into this story. They contribute, however obliquely, to the conquest of self, the aspiration to higher levels of consciousness, which colors the writing.

If we agree that this book studies the development of the *esprit fort* of Christian humanism under adverse conditions, then we see how, in this case, style is dexterous in a most satisfying way. Early in the prologue one is made conscious of the gap between frontier exigencies and cloistered routine. The missionary stands apart from the European prelates; he is "an Odysseus of the Church," bound to look "much older than any of them, old and rough. . . ." We sense the breadth of his diocese within the "icy arms" of the Great Lakes, his "long lonely horseback rides among his missions. . . ." In this Old World milieu, nature is associated with urban prestige, suggesting formal display, letter rather than spirit. Rome itself, the eternal city, falls into this category: ". . . the low profile of the city barely fretted the skyline — indistinct except for the dome of Saint Peter's, bluish-grey like the flattened top of a great balloon, just a flash of copper light on its soft metallic surface."

NOTHING IS MORE PERSUASIVE than Miss Cather's treatment of backgrounds against which her characters live and move — backgrounds which, in lesser hands, might have provided fatal opportunity for the "voluptuous unconcern" of which Wordsworth complained. The best manner in which to define such elements, of course, is to state simply

that they establish Miss Cather's mature objectivity, her ability, that is, to lose herself in the requirements of theme. At the outset, the dreary regularity of landscape slackens the pace, no effort being made to heighten interest, no intimation given of events to come. "As far as he could see, on every side, the landscape was heaped up into monotonous red sand-hills, not much larger than haycocks, and very much the shape of haycocks." The repetition, weary, depleted, of haycocks implies the physical and mental fatigue of lonely journeys. Similar command is visible later, when Miss Cather wishes to expose the emotional bond between her hero and his surroundings. Gazing at the rock of Acoma, Bishop Latour takes in all its oppressive vastness, and we recognize a movement incompatible with the characteristic upward surge of men like himself and Father Vaillant.

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.

A moment later the rock of Acoma is made subject to a more personalized influence. "Christ Himself had used that comparison for the disciple to whom He gave the keys of His Church. And the Hebrews of the Old Testament, always being carried captive into foreign lands — their rock was an idea of God, the only thing their conquerors could not take from them." But we retreat from such intimations to the perdurable cycle of sand and dust and lonely watchfulness. For the most part Miss Cather relies upon visual details which lend themselves to ready assimilation. "The sandy soil of the plain had a light sprinkling of junipers, and was splotched with masses of blooming rabbit-bush — 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." Yet she shows herself profitably fascinated by revelations in the midst of wonted things: the peach orchard and grape cuttings of Fray Baltazar, the bean salad, with its touch of onion and salt pork, with which Father Joseph crowns his meal, the glistening stone of the Bishop's cathedral.

There is no need to insist upon incalculable possibilities — these things are fundamental to the Bishop's reading of human experience. Rather the necessity arises to provide adequate foundation for this

world of miracles, which makes a man give up European retirement for a place which "sounded the note of the South!"

A welcome visitor to the dying Archbishop is the Navajo chief, Eusabio: ". . . one of the strong people of the old deep days of life did appear, not in memory but in the flesh, in the shallow light of the present." Only by relinquishing oneself, freely, to time-encircled cycles does one emerge, as Bishop Latour succeeds in doing, at the summit of awareness. There is a passage in Meister Eckhart which sheds light on thematic elements here. In a sermon the Dominican refutes the notion of God as found only under special conditions. A man may go into a field and pray, or he may turn into a nearby church; what Eckhart warns against is equating formula with penetration: ". . . if he is more aware of Him because he is in a quiet place, that is his own deficiency and not due to God, Who is alike present in all things and places and willing to give Himself everywhere so far as lies in Him. He knows God rightly who knows Him everywhere."

Willa Cather had been involved before with this problem of spiritual intelligence and intact sensibility: in the solitary homeliness of Alexandra Bergson, in the pliant enthusiasms of Antonia, in the torturous escape of Claude Wheeler, in the youthful miscues of Niel Herbert, in the psychic discordance of Professor St. Peter. But now, clearly, we have attained to something higher. It is wise to examine the text itself on this score. The rock is "the utmost expression of human need; even mere feeling yearned for it; it was the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship." But for those trapped on the mesa of Acoma, isolation meant destruction. "He felt as if he were celebrating Mass at the bottom of the sea," the Bishop recoils before these pathetic strangers, "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." Considering the fate of another vanishing tribe, the churchman unqualifiedly rejects any program based upon ritualistic deification. "Pecos had more than its share of dark legends — perhaps that was because it had been too tempting to white men, *and had had more than its share of history.*" (Italics added) This is the fate of traditions atrophied by carelessness or excess, by separation from the basic humanity which must purify lasting experience. Father Joseph pleads for a difficult assignment. "'Any one of our good French priests from Montferrand can serve you here. It is work that can be done by intelligence. But down there it is work for the heart, for a particular sympathy. . . .'"

