Death Comes for the Archbishop Study Guide

Death Comes for the Archbishop by Willa Cather

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Published in 1927 in New York, Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is based on the actual lives of Archbishop Lamy, the first bishop of New Mexico, and his vicar, Father Joseph Machebeuf. Both men were from France. When Cather came across Father Joseph Howlett's biography of Machebeuf (published in 1908), she was inspired by the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of pioneer priests and missionaries in New Mexico. Howlett's biography included letters Machebeuf wrote home to his sister, a nun. In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Lamy becomes Bishop Jean Marie Latour, and Machebeuf becomes Father Joseph Vaillant. Although the novel is based on historical figures and information, the bulk of the book is fictionalized. Without the factual information and the insights of Machebeuf's biography, however, Cather may not have been inspired to write the book, nor would she likely have been able to construct such believable, complex characters.

Set in the second half of the nineteenth century, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* spans almost forty years in the life of Bishop Latour. It is an episodic narrative that shows how the French priest gradually wins the trust and respect of the natives, and brings order to the Catholic Church in the Southwest. The novel is peopled with numerous minor characters who function to represent and relate the culture, folklore, history, and belief systems of the Mexican and Indian people in New Mexico. The novel is also known for its rich descriptions of landscape and its role in the lives of the people who live among it.

Author Biography

Wilella ("Willa") Cather was born December 7, 1873, in Back Creek Valley, Virginia, the eldest of seven children. She spent much of her early childhood on her grandfather's sheep farm, where her energy and imagination found outlets in her rural surroundings. Her grandmother took an active role in her education, teaching her to read and appreciate language. Cather's fascination with stories drew her to gatherings of local men and women, who kept alive a rich oral tradition.

In 1883, the sheep farm burned down, and Cather's family moved to Nebraska. Surrounded by the vast landscape, Cather first reacted with fear and discomfort. According to many biographers, this move proved to be a defining experience in Cather's life. After a year of homesteading, Cather's father moved the family to the small town of Red Cloud and opened a loan and mortgage business.

As a teenager Cather rejected traditional femininity. She cut her hair short, wore boys' clothes, and indulged her interest in medicine by performing experiments and dissections. These unusual behaviors were neither understood nor accepted by the community of Red Cloud, and when Cather graduated in 1890, she immediately left for Lincoln to attend the University of Nebraska.

In college Cather discovered her love of journalism. She contributed columns and theater reviews to local papers to support herself so she could stay in school despite an economic downturn. She graduated in 1895. Her experience as a journalist took her to Pittsburgh, where she edited and wrote for *Home Monthly*. When new owners bought the magazine, she resigned but continued writing drama reviews for a local newspaper. In 1903 Cather met Edith Lewis, who became Cather's lifetime companion. Cather accepted a position with *McClure's* in New York so she could be with Lewis. While on assignment in Boston for *McClure's*, Cather met the novelist Sarah Orne Jewett, who became her literary mentor. After the shock of Jewett's death in 1909, Cather continued to work for *McClure's* as she honed her fiction. In 1911 Cather left the magazine and committed herself to a new career as a novelist and short-story writer, at the age of thirty-seven.

In 1912 Cather accompanied her brother to the American Southwest. She was taken by the canyons, sweeping sky, folklore, and Native American ruins. The following year, *O Pioneers!* was published, the second of her novel-length works. Its critical success was followed by other novels such as *My Ántonia* (1918), *A Lost Lady* (1923), and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), all of which are still widely read today. In 1923 Cather won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *One of Ours* (1922). Although scholars find it difficult to categorize Cather's work, her unique voice, sense of setting, and complex characterization explain her continued popularity among readers and academics alike.

While sleeping on the afternoon of April 24, 1947, Cather suffered a cerebral hemorrhage that took her life. She is buried in Jeffrey, New Hampshire, where her

tombstone features a quote from *My Ántonia*: "That is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great."

Plot Summary

Prologue

Death Comes for the Archbishop opens in 1848 in Rome, where three cardinals and a missionary bishop from America are discussing the situation of the Catholic Church in America. The missionary describes the neglect in New Mexico and the need for a young, strong, devoted priest to take charge and bring order to the region. They decide to send Father Jean Marie Latour, a thirty-five-year-old priest currently serving in Ontario, Canada.

Book 1: The Vicar Apostolic

It is now 1851 and Latour is making his way across the New Mexican terrain. He is exhausted, thirsty, and lost, but stops to pray before a tree in the shape of a cross. Soon he finds water, and a Mexican girl leads him to a nearby town. Latour performs long-overdue marriages and baptisms and continues on his way. He is returning to Santa Fe from Durango, Mexico, where he obtained proof of his church authority. As the apostolic vicar of New Mexico, Latour's seat is to be in Santa Fe, but when he and his lifelong friend Father Joseph Vaillant arrive, they are dismissed. Now, with proof from the bishop in Durango, Latour is prepared to assume authority. Arriving in Santa Fe, Latour discovers that in his absence the ugly yet lovable Vaillant has not only won the trust of the people, but has arranged for the previous priest to return to Mexico.

