

# **Outland as Motherland: Maternity and Homosexuality in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House***

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Concerning the emotional and psychological dilemma of Professor St. Peter Godfrey in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*, Doris Grumbach articulates the query central to countless readings of the narrative: "what is wrong with the professor?" (336). Among the numerous responses to this perennially debated question, perhaps queer analyses, which typically focus on what John P. Anders envisions as "the link between homosexuality and the spiritual experience," venture the most successful accounts of Godfrey's baffling disposition (97). Regarding "homosexuality" as "Cather's most potent metaphor" for the professor's "redemptive quest," Anders conceptualizes the "overtly eroticized" St. Peter and Tom Outland relationship as one that operates outside the modern realm of heterosexual domesticity and functions as a creative, imaginative, and therefore, recuperative space for the spiritually and emotionally depleted St. Peter (97, 99). For Anders, the freedom of homosexual companionship consistently finds expression in Cather's "poetics of engendered space": the homoerotically charged spatial metaphors of attics, gardens, and lakes, which circumscribe, mediate, and stimulate the romantic connection between the professor and Outland. Providing escape from "rampant materialism" and "spiritual decline," these romantic and erotic spaces are metaphors for the homosexual intimacy that reconciles "tensions in the professor's life," namely the friction between his repressed homosexual identity and his psychically corrosive and alienating hetero-normative life comprised of "'marriage and the world of women'" (Anders 116, 103).

When positioning St. Peter and Outland's romance within erotic and engendered landscapes, Anders and other critics, however, overlook the significance of maternal metaphors within these contexts and their implied relation to the professor's symbolically homosexual spaces. The central and recurrent image of water, for instance, frequently inspires a mingling of maternal and homoerotic codes. The lake that metaphorically represents birth—"The sun rose out of it, the day began there; it was like an open door

that nobody could shut”—also harbors erotically charged cliffs, foam, and “one tall, straight pine tree” growing “on the very tip of the little promontory” (20-21). Moreover, the “blue water” that recalls St. Peter’s fantasies of “childhood” and the beginning of “consciousness” simultaneously recollects water-based homosocial experiences, notably the professor and Outland’s leisurely activities on the lake and St. Peter’s erotic fantasies of his sea voyage with captain “Hautes-Pyrenees, half a dozen spry seamen, and a line of gleaming snow peaks, agonizingly high and sharp, along the southern coast of Spain” (20, 79).<sup>1</sup> The infusion of homoerotic spaces with maternal symbolism and the inscription of the St. Peter—Outland dynamic within maternal spaces strongly suggest a parallel between themes of maternity and homosexuality.

My interest in maternity and homosexuality in *The Professor’s House* arises from the scant attention critics have given to St. Peter’s longing for maternal union, but especially the unexplored juxtaposition between the professor’s cathexis and his homosexual yearning. Except for Leon Edel’s succinct depiction of the professor’s psychological drive for the harmonious state within the embrace of the “protective, caring” mother (73), discussion considering maternity central to the text appears limited to Sharon O’Brien’s brief declaration that *The Professor’s House* features the “search for a maternal figure” (O’Brien 52). Examining the biographical resonance of lesbianism and mother-daughter relationships within Catherian fiction, O’Brien sees a number of texts reflecting the psychodynamics of self and mother proposed by object-relations theorist Nancy Chodorow. For O’Brien, narratives such as *My Antonia*, demonstrating issues of mother-infant unification and separation, reflect the basic psychoanalytic story provided by object-relations theory, which sees the roots of human development in the infant’s identification with the primary love object of the mother. This state of “pre-oedipal fusion” or undifferentiation marks a time when “the infant does not distinguish itself from the external world, which is coextensive with the mother,” and in which “there are no ego boundaries separating self and other and no reflective ego” (46). The process of individuation entails the infant’s alienation from the primary love object. According to O’Brien, self-identity, both in Cather and object-relations theory, evolves through separation from maternal origins and becomes constructed through language and social discourses (47). “[L]osing the original union with the mother and

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<sup>1</sup> This paper follows Anders and others in assuming that homosociality implies homosexuality in *The Professor’s House*.

abandoning state of oneness,” the infant is pulled remorselessly into language and alienated subjectivity.

