

# *Illumine*

*The Journal of the Centre for  
Studies in Religion and Society  
Graduate Student Association*

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**Editorial Board 2006**

Sarah Hunt

Sabrina Jackson

Cynthia Korpan

Bronwen Magrath

Paul Teel

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Centre for Studies in Religion and Society  
University of Victoria  
PO Box 1700, STN CSC  
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2  
Phone: (250) 721-6325  
Email: [csrs@uvic.ca](mailto:csrs@uvic.ca)  
Web: [www.csrs.uvic.ca](http://www.csrs.uvic.ca)

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**Centre for Studies in Religion and Society Graduate Student Association**

The Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (CSRS) was established at the University of Victoria in 1991 to foster the scholarly study of religion in relation to any and all aspects of society, both contemporary and historical. The CSRS Graduate Student Association, led by graduate students who hold fellowships at the CSRS, draws together UVic graduate students from a variety of departments and academic programs who share an interest in areas related to the research mandate of the CSRS.

This issue of *Illumine* represents a continuation of the Association's tradition of producing an annual publication containing graduate students' written scholarship exploring the interrelation of religion and society. Copies of back issues are available from the CSRS at the address above. *Illumine* is published annually, and welcomes submissions from graduate students enrolled in Canadian educational institutions. Submission and deadline details are available at <http://csrs.uvic.ca/publications/graduate/illumine/index.php>. Other inquiries may be directed to the CSRS, or to [illumine@uvic.ca](mailto:illumine@uvic.ca).

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## Introduction

*Illumine* is a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary journal produced by the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society (CSRS) Graduate Students Association at the University of Victoria. The journal provides a forum for graduate work that contemplates religious and other spiritual and philosophical systems enmeshed in diverse cultural, societal, temporal, and geographic settings. This fifth issue of *Illumine* explores the many ways in which spirituality and ideology are reflected in assorted cultural products such as art, literature, oral histories, and print media.

Beverly Bouma uses the ethnographic method of interviewing to examine the everyday, lived experiences of feminist Christian women in relation to Biblical texts in her article “Jesus Was a Feminist: An Institutional Ethnography of Feminist Christian Women.” The author explores the variety of responses provided by competing discourses associated with feminist and Christian institutions.

Alison Campbell examines the art work of Jim Logan, who challenges tradition through his incorporation of First Nations imagery into significant Christian works in the Western art canon. Campbell addresses this dualism by means of post-colonial analysis in her article “Beer Bottles and Saints: A Postcolonial Reading of Jim Logan’s *Let Us Compare Miracles* from His *Classical Aboriginal Series*.”

In “The Popes and the Cold War: Examining Encyclical Evidence and the Evolution of their *Ostpolitik* 1945–1990,” Robert Dennis provides discussion about the changing nature of the Vatican’s *ostpolitik*. Dennis separates his paper into historical periods beginning with the papal rule of Pope Pius XII in 1945 and ending in the midst of Pope John Paul II’s rule in 1990. He uses encyclical evidence to understand the contemporary Vatican’s position on the Cold War.

Cynthia Korpan takes a look at *The Tale of the Nativity*, a composite narrative about the birth of Christ. The author utilizes textual and visual analysis to highlight the role that animals played in the retelling of this story by a group of Okanagan children from the Nk’Mip Reserve in British Columbia during the 1930s. The article is fittingly called “The Role of Animals in *The Tale of the Nativity*: A Textual and Visual Analysis.”

Bronwen Magrath conducts a comparative case study of Alsatian and Algerian classrooms to reveal how the French government sought to strengthen the

Republic by fostering patriotism among youths during the interwar period. In her article “Conflict in the Classroom: Religion and Republicanism in Algeria and Alsace, 1918–1940,” Magrath concentrates on the way cultural identities were created and recreated in education policy so as to demonstrate how individuals and groups on all sides of the colonizing relationship interacted.

Carolyn Salomons discovers the linkages between premodern and postmodern texts in such areas as the construction and maintenance of power, as well as in the varieties of resistant experience. The author explores and compares different examples of resistance found in St. Augustine, the desert fathers, the mystics, and the “little saints” of Aquitaine from the postmodernists. The article is titled “What the Age Demanded: Power and Resistance in Premodern and Postmodern.”

Janice Young, in “A Spider Woman Story,” explores Spider Woman, the Cosmic Weaver, as a healing symbol and image of empowerment. The author traces the emergence of Spider Woman in her many cross-cultural manifestations and textile metaphors, and links this to the “gynocentric language” and new linguistic landscape evident in contemporary women’s writing.

The essays in this issue contain thoughtful discussions of ideologies, practices, and expressions that permeate the lives of people in distant places at divergent times. The vitality of the contributions is a testament to the scholarly inspiration that awaits those who venture into the entanglements of religion and society.

The CSRS graduate student fellows who formed the editorial board for this issue would like to express sincere thanks to all of the contributors for the effort they took to make their pieces so expressive and engaging, as well as to those students who contributed submissions that were not published. Support from the CSRS and its administrative staff, Moira Hill, Susan Karim, and Leslie Kenny, were central to the completion of this project.

Cynthia Korpan

For the Editorial Board, November 2006

# Jesus Was a Feminist: An Institutional Ethnography of Feminist Christian Women

Beverley Bouma, University of Victoria

## Abstract

*Institutional ethnography is used to examine the everyday, lived experiences of feminist Christian women in relation to Biblical text. Through interviews, I explore how feminist Christian women respond to, organize, and are organized by textually mediated social relations. While feminist and Christian institutional discourses appear on the surface to be competing belief systems, the women I interviewed had a variety of responses to this apparent dissonance. Related to local and trans-local settings, their responses include compartmentalization, information management, selective religiosity, and integration of beliefs.*

Jesus was a feminist—one of the greatest feminists of all time... I can't understand Christians who say they aren't feminists!  
~Marie

In this research, I employ institutional ethnography to explore the discourse surrounding the ways in which feminist Christian women make sense of Christian liturgy in light of what appear to be competing belief systems. Institutional ethnography, a feminist method of sociological inquiry developed by Dorothy E. Smith, requires the researcher to take the standpoint of the ruled. This standpoint locates our selves as actively involved in our research—the woman's standpoint is the working, actual, on-the-ground perspective. It is rooted in the embodied, everyday-everynight viewpoint of a person who is engaged in social relations that link her to others in a variety of ways (Smith, 1999). Through institutional ethnography, I examine these textually mediated social relations in terms of how they organize, how they *are* organized, and how feminist Christian women respond to, interact with, and contribute to them.

The issue is explored through my own experience as a feminist and as a former member of the Christian Reformed Church and through my conversations with women identifying as both feminist and Christian. Intimate familiarities with feminist and Christian discourses reveal certain tensions between the two, especially in issues of sex/gender inequality. What happens when both of

these discourses are adopted by one person? Do women who identify as both feminist and Christian engage in a particular process or do some work to reconcile what appear to be contradictory values? To answer these questions, I begin with an examination of the every day, lived experiences of feminist Christian women in relation to a particular Biblical text.

The text is well known in Christian discourse as the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father,  
Which art in Heaven.  
Hallowed be Thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom come,  
Thy Will be done—  
On Earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day  
Our daily bread,  
And forgive our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
And deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the Kingdom,  
And the Power,  
And the Glory  
Forever.  
Amen.

~Matthew 6:9–16, Luke 11:1–4

This is the prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples, as recorded in history by the writers of the Biblical books of Matthew and Luke. Translated into many languages, the Bible is believed by Christians to be the holy word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Individually, socially, and within the institution of the Christian church, people in different countries, time zones, and languages have their actions coordinated by the activation of this text. The Lord's Prayer is transmitted to Christians internationally as the standard for prayer. Christians the world over start and end their days with the Lord's Prayer, bowing their heads, bending their knees, gathering with their families. In small groups and in churches, they recite the words in unison, read them, and listen to others pray them. This speaks to the trans-local nature of textually mediated social organization,

which occurs in and across local and trans-local settings where groups of people are involved in activating the text.

Specific questions arise when considering the Lord's Prayer in relation to feminist ideologies. Do women identifying both as Christian and feminist find tensions between their two belief systems with regard to this text? How does the institutional discourse surrounding this text affect their activation and performance of the text. Is there any reconciliatory work being done by these women in resolving any tensions between feminist and institutional perceptions of this text?

The assumption of tensions between feminism and Christianity is grounded in my twenty-five years of accumulated study of Christian texts and discourses, as well as of the values, beliefs and rhetoric expounded by the Christian Reformed Church of Canada, which I attended during this same span of time. Early adoption of feminist ideals—without formal exposure to feminist theory—created an increasing level of discomfort for me as I became less able to accept Biblical text in the unquestioning manner that is sometimes defined as “faith” in mainstream Christianity. This discomfort increased—as the disjuncture of feminist and Christian ideologies became increasingly apparent—and resulted in my personal withdrawal from all the institutional aspects of this religion.

Not all women identifying as feminist and Christian choose to disengage from their church communities. Many continue the work of activating Christian liturgical text either individually or within an institutional setting, questioning and challenging the assumptions intrinsic to those activities. In sharing their experiences, three women—referred to in this paper as Kate, Heidi, and Marie\*—illuminate the disjuncture, complementarity, and fusion of these two identities into unique feminist Christian discourses.

The work of activating the text differs, depending on whether one intends this undertaking to be an individual or group event. In the case of individual activation, it may be a silent recitation prior to a meal. Or, it may involve a more intricate ritual: perhaps choosing a particular time of day to dedicate to the activity, traveling to a quiet place, secluding oneself, reading the Bible, meditating, chanting, singing, or combining any number of

actions that add personal meaning to the experience. In addition, the work of activating the text may include such things as preparing breakfast for one's family, bathing, ensuring there are clean clothes for oneself and one's partner and children to wear to church, cleaning the home in preparation for the possibility of company coming by after the church service, fuelling a vehicle, walking or arranging other transportation to the place of worship, or ensuring children have memorized a song or verse for their Sunday school class. All of these types of preparations, in different combinations, are lived experiences of the unrecognized work that takes place prior to and makes possible the activation of the text.

The activation of the text, particularly in the institutional setting of a church service, is not a neutral undertaking and involves certain assumptions: persons present have memorized or are familiar with the text, can locate it within the larger body of textual material at the location, and have a desire to participate in meaningful performance of the text. These assumptions affect the individual's relation to both the text and the church.

Heidi describes her first experience of the Lord's Prayer in the context of a Sunday service in an Anglican Church in her hometown. She was only attending for the purpose of performing as a member of her school choir. Prior to the sacrament of communion<sup>1</sup>, church members performed the Lord's Prayer in unison without significant prompting, introduction, or memory aids. This experience, as well as subsequent similar experiences resulted in confusion, as “...they never told you in the book where it was, you were just expected to know it.” The expectation that each person present at the service knows certain parts of commonly used liturgy did nothing to promote increased access to the text, nor did it foster a desire to learn the text for its intrinsic value; rather, it created a discomfort in the church setting, stemming from an impression that belonging to the church involved some type of esoteric knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> The sacrament of communion is a ritual in which Christians eat bread and drink wine to remember that Jesus Christ sacrificed his life (flesh and blood) and suffered in hell as payment for the sins of humanity. On the third day after his death, the Bible says, Jesus arose from the dead, appeared to his disciples so that they would have no doubt of his resurrection by God, and ascended into heaven to be with the Father (Matthew 26:26–27:20; Mark 15:21–16:19; Luke 23:26–24:50).

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\*Names of research participants have been changed.

The notion of esoteric knowledge is supported by Kate's assertion that she was not "...taught it, I just remember sitting in church, and I think I just picked it up," and Marie's recollection that "...it's the first thing you memorize." The initial motivation for activating the text in Heidi's case was to alleviate the uncomfortable situation of being unable to follow institutional liturgical programming, rather than a desire to perform and access the true meaning of the text. For Kate and Marie, initial activation of the prayer involved repeated exposure to its performance in an institutional setting, resulting in its memorization. In each case, none of the institutional assumptions of knowledge of the text, or related desires to activate it in a meaningful way were met during each participant's initial performance of the Lord's Prayer; this had the most noticeable effect on Heidi, a non-Christian who began attending the Anglican Church to sing with her school choir.

When the text is known, institutional recital includes the assumption that persons participating in its performance are familiar with its origin and meaning, have the same or similar beliefs regarding the text, and agree with the church's presentation of it. In this case, Biblical accounts of the origin of the Lord's Prayer state that this prayer was taught by Jesus Christ to his disciples after they asked him how to pray. Of the women interviewed, only Heidi claimed knowledge of the origin of the Lord's Prayer, saying that after she began to attend the Anglican Church regularly the pastor there gave a series of sermons on the topic. When asked if the origin of the Lord's Prayer made any difference to their beliefs or interpretation thereof, Kate stated, "I don't think I ever really thought about that," and Marie replied, "I don't think that origin means so much to me." While the lack of contextual presentation of these remarks belies the women's general awareness of this text, their commentary is indicative of erroneous assumptions related to the activation of the text within the church institution.

Heidi feels that "because it was a prayer that Jesus had taught us to pray to the Father, that something spiritual happens when we pray it, beyond our own intellectual ability to understand..." In addition, the series of sermons given at her church assisted her in understanding that the origin of the prayer is part of why this particular text is important. She is convinced that the church reflected her own beliefs in this area, rather than her beliefs being a reflection of church

teachings. For Kate, the origin of the prayer does not make a difference; what is more important is that the transcendent qualities of God are acknowledged by her church through incorporation of another gender to the text. Having the pastor begin the Lord's Prayer by saying "Our Father/Our Mother" during church services is a necessity for Kate, as a feminist woman with a same-sex partner, to feel that she "had a place in the religion."