Book 2: Missionary Journeys

Father Vaillant is returning from a journey to Albuquerque and stops at a large ranch owned by Manuel Lujon. Lujon welcomes Vaillant, who performs the sacraments of marriage and baptism for his workers. Before leaving, Vaillant manages to talk Lujon out of his two beautiful cream-colored mules, one for himself and one for Latour.

On a trip to Mora, Latour and Vaillant stop at a rundown home to spend the night. They sense something evil about Buck Scales, the man who lives there, and when his meek Mexican wife warns them that Scales will kill them, they leave in haste and make it to Mora. They fear for the life of the woman who saved them. The next morning, they find that she escaped and got to Mora safely. Her name is Magdalena Valdez. She says that Scales has killed four other travelers and all three of their children. He is captured, jailed, and later hanged. Latour has befriended Kit Carson, a well-known scout. Carson takes Magdalena to his home, where his wife can care for her. She later goes to help a small group of nuns start a school for girls.

Book 3: The Mass at Ácoma

Determined to know his diocese better, Latour enlists a young Indian guide, Jacinto, to take him to the surrounding Indian missions. When they arrive in Albuquerque, Latour finds that the scandalous rumors about the priest, Father Gallegos, are true. He decides that Gallegos must be replaced.

Latour and Jacinto continue their journey, visiting small missions where Latour performs sacraments and holds Mass. Along the way, Latour visits various missions and pueblos, learning more about the people and their past.

Book 4: Snake Root

Vaillant replaces Father Gallegos in Albuquerque. When Vaillant does not return from a long journey, a messenger informs Latour that Vaillant has black measles. Latour and Jacinto set out at once. They encounter a terrible snowstorm, and Jacinto leads them to a secret Indian cave. Jacinto entreats Latour never to mention this place to anyone. Latour wonders if this is the cave significant to Jacinto's people's snake worship. The men sleep safely through the night and continue their trip. Delighted, Latour finds that Vaillant has recovered.

Book 5: Padre Martinez

Latour and Jacinto go to Taos to meet the notorious Father Martinez, who has a reputation as being selfish, materialistic, tyrannical, and cruel. Upon entering his home, Latour meets Trinidad, a young monk who is studying to be a priest. Trinidad is lazy, dull, and gluttonous. Latour and Martinez debate the authority of the church in New Mexico, Martinez claiming that in the new world, Rome has little relevance or power, while Latour heartily disagrees. Martinez threatens that if dismissed, he will take his numerous loyal followers and start his own church.

Latour has been called to Rome, and when he returns, he brings back new missionary priests. One, Father Taladrid, replaces Martinez, although Martinez retains minor duties. After a power struggle, Martinez and his longtime crony Father Lucero start their own church. Martinez and Lucero have a rocky past, but they are equally irreverent toward the church.

Latour sends Vaillant to deliver letters of excommunication to Martinez and Lucero, and Martinez dies shortly thereafter. Lucero's heath declines, and when he kills a burglar in his home, he never recovers from the trauma. Vaillant goes to Lucero's deathbed and delivers last rites to the repentant Lucero, but not before the dying priest tells him of a buried hoard. After Lucero's death, the hoard is recovered, and totals more than twenty thousand dollars.

Book 6: Dona Isabella

Latour decides to build a cathedral, and finds patrons in the wealthy Don Antonio Olivares and his young wife Isabella. When Olivares dies later in the year, his brothers set out to take the inheritance. They make the argument that Isabella is not old enough to be the mother of Olivares's daughter. Isabella would rather forfeit the entire inheritance than admit her true age. Latour and Vaillant plead with her to tell the truth and enjoy a comfortable future. She finally agrees and is granted the inheritance.

Book 7: The Great Diocese

After a journey and a long illness, Vaillant recovers in Santa Fe. Although Latour invites Vaillant to extend his stay, Vaillant is anxious to get back to his people.

Latour goes to visit Eusabio, an important man in the Navajo community who has lost his son. When Jacinto is sent to ask Vaillant to visit Santa Fe, Eusabio accompanies Latour back home. The two men enjoy traveling together and find that they have much in common.

Book 8: Gold Under Pike's Peak

With Vaillant in Santa Fe, Latour shows him a nearby golden mountainside where they will get the stone for the cathedral. Latour also wants a French builder so the style will be magnificent. Vaillant believes the cathedral is worthwhile, but does not share his friend's insistence on grand style.

Latour receives a letter about a gold rush in Colorado. Because so many people have come to the area, there is a need for priests. This area will fall under his jurisdiction, so Latour decides to send Vaillant. Vaillant prepares for his mission, and the parting is bittersweet. Latour fears he may not see his dear friend again, but he encourages him in his calling.

Over the years, Vaillant returns to New Mexico to visit and to see Latour made archbishop. Vaillant's travels and work in Colorado are arduous and demanding, but he is dedicated and perseveres.