But while Nancy Chodorow asserts that the preoccupation with pre-oedipal oneness particularly informs the psychic growth and future relationships of females—as a mother’s identification with her daughter frustrates the processes of differentiation and separation more easily undertaken by the son—she submits that “On one psychological level, *all people* who have experienced primary love and primary identification have some aspect of self that wants to recreate these experiences, and most people try to do so” (79, added italics). “Freud,” she writes, “talks about the turn to religion as an attempt to recreate the lost feeling of oneness. Michael Balint suggests that adult love relationships are an attempt to recreate primary intimacy and merging, and that the ‘tranquil sense of well-being’ is their ultimate goal” (79). Pre-oedipal fixation is accordingly possible for sons as well as daughters. And even though O’Brien’s readings similarly stress fusion and separation in the context of mother-daughter relationships, her own explication of Willie’s return to “preverbal infantile bliss” in Cather’s short piece, “The Burglar’s Christmas,” instantiates the importance of mother-son relationships and predicts the centrality of this issue within the author’s longer fiction. Indeed, O’Brien’s reading of “The Burglar’s Christmas” as the story of a male protagonist seeking primary union with his mother anticipates my own argument for St. Peter’s preoccupation with pre-oedipal harmony in *The Professor’s House*.

My analysis builds from O’Brien’s suggestion of the thematic primacy of maternity in *The Professor’s House* and the critic’s employment of Chodorow’s psychoanalytic categories to explicate the parallel between maternity and homosexuality.<sup>2</sup> This reading of St. Peter’s narrative through spatial metaphors argues that the return of the professor to evocations of motherhood and homosociality signifies attempts to recapitulate a state of “preverbal infantile bliss” (O’Brien 53). Responding to Grumbach’s question about the nature of St. Peter Godfrey, I suggest that central to the professor’s “problem” are basic psychological issues set forth in object-relations theory: the haunting loss of the primary-love object and the subsequent drive for maternal origins and pre-oedipal unity. The desire to

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<sup>2</sup> Like O’Brien, I find Nancy Chodorow’s categories in *The Reproduction of Mothering* particularly helpful in illuminating the psychosexual issues of *The Professor’s House*. Yet, Freudian psychoanalysis, whose general connection to Cather has been only recently pioneered by John N. Swift, may be a more historically appropriate source. See John N. Swift, “Cather, Freudianism, and Freud.”

reclaim primordial wholeness characterizes the professor's persistent occupation of symbolically maternal spaces that metonymically recall primary fusion. Associated with these maternal environments, male homosexuality—suggested in various erotic figures, fantasies, and romantic subtexts—functions as a code for the primordial union St. Peter hopes to recapture. Tom Outland, the youthful male homosexual lover, accordingly serves as a surrogate love object by which the professor has attempted, but failed to reinstate primary identification in the novel.

In this paper, I first evince the professor's pre-oedipal cathexis by depicting his preoccupation with symbolically maternal surroundings, namely the lake, the attic room, and the garden. Evidencing the coalescence of maternal and homosexual significations within these spaces, I argue that St. Peter's past romance with Outland, who had "brought him a second kind of youth," marked his failed attempt to recapture primary harmony through male-male intimacy (234). Rather than Anders's bleak conclusion that *The Professor's House* results in St. Peter's spiritual resignation and submission to "conventional gestures" (117), or Edel's argument that the protagonist's problematic "mother fixation" remains unresolved, I maintain that St. Peter successfully satisfies his longing for primary oneness (Edel 75). Having failed to reinstate pre-oedipal unity by replacing the primary object of the mother with the surrogate object of the homosexual lover, St. Peter recovers a sense of maternal origins through an embrace of religion, which refashions the "oceanic feeling" enjoyed in pre-oedipal unification.<sup>3</sup> The professor's death and rebirth through Augusta, the religious mother who leads St. Peter to the freedom of God, returns him to psychic and spiritual wholeness.

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In *The Professor's House*, St. Peter's psychic issues express themselves in what Sharon O'Brien terms "the language of space" (63). The various maternal/homoerotic spaces the professor inhabits throughout the narrative—the lake, attic, and garden—reveal his preoccupation with recapturing original union. What catalyzes his obsession with maternal origins, appropriately, is an abrupt change of landscape recollected in the opening of the first section, "The Family." Here, the professor's recollected transition from the "blue water" of "Lake Michigan, the inland sea of his

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<sup>3</sup> See Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

childhood,” to the “wheat lands of Kansas” figures a shift away from maternal harmony and the loss of maternal origins that St. Peter strives to recuperate throughout the narrative (20-21). For St. Peter, “blue water” contextualizes a primordial state before the advent of ego, “when he was unwilling and unconscious, when his eyes were merely wide open” (21). Fittingly, the professor associates this time before self-consciousness and separation not only with a mother-lake, but with his actual Methodist mother and sense of protected infantilism: the lake from which “the sun rose” and “the day began” evokes the sanctum of the womb, where the “land and all its dreariness could never close in on you,” and the freedom of primary union, a space much like an “open door that nobody could shut” (Cather 20).