Marie states that rather than the Biblical origin of the Lord's Prayer, "the cultural value means a lot to me." The prayer is no more or less important because of how it came to exist; what matters more to Marie is its present meaning to the Christian community as a whole, as well as to the individual persons choosing to activate the text.

In addition to differing beliefs about and familiarity with the origin of the Lord's Prayer, discussions with these women reveal opinions differing from the dominant Christian discourse regarding meanings within the text. Says Kate:

I don't like the part—the temptation part, and the deliver us from evil either...I realize that there's different things—like, you can be a good person, you can be a bad person—but...I don't think that God doesn't want me to have pre-marital sex, and God doesn't want me to have a female lover, and I don't think that— don't necessarily buy into the idea that there's temptations that I shouldn't go into...and I don't necessarily... believe in a hell...how do you believe in a heaven without believing in a hell? I don't know, but I do...I'm not fond of that part of the prayer.

In this statement, Kate questions the necessity of avoiding "temptations" generally interpreted by Christians as morally wrong, such as pre-marital and same-sex sexual relations. In addition to this departure, she refers to the corollary of heaven-hell as something in which she does not believe. Both of these comments indicate that a selection process based on a different set of values was necessary in order for her to continue her acceptance of Christian liturgy and institutional discourse as a part of her lifestyle.

Marie draws attention to some of the same terms in the Lord's Prayer as Kate, but for different reasons. Marie points out that language and cultural references change throughout history, and in terms of Christian rhetoric, it is difficult to interpret "things like using words like "evil," "power," and "glory"—

those are all words that have been used, like “evil”—what do we think of when we hear the word evil—the forces of evil in the world?” While there is some consensus across Christian denominations regarding the interpretation and application of these terms, Marie’s comment highlights the historical and trans-historical nature of this text. The Lord’s Prayer, in use for nearly 2000 years, has been interpreted in various ways throughout history, and may be interpreted differently today than it was at its inception.

Similar to Marie’s view of the trans-historical nature of the text, but more in keeping with Christian discourse, is Heidi’s view that the Lord’s Prayer transcends time:

I have prayed it and felt a really neat connection with the church of the past...as something that Jesus taught, it has the authority of God, and if we can look at it in the context it was said originally, we can better understand it and apply it to our present situation.

This perspective, rather than perceiving a certain amount of difficulty or variation in interpreting meanings within the text due to historical change, adopts the dominant Christian discourse that Biblical teachings are as applicable today as they were in Jesus’ time.

Kate accepts intergenerational differences in the interpretation of God as a force, rather than as a male or female figure. She says, “[The Lord’s Prayer is] something that presumably most people believe in when they’re saying it, and you’re all saying it together.” Regardless of individual differences in perceptions of God, or variations in the meanings of various words, the notion of God—and of Jesus Christ as the son of God—is common to every participant. Marie’s statement is inclusive of institutional terminology, but it is indicative of a non-literal interpretation of the Bible. In her view, God is neither male nor female; therefore, Marie looks at the “Our Father” as a non-gendered term for God. In addition, she finds strength in “the power of knowing that so many people have said it and believed in it.”

In general, opinions differing from dominant Christian discourse regarding meanings within the text are based on a view of the Bible as a non-literal document, with various interpretive possibilities influenced by the interpreter’s age, historical time period, gender, education, and social context. The Biblical text, then, while

accepted as God’s holy inspiration, is seen as poesis—the original writer’s interpretation of Jesus’ words, to be re-interpreted through the lens of the reader. Given the contrast of this opinion with that of more traditional, fundamentalist Christianity, it is surprising that each woman presents the same institutional assumption: persons united in the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer in a church setting all have the same or similar beliefs regarding the meanings in and behind the words being spoken.

In this institutional setting, the Lord’s Prayer serves the purpose of creating a sense of unity but has the corollary of reduced personal meaning. Research participants indicate that occasional meaninglessness is due to automaton-like performance and to a feeling of committing an action similar to those performed in “cult” settings. All the women interviewed make statements evoking feelings of connectedness to other Christians through the activation of the text. This sense of intergenerational, cross-cultural linkage is one aspect of the sense of communion elicited by the Lord’s Prayer; in addition, an imminent sense of unity arises through the simultaneous recitation of the text during church services. Within this institutional setting, research participants relate, they truly feel bonded with God and their sisters and brothers in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

There’s power in something...collective, and it’s like the power of chant...you’re all unified in a sense, which I really love about going to mass, and praying, is that there’s really something powerful in hearing your voice amongst a group of others who are saying the same thing and who are praying, and feeling the same spirituality that you do.

In this statement, Marie reiterates the organizational assumption that others present in this social interaction have the same (or at least similar) beliefs regarding the meaning of the text and are in agreement with the church’s presentation and method of activation. This spiritual connection is expressed in a similar fashion by Heidi, who states, “I feel that there’s a lot of unity in it, as well, when we pray it together as Christians.”

In positing that persons present have the same

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<sup>2</sup> “Brothers and sisters in Christ” refers to the belief that through the life and death of God’s son, Jesus Christ, all believers are adopted as sons and daughters of God—brothers and sisters through and with Christ.

feelings and are affected spiritually by the performance of this prayer in the same manner and degree, Marie illustrates the type of belief that is characteristic of Christian faith. Rather than empirically based knowledge, faith is a belief in things not seen; in this case, it may be interpreted as the assumption that others feel the same sense of spirituality when engaged in performance of the text.

Kate agrees that “[The Lord’s Prayer] definitely brings unity” but continues to assert that alteration of the text is a positive step for Christian churches.

I think anytime that we do it slightly differently, it brings meaning because it breaks the rhythm where you’re just spewing out something that is memorized. Christmas Eve, you have so many people that don’t normally go to church that there’s a lot of people that don’t know it. So I think more about it more on Christmas Eve than I do on any other day.

Unity in activating the text only occurs when its performance is mindful; making changes in the wording or changing the style or pace of how it is activated (i.e. chanting) prevents the possibility of an automaton-like recitation by those familiar with the text.

The perception of a mindless or automatic performance is summed up by Heidi’s first experience of the text in the Anglican Church. To her, the Lord’s Prayer seemed like “this sort of drone-like system of words.” Marie uses the same wording to describe the lack of spiritual fulfillment that occurs with the repetition of liturgy on a regular basis. “Sometimes... you listen to people saying it all together, and it sounds like drones, you know...” She goes on to agree with Kate’s previous statement regarding altering the performance of the text, saying “...different religions have helped me give different meanings to it, like Buddhist chant. Until I’d heard Buddhist chant, I never saw [the Lord’s Prayer] as a potential chant...meditative.”

Kate’s experience of chanting the Lord’s Prayer also resulted in a new appreciation of the text, by drawing her out of her comfort zone. She states:

I remember when it was an Easter service... and everyone sort of sang the Lord’s Prayer at the same time, and it was really eerie, only because... I was going through a time where I wasn’t

comfortable with my beliefs, or where I fit in them, and I felt... why were we saying this and why did we all believe... you read things about cults, and you wonder, how can they all believe that?... so, during my youth I questioned it a little... I probably still do.

This questioning of her beliefs has resulted in a firmer sense of her beliefs overall; in particular, parts of this text resonate with her enough to enhance her experience of performing it in the church.

According to Heidi, “...one of the risks of having an institutional prayer is...you just speak it...in moments like that we might as well not be there, and we might as well not pray it, because it’s just this institutional gathering that doesn’t have anything to do with spirituality.” All three women recognize this risk and admit that there have been times where this statement is representative of their experience. The explicit instructions of Jesus about how to pray to God are enacted by the church on the authority of the Bible; therefore, this is not in question. For these women the questioning arises in the interpretation of the instruction, in the acceptability of variation in how they go about following Jesus’ commandment, and in how it is informed by their acceptance of what may be seen as the competing values of feminism.

Variations in following Biblical standards of prayer increase depending on the location of the petitioner. Institutional practice permeates the private practice of Christianity and its associated liturgy; however, for these women, variation is embraced in personal prayer, as individual differences from institutional discourse are representative of a personal relationship with God and are seen as a sign of spiritual development.

In Kate’s case, changes in institutional practice were directly transferred to her entire family. “...[W]e changed our prayers at home too, so for our grace we wouldn’t use a male name...we’d say ‘let us thank God for our food,’ or ‘let us thank her’...it was actually quite individual.” It was acceptable in her home to personalize prayer in whatever way each person felt was appropriate for the moment.

In relation to the text, Kate “very seldomly” uses the Lord’s Prayer for her personal devotions, explaining that “when I’m doing a [different] prayer on my own, I *feel* much more...” The use of her own dialogue of prayer rather than institutional liturgy creates a more intimate conversation with God for Kate, whereas Marie and Heidi indicate that the Lord’s Prayer is comforting in itself and provides a framework for their personal prayers. Says Marie,



“...sometimes I get insomnia, and I use that or the serenity prayer to put me to sleep, because I find it really calming, saying it over and over in my head.” This calming effect is described by Heidi as well: “...when I was feeling lost and afraid in a spiritual sense, and just really alone, and didn’t know what to pray, or how to communicate to God, that I could just say these words, and pray them, and somehow it would make things better, whether I understood them or not.” Activating this liturgical text in private comforts and consoles both of these women in times of disquiet and loneliness while apart from their fellow Christians.

In addition, the trans-local nature of the text is illustrated by its use outside of church and by the recognition that others in various locations are finding meaning in it as well. For instance, Heidi says, “I feel a sense of unity, even when I’m by myself, just in knowing that people all around the world in different cultures, in different languages, in different experiences than my own have prayed this prayer, earnestly and sincerely, to the Father.” Finding spiritual comfort through activation of the text is made possible due to its trans-locality; no matter their location, the women are able to feel less lonely by coming into the presence of God and their co-believers worldwide.

Further, the activation of the text apart from the church setting creates the opportunity for the women to change it in ways that suit their circumstances. Marie comments on the helpfulness of being provided with guidelines for spiritual practice, saying, “...as a personal prayer I recognize it’s useful, and I’m happy to have it.” In the same way, Heidi explains that the structure of the text—praising God, repenting, petitioning for needs and wants, and glorifying God—is a helpful outline for all prayer. “I think when I pray it by myself, the difference is, I usually use it...as just a frame...to keep me on track and focused, so I really appreciate this as a tool of meditation.” These statements illustrate the willingness to adapt institutional liturgy to one’s personal needs, and they indicate the belief that there is a correct manner in which one may alter the text.

“I think we have a cultural obsession about being right, and being factual. Being right or wrong, is owning power, which is a lot of what the church has been built on, and I see that as being a major fault and doing a disservice to Christianity and spirituality in general.” With this, Marie sums up a main source of tension between feminist and Christian ideologies: competing beliefs regarding

who has power. In the Christian tradition God, Jesus Christ and his disciples, and the writers of the Holy Bible are all men; further, women are often depicted as either virgins or whores, referenced as men’s property, and subject to their will.<sup>3</sup> Feminist ideals of equality for women and men of all ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, genders, sexualities, etc. are incompatible with this type of power structure. Differing Christian and feminist ideologies, each vying for priority over the other, must be addressed by those identifying with both sets of discourse.

Depending upon their social context, this dissonance is addressed differently by the women interviewed, who make use of compartmentalization, information management, selective religiosity, and integration of beliefs.

...[I]n feminist circles, I don’t refer to myself as a Christian very much, and part of that is just a fear of being attacked, or being misunderstood, or not being considered ‘feminist enough’...and also, there comes the problem [for others] of Are you a Christian or feminist first?

Marie’s sense of disjuncture is rooted in others’ perceptions and stigmatization of her feminist and Christian identities, resulting in the employment of information management<sup>4</sup> and compartmentalization strategies to maintain relatively separate spheres of engagement for each identity. For feminists and Christians, the priority of their ideals as either feminist or Christian is projected out to others claiming the same identity; however, if others do not

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 19:6–8—Lot offers his virgin daughters to a mob of angry men; Exodus 21:7–11—Israelites in financial straits may sell their daughters as slaves; Leviticus 21:9—a priest’s daughter who is found to have lost her virginity shall be burnt with fire; Leviticus 21:10–15—a priest may only take a virgin for a wife; Deuteronomy 22:13–21—a wife whom is declared to have not been a virgin on the wedding night by her husband shall be stoned to death; Deuteronomy 24:1–4—an unhappy husband may divorce his wife; Judges 11:29–40—Jephthah the Gil’eadite gives his daughter as a burnt offering to God; Judges 19:23–25—a Levite offers his concubine to a group of Benjaminites; Colossians 3:18–19—wives commanded to submit to husbands; 1 Corinthians 11:3–12—women subject to/created for men; 1 Corinthians 14:34–36—women to be silent in church; 1 Timothy 2:8–15—women to be silent, women are saved by bearing children; 1 Peter 3:1–7—wives subject to husbands; Ephesians 5:22–33—husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the church.

<sup>4</sup> For more on information management, see E. Goffman, *Stigma* (1963).

perceive them to be giving one identity priority over the other, they may not be accepted or taken seriously in feminist or in Christian circles. Interestingly, for Heidi and Marie it appears that being identified as Christian within feminist social settings is more stigmatizing than being feminist amongst other Christians. Heidi states, "...for the longest time, I'd never really call myself a Christian, but I'd say, I'm striving to be a disciple of Jesus..." This presentation of self as an individual disciple of Jesus, rather than as a member of a larger religion, was due to her assessment of hypocrisy within Christian institutions and to her belief that her feminist friends would perceive her negatively should she reveal her Christian identity.