Book 9: Death Comes for the Archbishop

In his old age, Latour retires to a home outside Santa Fe. He often meets with new priests to educate them on language and customs. In 1885 a young man named Bernard Ducrot comes to care for Latour.

After a busy December in 1888, Latour is caught in a January rainstorm and falls ill. He sends word to the new archbishop in Santa Fe that he would like to return there to die.

Although Ducrot dismisses the idea that the man could die of a cold, Latour has made up his mind.

In his final days Latour recalls memories of his years in New Mexico. He remembers legends, people, and Vaillant, who has already passed away. As he grows weaker, he sleeps more and eats less, and his final thoughts are of Vaillant. The next morning, his body is laid before the altar in his cathedral.

Characters

Bernard Ducrot

Bernard Ducrot is a young priest who comes to Latour's aid in his old age. Ducrot is an admirer of Latour's work in the Southwest, and Latour becomes a fatherly figure to him. Ducrot accompanies Latour when he makes his final trip to Santa Fe to die.

Father Gallegos

Father Gallegos is the priest in Albuquerque when Latour arrives in New Mexico. Latour hears of his scandalous behavior, all of which is confirmed. Gallegos is robust and lively, favoring parties over serious religious observance. He enjoys dancing all night, playing cards, and accepting the patronage of a local widow. He makes no effort to minister to his people's spiritual lives, nor does he go out to neighboring villages to attend to ceremonial duties for those people. When Latour visits, he pretends to have an injury to his foot, even though he spent all night dancing. He does this so that Latour will not expect his company as he travels to the neighboring villages. Gallegos is the first priest Latour replaces as he sets about "cleaning house" in his diocese. Father Vaillant takes his place.

Jacinto

Jacinto is a young Pecos Indian guide who accompanies Latour on his journeys to the missions and pueblos of New Mexico. He has a wife and a sick baby at home, but he is highly attentive to his duties as Latour's guide. Jacinto knows the area very well, and his skills and companionship are important to Latour's outings. The two men do not share all the same religious views, but they respect each other for their devotion to their beliefs. Jacinto's affection for Latour is evident when he takes him to a secret Indian cave unknown to anyone outside the tribe. Because Latour understands the importance of the secret, he honors Jacinto's request never to mention it to anyone.

Jean Marie Latour

While working in Canada, Father Jean Marie Latour is appointed the new vicar apostolic of New Mexico, although he eventually ascends to the title of archbishop. His mantle is heavy, as it is his responsibility to bring order to the Catholic Church's presence in the American Southwest. When he arrives, some of the most influential priests are corrupt and irreverent. Gradually, Latour succeeds in replacing them with more suitable but equally strong priests.

Latour misses his home of France, and is often reminded of home by the landscape of New Mexico. He is refined and educated, but humble. He enjoys the arts, but does not

resent missing such pleasures of home. Instead, he embraces the beauty and culture of his new home. He seeks to win over the people of New Mexico not by force, but by patience, sincerity, and faith. Latour is a servant at heart, first to the church and then to his people. He is kind, dedicated, serious, strong, and deeply devoted.

Throughout the novel, Cather depicts Latour as a very compassionate man. He is sensitive to Magdalena's terror that her husband will kill her, pained to have forced Isabella to reveal her age, and hurt by Eusabio's loss of his son. And when Vaillant is torn between duty and friendship before leaving for Colorado, Latour gives him the encouragement he needs to follow his calling in good faith.

Latour finds that among the differences between his faith and that of the native people, there are important similarities. The Indians, he finds, have a deep respect for tradition and ceremony. They also believe wholeheartedly in their religious views and are stubborn in compromising them. He finds them honorable and reverent, qualities he respects. As for the Mexicans in his diocese, he finds them mainly in need of good leadership. They are faithful, but many have been without respectable priests to guide them in their spiritual walks.

Just as Latour appreciates art and culture, he is very interested in history. He seeks reliable information about the history of the region that is his new home, and he becomes part of changing it for the better (as when he helps the Navajos regain their land). As much as he despises Father Martinez's ways, he admires his knowledge of the history of Taos. In his final days, Latour recites much of the history he has learned to Ducrot, so future generations will benefit from it. A man of balance, Latour also has an eye toward the future. From the time of his arrival in New Mexico, he takes steps to make the future of the land and the church better, and he makes his dream of building a cathedral a reality.

Antonio Jose Martinez

Father Martinez is the priest in Taos. He is very powerful and influential, and despite his tyrannical ways, has a faithful following. He is indulgent, materialistic, and very disrespectful of the church's authority. He has children in town and claims that celibacy is not a necessity for the priesthood. Martinez allows a young monk named Trinidad to live with him as he ostensibly studies to become a priest. Trinidad is lazy and gluttonous, but Martinez makes no effort to shape the young man's character. Martinez also has a reputation for being cruel to the Indians, even swindling seven of them out of their land before he lets them hang for his own crime.

Martinez tells Latour that if he tries to replace him, he will simply start his own church and take all the people of Taos with him. When this in fact happens, Latour is forced to excommunicate Martinez and his cohort. Martinez dies not long after, but he never repents of his wicked ways. His death, however, enables the new priest to assume full control.