The professor’s memory of maternal waters as “the one thing” for which he was continually “home-sick” and of his nearly fatal expulsion from the lake to “the wheat lands of central Kansas” as an unparalleled “anguish” that “seemed so final” suggest the extent to which the loss of pre-oedipal union governs his psychological motivations. St. Peter’s movement from Lake Michigan to Kansas allegorizes a transition from infantile bliss within primary oneness to the isolation of detached identity. As the professor later states, infantilism reflects the time before “adolescence grafted a new creature into the original one,” the state before social and sexual determinants “ordered [him] from the outside” (250). As it stands in his memory, St. Peter’s dislocation from the womb/lake, which leads directly to a “professorship” as well as heterosexual “love” and marriage, follows a common psychoanalytic story that understands selfhood and gender identity beginning in the psychic separation of infant from mother (250). The professor’s desire in adulthood to remain “near the lake” reaffirms—against Chodorow’s model of facile mother-son separation—his continuing longing for maternal origins and anticipates the persistence of the suitably “tireless swimmer” of maternal waters to recover “some part of [pre-oedipal] delight” (4).<sup>4</sup>

The psychic transition one sees represented in the professor’s change from Lake Michigan to Kansas reverberates in the opening of *The Professor’s House* (“The moving was over and done”) where the reader encounters St. Peter clinging to his attic room in the wake of another geographical change that similarly threatens to drag him away from a desired past, a time when “he had worked out his career” and raised his daughters (1). But, as Leon Edel suggests in naming St. Peter’s “strange

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<sup>4</sup> Dinnerstein quoted in O’Brien’s *Willa Cather: An Emerging Voice*, 54.

attachment” to the old house and especially the womb-like attic “infantile conduct,” the professor’s continuing occupation of his “cuddy” represents more than a hope to salvage an earlier familial moment. The “dark den” to which the professor clings appears to be a protective maternal “insulation from the engaging drama of domestic life” in which St. Peter attempts to replay maternal union. Even the house itself, which always remained generally unfurnished and imperfect—“there were always so many things to fix”—reflects the professor’s desired state of incomplete development (3). And still more, the implicit depiction of the house as a neutral space—the wall-paper fades into “inoffensive neutrality”—recalls Cather’s personal conception of infantilism as neutral, communal territory—a time of “freedom and wholeness...when the self was not yet socially engendered” (O’Brien 97).

Suitably, the professor’s attic also features two prominent maternal symbols: Augusta, the motherly sewing woman who appropriately frequents the attic room, and the sewing dummies that suggest feminine archetypes or female “forms” (9). As St. Peter ironically implies, each dummy for him functions metonymically (9)<sup>5</sup>. The first, “the bust” in which the professor takes special “delicacy,” is an explicitly maternal figure. The “headless, armless female torso, covered with strong black cotton, and so richly developed in the part for which it was named” metonymically signifies the sanctum of the mother, as it “looked so ample and billowy (as if you might lay your head upon its deep-breathing softness and rest safe forever)” (9). But, at the same time, the maternal form recalls “certain disappointments,” what the professor imagines as the “severe shock” of eventual separation from the mother, the inevitable expulsion from pre-oedipal fusion (Cather 9). A “dead, opaque, lump solidity” the bust connotes the illusoriness of primary oneness (“somehow always fooling you again”) as well as the potential impossibility of returning to maternal origins (9-11). While Leon Edel maintains that the second form, “a woman of light behavior,” resembles a sexualized and eroticized maternity, St. Peter’s resistance to the “cruel biological necessities” embodied by the sewing dummy—“he had never been taken in by one of her kind!”—indicates that it symbolizes a threatening social and sexual identity—one from which the professor wishes to retreat by returning to amorphousness within pre-oedipal undifferentiation

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<sup>5</sup> St. Peter declares that Augusta’s dummy labels “followed a natural law of language, termed, for convenience, metonymy” (9). But, as the labels are synecdochic rather than metonymic, the professor ironically implies his own metonymical association of the dummy.