Kate indicates that the closed-minded individuals composing her church congregation created a negative environment for her feminist ideals, and that there were times she considered leaving the United Church. She credits the beginning of a female pastor's ministry with her church as a turning point in reconciling her feminist and Christian beliefs, saying, "...if we hadn't had Jan as a Reverend...I'm not sure if I could've...continued with church...It was much more inclusive...and I wouldn't say the congregation was...it's not a very accepting community..." In the end, Kate agrees with Marie and Heidi, summing up their discussion with

...[I]t's been easier to bring a feminist perspective into Christianity than it has been to bring Christianity into any sort of feminist discussion or feminist classroom, I've found...just as with anything, there's sorts of stereotypes that go along with saying you're Christian.

It is clear that for these women the process of incorporating both feminist and Christian discourses as primary in their lives involves an introduction of feminist thought into their Christian faith, rather than the reverse. The practice of creating a more progressive, feminist Christianity is rooted in the struggle for human rights. That is what Christianity is based on, states Marie: Jesus, a person who was fighting for social justice.

To me a Christian is...taking what are the main premises of the person of Christ as presented in the Bible, which is love and acceptance, and social justice... and, applying that, using that as a platform for your life—your set of beliefs—and how

you act day to day, and on a larger basis in your life. To me, a feminist is a part of being Christian, because feminism is a movement and a commitment to gender equality and it's a responsibility to always fight for that, but not just fight for it, but to maintain it in our society.

The women herein identified as feminist Christians have a number of general commonalities that either contribute to or are a part of a new feminist Christian discourse. First, none of them regularly or exclusively attend a particular denomination of the Christian church. Kate does not attend church regularly at present, but will attend services at her childhood church when she is visiting her hometown. Heidi does not identify with a church. She states, "...I don't really consider myself an Anglican...I prefer to say that I just come from a Christian perspective...If I weren't able at some point in my life to differentiate between the church and God, I'd never be a Christian..." With these strong words, Heidi distinguishes between beliefs about God and the practice of Christianity, and she indicates that those beliefs are more important than the institution built around them. The church and the Christian religion itself are further defined by Marie as tools for personal growth:

...[I]n regards to Christianity and feminism you cannot rely on there being a right or a wrong...I've always seen Christianity not as a set of beliefs set in stone, but rather as a commitment to a journey, to growth, and I see feminism as the same thing... everything becomes a tool for your identity...

These tools for the journey may be taken up by feminist women and adapted as needed to various circumstances in their lives.

The second commonality in this new feminist Christian discourse is the women's constructions of God as a non-gendered, sentient entity. Even though all the women's introductions to Christianity included male representations of God, Heidi says, "I never perceived God to be male or female." This is a slight contrast to the gender inclusivity of Kate's church, where God is referred to with either or both male and female pronouns; however, discussion regarding the limitations of language feature in every interview. Marie states, "...the limitations of language and how we understand God is—has been genderized; this doesn't have to be...God is both—or neither—so, with that understanding, I can say that

[the text] and not feel threatened by it [referring to God as 'Father'].”

Marie refers to God as “non-gendered” but touches on Kate’s idea of God as “all-gendered”; in any case, both are congruent with the feminist ideal that all genders are equal.

Third, while not all agree that the *text* should be changed, there is agreement that, with regard to gender, the *interpretation* should be changed. Kate advocates changing the Lord’s Prayer to include or substitute “Our Mother.” She says, “I think it’s great...it’s a step in the right direction.” For Marie, interpreting the text to be either non-gendered or all-gendered—regardless of the perceived gender attached to the language used—is enough to move beyond the question of changing the beginning of the text.

Contrary to Marie and Kate, Heidi is firm in her belief that the Lord’s Prayer should not be altered in any way. She says, “I understand the sort of political aspect behind feminists wanting to change this male-dominated language...it is really language, and not a symptom of spirituality or the church.” In her mind, the love of God and the quest for spiritual growth transcends feminist political action. This perspective is illustrative of a significant source of variation in these women’s lives: Christian doctrine has priority over some feminist ideals and not others.

Fourth, and related to list last point, these women engage in what I term “selective religiosity”—emphasizing the parts of the Christian tradition that work well with their feminist ideals, and de-emphasizing the parts that do not. Kate illustrates this point well, saying

...[W]hat would be considered a sin, I don’t consider a sin...I don’t wanna make judgments, that baffles me that you can...take something where almost all of your life choices are considered sins and then ask for redemption from them...I wouldn’t wanna be a part of that...I’m lucky that my church is willing to accept a different sort of lifestyle.

Kate’s statement, while more explicit regarding the editing out of Christian discourse that is contrary to her feminist beliefs, is illustrative of a tailored version of religiosity evident for all three women. Kate puts it succinctly: “I’ve had to take what I can believe and adapt what I can’t to fix what I can buy into.”

The common thread in the development of a

selective religiosity is the continued questioning of ideals, beliefs, and practices. Heidi states that she has “never been able to accept what somebody tells me at face value, because I’ve always questioned my whole life—everything—and so, with Christianity, it wasn’t gonna be any different.” Marie agrees, noting what she calls the folly of being anchored in a set of black and white beliefs rather than in a commitment to personal growth. Spiritual and personal development occur through continued questioning, and, stated Heidi, “...the church was meant to be a group of thinking people...it’s important that we never stop thinking—always keep searching our hearts, and keep searching for the wisdom of God through prayer.”

For all three women this kind of questioning leads to a selective or edited version of Christianity, achieved in large part through a feminist lens. Integration of Christian and feminist identities requires questioning and challenging the basis of belief structures, non-exclusive membership in any particular church, and the vulnerability involved in being open to new learning experiences. Through this process a new, feminist Christian discourse develops.

Regardless of the apparent work involved in the creation of a new discourse of feminist Christianity, Heidi indicates that the two perspectives are a strong match, saying, “...it’s just welded together really well...I am a feminist from the point of view of not wanting to be treated any differently on account of being a woman...for this world, as well as in the church, and in any other aspect...” She credits Christianity and the love of God with helping her to love herself as she is, improve her body image, and move past her feelings of anger. Heidi expresses Christianity as a way of healing gendered injustice; this differs from Kate and Marie, who see themselves as more oriented to social justice initiatives, including political action against the agents of the ruling relations.

In sum, analysis of the Lord’s Prayer as an institutional text brought forward a larger discussion of dissonant as well as complementary feminist and Christian ideals, ending with a description of how these women manage to balance the discourses associated with each. More research is necessary to completely explore the disjuncture between the two and the different manners in which women are able to incorporate both Christian and feminist discourses into their everyday experiences. Trans-local settings involved in the activation of the text extend into women’s everyday/everynight existence and back out again; they pray the Lord’s Prayer alone and/or

socially, feeling a connectedness with Christians worldwide and with society at large.

Further, text-mediated decision making by these women reflects the ruling interests in their accedence to the perceived supremacy of either feminist or Christian ideologies in various social contexts. The text in question organizes these women's experiences individually as well as socially, in that it provides instruction for how they are to pray, regardless of their company or location. In the context of these women's various situations, the similarities of their responses to the Lord's Prayer—and to Biblical text generally—may indicate the development of a new, feminist Christian discourse.

## Beer Bottles and Saints: A Postcolonial Reading of Jim Logan's *Let Us Compare Miracles* from His *Classical Aboriginal Series*

Alison Nicole Taylor Campbell, University of Alberta

### Abstract

*Colonization, modernism, and postmodernism have challenged the way First Nations people are looked at, and how their art is perceived. As a result, First Nations artists and theorists are challenging the "otherness" that has been assigned to them through these discourses and are striving to find a place for their art practice in the art canon. In this climate, Jim Logan, a Métis born Canadian artist, challenges tradition through his incorporation of Native imagery into significant Christian works that are part of the Western art canon. In Logan's work an apparent dualism exists: the works reflect Native art production, writing, and discourse, and yet also strive to locate themselves within the European art tradition. To understand this dualism, a post-colonial analysis will be applied to the art conventions incorporated into Logan's work Let Us Compare Miracles, painted in 1992 as part of his Classical Aboriginal Series.*

Jim Logan's *Let Us Compare Miracles* (1992) is a layered work. On the surface, Logan has painted a martyr-like figure reminiscent of St. Sebastian, tied to a pole with arrows embedded in his brown flesh (Fig. 1). Blood trickles from the wounds. Behind the martyr is a column, one half inscribed with text, the other with an ornate pattern. Behind the column is a landscape composed of bright primary colours. A red train passing through yellow and red mountains intercepts an emerald green plain. The landscape behind St. Sebastian reflects the landscape of the Rocky Mountains where meadows are broken by rivers, mountains, and forests. Like the Rocky Mountains, this painting combines elements of the sublime wilderness with the invasion of technology. The train, plane, and automobile are juxtaposed to the image of the teepee—a symbol of the traditional way of life for Plains Indians. Logan has made the martyr Native. This man stands against the pole with his eyes looking heavenward, his identity as a Native person disclosed through the colouring of his skin and his feather headdress.

Extracted from this surface reading of Logan's

*Let Us Compare Miracles* is a much richer message. Issues relating to Christianity, Native identity, and alcoholism are explored by Logan as he manipulates Andrea Mantegna's *St. Sebastien*, circa 1455–60 (Fig. 2), repainting the work to include an Aboriginal person set in a Canadian landscape. The canvas becomes a "third space," where Logan is able to freely address Aboriginal issues in relation to European conquest.<sup>1</sup> *Let Us Compare Miracles* is part of Logan's *Classical Aboriginal Series*, in which he has taken famous works from the European art canon and reworked them to incorporate Aboriginal people. Containing over a dozen paintings—many of these exploring Christian themes—the series includes *A Rethinking on the Western Front* (Fig. 3), a parody of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (Fig. 4); *Jesus was not a Whiteman* (Fig. 5), which references El Greco's *The Savior* (Fig. 6); *The Annunciation* (Fig. 7), a twist on Fra Angelico's fifteenth-century *Annunciation* (Fig. 8), and Paul Gauguin's *Tahitian Woman on the Beach* (Fig. 9).

Born in 1955 in New Westminster, British Columbia, Jim Logan was raised in Port Coquitlam. While growing up, Logan was aware of his "otherness." His mixed Cree, Sioux, and Scottish background set him apart from the white children in his classes. Otherness became a daily issue. When learning about evolution, differences based on skin colour were reinforced for him. Diagrams showing the evolutionary development of man would depict an "evolving" string of characters: Homo Erectus—a black figure; Peking Man, resembling an Oriental; Neanderthal Man—a Jew; and, as Logan points out,

coming after him would be Cro-Magnon Man, and 'jeepers,' this fellow looked like our people! He could be a Sioux or a Cree, a Plains Indian. All these people would be naked, hairy, but when it came

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<sup>1</sup> Homi K Bhabha, "The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 207–221.

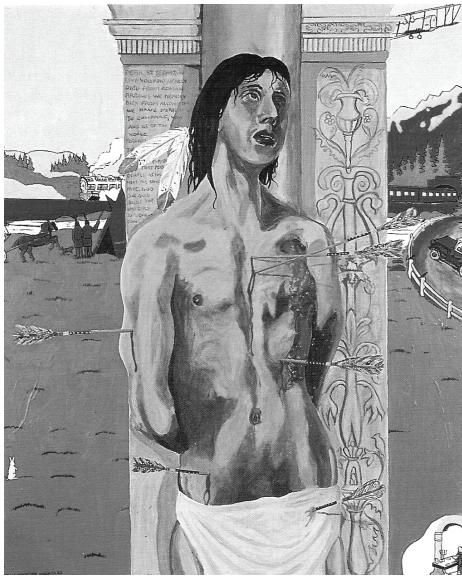


Fig. 1: Jim Logan, *Let Us Compare Miracles*, 1992. Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 84 cm. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

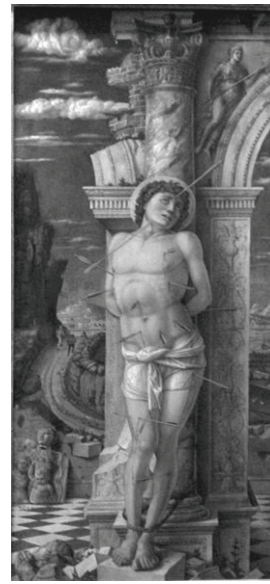


Fig. 2: Andrea Mantegna, *St Sebastian*, c. 1455–1460. Source: Wikipedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/>.)

to representing *Homo sapiens*, modern man, it would be a short-haired White man strutting along!<sup>2</sup>

Experiences similar to the one described above have emerged visually in Logan's *Classical Aboriginal Series*; for example, this evolutionary chain can be seen depicted directly in the top left corner of *A Rethinking on the Western Front* (Fig. 3).

Christianity is a prominent theme within Jim Logan's artwork. His artwork does not undermine Christianity, but rather seeks to relocate the context of viewing to a Western perspective. Unlike many of Logan's contemporaries, who use Christian iconography to challenge Christianity, Logan uses Christian imagery to claim ownership of Christian tradition. Logan writes:

When you're brought up as a minority looking at all the structure of the Church [and] all the imagery of the Church, and realizing that you're not there, it leaves you feeling that you're not supposed to be there...<sup>3</sup>

The canvas is the medium through which Logan addresses his own spiritual beliefs, concluding that

Native people should be represented as part of the Christian tradition. By making St. Sebastian a Native person, Logan finds a way to incorporate his own heritage into the Christian dogma.