Joseph Vaillant

Father Joseph Vaillant is Latour's longtime friend and supporter. Together they go to New Mexico to begin the hard work of bringing order to the region. Their friendship is the most important personal relationship in their lives, and Vaillant proves to be selfless, loyal, encouraging, and wise. He can also be impulsive, as when he gets in financial trouble for the church and must go to Rome to explain himself.

Vaillant is an ugly man who readily makes friends with his congenial personality. People are drawn to him and trust him, which makes him effective as a priest. When Latour assigns Vaillant to become the new priest in Albuquerque and later to the miners in Colorado, Vaillant is enthusiastic about the challenges. In both cases, his dedication, magnetism, and faith contribute to his success.

Latour admires Vaillant for his humility and willingness to do whatever is necessary to benefit the church. He begs when necessary and cajoles when necessary, but always seems to get what he needs. His lack of pride, however, prevents him from feeling compassion for Isabella when she resists revealing her real age to the court. He judges her as vain, while Latour has compassion for the woman's sense of privacy. Still, Vaillant is warmhearted and accepting, even when he does not agree or understand someone's motives.

Themes

Faith

Because the novel relates the stories of Latour's missionary journeys throughout New Mexico, the theme of faith is significant. Without the motivation of his personal faith, Latour would lack the drive to endure the physical difficulties and rejection he must overcome to fulfill his mission. Latour is deeply devoted to his faith, making certain to pray, read, and reflect every day. When his thoughts have wandered from religious matters for too long, he feels urgency to pray or meditate. Never does the reader find that Latour wavers from his "calling" to the priesthood. He does not wonder what it would be like to have any other life, and he does not discuss his life prior to joining the priesthood. He gladly sacrifices comfort, family, wealth, and social opportunities for his vocation.

As a counterpoint to Latour's faith is that of the Native Americans in the area. Their beliefs vary from pueblo to pueblo, but they are marked by superstition and the worship of animals and deities. Their faith in their belief systems is at times as strong as Latour's is to his Catholicism. Zeb Orchard, a trader well acquainted with the natives and their beliefs, tells Latour that he "might make good Catholics among the Indians, but he would never separate them from their own beliefs." Still, what Latour and the Indians have in common is a strong tradition and solid faith.

Trust

In order for Latour to be a meaningful Catholic presence in New Mexico, he must not only earn the trust of the Mexicans, Americans, and Indians living there, but he must also earn the trust of the existing church leaders. He soon finds that earning this trust, especially that of the native people, will not be easy. They have endured a brutal and unjust past with Europeans, and their distrust is as firm as it is well grounded. Latour regards this challenge as a matter of showing himself to be a man of integrity and sincerity. He ministers to the people and remains humble in public and private. He does not develop elaborate social or political strategies to win them over, but instead relies on his faith and his own character. Although there are many people whose trust he never fully earns, he succeeds in winning the respect of many people, including Eusabio, Kit Carson, the slave girl, and Jacinto.

Similarly, if Latour is to assimilate to life and culture in New Mexico, he has to learn to trust its people and land. If he fails to embrace the ways of the American Southwest□its food, landscape, housing, customs, etc.□he will be too foreign to be effective. He is in an interesting predicament; he is there to assimilate the New Mexicans to his ways, but he must also assimilate to their ways. To pursue this is an act of faith because his future takes an unknown shape. He has to have faith that such a blend of the European Catholic ways and the New Mexico culture will be viable and meaningful.

The issue of trust is also important to Latour on a personal level, as his friendship with Vaillant demonstrates. As is evident throughout the book and in Latour's final thoughts, his bond with Vaillant is among the greatest treasures of his life. Their friendship is based on a long history together that is sustained by openness, encouragement, mutual respect, and deep trust. Latour knows that Vaillant is reliable and can be counted on to provide the support he needs. He is not at all surprised that, upon returning to Santa Fe from Durango, Vaillant has won the confidence of the people there and selflessly prepared for Latour's arrival. Latour's first major challenge as bishop of New Mexico is replacing Gallegos in Albuquerque, so he gives the position to Vaillant. He trusts that Vaillant, with the strength of his personality and integrity, will be able to restore the city's faith community to its proper reverence. Later Latour must decide how to address the need for Catholic leadership in the masses of people in Colorado for the gold rush. A truly challenging mission, he knows that Vaillant is suited to meet the needs of the area and that he will do so willingly. The trust Latour and Vaillant share comes from their hearts and their shared faith.

Style

Landscape

Throughout *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Cather presents lavish descriptions of the southwestern landscape. With color and texture, she paints pictures of the mountains, deserts, mesas, plants, and vast skies of the region. She early on establishes the importance of the landscape, devoting the majority of the first, lengthy paragraph to describing the features of the land in which Latour finds himself. The color red is everywhere, a telling insight into the perception of the devout Catholic Latour. Red is the color of passion and suffering, and even in this foreign land, Latour finds the heart of the faith that has brought him there. When, in the next paragraph, he discovers a juniper tree in the shape of a cross, the reader begins to understand how the landscape will play a role in Latour's experience and how he will project himself onto it. Latour is a serene and resilient man, and that tone come across in his landscape descriptions.