(10). Significantly, the second form, as well as the first, comforts the professor by suggesting the artificiality of gender. Each dummy recalls engendering ornaments, namely the party “frocks”—which Augusta fittingly terms “transformations”—worn by St. Peter’s daughters in order to create the illusion of mature femininity.

The “walled-in garden” figures another maternal surrounding through which the professor strives for his lost maternal origins. Like the attic room and lake, St. Peter’s garden marks a womb-like space, a maternal surrogate he begins to occupy after “his wife began to be unreasonable about his spending so much time at the lake” (5). Within the fertile landscape of the garden, where there prospers various feminine and maternal flowers and trees—“Salmon-pink geraniums,” “French marigolds,” and “two symmetrical, round-topped linden-trees”—St. Peter works off his “homesickness for other” motherlands, specifically the maternal waters of the lake (6). The garden that allows the professor to “evade the unpleasant effects of change” is suitably retroactive, allowing him to recapture his pre-domestic identity: “sending his wife and daughters to Colorado...In these months he was a bachelor again, he brought down his books and papers and worked in a deck chair under the linden-trees; breakfasted and lunched and had his tea in the garden” (7).

Yet these spaces of primordial significance—lake, garden, and attic—are really composites of maternal and homosexual metaphors. While evoking maternal origins, they also suggest homosexuality through erotic symbols, homoerotic fantasies, and subtexts of male-male romance. The French garden of maternal symbolism, for instance, simultaneously features phallic figures, such as the “row of slender Lombardy poplars” and the “green-brier” with “prickly stems” (6). It also marks the site of the Professor’s first encounter with Tom Outland and their ensuing relationship: “And it was there he and Tom Outland used to sit and talk half through the warm, soft nights” (7). Similarly, the lake, and the “blue water” with which St. Peter associates it, are maternal metaphors charged with homoeroticism. A womb-like landscape “studded with shaggy pines,” the lake ensures maternal comfort while its blue water stimulates reveries of the sea voyage with Hautes-Pyrenees along the masculine “ranges of the Sierra Nevadas” covered with “snow peak after snow peak, high beyond the flight of fancy, gleaming like crystal and topaz” (89). The dual maternal/homosexual resonance of water even surfaces when the simultaneously fetal and phallic-imaged professor, wearing a “rubber visor” that “was like a continuation of his flesh,” swims against the “purple blue” of the lake water (57). Like the garden, the mother-lake further contextualizes St. Peter’s relationship with

Outland: “Every Saturday the Professor turned his house over to the cleaning-woman, and he and Tom went to the lake and spent the day in his sailboat” (154). And even the attic, while not bearing explicit homosexual symbolism, similarly allows St. Peter to gaze longingly at a “dark clump of pine-trees” and the “Physics building” where “Outland’s laboratory used to burn so far into the night!” (74).

The mingling of maternal and homoerotic metaphors juxtaposes homosexuality and maternity and suggests a parallel between the lost mother-son dynamic the professor wishes to re-inhabit and his past relationship with Tom Outland. Suitably, the professor’s memories of what John P. Anders identifies as an often implicit, but ultimately transparent homosexual romance with Outland are located within maternal contexts. The professor even associates Tom with timelessness and his “original, unmodified” state (Cather 239). Continuous with St. Peter’s love of youth that “had nothing to do with Time,” his attraction to Tom, who “‘hasn’t any birthday,’” stems from Outland’s signification of everlasting boyhood (19, 104). But most significant, Tom’s journey on the symbolically maternal Blue Mesa parallels the professor’s own attachment to motherlands. Inhabiting the mesa and Cliff City, Outland displays a “narcissistic-infantile” attachment to “the paradise of life in the womb” (Edel 74). While Deborah Lindsay Williams observes that “Tom finds on the Blue Mesa” a “woman’s world,” I believe the mesa more precisely represents a *maternal* world (164). The mere blueness of the landscape echoes the maternal significations of St. Peter’s blue water; its Cliff City stands steeped in maternal resonance, circumscribing feminine symbols ranging from caves to “Mother Eve”—the mummified body of a dead “*young woman*”—and even the bust-like “pinons” growing in St. Peter’s garden (192, 168, my italics). And just as the professor’s mother-spaces feature erotic symbols and subtexts of homosexual romance, Outland’s mesa supports a “tower, swelling out to a larger girth a little above the base, then growing slender again” and contextualizes the commonly noted intimate relationship of Tom and Roddy Blake. But in contrast to the professor’s metaphorical expulsion from pre-oedipal harmony, the literal absence of Outland’s maternal figure, who “died in the mover wagon” when “Tom was a baby,” appears the catalyst for his mother quest.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly the death of Tom’s father by drowning in river water implies another masculine preoccupation with maternal origins (Cather 105). His death in maternal waters further anticipates the parallel between death and primordial harmony observed in the closing of the narrative.