Logan's decision to address religion through art was made after his graduation from the Kootenay School of Fine Art in 1983, when he moved to Whitehorse to take the position of graphic designer at the *Yukon Indian News*. During this time he served as a lay minister, working with Aboriginal people in the Kwanlin Dun Village.<sup>4</sup> The living conditions Logan found in the village opened his eyes to the realities of Native oppression. Logan realized that he needed to do more for the people than his ministry allowed. From an interview with Logan, Alexander Easton explains that

...over time the overwhelming poverty and oppression of so many people, and the seemingly entrenched systematic racism which dominated so many lives, was greater than one man's personal faith.<sup>5</sup>

To raise his voice against the oppression of his people, Logan has

channeled his rage at the economic and social conditions of Native life in the North into

<sup>2</sup> Allan J. Ryan, *Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 125.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>4</sup> Allan J. Ryan, "In Profile: Jim Logan," *Native Peoples* (Fall/Winter 1995), 96.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander N. Easton, "Lower than the Angels: The Weight of Jim Logan's Art," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 10: 1 (1990), 139.



what he sincerely believes to be an effective medium by which to promote social change.<sup>6</sup>

*Let Us Compare Miracles*, therefore, is Logan's visual attempt to draw attention to the social conditions of his people, and to help his people locate themselves within the tradition of Christianity.

David Chidester, a professor of comparative religion at the University of Cape Town, explores the impact that religion plays in colonialization. He suggests that religion is a tool used to manipulate the "other" in a colonized country. Chidester argues that once difference is established, consequent action is justified. Thus, otherness "served the colonial project by representing indigenous people as living in a different world."<sup>7</sup>

Through the *Classical Aboriginal Series*, Logan hopes to diminish the gap that has been created between the worlds of European and Aboriginal people. Logan addresses the wounds that religion has caused his people through colonialization. He writes:

It is hard for me as a Christian to imagine how this system could develop in the name of Christ. I hope that by painting the stories it will help to bring healing. I hope my paintings will play a part in this.<sup>8</sup>

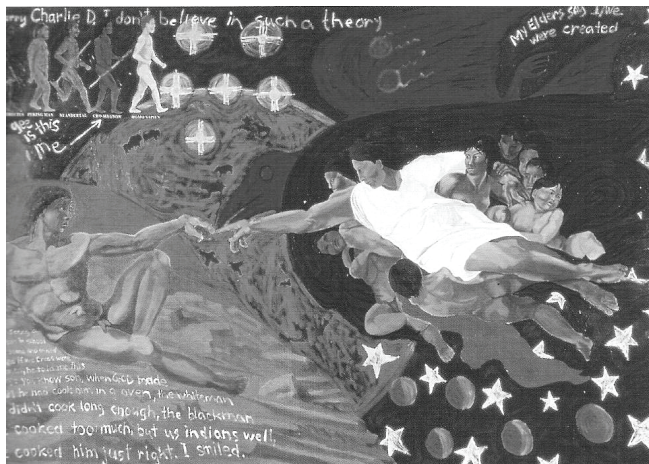


Fig. 3: Jim Logan, *A Rethinking on the Western Front*, 1992. Acrylic on canvas, 167 x 244 cm. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>7</sup> David Chidester, "Colonialism," *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: Cassell, 2000), 428.

<sup>8</sup> Fredy Baglo and Donald Johnson, "Jim Logan the

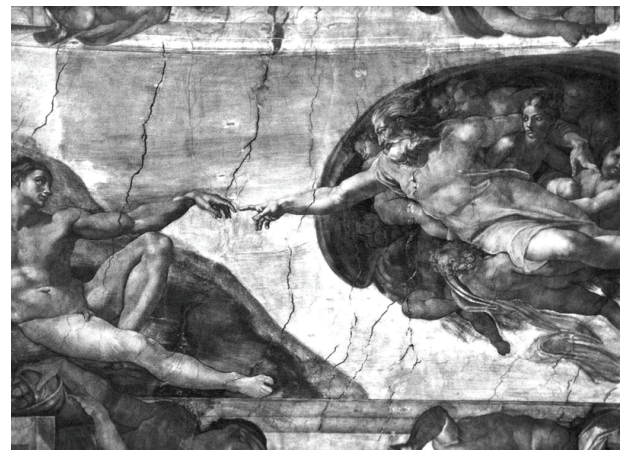


Fig. 4: Michelangelo, *The Creation of Adam*, 1508-1512. Fresco. Source: Wikipedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>).

To bridge the difference between Aboriginal and European people, *Let Us Compare Miracles* uses Andrea Mantegna's *St. Sebastien*, circa 1455–60, as a template, a characteristic common to Logan's *Classical Aboriginal Series*.

In Mantegna's painting, we see the wounded martyr St. Sebastian tied to a pole. According to scholar Jack M. Greenstein, the rubble in which Mantegna has placed Sebastian is a derelict Romanesque basilica indicated by the archway and the column. Mantegna has manipulated the background in which Sebastian is set: the architecture and the landscape on the right side of the column speak of the artists own time period, while the scenery to the left of Sebastian depicts the historical period that Sebastian lived in. To the right, off in the distance, the viewer can see a busy harbour. This reference to modernity, trade, and commodity speaks of progress, and is juxtaposed to the ancient ruins in the background of the left landscape. On the left, we also see Sebastian's executioners moving away from the viewer.<sup>9</sup>

While Mantegna used his *St. Sebastien* to merge Roman and Renaissance epochs, Logan uses *Let Us Compare Miracles* to merge divergent cultures. Echoing Mantegna, *Let Us Compare Miracles* speaks of the progress of time. In the background of the work, the viewer sees the introduction of mechanization to the environment. The horse and carriage and the teepee are juxtaposed with items of modernity: the train, plane, and automobile. Despite the advancement of

Painting Prophet," *Canadian Lutheran Magazine* 6:11 (December 1991), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Jack M. Greenstein, *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 71–80.

time, the native man is depicted in the guise of the “Stone Age Indian.” Though the sublime is conquered by the scientific advancement of mankind, the Indian remains static—the image to which First Nations people have been assigned since conquest.

Many First Nations artists want to be true to their Native heritage while also challenging and expanding the borders of their art practice. First Nations artists are stereotyped by traditional handicraft and have difficulty finding acceptance in contemporary art circles. George Longfish, a First Nations artist who first challenged this conception, is quoted by Young Man as suggesting

While we as cultural people have learned and changed in order to survive, we find that the dominant society no longer wants the Indian to change. An interesting dilemma. We are much less threatening to the white man when we are uneducated in his ways, and we are unable to have our Indian ways.<sup>10</sup>

Jim Logan is in the position to challenge this conception. Like St. Sebastian, who confronted the emperor about his treatment of the Christians, through *Let Us Compare Miracles*, Logan is standing before his audience and voicing his concerns about the mistreatment of First Nations people, while simultaneously challenging his audience to recognize the capabilities of First Nations’ artists.

The *Classical Aboriginal Series* speaks strongly of the need to re-examine the way in which art is perceived. In an interview with Alfred J. Ryan, Logan states:

I went through art history in school and was taught how glorious European art was. It seems to be the standard to judge all other art, and I question that. . . . Is it the standard, and [if so] why is it the standard? What makes masters masters?<sup>11</sup>

Master works, such as the ones referenced in the *Classical Aboriginal Series*, are made to be the standard by which all other art is judged by the art

community. Native handicraft and contemporary native art do not fall within this narrowly focused spectrum. If it is looked at under the guise of the canon, it is labeled “primitive.”<sup>12</sup> If a work is not part of, or built upon the ideas of the European canon, it can not be “high” art. To draw attention to this biased system of evaluating art, Logan has reworked many of these famous images, inserting Native figures, Aboriginal mythology, social concerns, and religious imagery as a way of making political and social statements and a means to address a Western approach to art. Referencing past artists has been, and continues to be, an established method of justifying future developments in art. Thus, Logan has placed himself in the canon amongst other great past artists such as Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Andrea Mantegna, Edouard Manet, Paul Gauguin, Fra Angelico, Jacques Louis David, Andy Warhol, and Russian Icon painters. In Logan’s case, however, he is recreating these masterworks in a Canadian context to address Aboriginal identity. By situating himself as an artist in this cultural context, he is not compromising himself as a Native artist, but grounding his work in a context that can help the viewer understand art. Once establishing his presence within the canon, he is taking the message he has incorporated into the *Classical Aboriginal Series* beyond a simple critique of the canon. He uses this as an opportunity to address social, religious, and political concerns. Logan has achieved this by playing with Mantegna’s image.

On the pillar of Mantegna’s *St. Sebastien*, the artist has inscribed his own name in Greek. Logan, in contrast, has inserted a social message onto the column:

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<sup>12</sup> Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Stiener, “Art, Authenticity, and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (California: University of California Press, 1999), 7. This article goes beyond defining the colonial attitude towards “primitive” art to also explore the notion of authenticity of artwork produced by colonized people. The concept of authenticity discussed by Phillips and Steiner provide a useful framework to understand the criticisms brought up by George Longfish. Traditionally, if First Nations artists were not working in their stereotyped style their work was not considered to be authentic. Logan’s attempt to situate himself in the European canon can be viewed as a means to generate authenticity while also attempting to evoke change in viewpoint.

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<sup>10</sup> Alfred Young Man, *Indian Art: It’s A Question of Integrity* (Kamloops: Kamloops Art Gallery, 1998), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Allan J. Ryan, *Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 120.



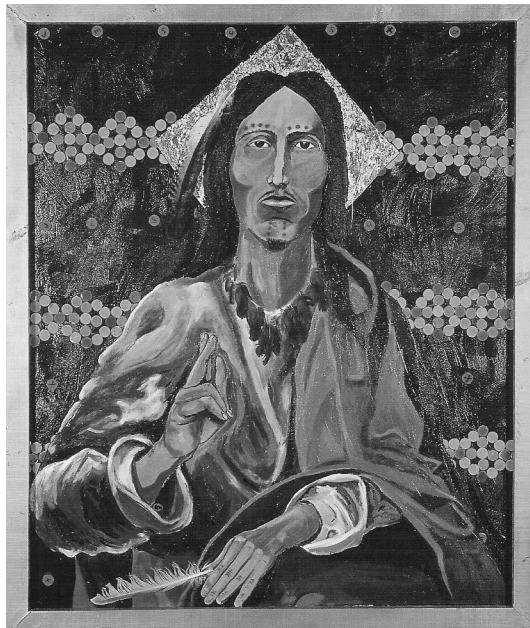


Fig. 5: Jim Logan, *Jesus Was Not a Whiteman*, 1992. Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 100 x 84 cm. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

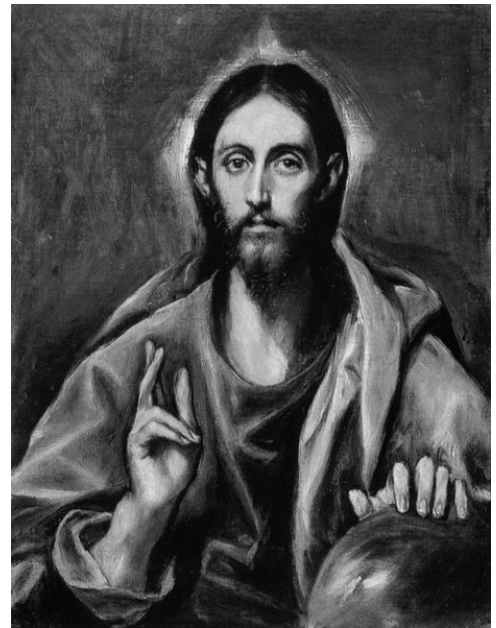


Fig. 6: El Greco, *The Savior*, 16th century. Source: Wikipedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>).



Fig. 7: Jim Logan, *The Annunciation*, 1992. Acrylic and gold leaf on masonite, 61 x 61 cm. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

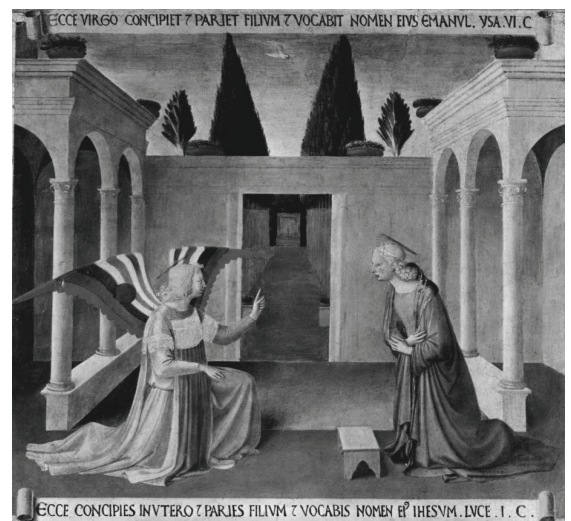


Fig. 8: Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, 15th c. Tempera. Source: Wikipedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>).

Dear St. Sebastian, like you who nearly died from Roman arrows we nearly died from alcoholism we have miracles to compare, you and us of the same world.

Logan has used the canvas as a third space, a space to bring two different cultural groups together to open dialogue between these groups. While St. Sebastian was pierced with arrows for his faith, since first contact, First Nations groups have struggled for survival, fighting disease, persecution, environmental change, and alcohol addictions.