As unlikely as it seems, Latour is frequently reminded of the French landscape as he explores New Mexico. Sometimes it is a sweeping view that takes his memory back, and sometimes it is a small detail. This tendency tells the reader two things. It reveals that Latour is drawn to landscape and natural wonders, wherever he is. He notices it and interprets it, usually at an emotional level. It also reveals that Latour is gradually accepting New Mexico as home. Because he sees in New Mexico much of what he loves about his own native land, he is opening himself up to recognizing it as his new home.

The landscape does not just reflect Latour's character and feelings. The Native American culture is very connected to its natural surroundings, and they learn it and build it into their lives. The Mexican people share a similar history of building a lifestyle around the offerings and hardships of the environment. Latour understands the link between the native people and their surroundings, which he observes when he visits Taos. Upon arrival, he and the local priest go to the church, where many people have gathered to kneel and greet them. Women toss down their shawls for Latour to walk on, and other men and women reach for his hand to kiss his ring. Cather writes, "In his own country all this would have been highly distasteful to Jean Marie Latour. Here, these demonstrations seemed a part of the high colour that was in the landscape and gardens, in the flaming cactus and the gaudily decorated altars." Latour accepts their behavior not out of pride or vanity, but out of understanding that the people are consistent with the landscape that surrounds them.

Narrative Structure

The plot structure of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is episodic, stringing together a series of experiences, encounters, and mini-adventures that build on each other in that they develop Latour's character and give the reader a broad view of the region's people

and culture. The novel begins with the decision to send Latour to New Mexico to bring order to the church presence and convert native people, then a lengthy middle follows relating Latour's and Vaillant's efforts, and the story ends with Latour dying after making significant progress over a forty-one-year time span. Cather relies on human interest and characterization to keep the reader invested in the story, rather than exciting plot twists or great conflicts.

Historical Novel

Death Comes for the Archbishop is considered a historical novel because it is a fictional story that includes historical people and events. While much of the story is fictionalized, it includes such historical figures as Kit Carson and Father Martinez, and the two main characters are based on actual missionary priests in New Mexico. In addition, references to such historical events as the Bent massacre and the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 contribute to the historic elements of the novel. Cather brings authenticity to her novel by incorporating the region's actual past.

The novel can also be considered a work of historical fiction, which is distinct from the historical novel. Historical fiction refers to a novel set in a different time period than the one in which it was written. Because *Death Comes for the Archbishop* takes place in the nineteenth century but was written in the twentieth century, it falls into the category.

Historical Context

America in the 1920s

Known as the "Jazz Age," the 1920s in America is remembered as a time of prosperity and high times. It was, in many ways, a period of excess. Flappers personified the carefree attitude of the youthful generations, enjoying all-night parties with drinking and dancing. Women in general enjoyed new social freedoms as they were allowed to vote, pursue education, and dress more to individual tastes. American big business was generally successful, but with consequences. Sinclair Lewis published his cautionary tale *Babbitt*, in which fictional American tycoon George F. Babbitt acquires wealth at the expense of his own humanity.

The 1920s also represented an introspective period for Americans. Having endured World War I, Americans were more inclined to attend to domestic needs rather than worry about Europe's postwar struggles. While the postwar years were an economic boon to many Americans, to others they were years of hardship. Miners and farmers, for example, struggled to make ends meet, and many were forced into other occupations altogether. The postwar years were also characterized by cynicism, as prohibition (making alcohol illegal) was found to be unenforceable and most Americans regarded the Bolsheviks involved in the Russian Revolution as either threatening or naïve.

In literature America saw the Harlem Renaissance and the Southern Renaissance play out in the 1920s. These movements signaled that America was opening itself up to new perspectives and experiences. The Harlem Renaissance represented the black experience in America and included such writers as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Jean Toomer. The Southern Renaissance represented a retrospective view of prewar America. Originating in Virginia, the movement supported southern writers such as William Faulkner, DuBose Heyward, and Pulitzer Prize—winning Julia Peterkin. In both movements, women's voices were an important component of the collective voice.

History of New Mexico

According to artifacts found in a cave near Albuquerque, the state of New Mexico has been inhabited for about 20,000 years. The earliest people were nomadic, and later farmers settled in the area. A group of seminomadic people known as the Basket Makers became the Anasazi cliff dwellers. They were the ancestors of the Pueblo Indians of recent past and today. The Pueblo Indians mainly lived along the Rio Grande River, and the Navajo Indians became farmers and sheepherders in the northwestern region of the state. The two tribes did not always coexist peacefully. The nomadic Apache Indians arrived in the thirteenth century (about the time the Navajo arrived) and seriously threatened Europeans and Mexicans who came to New Mexico in later years.