St. Peter's memories of Tom within maternal contexts, the professor's association of Tom with a perennial youth reminiscent of his own original, unmodified identity, and Tom's association with the mother-world of the Blue Mesa all invite an identification of Outland as a lost motherland or maternal surrogate for St. Peter. For the professor, the homosexual lover Tom Outland represented a surrogate love object with whom he had hoped to replace the primary love object of the mother and to recapture pre-oedipal harmony. Under this interpretation, St. Peter's past relationship with Outland reflects the adult love relationships through which, in Michael Balint's view, many adults attempt to recreate primary identification and merging.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, this proposed parallel between maternity and homosexuality provokes some questions. Why would a homosexual relationship in particular allow the professor to reenact pre-oedipal fusion? Why would the young male lover Tom Outland represent motherland to St. Peter instead of the professor's wife Lilian? While object-relations theorist Nancy Chodorow does not discuss mother-infant issues in relation to homosexuality, Sharon O'Brien, reading female intimacy in Catherian fiction, suggests that specifically lesbian relationships, in which the lover sees the primary object of mother reflected in her female partner, replay primary identification: "And the daughter who becomes a lesbian, as did Cather, does not abandon the child's erotic bond with the mother but replays it in her sexual and romantic relationships" (104). But, in understanding mother-son relationships in Catherian fiction, typically "characterized by fusion rather than separation," as merely masks for mother-daughter relationships (and thus, male homosexuality that connotes primary harmony as a veil for lesbianism), O'Brien neglects the capacity of male-male intimacy to replay primary identification. While one might benefit from interpreting male homosexuality in *The Professor's House* as disguised lesbianism, such reading assumes that Cather differentiated between male and female sexuality in terms of their capacity to reproduce pre-oedipal fusion. If pre-oedipal fusion, according to object-relations theory, results from an infant's identification with the mother (the love object from whom the infant does not differentiate itself), it seems possible that even male homosexuality—relationships in which masculine lovers find themselves reflected in same-sex partners—replays the primary state of undifferentiation.

In any case, the coalescence of maternity and homosexuality in *The Professor's House* certainly encourages a conception of St. Peter's lost intimacy with Tom Outland as a failed attempt to reconfigure mother-son

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 79.

unity. Outland's maternal significance for the professor even accounts for the failure of the relationship to translate into an explicitly identifiable homosexual romance. In his reading of the professor-Outland interaction as a "Whitmanesque model of friendship...that *fails* to gel into a recognizable subcultural idiom," Scott Herring contends that the overall covertness of the allegedly homosexual dynamic, especially the professor's refusal to translate his supposed romance with Tom into language, signals its estrangement from the "modern" heterosexual/homosexual binary: "In lieu of sexual legibility, Godfrey refuses to institutionalize—to properly name—the relational gifts that the boy has brought. He can't and he firmly refuses to 'explain' a bond that is utterly unlike 'everything' else that he knows, since his friendship with Tom fits no contemporary pattern (79-80). Though I concur with Herring on the Whitmanesque nature of the St. Peter-Outland union, I believe the maternal significance of the relationship better explains the refusal or inability of the professor to voice this male-male romance. As Nancy Chodorow notes, the pre-oedipal state of infant-mother unity is pre-linguistic, as it occurs before the advent of a languaged and socially engendered identity. In *The Professor's House*, St. Peter suitably associates adolescent growth, which "grafted a new creature into the original one," and the development of a socially constructed, hetero-normative identity—the time when he began being "ordered from the outside"—with the spoken word:

The man he was now, the personality his friends knew, had begun to grow strong during adolescence, during the years when he was always consciously or unconsciously conjugating the verb 'to love'...When he met Lilian it had reached its maturity...One thing led to another and one development brought on another, and the design of his life had been the work of this secondary social man, the lover. (240)