*Let Us Compare Miracles* speaks of the struggle that First Nations people have had with alcohol. Mantegna deliberately chose to situate his Sebastian in a Romanesque Basilica, an environment that reflected the reason for his suffering; Sebastian was martyred for his faith. Logan's Sebastian is suffering because of the effects of alcohol on Native communities. It is not surprising, therefore, that the landscape in which Logan has deliberately set his Sebastian figure is not just a generic image of the Canadian Rockies, but the landscape that figures prominently on the label for Pilsner Beer (Fig. 10). Pilsner beer, a Molson product, has a longstanding tradition in western Canada. According to Molson's website,

Pilsner is the beer that sparks pride in the down-to-earth values that endure in Western Canada. The beer has been brewed in the west since 1926 and has an extremely loyal following. Pilsner remains true to its western roots. . .<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 9: Paul Gauguin, *Tahitian Women (On the Beach)*, 1891. Oil on canvas. Source: Wikipedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org>).

The visual elements in the Pilsner Beer label show not only the progress of time, but also first contact, depicted by the stagecoach moving toward the teepee. The introduction of alcohol to the First Nations people is the result of European contact in Canada, and its effects have been destructive to First Nations communities. Many First Nations people have turned to alcohol as a means of coping with the destructive changes to their lifestyle caused by modernity, the loss of language, culture, and the aftermath of colonialism.

The train, plane, and automobile, pictured in the Pilsner Beer label, are incorporated into Logan's work and speak of the destruction of the landscape, the end of nomadic lifestyles, and the need for First Nations people to adapt to a new environment. Alcohol provides an escape for those who can not adjust to these forced changes in lifestyle. This phenomenon is exemplified by the Lubicon nation. Once living as hunters and trappers in northern Alberta, their lifestyle was disrupted when Shell Oil gained the rights to drill on the land that they inhabited. With the invasion of the rigs, the moose population migrated further north, and animals that the Lubicon once trapped followed. Without food or livelihood, the Lubicon turned to alcohol, and there are now few families not affected by suicide, depression, or addiction.<sup>14</sup>

The use of a beer label, therefore, highlights issues of alcoholism addressed by Logan. The tiny scene in the right corner of the work of a monk brewing beer is directly taken from the Pilsner ad; however, in Logan's

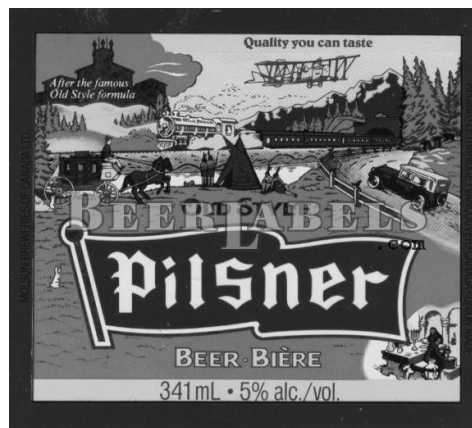


Fig. 10: Molson Breweries, *House of Lethbridge Old Style Pilsner, Centennial 1885–1985*. Reprinted courtesy of BeerLabels.com.

<sup>13</sup> Accessed from [www.molson.com/en/molson\\_brands](http://www.molson.com/en/molson_brands). 26 March 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Todd, "Why an angry Lubicon Indian band will picket the Olympics' opening: they claim their land was stolen, resources given to corporations," *The Montreal*



work, it reinforces the cause of the martyr's suffering. Mantegna painted the archers strolling away from the torture scene; while Logan has depicted the monk brewing beer as his interpretation of Mantegna's convention. This painting, however, is not meant to cast blame, but instead, to alert the viewer to the issue of alcoholism. Logan states:

The comparison is one of recovery rather than suffering. Just as St. Sebastian made a miraculous recovery from wounds inflicted for his spiritual beliefs, so too Native people are beginning to recover from wounds incurred over a century of alcohol abuse.<sup>15</sup>

Like so many of his contemporaries, Logan situates himself as an artist/healer,<sup>16</sup> and has created a visual environment where "cultural and cross-cultural healing can take place."<sup>17</sup>

Art is the medium by which Jim Logan has found his voice. Through the *Classical Aboriginal Series*, Logan has evoked conversation about First Nations people; conversations that challenge the location of Aboriginal people within Christianity, while drawing attention to the compromised status given to First Nations artists. *Let Us Compare Miracles* provides Logan with the means to open channels of communication between Native and non-Native communities. Through this complex work, Logan has subverted the traditional "white" viewpoint of Western art by integrating a Native person into Andrea Mantegna's *St Sebastien*. The incorporation of the Pilsner Beer label locates Logan's painting in a Canadian context, further removing the work from a European basis. This action also provides Logan with the context to discuss alcoholism and contemporary Aboriginal social issues. Through the combination of beer bottles and saints Logan reminds the viewer of the miracle of survival.

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*Gazette* (13 February 1988), A1 Front.

<sup>15</sup> Allan J. Ryan, 194.

<sup>16</sup> This is a strategy taken by other Native artists such as Rebecca Belmore, whose works aim to initiate healing regarding land loss, and lack of voice, or Joane Cardinal-Schubert, who works through issues such as residential schools in her art.

<sup>17</sup> Allan J. Ryan, "In Profile: Jim Logan," *Native Peoples* (Fall/Winter 1995), 96.

# The Popes and the Cold War: Examining Encyclical Evidence and the Evolution of their *Ostpolitik*, 1945–1990

Robert H. Dennis, Queen's University\*

## Abstract

*This discussion identifies the changing nature of the Vatican's ostpolitik—its attempt to assuage tension between the Roman Catholic Church and the governments of the USSR and its satellites in Eastern Europe—by sampling how these approaches were articulated within the discourse of particular encyclicals promulgated during pontificates from the onset of the Cold War through to its conclusion. It is divided into four short sections, one allotted to each pope, starting mid-way through the pontificate of Pope Pius XII (1939–1958) in 1945, and ending in the midst of Pope John Paul II's (1978–2005) in 1990. Encyclical evidence provides an effective and accessible primary-source window into understanding the contemporary Vatican's intellectual history vis-à-vis its position on the Cold War.*

The earliest statement on the Vatican's position on Communism can be traced back to the condemnation made by Pope Pius IX (1846–1878) in *Qui Pluribus* (1846).<sup>1</sup> Only two years later, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published their infamous manifesto, leading to a firmer anathema in the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864).<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite

these efforts, no other text did as much to shape the course of history in the second millennia. Indeed, its influence on the development of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) led Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) to state in *Divini Redemptoris* (1937):

Communism is intrinsically wrong, and no one who would save Christian civilization may collaborate with it in any undertaking whatsoever.

He also said:

Those who permit themselves to be deceived into lending their aid towards the triumph of Communism in their own country will be the first to fall victim of their terror.<sup>3</sup>

Given the broad *lacunae* in the literature, there is a wonderful opportunity for an industrious scholar to situate the history of the Vatican's position on Communism in relation (or in opposition) to developments in Marxism from 1848 to 1917, Marxism-Leninism from 1917 to 1928, and Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism from 1928 to 1945.<sup>4</sup> Such an effort

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absolutely contrary to the natural law itself, and if once adopted would utterly destroy the rights, property, and possessions of all men, and even society itself." Quoted in *Divini Redemptoris*, "Attitudes of the Church Towards Communism," article 4.

<sup>3</sup> These excerpts from *Divini Redemptoris* are found in Thomas J. Craughwell (ed), *The Wisdom of the Popes* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 226.

<sup>4</sup> In the first section of his monograph, "The Church and the Challenge of Communism," Peter C. Kent offers a brief, though excellent, treatment of this variety. See Peter C. Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII: The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943–1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2002), 11–18. Moreover, there are exciting opportunities here, I believe, particularly within a historical institutionalism paradigm, which experienced renewed interest in 1990s among political economists and political scientists. For a good overview of historical institutionalism's precepts see Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative politics," in Kathleen Thelen et al. *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–32.

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<sup>1</sup> Used as foundational to its argument, this text is cited in *Divini Redemptoris*, "Attitudes of the Church Towards Communism," article 4.

<sup>2</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin Classics, 1985 edition). In the *Syllabus of Errors*, which identified contemporary errors in the nineteenth century and was in effect until a pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), was adopted during Vatican II, Pope Pius IX wrote: "that infamous doctrine of so called Communism which is

would offer much to other analyses on how the Vatican's *ostpolitik*—its attempt to assuage tension between the Catholic Church and the governments of the USSR and its satellites in Eastern Europe—was culturally, intellectually, and politically constructed during the Cold War<sup>5</sup>

The task at hand is a far more humble project. In order to provide meaningful background for such an endeavour, this discussion limits itself to identifying the changing nature of *ostpolitik* and sampling how these approaches were articulated within the discourse of particular encyclicals promulgated during pontificates from the onset of the Cold War through to its conclusion. It is divided into four short sections, one allotted to each pope, starting mid-way through the pontificate of Pope Pius XII in 1945, and ending in the midst of Pope John Paul II's term (1978–2005) in 1990.<sup>6</sup> Ostensibly, this approach requires more focus on select primary documents and less reliance on secondary material; however, it does provide an important means of understanding the contemporary Vatican's intellectual history *vis-à-vis* its position on the Cold War. Because these are currents that have run through topics studied to date, it is intended to culminate the author's initial attempt to address the contemporary history of the Vatican, its popes, and their pontificates.

## I. Pope Pius XII: 1945–1958

As Peter C. Kent adroitly points out in *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII*, the central interpretative issue on Pope Pius XII's role in the Cold War is whether or not he had an active political agenda during its onset.<sup>7</sup> While concurring that Pope Pius did have a political agenda, the author moves the debate beyond a simple active/inactive dichotomy and argues these policies often ran contrary to any single "great" power.

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<sup>5</sup> This definition is taken from an article from Dennis J. Dunn published in the midst of the Cold War. See Dennis J. Dunn, "The Vatican's *Ostpolitik*: Past and Present," *Journal of International Affairs* volume 36, number 2 (Fall/Winter 1982/83), 247.

<sup>6</sup> Given his short tenure, Pope John Paul I (1978) has been reverentially omitted from this discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Given the economy of time and space, this historiographical question needs to be left aside particularly since it has been dealt with in the introduction of the monograph cited above. See Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII*, 8.

The Holy Father worked for compromise amidst demands for unconditional surrender.<sup>8</sup> Kent writes:

Although he relished the opportunity to fashion his discourses on spiritual principle, when it came to judging the behaviour of people and nations, Pacelli had a difficult time resolving the many perspectives bearing on particular questions.<sup>9</sup>

This insight bears directly on an attempt to define Pope Pius XII's *ostpolitik* and raises three interrelated questions: first, was there a programmatic break from early papal thought, or was there broad continuity situated in a new global paradigm? Second, did he deal with Communism as an abstraction, or did Pius XII react to its practical implications in Eastern Europe and the USSR? And finally, did political considerations operate independently of doctrinal concerns? Answers to how these questions are "played-out" ought to be interpreted initially, and importantly, in light of the Holy Office decree signed by Pope Pius XII on 30 June 1949 and released two weeks later on 14 July 1949. It not only excommunicated Communists ascribing to materialist doctrines, but also individuals working to install Communist regimes.<sup>10</sup> While Pope Pius XII did perceive a much greater political threat from Communism than had his predecessors, one ought to understand this concern in terms of its doctrinal implications—including its inherent atheism, suppression of religious freedoms, and other forms of religious persecution—rendering the former contingent on the latter.<sup>11</sup>

Towards this end, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical titled *Humani Generis* (1950) in the Holy Year, which dealt efficiently with doctrinal matters pertaining to evolution, new trends in philosophy, such as developments in existentialist thought, and, in several instances, Communism. Here he wrote:

Communists gladly subscribe to this opinion so that, when the souls of men have been deprived of every idea of a personal God, they may the more efficaciously defend and propagate their dialectical materialism.<sup>12</sup>

Pope Pius XII went on to say:

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (London: Collins, 1985), 225–226; Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII*, 255–256.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Humani Generis*, article 5.

No Catholic can doubt how false this is, especially where there is question of those fictitious theories they call... idealism or materialism, whether historic or dialectic, or even existentialism, whether atheistic or simply the type that denies the validity of the reason in the field of metaphysics.<sup>13</sup>

Although Peter Hebblethwaite questions whether or not it was a “theological bombshell,” it was arguably another twentieth-century *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) like Saint Pius X’s *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907).<sup>14</sup> However even later encyclicals like *Laetamur Admodum* (1956), written for Hungary and Poland, and *Ad Apostolorum Principis* (1958) directed at China, which contained austere political messages, were rooted in doctrinal concerns. Clearly this characterization was true for *Humani Generis*, which was based on fears over new developments in theology and its influence on church teachings, perhaps directed at the French Church and its priest-workers, and directly took issue with the political reality of Communism and its affect on the church throughout the world.<sup>15</sup>

## II. Blessed John XXIII: 1958–1963

An important historical issue in determining the nature of his *ostpolitik*, though not widely discussed in the secondary literature, is the moment when Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) broke from papal tradition and curial influence by articulating his own vision for relations with the Communist bloc. Clearly, this approach does not come in the first half of his short pontificate. Even when Pope John announced there would be a Council—in a speech at St. Paul’s Cathedral on 25 January 1959—he spoke in language that disparaged Communism.<sup>16</sup> His first encyclical, *Ad Petri Cathedram* (1959), probably written for Pope Pius XII, reinforced this point.<sup>17</sup> Whereas his

predecessors denounced the system of governance on doctrinal grounds—the Curia continued this practice during “Good” Pope John’s pontificate—it was not until he issued *Mater et Magistra* (1960) that his *ostpolitik* may be understood in a pastoral capacity.<sup>18</sup> Redefining the church’s traditional position on Communism and Socialism, he spoke to all men of good will and re-established diplomatic ties with Moscow.<sup>19</sup> This new approach is emphasized by the language used in the preparatory Council documents: “fear of Soviet power,” “hatred of Communism,” “the iron curtain,” and “the Church of silence” were all terms the Holy Father wished to avoid.<sup>20</sup> While the effectiveness of any given *ostpolitik* is a separate issue, Pope John’s approach began to pay dividends as a number of bishops from Eastern Europe, Karol Wojtyla from Krakow among them, arrived for the opening of the Council in October 1962.<sup>21</sup> Only days later, Pope John, due largely to his pastoral approach to the Cold War, helped avert a nuclear holocaust as the United States and Soviet Union faced off in the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>22</sup>

Encapsulating his *ostpolitik*, and perhaps reflective of contemplative introspection on these events, Pope John XXIII issued *Pacem in Terris* (1963) that became one of the most important encyclicals in papal history. Appealing not only to Church brethren, but the whole of humankind, Pope John covered a range of issues in his final encyclical including economic and political rights, disarmament, and the United Nations (UN). Here he transcended anathemas directed at either superpower and instead articulated a pastoral vision for the entire human community. Offering a message applicable to both the occupation of the Eastern bloc as well as the neo-colonialism perpetuated by the West, he cited “characteristics of the present day,” saying

No one wants to feel subject to political powers located outside his own country or ethnic group. Thus in very many human beings the inferiority complex which endured for hundreds and thousands of years is disappearing, while in others there is an

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., article 32.