Throughout, Miss Cather has been interested not in physical details themselves, but in details as signposts to moral response: the gentle manner of Jean Marie, the prize mules of Father Joseph, the tangled ball of woman's hair in the bedroom of Padre Martinez' house, the agonized face of Padre Lucero in candlelight, the tacit eloquence of Kit Carson. As the churchman draws near his final journey, the passage of time fades, together with other dreary concomitants of earthly endeavor. "The mistakes of his life seemed unimportant, accidents that had occurred en route, like the shipwreck in Galveston Harbour, or the runaway in which he was hurt when he was first on his way to New Mexico. . . ."

It ceases to be crucial that there was no longer "any perspective in his memories," for the Bishop has earned the sense of timelessness which is a handmaiden of spirit. In this vividly moral world even minor details become potentially emblematic. It is writing (here too one locates a valuable guide to method) in which the whole is more important than independent segments. Yet one feels it erroneous to conceive of this book as allegory. Miss Cather would concur wholeheartedly with the following view from Santayana. "It is those of us who are too feeble to conceive and master the real world, or too cowardly to face it, that run away to those cheap fictions that alone seem to us fine enough for poetry or for religion."

I have said enough to indicate how *Death Comes for the Archbishop* pursues Willa Cather's major theme: the quest for personal equilibrium, an equilibrium with social and artistic ramifications, but one which was, for her, primarily an issue of moral awareness. In Bishop Latour, her most thoroughly realized protagonist, we observe the subtlety with which this moral awareness, in a human being of intelligence and sensitivity, aligns itself with religious discipline. It should be obvious that emphasis is never given to specific details of "dogma." "One friendly reviewer," Miss Cather remarked, "says that to write the book I soaked myself in Catholic lore; perhaps it would have been better if I had. But too much information often makes one pompous, and it's rather deadening."

In contemporary religious literature, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, François Mauriac, among others, have established the prevailing view of our era, a period characterized by secularism, materialism, individualism, superficial Christianity. Their primary goal depends largely upon variations of that honored prayer beginning: "O Lord, I am nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing but sin, being a child of wrath by

nature. . . ." Everywhere one hears cries of emptiness and mediocrity. Both our poets and fictionists echo the opinion voiced by Romano Guardini when he warns that we ought not yet to call ourselves Christians, but only those who are trying to become Christian.

Granting that these chroniclers are correct in terms of present actualities, it is necessary to recall that Willa Cather is not involved with the tactical defense of any specific area of belief, no more than with realistic exploration of religious mores. Her impulse emphasizes those pervasive attributes of courage and generosity independent of time which express themselves in a variety of contexts, in an Indian pueblo full as well as at the Vatican. Jean Marie Latour is not intended to proffer qualities intrinsically superior to earlier exemplars of pioneer heroism; his native powers, on the other hand, find more complete, formalized expression through the conventions, one feels tempted to write, of his vocation. Miss Cather resolutely avoids larger issues of church discipline, the formalities of doctrine or modes of action within the hierarchy, for example.

Attention continually fixes itself on her characters as individuals. Yet it is not without significance that her hero fulfills himself in a religious vocation. " 'I shall die of having lived,' " insists the old Bishop, and we review the heartache and physical separation which have purified his ideal. Watching his friend in the coffin, "scarcely larger than a monkey," he forces himself to imagine his companion of the past. He sees Joseph, yes, "but always as he was when they first came to New Mexico." "It was not sentiment," we are cautioned; "that was the picture of Father Joseph his memory produced for him, and it did not produce any other." On his bed of death, the old man returns to earlier experiences, to that moment when his impulse to help others exercised itself most fatefully. Those nearby think he wishes to ask for something. "But in reality the Bishop was not there at all," we understand;

he was standing in a tip-tilted green field among his native mountains, and he was trying to give consolation to a young man who was being torn in two before his eyes by the desire to go and the necessity to stay. He was trying to forge a new Will in that devout and exhausted priest; and the time was short, for the diligence for Paris was already rumbling down the mountain gorge.

A new will — our destination, all along — rises to full stature with the noise of the Paris coach; this capacity, shared by such various human

beings as Bishop Latour, Kit Carson and old Eusabio, to forge something of permanence out of the clay of their mortal selves. It is precisely this power which makes it possible for the Bishop, not to vanish, but to control distress and loneliness: ". . . when he entered his study, he seemed to come back to reality, to the sense of a Presence awaiting him. The curtain of the arched doorway had scarcely fallen behind him when that feeling of personal loneliness was gone, and a sense of loss was replaced by a sense of restoration." Adequately schooled, this will makes possible exile from things ordinarily necessary for men of sensibility. "Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those light-hearted mornings of the desert, for that wind that made one a boy again."

