

Manuel Lujon, Another Name by Willa Cather

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IN HER INTERESTING ARTICLE ON "How Willa Cather Chose Her Names," Mildred R. Bennett clearly demonstrates that one of Miss Cather's techniques was to modify names of friends, occasionally for whimsical effects.¹ Mrs. Bennett's impressive evidence adds weight to a little theory of mine.

In *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, Bk. II, ch. 1, Father Vaillant performs marriages and then, with startling efficiency, baptisms at the *ranchito* of one Manuel Lujon, who lives between Bernalillo and Santa Fé. When the good padre leaves Lujon's place two mornings later, he takes with him a pair of white mules, gift of the generous *ranchero*.²

Two summers before she published *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, in 1927, Willa Cather returned to the American Southwest, long one of her favorite locales, and spent considerable time all around Santa Fé — at Albuquerque, Bernalillo, Pecos, Tesuque, Chimayo, and Taos. She even broke a rule and accepted Mabel Dodge Luhan's invitation to come to her *hacienda* at Taos. Edith Lewis, Miss Cather's devoted companion, reports that they planned to stay a couple of days but remained two weeks and even returned the following summer for another visit. Mabel Luhan, possessed according to Miss Lewis of "a large, ungrudging generosity toward people she admired," put a guest house at Willa Cather's disposal and, while rarely appearing herself "excepting at meals," also encouraged her Taos Indian husband Tony Luhan to accompany the

¹ Mildred R. Bennett, "How Willa Cather Chose Her Names," *Names*, X (March, 1962), 29-37.

² Willa Cather, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), pp. 52-64.

grateful novelist "on long drives about the country." Miss Lewis adds that "Although *Eusabio* in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is a Navaho Indian, I think his character was essentially drawn from Tony Luhan."³

Further, I think that Willa Sibert Cather – who played with her name and its initials in such juvenile *noms de plume* as Gilberta S. Whittle and Clara Wood Shipman⁴ and whose first big hero's name, Bartley Alexander, was derived from that of her University of Nebraska friend Hartley B. Alexander⁵ – was having another onomastic joke, if but nominal, when she created the name of Manuel Lujon. *Manuel* is a very close masculine Spanish equivalent of *Mabel*. And Lujon is also close to Luhan, orthographically and especially phonetically. To be exact, the last name of Tony, Mabel Luhan's husband, was really Lujan,⁶ which is even nearer to Lujon.

So the name of Manuel Lujon, host and owner of a prolific *rancho*, derives without doubt from the name of Mabel Luhan, dynamic hostess to Willa Cather while she was exploring the country which inspired her to write *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

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³ Edith Lewis, *Willa Cather Living: A Personal Record* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 139–143.

⁴ Bennett, p. 37.

⁵ L. V. Jacks, "The Classics and Willa Cather," *Prairie Schooner*, Winter, 1961; quoted by Bennett, p. 33.

⁶ Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Edge of Taos Desert: An Escape to Reality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), p. 337.