<sup>14</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, 228; Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope Paul VI: the First Modern Pope* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 235.

<sup>15</sup> While this discussion does not deal with this issue extensively, see Pope Pius’ disapproval of priest-workers in Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, 228.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 320–321.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, an article entitled *Punti Fermi* in *L’Osservatore Romano* on 18 May 1960. Though unsigned, but it was likely written by Cardinal Ottaviani, Cardinal Siri, and Cardinal Tardini. See Ibid., 358.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 393–394.

<sup>20</sup> Hansjakob Stehle, *Politics of the Vatican 1917–1978* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), 444. Cited in Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, 414.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 427.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 445–446.

attenuation and gradual fading of the corresponding superiority complex which had its roots in socio-economic privileges, sex or political standing.<sup>23</sup>

Recasting the modern world in a positive light, *Pacem in Terris* was Pope John's "last will and testament."<sup>24</sup> It had two remarkable effects. First, in the international community, the encyclical was enthusiastically received at the UN when Cardinal Suenens presented it.<sup>25</sup> Second, and perhaps even more importantly, within the Church Pope John walked a fine line between creating greater harmony and marginalizing the plight of his faithful living under the restraints of Communism in the "Catholic" countries of Eastern Europe.<sup>26</sup> Complicity with oppressors, inadvertent or not, is not well received. Perhaps, then, the true importance of *Pacem in Terris* was moving beyond this objection by stating ideals pertinent to both sides of the bi-polar world.

### III. Pope Paul VI: 1963–1978

By the beginning of Paul VI's (1963–1978) pontificate, then, being inherently multifaceted was a conceptual hallmark of the Vatican's *ostpolitik*.<sup>27</sup> Pope Paul, largely through his leadership in the Council for Public Affairs, Monsignor Agostino Casaroli, fully added two other descriptors to the mix: dialogue and development. According to this pontiff's first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), dialogue was possible—a natural extension of Pope John's *ostpolitik*—and the Church continued to repudiate ideological systems premised on a rejection of God. This was a powerful caveat to his predecessor's work. Moreover, while the Church

had not altered its position, the Communist bloc had made an important concession.<sup>28</sup> This position was the foundation for Pope Paul's speech at the United Nations the following year, when he addressed the supranational institution and focused on creating dialogue, not only between Moscow and Rome as he suggested earlier, but between the Church and the international community.<sup>29</sup> By 1971, Casaroli made the first official visit to Moscow since 1917.<sup>30</sup> Pope Paul's approach, however, quietly undermined the same system with which it sought *détente*. Because Communism saw religion as an alienation of capitalism, Communist countries were prepared only to tolerate religion during a transitional period, and then only if it was run by the state. By continuing to dialogue with Communist countries, Pope Paul maintained the Church in much of Eastern Europe and managed to discredit, in theory, a system he sought appeasement with in practice.<sup>31</sup> Unbeknown to the Holy Father, the effect of his *ostpolitik*, most venomous to Communism in the Eastern bloc, had yet to occur, for "...without the overtures to the East by Paul VI and Casaroli, a Polish Bishop would never have been elected Pope."<sup>32</sup> Thus, this discussion submits, the nature of Pope Paul's *ostpolitik*, whether in intent or outcome, ought to be examined as a subject of historical revisionism.

Since the developing world was the next battleground in the Cold War, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Pope Paul VI's great encyclical on development in these regions, ought to be considered in this context. Though he rarely used the term "capitalism," opting for "liberalism" instead, the Bishop of Rome made no mention of "Communism." However, reading it "against the grain," one can see latent suggestions become manifest in Pope Paul's thinking. The encyclical is based on axiomatic assumptions—even where it repudiates capitalism. It suggests that a proper world order ought to be based on a market economy within a welfare state, private property, and an equitable distribution of goods and services.<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere, however, Pope Paul writes more

<sup>23</sup> *Pacem in Terris*, article 43.

<sup>24</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, 467, 484–485.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 495; Hebblethwaite, *Pope Paul VI*, 436.

<sup>26</sup> Dennis J. Dunn writes: "In contrast to the other East European states, papal *Ostpolitik* was viewed suspiciously in Poland, not by Communists, but by the Polish Catholic leadership." See Dunn, "The Vatican's *Ostpolitik*: Past and Present," 253.

<sup>27</sup> Commenting on this evolution, Hebblethwaite writes: "It has two aims and works on two levels. It hopes to improve the lot of Catholics living under Communism and to contribute something to peace and *détente* on the wider international scene. It has a pastoral and a world-political objective."<sup>27</sup> See Peter Hebblethwaite, *The Runaway Church* (London: Collins Publishing, 1975), 165.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 164–165.

<sup>29</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Pope Paul VI*, 436–440.

<sup>30</sup> Hebblethwaite, *The Runaway Church*, 167.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 171, 177.

<sup>32</sup> Dunn, "The Vatican's *Ostpolitik*: Past and Present," 254.

<sup>33</sup> A stance one might call today "capitalism with a human face." Writing on authentic development, he argues, "The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone...it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man...What counts for us is

overtly on the merit of democratic pluralism, saying that

[the public authorities] must also see to it that private initiative and intermediary organizations are involved in this work. In this way they will avoid total collectivization and the dangers of a planned economy, which might threaten human liberty and obstruct the exercise of man's basic human rights.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas political considerations became tied to development, pastoral ones were couched in the language of dialogue. His venerable predecessor's phrase, "To all men of good will," is used in the encyclical's opening and closing words. Pope Paul asks, "We call upon all men of good will to join forces with you as a band of brothers. Knowing, as we all do, that development means peace these days, what man would not want to work for it with every ounce of his strength?"<sup>35</sup> Although a close reading shows the pope favours a western model, advocating one was not his primary concern. Rather, he disseminates modern commandments for the modern world. Hebblethwaite summarizes these commandments as

Feed the hungry; care for the health of all people and all peoples; educate humanity; free the enslaved.<sup>36</sup>

Just as *Pacem in Terris* was a vital part of Pope John XXIII's pontificate, *Populorum Progressio*, arguably, became inextricably linked to Pope Paul VI's legacy.

#### IV. Pope John Paul II: 1978–1990

In contrast to his predecessors, and perhaps as a consequence of being a Pole raised under Communist rule, Pope John Paul II was unwilling to placate Communist regimes. With the notable exception of Pope Pius XII, it is curious, then, to

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man—each individual man, each human group, and humanity as a whole." By offering a critique of capitalism, moreover, he was tempering a powerful repudiation of the philosophic/ideological system evident in the Eastern bloc. See *Populorum Progressio*, article 14.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., article 33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., article 87.

<sup>36</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Pope Paul VI*, 483.

cite continuity with his immediate predecessors' *ostpolitik*. Yet the Holy Father did share some of Pope John XXIII's pastoral concerns, and Pope Paul VI's chief viceroy on foreign affairs, Agostino Casaroli, not only maintained this position, but was elevated to secretary of state and made a cardinal. Thus Pope John Paul's *ostpolitik* was unique—a blend of change and continuity—not only reintroducing an active political agenda, but establishing particular political objectives as well. The historical evidence reveals compelling basis for this claim: after his election. As Hebblethwaite writes,

When he went to Gniezno in 1979 and proclaimed "spiritual unity of Europe," he seemed to be disregarding the brutal material facts—the ideological division of Europe, the Berlin Wall, and so on...it stood Marxism on its head in so far as it asserted that, eventually, the material arrangements would catch up to this pre-existing "spiritual unity," and give it expression.<sup>37</sup>

The assassination attempt by Mehmet Ali Agca on 13 May 1981, commissioned by the Soviet secret police (KGB), offers proof that the Soviet bloc was conscious of this objective.<sup>38</sup> Yet, arguably it was this event that inaugurated the "Holy Alliance" between the church and the United States, argues Carl Bernstein, "to hasten the end of the Communist empire" after Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Regan met in 1982.<sup>39</sup> Clearly Pope John Paul II had a political end game in mind early in his pontificate. The important, grand-scale historiographical question, then, is how he influenced the end of the Cold War and fall of Communism in the Eastern bloc.<sup>40</sup>

Using his encyclicals as a tool to further his *ostpolitik*, *Laborem Exercens* (1981) was at once covertly and overtly political. Written to commemorate the great social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), some of the opening words of *Laborem Exercens* were,

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, "The End of the Vatican's *Ostpolitik*," in Peter C. Kent and John F. Pollard, *Papal Diplomacy in the Modern Age* (London: Praeger, 1994), 258.

<sup>38</sup> Dunn makes this point in the final footnote of his piece on the Vatican's *ostpolitik*. See Dunn, "The Vatican's *Ostpolitik*: Past and Present," 255.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Bernstein, "The Holy Alliance," *Time* vol. 139 (24 February 1992): 29.

<sup>40</sup> Among the works addressing this issue are: Ibid: 28–35; Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 449–483.



We are celebrating the ninetieth anniversary...on the eve of new developments in...economic and political conditions...with influence in the world of work and production no less than the Industrial Revolution of the last century.<sup>41</sup>

Although he criticized both “Marxist collectivism” and “liberal capitalism” at various points throughout the rest of the encyclical, the pontiff made specific choice in diction to articulate his message. For example, he says

The call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers, especially to those engaged in narrowly specialized monotonous and depersonalized work in the industrial plants, when the routine tends to dominate men...*it was the reaction against the degradation of men as the subject of work* and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation...this reaction united the world in a community marked by great solidarity.<sup>42</sup>

It continued,

...Education in itself is always valuable and an important enrichment of the human person: but in spite of that, “proletarian” processes remain possible...There is a need for every new movement of solidarity of the workers and with the workers....<sup>43</sup>

This article is particularly powerful because it consciously used the language of “solidarity,” at once both an abstract concept reflective of Christian ideals and a powerful statement of support for Polish resistance. After the end of the Cold War, even the Holy Father himself reflected on his *ostpolitik*. He says, “perhaps this is also why the Pope was called from ‘a faraway country.’”<sup>44</sup> Given the revealing subtext of *Laborem Exercens*—and, later, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*

<sup>41</sup> *Laborem Exercens*, Chapter I, “Introduction,” article 1, “Honouring Work on the Ninetieth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.”

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter II, “Work and Man,” article 8, “Worker Solidarity.”

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>44</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 131.

(1987)—perhaps it was.

## Conclusions

Choosing to examine certain documents often comes at the exclusion of other relevant ones. Certainly this is the case here. However, examining the primary evidence, even in a limited capacity, offers a valuable opportunity to trace as transitive and transient a concept as the Vatican’s *ostpolitik* during the twentieth century. Beginning with the Pope Pius XII, one sees a firm approach to Communist rule armed with doctrinal objections; with Pope John XXIII, one sees the Vatican adopt a far more conciliatory approach based on pastoral intentions; similarly with Pope Paul VI, the Vatican maintained this approach and began to give greater attention to dialogue and development; and finally with Pope John Paul II, *ostpolitik* became a political tool aimed at bringing about the fall of Communism, the break-up of the Soviet Union, and the democratization of Eastern Europe.<sup>45</sup> Written ten years after *Laborem Exercens*, it is appropriate to conclude with insights from an encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* (1991), which Pope John Paul II issued to commemorate both the one-hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* and, perhaps more importantly, the historic events of the preceding years. He writes:

The events of 1989 are an example of the success of willingness to negotiate and of the Gospel spirit in the face on an adversary determined not to be bound by moral principles. These events are a warning to those who in the name of political realism wish to banish law and morality from the political arena.<sup>46</sup>

And yet, in terms of a postscript, the post-Cold War era is not necessarily shaping up to be the era it might otherwise have been. When Pope John Paul II returned to Poland in the early 1990s, he castigated his fellow

<sup>45</sup> While these characterizations have been offered discretely for the purposes of this discussion, it ought to be noted that further study would reveal great interplay them. For example, Pope John Paul II’s *ostpolitik* can at once be both doctrinal and political. My intention here, then, is to offer a means of primarily understanding how its conceptual nature changed from pontificate-to-pontificate. It is my sincere hope further comparative work is conducted to show commonalities and differences in the changing nature of the Vatican’s *ostpolitik*.

<sup>46</sup> *Centesimus Annus*, Chapter III, “The Year 1989,” article 25.