Expatriation has grown into one of the most confused literary questions of our era, especially when the investigator makes no allowance for legitimate distinctions. Most readers, when they approach this issue, form in their minds the notion of a dependency ascribed to certain of our writers who hanker after institutions of the Old World. Henry James's desire to "re-ascend the stream of time" is one expression of the voluntary expatriate. Another attitude, exemplified by men like Harry Crosby and the Black Sun Press, suggests the task of the expatriate as one of conscious mockery of the relinquished fatherland. One revives, perhaps too readily, the anti-American views of young people who went to Europe to assist at the Revolution of the Word announced by magazines like *transition*.

There is another side to this matter, one both deeply American and intimately associated with the lot of the creative artist in our age. I refer to psychological expatriation, the malaise one notes in Hawthorne as well as in artists more commonly assigned to the cult of "Europe," Henry James and T. S. Eliot. In such cases it is not so much a problem of physical location as one of spiritual dissatisfaction. Indeed, the major stumbling block for modern artists, irrespective of country or personal situation, has been to assert values in the face of the separation in the world around them of the centers of cultural power from the centers of political and economic power. Hawthorne remained at home for the most part, painfully exploring for material with which to clothe his creative urges, whereas Henry James and Mr. Eliot used this quest to dramatize the major theme of their careers. We need not remind ourselves that this problem of psychological (or, perhaps better, spiritual) expatriation remains chronic in twentieth century letters. James Joyce,

Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust, André Gide, each in a way adjusted to individual response, have all of them reacted to what will probably be recalled as the major heresy of the late nineteenth century: the credo which held that art can be divorced from the power and resources of society without danger to both.

It would be ridiculous to pretend that Willa Cather was untouched by this unsettling tendency. What I am trying to suggest is that, making allowance for varying modes of perceiving reality, she devoted herself to what she considered the best line of attack against a debilitating divorce. What has confused issues has been the wholesale readiness to accuse her, often with minimum reference to text, of flagrantly avoiding the crises of human life.

Willa Cather sought to depict the good life, a life characterized by intellectual awareness, imaginative sympathy, moral discipline — qualities in her pioneers of the land as well as of the soul. Descartes, that most influential of moderns, has taught us that the essence of the soul is consciousness. Paradoxically, Willa Cather has best stated her program through the rendering of exactly this quality. "He sat in the middle of his own consciousness. . . ." Those who reject this as a religious novel in the parochial, inflexible sense are wide of the mark. What is amply present, as it must everywhere be present in mature imaginative prose, is a revelation of the complexities of experience as they operate in situations geographically distant, perhaps, but humanly as intimate as one's next breath.

This is the lesson of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, if one may insert a currently devaluated term. It salutes the preciousness of everyday existence, the craving of human beings to form logical patterns, provided that one possesses some guiding principle, some valid norm. It suggests the breadth of the real world, the world of inevitable partings, of failures and misunderstandings. It reflects a world where everything has its due place; where nothing is observed in isolation, but rather as an integral part of a steadfast complex — one not facilely allegorical but endowed with the natural symbolism available to a theocentric world.

We speak, fairly but loosely, of Jean Marie Latour's opportunities for dedication, and some of his admirers would feel that parallel choices no longer exist. Yet an equally plausible and not more strenuous corollary of his life supervenes upon its defense of a minority view of humility, one which grasps it as a power of eliciting reverence for beauty, here and now, full well as in the New Mexico of a century ago. Miss Cather repeatedly insists (and is not this her ultimate claim upon our

loyalty?) that such reverence need never descend to standardized enthusiasms, genteel avoidance of fact. She makes generous provision for individual discrimination, counterbalancing the introspective Bishop himself with the brusque and weathered Father Joseph. What she recommends is not vacuous yea-saying, but reasoned sympathy and intelligent tolerance. Most valuable of all, Jean Marie Latour expresses the truth that, no matter how distinct one's mode of guiding response, surrender through discipline does not cheapen the prestige of individuality, but builds, in time, a more genuine plentitude of consciousness itself.

On his election to the French Academy Louis Pasteur addressed his new colleagues. "Happy is the man," he reminded them, "who bears within him a divinity, an ideal of beauty and obeys it, an ideal of art, an ideal of science, an ideal of country, an ideal of the virtues of the Gospel." The pervasive ideality reiterated in these words lives at the heart of the Bishop's journey: an ideality channeled and controlled by means of the superb distribution of Willa Cather's narrative, with its freely acknowledged debt to history as well as imagination.