The first European exploration of New Mexico was in 1540 by Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. Subsequent expeditions were made by other Spanish explorers, who gradually built settlements until the 1800s. When Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, New Mexico became a Mexican land. The next three decades were tumultuous, with revolts and resistance to the Mexican government. Eventually New Mexico became an American holding in 1850 (the year before Father Latour arrives in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*). Little changed for those living in New Mexico; there were ongoing territorial disputes and struggles with authority. As Americans began to arrive in New Mexico to establish new homes, cultures clashed.

In 1879 the railroad came to New Mexico, bringing economic opportunities for its inhabitants. As the century neared to a close, the American Indians and the Anglo-Americans were finally learning to coexist. In 1912 New Mexico officially became a state.

The twentieth century saw great change in New Mexico. Natural resources were discovered and mined or drilled, and tourism brought Americans to visit the new state. The manufacturing and defense industries also found homes in New Mexico. In the twentieth century the state is thoroughly modern.

Critical Overview

When *Death Comes for the Archbishop* was published in 1927, readers and critics alike embraced the novel. Cather's love of the Southwest and its inhabitants was clear, and readers came to share her affection for the region. In *American Writers, Volume 1*, Dorothy Van Ghent observes, "Most of the episodes evoke the virtue of place, textures of earth and weather that are the basis of all sense of reality, and the relationships of human generations silently handing down their wisdom of place." Brad Hooper in *Booklist* remarks that *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is a story told "in a beautifully lyrical style." Cather's captivating language was intentional and hard-earned, according to Van Ghent, who notes that every day after writing, Cather went alone into the woods to read it aloud for sound and rhythm.

Cather's characters and their struggles are another topic of critical commentary. In *American Heritage*, Alexander O. Boulton writes, "Willa Cather's picture of the Southwest and its early inhabitants isn't easy to shake off, even today. She saw a racial contest where modern ideas struggled against ancient fears and superstitions." Van Ghent comments, "the people in the book, the 'strong people of the old deep days of life,' not only have each their legends but have become their own legends."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature, and is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay Bussey explores the specific challenges faced by Bishop Jean Marie Latour when he arrives in New Mexico, and how he gradually overcomes these issues.

When Father Jean Marie Latour arrives in New Mexico as its new bishop, he quickly realizes that there are significant barriers awaiting him. His purpose is to bring order to the Catholic Church in the American Southwest and to win converts among the non-Catholics. The people of New Mexico, however, are not all anxious to embrace the changes he sees as necessary. In order to fulfill his mission and become a respected church authority, he must overcome enormous obstacles. Latour must not only win the trust and respect of the American Indians who have been grossly mistreated by former Europeans and missionaries, he must also overcome the corrupt leadership of some of the current priests. He discovers that he faces the daunting task of overcoming the distant and recent past for the sake of New Mexico's future.

Latour is anxious to know the diverse people of his diocese, so he enlists the help of Jacinto, a young Indian guide who can take him to the area missions and pueblos. Although some groups of people welcome him and respect his authority, others have learned from the past that Europeans cannot be trusted. The cultural, economic, and emotional damage done to these people is almost incomprehensible to Latour, who is a very compassionate man. He understands the Indians' mistrust, but he does not give up trying to prove to them that true men of God are not selfish, cruel, and materialistic. Because Latour has a particular appreciation for history, he is able to take the stories of the past and interpret them as they relate to the present. The more he learns about the violent and unjust past of the Indians in his region, the more he comprehends their deep sadness.

In addition to the mistreatment doled out by European explorers and settlers, past missionaries and priests have been guilty of cruelty to the Indians. This is especially difficult for Latour because not only must he differentiate himself from those who wore the same vestments as he, but he must also come to terms with the fact that his own church's past is responsible for the Indians' plight. Perhaps this is why he is so resolute in working with the U.S. government to restore the Navajos to their rightful land. Although he assumes no personal guilt for past crimes, he may feel a bit of collective guilt that motivates him to right a wrong. Interestingly, some of the Indians generalize the actions of past missionaries and hold tight to their distrust, while others judge each priest individually. Latour hears the story of Father Baltazar, who was a priest among the cliff dwellers in the 1700s. He was overbearing, materialistic, impulsive, and gluttonous. He used Indians to tend to his house, animals, and garden. Over the years, he wielded his power more harshly, but the Indians were afraid to revolt because they did not understand the priest's powers. One night, however, when Baltazar accidentally killed an Indian servant boy in a fit of rage, the tribe gathered for revenge. They tied him up and threw him off the cliff. Despite the years of suffering under his unjust rule, the

Indians did not reject the next priest sent to them. That some of the Indians are willing to give each man a chance is a source of hope to a man as kind and honorable as Latour.