Poles for letting the excesses and secularism of modernity take hold in their homeland. He spoke passionately, referring to Poland as both his mother and his father, and reprimanded his brothers and sisters for squandering the opportunity they were blessed with following the collapse of Communism in their country and the rest of Eastern Europe.<sup>47</sup> He widened this message to the world as a whole in his widely translated work—likely the only papal pronouncement ever to make the *New York Times* best-seller list—entitled *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Here he casts consternation in the light of optimism.<sup>48</sup> Yet, as liberal-democratic capitalism becomes the norm in a world fraught by globalization, the Vatican's new *ostpolitik* may not be its relationship with Communist states, but with modernity itself in the post-Communist world. If the antecedents to the Vatican's role in the Cold War do lie with Pope Pius IX, as this discussion suggested at its outset, then maybe, just maybe, the roots of today's conflict lie there too.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bernstein and Politi, *His Holiness*, 487–498.

<sup>48</sup> This theme is central to the book as a whole. See Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.

<sup>49</sup> With his *Syllabus of Errors*, Pope Pius IX set the precedent for policies enacted later, such as St. Pius X's anti-modernist campaign. Writing on the latter's "Court," Peter Hebblethwaite argues, "It believed that the modern world was riddled with errors...It may be said to have invented "Modernism" as a system in order to better condemn it." While the today's concerns about modernity are founded on a whole different basis—arguably, Pope John Paul II has adeptly identified issues that the force of modernity, in all its ubiquity, has mystified in the post-industrial/modern period—it is interesting that these "new things" are hardly new at all. For the quote above, see Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII*, 57–58; for an early analysis of St. Pius X's *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, the encyclical inaugurating this campaign, see Rev. Father George Tyrrell, *The Programme of Modernism: A Reply to the Encyclical of Pius X, Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1908).

# The Role of Animals In *The Tale of the Nativity*: A Textual and Visual Analysis

Cynthia Korpan, University of Victoria

## Abstract

*This article applies textual and visual analysis to a play about the birth of Christ, called The Tale of the Nativity. It was written in the 1930s by a group of Okanagan children at a day school on a reserve in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. I specifically look at how the children incorporated cultural elements associated with animals into their version of the birth of Christ.*

In the late 1930s at a small day school on a reserve in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia a teacher asked the attentive pupils this question: "If the Nativity had taken place in the lower Okanagan Valley, what would have been the setting?" The students answered, "There would be no stable, but there would be calves in the hills of our reserve...There would be no ass or ox, but there would be deer, coyotes and rabbits."<sup>1</sup> Thus began a long artistic engagement between the children of the Inkameep Day School and the story of the Nativity, the birth of Christ. This relationship commenced with the production of a Christmas card and continued to encompass artwork, the children's own version of the story entitled *The Tale of the Nativity*, a play version called *An Okanagan Indian Nativity Play*, a radio version titled *An Indian Nativity Play* that had numerous retellings on the radio<sup>2</sup>, and requests for permission to work with the story by interested schools in Canada and the United States.

Throughout the world people tell stories to express their feelings about the virtues, norms, and rules that are important to them, revealing much about their culture's worldview. The incorporation of stories from one resource to another, which involves a retelling and reworking of the story to

fit into the beliefs of the culture, has been termed a composite narrative.<sup>3</sup> This reworking of a story may alter it in a variety of ways while still maintaining the structure of the original story. *The Tale of the Nativity* could be classified as such since it was in this way that the children created a vibrant story that drew upon their cultural resources and the story about the birth of Christ, which, combined with their contemporary situation, provided the basis for the creation of *The Tale of the Nativity*.

There are many aspects of this particular version of the birth of Christ that are of interest, but this article will be limited to an examination of how the First Nations children of the Inkameep Day School on the Nk'Mip<sup>4</sup> reserve represented their culture, textually and visually, through the inclusion of animals in their creation of *The Tale of the Nativity*. Towards this end I will look at which animals the children included, how the children incorporated these animals into their story, and what this says about the relationship that the children had with these animals. Characteristics of each of the animals will be identified with discussion about how these traits are represented by the animals. Some of the animals may be associated with spirituality, some with living in close proximity to the children, and some with practicality and sustenance. The analysis will conclude with a look at where the animals are inserted into the story and what associations are formed by their position of placement.

## The Inkameep Day School

The Inkameep Day School was situated near Oliver, B.C. in the Okanagan Valley of Canada. Due to various reasons particular to Canada at that time, Catholic and Protestant denominations were assigned

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Walsh, "The Inkameep Indian School," in *Okanagan Historical Society* 38 (1974), 14–19.

<sup>2</sup> One such example is that a radio play of *Tale of the Nativity* was broadcast over the University of Alberta's station CKUA in 1941. For a full timeline of activities associated with this story, see the "Drawing on Identity" website at <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Inkameep/english/index.php>.

<sup>3</sup> See James M. Taggart, "'Hansel and Gretel' in Spain and Mexico," in *The Journal of American Folklore* 99 (1986), 436.

<sup>4</sup> Nk'Mip is the historical name, meaning "end of lake," whereas Inkameep is the contemporary, phonetic spelling of Nk'Mip. For this document, I will be using the historical name when referencing the reserve and the contemporary name when referencing the Inkameep Day School Project.

to different reserves, with the Inkameep reserve being under Catholic auspices. The day school went through a series of teachers due to the identified harsh conditions of the living quarters and the remoteness of the school. However, during the 1930s an Irish immigrant teacher named Anthony Walsh, a devout Catholic, decided to initiate a transfer (he was at a school in Vernon) to the Inkameep Day School in 1931 that ended up lasting eleven years. Walsh believed, contrary to the educational philosophy of the day<sup>5</sup> (this is the time of cultural prohibition in British Columbia), that if these Okanagan children understood and performed their culture in a positive manner, they would be stronger people living in the developing nation-state of Canada.<sup>6</sup> Walsh had the children actively engage during and after school hours in artistic expression that referenced and celebrated their culture. As well, Walsh subjected their artistic cultural productions to various competitions within Canada's borders and abroad, leading to some of the children receiving prestigious international awards.<sup>7</sup> Through the success and interest provoked by the Nativity Christmas card, the children went on to create artwork that was based on the story of the Nativity, which led to the complete story being written by the children. Walsh explains:

...as to what their views would be of [the] Nativity—Shepherds and wise men etc., caused a great deal of interest... You

<sup>5</sup> However, Walsh was not the only person in Canada and the United States who was thinking this way. See Gerard R. McMaster, "Tenuous Lines of Descent: Indian Arts and Crafts of the Reservation Period," in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* IX:2 (1989), pp. 205–236 for discussion of other Canadian organizations and individuals working along these lines. As well, see Molly H. Mullin, "The Patronage of Difference: Making Indian Art, 'Art, Not Ethnology,'" in *Cultural Anthropology* 7:4 (November 1992), 395–424 for a discussion about similar endeavours in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> See Andrea N. Walsh, "No Small Work: Anthropology, Art, and Children." Paper read at the *Canadian Anthropology Society Meetings*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 9 May 2003. Available at <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/~inkameep/english/research/index.php>.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Sis-hu-lk (Francis Baptiste) won a Bronze Star in 1936 at the Royal Drawing Society's Exhibition (in England) for his painting on buckskin, *Canadian Nativity*, and in 1937 at this same exhibition a Silver Star for his painting, *St. Francis and the Birds*.

would throw questions and they would answer, and I would gradually take it down. But it was trying to get an Indian child's point of view as to these happenings, in the way that they would sense it.<sup>8</sup>

The first printing of this story was in the fall of 1940, which was encouraged by "a small Committee anxious to arouse more interest in the preservation, revival, and encouragement of the artistic and dramatic abilities innate in our Indian fellow Canadians...."<sup>9</sup> The frontispiece consisted of artwork (Fig. 1) provided by one of the students, Sis-hu-lk,<sup>10</sup> with the words, "The Tale of the Nativity as told by the Indian Children of Inkameep British Columbia Price 25 Cents." By 1942, 2000 copies had been printed, with the third printing of the story taking place as recently as 1981.<sup>11</sup>

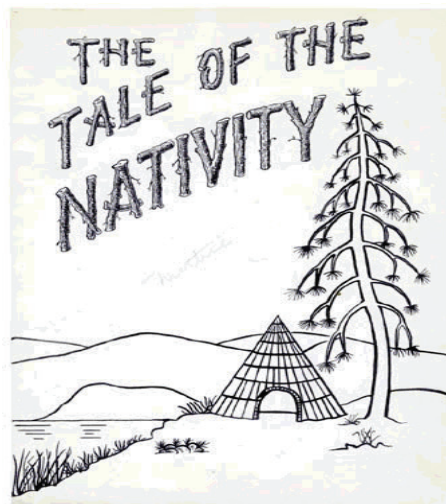


Fig 1: *Tale of the Nativity* booklet cover. Ink on paper, 9" x12"<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Walsh, Summary of interviews of Tony Walsh for the radio documentary "Children of the Inkameep," a sixty-minute program produced for CBC Radio's "Saturday Evening" (referenced in *CBC Times*, April 1966).

<sup>9</sup> Foreword, *The Tale of the Nativity*. The committee was the Committee for the Revival and Furtherance of B.C. Indian Arts, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>10</sup> Sis-hu-lk is Francis Baptiste's Okanagan name. Sis-hu-lk produced all of the artwork for *The Tale of the Nativity*.

<sup>11</sup> The illustrations in this article are reprinted with permission of the Osoyoos Indian Band and the Osoyoos Museum Society.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Inkameep/english/catalogue/pages/1967-028-019.php>.

## The First Christmas

As a starting point for this analysis I am positioning a European version of the birth of Christ as a comparative piece. It is entitled *The First Christmas*<sup>13</sup> and is included simply to amplify the differences of how the children augmented their version of the story with Okanagan cultural elements. To facilitate this process I include a short synopsis of each of the stories, identifying key elements.

*The First Christmas* introduces Mary and Joseph as the main characters and begins with the appearance of an angel to Mary, announcing her impending pregnancy with the son of God, whose name was to be Jesus. Joseph and Mary are married and soon forced to travel to Bethlehem to pay a tax, with Mary traveling on a donkey. Upon their arrival they discover that there are no rooms available at any of the inns, forcing Mary and Joseph to take comfort in a stable. With the animals as witness, Mary gives birth to Jesus. Shepherds nearby, who are tending their flock of sheep, are visited by an angel who tells them about the birth of Jesus, encouraging the shepherds to go and find him. As well, three Wise men notice the star and decide to follow it, since they knew it meant that a great ruler had been born. Mistakenly the Wise men visit the King's palace, thinking that the new ruler had been born there. The King, afraid of being overthrown, asks the Wise men to find the new ruler and to inform the King of his whereabouts, so that he could also go and worship this new ruler. However the Wise men have a dream informing them not to tell the King, so they journey home instead of going back to King Herod. Joseph has a similar dream about King Herod's decree to have Jesus killed and is told in the dream to take Mary and Jesus away to Egypt, which he promptly does. King Herod in turn has the entire population of baby boys in Bethlehem killed, hoping to eradicate this threat to his throne.

## The Tale of the Nativity

*The Tale of the Nativity* begins with Mary being visited by a Man with Wings announcing that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of his son. Mary's parents request their friend Joseph to

come and marry their daughter. Shortly thereafter, Mary decides to visit her cousin Elizabeth on the other side of the valley. Mary travels by horseback with her dog and pet chipmunk accompanying her. Elizabeth is pregnant as well, so the two engage in weeks of preparation of articles for the birth of their baby boys. Mary returns home to Joseph who has news that the Great Chief has summoned all of his people together so as to know how many exist. It was winter and not easy to travel, so Joseph and Mary leave a bit early and take their pets with them. Upon arrival they find that all of the lodges and shelters are already full, leaving a cave the only place to rest. Animals from the surrounding woods come to the cave and keep Mary and Joseph entertained, as well as witnessing the birth of the Baby. Soon hill-men come to visit because they had been told by Men of the Air that a Great Chief had been born in a cave. People from the coast and other regions send gifts to the new Great Chief. A Great Star informed the people of the south that a Great Chief had been born, so they send three of their wisest men with gifts. Upon their arrival, the Head Chief inquires as to who they are and when he hears about the birth of a new Great Chief, he becomes jealous and asks the three wise men to inform him of the child's whereabouts. The men find the cave and have a wonderful visit, but then in their sleep they receive a dream telling them to return to their home, without informing the Head Chief. Mary and Joseph prepare the Baby to meet the Priest in the large lodge. The Priest bestows the name Jesus on the Baby. Very shortly thereafter, Joseph has a dream from a Man with Wings that tells him that he must take Mary and the Baby away because a war party is on their way to harm the Baby. They move far away and live very happily for many years until Joseph has another dream telling him the bad Head Chief had died and it was safe for them to return to their own country. Mary requests they settle somewhere else where the people are kind and it is not as cold, which Joseph gladly agrees to because of his love for the Boy and Mary.

## Significations

The methodology that I am employing in this analysis is semiotics. From the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of semiotics is "the science of communication studied through the interpretation of signs and symbols as they operate in various fields."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Florida Glover, *The First Christmas* (New York: Dutton, 1943).