The "vulgar tongue" into which St. Peter refuses to translate his relationship with Outland not only refers to "money" and "laws of society"—by which heterosexual relationships such as Rosamond and Tom's become economic—but language itself: the catalyst for pre-oedipal separation and social alienation (50). The professor cannot name his preoccupation with maternal union because, as an inherently pre-social and pre-verbal state, it precludes linguistic characterization.<sup>8</sup> As St. Peter himself suggests, one

cannot verbalize “‘one’s deepest feelings’” (37)—a sentiment the professor demonstrates in his incapacity to identify his strive for maternal origins, which one observes in his failure to name Augusta’s resemblance of his mother: “How much she reminded him of, to be sure!” (15). Like St. Peter’s psychic drive to recapture primordial unity, the professor and Outland’s relationship, by its pre-verbal nature, remains a mystified subtext that never translates into clear terms and remains outside the language of the narrative.<sup>9</sup>

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Many critics, such as Catherine M. McLay, interpret St. Peter’s “return to Earth” at the conclusion of the narrative as merely a failed attempt at suicide in which the professor finds himself on the “verge of death” (Cather 241).<sup>10</sup> But it is important to note that St. Peter himself conceives his final act as a “definite absence from the world of men and women”—a figurative or literal death returning him to an “earlier state” before engendered and socialized identity and before “distinction” (255, 240, 242). Appropriately, St. Peter likens, albeit ironically, his death or death-like state to maternal origins. Misquoting Longfellow’s translation of the Anglo-Saxon “Grave,” which he significantly recalls from reading “long ago in one of his *mother’s* few books,” (added italics) St. Peter parallels the death-bed with the original bed, the maternal womb:

For thee a house was built  
Ere thou was born  
For thee a mould was made  
Ere thou of woman camest. (248)

Here the professor’s subsequent question—“Why pretend that it is possible to soften that last hard bed?”—further, if ironically, the juxtaposition of death and primordial origins by suggesting that “the sham upholstery that is put in coffins” marks the attempt by humans—who are subliminally aware

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<sup>8</sup> Pioneering Cather’s Freudianism, John N. Swift similarly identifies speechlessness in Catherian fiction as the “desire at the foundation of the unconscious, the child’s desire, unrepresentable but unforgotten: the ‘thing not named’ (and unnamable, because it is prior to the alienating deflections of speech), or perhaps more simply ‘the precious, the incommunicable past.’” See *Cather, Freudianism, and Freud*.

<sup>9</sup> The relationship’s prequel status — that is, its placement before the time of the narrative — further implies its figurative primordality.

<sup>10</sup> See *Religion in the Novels of Willa Cather*

of the similarity between death and pre-oedipal fusion—to recreate the softness of the womb in the casket.

Lying on his death-bed couch within the maternally symbolic attic room, St. Peter falls “out of all domestic and social relations, out of his place in the human family,” releasing himself “from consciousness” and returning to mother “Earth,” the “root of the matter” and source of “the original, unmodified Godfrey St. Peter” (239). The professor’s death is neither suicide nor resignation, not an end but a Whitmanesque diffusion back into the landscape from which he came, a return to “primitive” or primordial origins (241).<sup>11</sup> Cycling from death to rebirth, St. Peter is reborn through the religious mother, Augusta, who embodies religion’s maternal signification for the professor and the maternal embrace of God, the freedom of which has been signaled in Godfrey’s name (God-free) all along. Since religion, as Freud claims, allows one to replay pre-oedipal fusion, St. Peter finds in Augusta and religion an everlasting maternity.<sup>12</sup> Having failed to recuperate pre-oedipal origins in his attachment to maternal spaces and through the surrogate love object of the homosexual lover, Tom Outland, St. Peter finally recaptures a permanent state of primary fusion through the “oceanic feeling” of religion.<sup>13</sup> Religious belief proliferates, for the professor, maternal resonance. Embracing this omnipresent maternity, St. Peter Godfrey perceives “a world full of Augustas, with whom one was outward bound,” and, at last, turns from the past to a future he can face “with fortitude” (258).

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<sup>11</sup> See “Song of Myself,” in which Whitman’s narrator disappears back into the eddies of the wind.

<sup>12</sup> See *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> Freud’s description of the oceanic feeling of religion interestingly recalls the maternal significations of water in *The Professor’s House*. See *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

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