The final obstacle Latour faces is that of corruption among his contemporaries. As he learns about the native priests, he learns that two of the most powerful and influential priests, Father Gallegos of Albuquerque and Father Martinez of Taos, are embarrassments to the Catholic Church. The behavior and attitudes of Gallegos and Martinez grossly misrepresent the church, and their irreverence toward its authority and their vows is deeply troubling to Latour. To establish the dignity of his role as bishop of New Mexico, Latour knows he will have to replace these stubborn and powerful men. Again, this challenge is painful to Latour because it is essentially coming from within his own ranks. His love of the church is very deep, and to see it disrespected is difficult for him. In addition, he understands that he must undo the damage inflicted by these wayward priests.

Father Gallegos is a materialistic man who enjoys gambling and dancing. He also has a questionable relationship with a local widow. He has no interest in serving the people of Albuquerque or the surrounding pueblos, as he is too busy hosting and attending festivals completely lacking in religious reverence. Luckily, Latour's decision to replace him with Latour's own friend Father Joseph Vaillant goes unchallenged. Vaillant is able to bring a stop to the parties and initiate serious religious observances.

Father Martinez proves to be a more difficult case. The priest in Taos, Martinez is a tyrannical, materialistic, cruel man with a strange magnetism that compels his followers to obey him. According to local legend, Martinez sent Indians on a massacre. When the Indians were captured, Martinez promised to help them if they would give him their land. Once he had their land, he let them hang. Upon meeting Martinez in person, Latour finds that Martinez is a renegade priest who makes his own rules. He dismisses the notions of celibacy and trying to live as sin-free as possible. Even more astonishing to Latour is Martinez's idea that the church in Rome has no relevance to the way things are in America. When Latour eventually replaces Martinez, Martinez and another renegade priest start their own church and face excommunication. The power struggle is hard-fought by both sides, but Latour eventually wins. In doing so, he overcomes the damage done by Martinez and proves to himself that he is capable of overcoming the scandalous past of his own church. He learns a critical lesson, that he *can* bring order out of chaos for the sake of his church's future.

In the face of such overwhelming obstacles, how does Latour begin to knock them down? He does it in two seemingly simple ways: he treats the Indians as they should be treated instead of how they have been treated, and he proves to everyone that he is not like past corrupt priests. In these two ways, he eventually wins the trust and respect of many Indians and Mexicans who initially rejected him and his authority. Of course, there remain people in his diocese who are unable to give him the trust he deserves, but the progress he makes is remarkable.

First, he treats the Indians with respect and dignity. He comes to them to serve them, not to lord over them. He never tries to use his position to coerce them to his way, but

instead attends to their needs. He strives to understand them, not to control them. In book 4, chapter 2, Cather reveals that Latour "was already convinced that neither the white men nor the Mexicans in Santa Fé understood anything about Indian beliefs or the workings of the Indian mind." This attitude motivates him to try to get to know the Indians on their own terms. Jacinto recognizes this and respects Latour for it. In book 3, chapter 2, Cather writes,

The truth was, Jacinto liked the Bishop's way of meeting people. . . . In his experience, white people, when they addressed Indians, always put on a false face. . . . The Bishop put on none at all. He stood straight and turned to the Governor of Laguna, and his face underwent no change. Jacinto thought this remarkable.

When he hears that the influential Navajo Eusabio has lost his only son, Latour's heart breaks for this man. He goes to minister to him in his time of great need, and the two men come to like and respect each other. When Jacinto takes Latour to surrounding missions and pueblos, the priest comes to perform mass and offer sacraments. He never demands changes or gifts; his purpose is to attend to their spiritual needs.

Second, Latour differentiates himself from the corrupt priests of the past (and present). He is humble and kind, asking for little when he is a guest in a home or a pueblo. He knows that in the past some missionaries have expected the best food, clothing, and shelter from their hosts, but Latour is not that kind of man. He also proves he is different by bringing his love for his homeland of France *to* New Mexico instead of trying to change New Mexico into France. Father Baltazar demonstrated his disdain for New Mexico when he all but enslaved the Indians to create a European setting for himself, complete with gardens that required precious water. The Indians knew Baltazar considered the people and land of New Mexico to be inferior, and they resented it. As soon as they had cause, they stoically bound him and threw him off the cliff to his death. In contrast, Latour embraces the similarities he finds between France and New Mexico, and he develops a deep and genuine love of the Southwest in its own right. He, like the Indians, makes New Mexico his true home.

The challenges in New Mexico are daunting to the young Latour, but he is equal to the tasks. By the time of his death, he has brought peaceful and respectable order to a region overrun with chaos and scandal. Amazingly, he manages to overcome some of the awful past of the early Europeans and missionaries in the area, and he does it by strength of character and resolve. Just as impressive as his accomplishments is how he handles them. He never brags or seeks any glory for himself, but instead gives it all to his church and God. The cathedral he builds is a testament not to his own great works, but to the drive and courage supplied through his faith, and the future he is committed to creating for the church is fulfilled.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on *Death Comes to the Archbishop*, in *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Topics for Further Study

Research the structure and hierarchy of the Catholic Church. For example, what are dioceses? And what are bishops, vicars, and cardinals? How do religious orders fit into the structure? Create an easy-to-follow chart that explains the distribution of authority and functions within the church. Include a brief write-up of how this chart sheds light on at least one issue in the novel.

Choose one southwestern Native American tribe, and research its belief system. Prepare a presentation in which you explain the tribe's religious views, and compare and contrast them with Catholicism. In which areas would you expect Latour and Vaillant to have the least trouble making converts? In which areas would you expect the most resistance?

Artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Rhonda Angel, Ritch Gaiti, Gary Myers, and Albert Dreher have found inspiration in the land and culture of the Southwest. Choose six works (by the same or different artists) that somehow illustrate *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Create a museum guide as if these works were on display specifically to complement the novel. Write explanations (ideally with some quoted material from the novel) to help museum-goers appreciate the exhibit.

Kit Carson is a good friend to Latour in the novel. Read about this real-life legend and write five journal entries as if he were writing about Latour and Vaillant. Include a brief biographical profile as an introduction to your work.

Compare and Contrast

1850s: The population of New Mexico is almost exclusively Native American and Mexican. It becomes a U.S. state in 1851, but Anglos are not accepted until close to the end of the century.

1920s: The Native American population in New Mexico is 19,500. This number is more than double what it was in 1890.

Today: The Native American population in New Mexico is estimated at 169,000, an increase of more than 30,000 since 1990.

1850s: Immigration numbers begin to swell in the U.S., particularly from Ireland, Germany, and Sweden.

1920s: This decade marks the beginning of an upswell of "nativist" sentiment. A Federal program is initiated to "repatriate" an estimated half million Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the U.S. in order to free up jobs for "American" workers (i.e., people of non-Mexican descent). This campaign of forced immigration uproots people (many of whom are American citizens) in various states throughout the U.S.

Today: Movements are being initiated to set up Federal investigation committees on the issue of forced repatriation, lawsuits for redress are beginning to emerge in state and national courts, and information and personal stories about this buried chapter of history are beginning to emerge.

1850s: There are very few female authors in American literature. The major writers of the day are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe. A few women such as Kate Chopin and Harriet Beecher Stowe enjoy success, but the overall feminine presence is lacking.

1920s: Although the literature of the era is largely associated with authors such as William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, women are becoming more respected as a literary presence.

Today: Female authors are as common as male authors. Many of the bestselling and most respected authors are women, including Barbara Kingsolver, J. K. Rowling, Patricia Cornwell, and Anne Rice.

What Do I Read Next?

Dee Brown's 1970 book *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* is read by students, scholars, and history enthusiasts as one of the foremost treatments of the nineteenth-century American Indian experience. Although this book only covers 1860 to 1890, it will give students a better understanding of the early Anglo approach to Native American civilizations in America.

Cather's *My Ántonia* (1918) is set in Nebraska and told from a male point of view. It is the story of Ántonia, a pioneer woman struggling against the challenges of her surroundings in a time when women enjoyed less freedom that they do today. Considered a classic, this novel is one of Cather's most widely read works.

Willa Cather: Stories, Poems, and Other Writings (1992) contains samples of Cather's short fiction, poetry, and literary commentary. Her subject matter is wide-ranging, and students find that Cather is much more than the voice of the American frontier.

Translated by Ruth Butler, *Journal of Paul Du Ru, February 1 to May 8, 1700* (1997) relates the experiences of a Jesuit missionary in Louisiana in very early America. In addition to his missionary duties, Du Ru helped explore the area for possible French settlement.

Further Study

Bohlke, L. Brent, ed., *Willa Cather in Person: Interviews, Speeches and Letters*, University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

Bohlke presents insightful interviews and letters, dating from 1897 to 1940. Collectively, these writings show Cather's growth as an author and a person, while shedding light on her literary views.

Cather, Willa, *Willa Cather on Writing: Critical Studies on Writing as an Art*, University of Nebraska Press, 1988.

Cather discusses elements of her own writing, and she comments on other works with which her contemporaries were familiar.

Jenkins, Myra Ellen, and Albert H. Schroeder, *A Brief History of New Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, 1974.

Jenkins and Schroeder provide a readable overview of the historical events and people of New Mexico. The book includes pictures and maps to complement the text.

Plog, Stephen, *Ancient Peoples of the Southwest*, Thames and Hudson, 1998.

In an easy-to-understand style, Plog presents the long and challenging history of the Southwest American Indians. He gives special attention to the ways they have adapted over the years to keep their tribes and customs alive.

Walker, Paul Robert, *The Southwest: Gold, God, and Grandeur*, National Geographic, 2001.

In this book, Walker brings together the many histories (Anglo, Spanish, Mexican, and Native American) of the Southwest. The book is illustrated with photography of the southwestern landscape.

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Boulton, Alexander O., "The Padre's House," in *American Heritage*, Vol. 45, No. 1, February/March 1994, pp. 92—99.

Hooper, Brad, Review of *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, in *Booklist*, Vol. 96, No. 15, April 1, 2000, p. 1442.

Van Ghent, Dorothy, "Willa Cather," in *American Writers*, Vol. 1, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974, pp. 312—34.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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