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<sup>14</sup> J. B. Sykes, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, Seventh Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

Barthes defines these terms for us as follows: “[t]he sign is therefore a compound of a signifier and a signified. The plane of the signifiers constitutes the plane of expression and that of the signifieds the plane of content...the signified is not ‘a thing’ but a mental representation of the ‘thing’.”<sup>15</sup> Semiotics involves two steps to discovering the layers of meaning of the signified, which will be applied to both the textual and visual material. The first layer is referred to as denotation, which is the act of identifying what is being depicted and the words used—the what and who. Denotation is concerned with just capturing what we recognize. The denotative method will be used to identify the animals used in the story and the images, as well as how the animals are grouped or on their own, how much attention is given to each individual animal, what the animal is doing, and how the surrounding text is used to provide information that pertains to the animal. The second layer of meaning is connotation, which addresses the concepts, ideas, and values that are expressed through the “what and who,” as well as addressing the “how.” The connotative level of meaning can “come about either through the cultural associations which cling to the represented people, places and things, or through specific “connotators,” specific aspects of the way in which they are represented.”<sup>16</sup> Barthes identifies two elements that are common carriers of connotation, poses and objects. Van Leeuwen<sup>17</sup> goes on to explain how Barthes identifies certain objects to be inducers of ideas and gives the example of a bookcase as an object which signifies intellectual. It is through the combination of these object-signs and style that the connotative meanings are created.

It can first be identified that the story follows a standard prose format with a beginning, middle, and end, presented in a book form with illustrations of the story. The title chosen probably references the genre and category of stories that would have been familiar to Walsh and the intended audience. I will begin the application of the semiotic method with a taxonomic approach to the words and artwork of *The Tale of the Nativity* as compared to *The First Christmas* to identify the

denotative level of the content that relates to the animals. Table 1 shows the range of animals that are included in *The First Christmas* while Table 2 shows the animals from *The Tale of the Nativity* in both the text and in the illustrations, with their corresponding frequencies.

**Table 1: Listing of animals in *The First Christmas***

	Text	Visual	Total
Donkey	3	2	5
Cows	1	3	4
Sheep	2	39	41
Wolves	1	0	1
Cats	0	1	1
Dog	0	1	1
Camels	1	3	4
Horse	0	1	1
Animals collectively	2	0	2

**Table 2: Listing of animals in *The Tale of the Nativity***

	Text	Visual	Total
Horses	4	2	6
Dogs	2	1	3
Chipmunk	4	2	6
Birds	4	1	5
Porcupine	1		1
Coyote	4	3	7
Jack-rabbits	2	1	3
Chick-a-dees	1		1
Deer and fawn	2	1	3
Owl	1		1
Mountain sheep	1	2	3
Black bear cubs	1		1
Grey squirrels	1		1
Mouse	1	2	3
Mountain lamb	1	2	3
She-camel	1	2	3
Mourning doves	1		1
Quails	2	2	4
Trout	1	1	2
Butterflies	1	1	2
Silver fish	1		1
Creatures/animals	6		6
Pets	3		3

Upon this initial taxonomic exercise, it becomes

<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 42.

<sup>16</sup> Theo Van Leeuwen, *Handbook of Visual Analysis* (Sage Publications Ltd., 2001), 97.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

immediately evident that the children included a lot more animals than exist in the European version. In fact they included almost three times as many animals with the diversity indicative of the environment in which the children lived. The roles that the various animals play in the story include sustenance, provisional, seasonal indicators, modes of transportation, messengers, and sources of comfort and amusement. In *The First Christmas*, the animals consist of subsistence and labour varieties, as well as providing a stable for comfort. They are limited to a donkey, a horse, cows, sheep, wolves, a cat, a dog, and camels. Their part in the story is rendered as very passive, with their roles described as staring and looking, or as utilitarian modes of transportation. The one animal that is posed as a threat is the wolf. This potential, imagined threat is directed towards the flock of sheep, which the shepherds need to protect. Overall, the animals in *The First Christmas* version play a very inferior role with no active interaction with any other characters in the story.

Kellert<sup>18</sup> has identified the following human behavioural expressions and attitude types towards animals. These include: naturalistic—where the animals are classified for hunting; humanistic—where the animals are classified as pets for companionship and affection; moralistic—where expressions of kindness are directed towards animals for ethical reasons; utilitarian—where the animals are utilized for consumption and/or as providing a service to humans; and lastly, negativistic—where the animal provokes fear behaviour. If we take the animals in *The Tale of the Nativity* and apply Kellert's behavioural classification, the children portrayed the majority of the animals in the categories shown in Tables 3 and 4.

This classification system allows us to see a syncretism between the roles that the animals played in the lives of the children and in the story. From an initial analysis we can deduce that the dog is used for protection; the horse and camels for transportation; the birds to indicate time; and the deer and fish as sustenance. I will now, in turn, describe in detail these functions and the attributes

assigned to the various animals in their respective categories.

**Table 3: Animals that can be classified as utilitarian**

Utilitarian	Total
Horses	6
Dogs	3
Porcupine	1
Owl	1
She-camel	3
Mourning doves	1
Quails	4
Trout	2
Deer	3
Birds	5
Total	29

**Table 4: Animals that can be classified as humanistic**

Humanistic	Total
Chipmunk	6
Coyote	7
Jack-rabbits	3
Chick-a-dees	1
Deer and fawn	3
Black bear cubs	1
Grey squirrels	1
Mouse	3
Butterflies	2
Young mountain sheep	3
Total	28

"Watchie" is Mary's dog who accompanies her on her journey "to look after you," when she goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The dog's name appropriately signifies his role and demonstrates how a child would sense this role. When Mary arrives at Elizabeth's camp, the dogs begin barking, to warn Elizabeth of the arrival of a visitor. In Figure 4 we see Watchie positioned slightly ahead of Mary on her horse, sniffing the ground. Watchie is performing the role assigned in a careful and attentive manner. These are the only references to Watchie or dogs in the story and the artwork.

The horses and she-camel are referred to and used simply as modes of transportation. In Figure 4 we see Mary riding her horse to see her cousin Elizabeth. The

<sup>18</sup> Stephen R. Kellert, "Human-Animal Interactions: A Review of American Attitudes to Wild and Domestic Animals in the Twentieth Century," in *Animals and People Sharing the World*. Andrew N. Rowan, ed. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 142.



horse is drawn to suggest pride in its task. Its head is positioned high in the air and its feet are as if in a position of trotting or prancing.

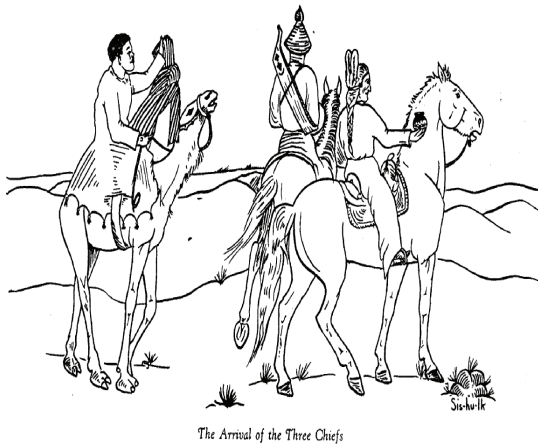


Fig. 2: The Arrival of the Three Chiefs

Upon Mary's arrival at her cousin's, Elizabeth asks Mary to tie the horse to the tree and informs her that once her husband Zachary returns, "he will take him down to the creek for a drink." This inclusion shows care on the part of Mary and Elizabeth for the horse, but may also address gender roles. When the hill-men arrive, the horses are described as beautiful whereas the she-camel provokes conversation amongst the men and fear amongst the women, children, and all of the animals. The reason for this reaction is explained because it is a "strange looking animal." This positions the she-camel as the only animal portrayed in a negativistic way. It is interesting that the children kept the camel in their story, since it would not have been an indigenous animal to the area but its presence is explained by the fact that the visitor has travelled far from the south. It also provides an example of how all of the animals protect themselves in the face of danger. The passage is as follows:

...while even the animals in the cave crouched down behind the rocks and scarcely breathed and the birds all flew to the tallest trees and did not let even a tiny chirrup betray where they were.

We see in Figure 2 the she-camel with its teeth bared, indicating the fear that this animal invoked. The she-camel is positioned behind the two horses, which again are depicted in alert poses.

Birds are used as indicators of seasonal change several times in the story, as in this passage, "the birds all come back from the south and the trees looked nice and green." Owl has the role of announcing the arrival of the Baby by hooting twelve times. This message is not just an indication to the reader, but also to all in the cave, as explained by, "and all of the inhabitants of the cave bent their heads to the ground." One other time that birds are mentioned as time keepers is in this passage, "as all the morning doves had gone to the countries in the south..." The quails have a dual significance. First they indicate seasons and time, since it is mentioned that mourning doves would have been the preferred gift for the Priest, but all of them had gone to countries south. The caption attributed to the image of the quails (Fig. 3), describes the importance of their contribution, "The Quails Prepare for this Great Honour." Here the quails knowingly offer themselves as gifts of sustenance to the Priest. The quail in the foreground is giving the impression of standing tall with its chest projected out, signifying confidence. Its wings are spread out and the tuft of feather on its head is sitting upright. Both of the quails have pleasant facial expressions that show contentment and happiness.



Fig. 3: The Quails Prepare for this Great Honour

The passage about the quails reads as follows:

Joseph took a pair of quails as an offering. When the pair of quails knew that they were to be honoured they washed themselves in the new fallen snow and preened their feathers so that they shone like velvet, and Quail Wife breathed on Quail's head feathers and polished them so highly that she was able to see if she herself was all spick and span...

This passage is followed by a drawing rendering the visit of Mary and Joseph to the Priest, showing the



quails in their cage in Joseph's hand.

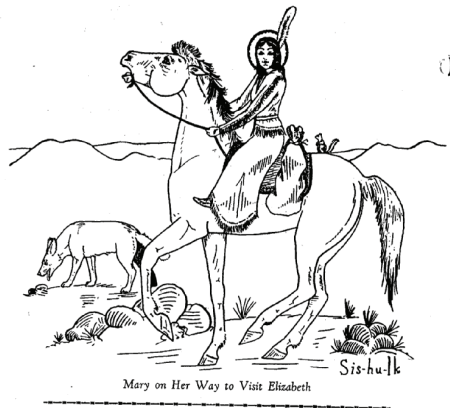


Fig. 4: Mary on Her Way to Visit Elizabeth

The following animals provide roles of maintenance, sustenance, and aesthetic pursuits. Porcupine was bestowed with a special honour, by being the provider of quills to help decorate the Baby Boards. These quills were dyed by Mary and Elizabeth, who "spend hours and hours working, because they wanted them to be the prettiest baby boards that had ever been seen in the valley." Trout and deer fall within both the utilitarian and the naturalistic categories, since they are sustenance for Mary and Joseph, with both mentioned a few times in the story; however, trout is the only one that is actually hunted. As this sentence reads, "He caught some young trout and he nearly cried when he saw his lovely young wife come riding into the camp because he was so happy." The "young trout" coincides in the sentence with "young wife," as well as tears of happiness, indicating a great deal of joy associated with the return of Mary from her long visit with Elizabeth. Figure 7 is the only depiction of fish but their inclusion in this drawing shows the importance of fish with the children's culture.

This image is when we are shown how happy the Child is with his foster father, as they are fishing and interacting with the other animals. Dried fish is mentioned twice in the story as food that is packed when there is a journey involved.

The many varieties of animals in the humanistic category provide insight into the breadth of companionship associated with all of these animals. The deer and fawn, the jack-rabbits, and the chick-a-dees create a trio of species that provide comfort and enjoyment to Mary and

Joseph. While Mary is in the cave waiting for Joseph to return with sage brush and fir boughs for their bed, the deer and her fawn, we are told, come down from the hills and breathe on Mary to keep her warm. The jack-rabbits come from their home and sit at Mary's feet to keep her cozy. The chick-a-dees fly in and sing cheerful songs to comfort Mary. Upon Joseph's return, he notices how kind the creatures have been and what good friends they are. Shortly thereafter, these same animals decide to do some tricks to make Mary and Joseph feel happier since the animals noticed how tired both of them looked. The following passage describes their activities:

The rabbits pretended that they were clowns as they jumped about and danced on their hind legs and then on their front ones, at the same time wagging their long ears. The mother deer and her little fawn had a butting match with their heads while the birds swooped and soared, as they sang their sweetest way that they could. When the hour of midnight drew near all of them formed a wall between the man Joseph and the maid Mary.

In this image there is a sense of contentment on the faces of the inhabitants of the cave, which could be suggestive of the importance of all who are gathered. Mary and Joseph have their heads tilted slightly up with smiles that display their confidence and pleasure. The animals are assigned agency and cognitive abilities of being able to understand how Mary and Joseph are feeling, and with the power of being able to do something that affects how these two humans feel. This trio of species is comparable to the stable animals in *The First Christmas*, in that they are the witnesses to the birth of the Baby. The trio of species in *The Tale of the Nativity* however, is given the role of comfort and to provide help and assistance to Mary and Joseph at this very important moment. The story explains:

When the hour of midnight drew near all of them formed a wall between the man Joseph and the maid Mary. Just at the hour the owl hooted twelve times and the cry of a baby was heard; and all the inhabitants of the cave bent their heads to the ground.

This passage provides the example of a bird being a time keeper, but also of the service of the animals of providing either privacy or sheltering Mary as she gives birth. There is also the significance of the owl and the Baby possibly conversing right at the moment of birth; the owl hoots and the Baby cries. Right after

this passage, Joseph and Mary wash the Baby and immediately put him in his cradleboard for all to see: “When they stood Him up for all to see, all the creatures, both feathered and furred, made their own special noise of happiness.” The passage goes on to explain how the Baby smiled at all of them so that all knew how happy he was, again providing an example of communication and understanding between all species. These last few examples fit into the Kellert’s moralistic category associated with animal behaviour, with both animals and humans exhibiting morally-based actions.



Fig.5: The Animals and Birds Try to Console Mary and Joseph

The next grouping of animals in the humanistic category is connected to the hill-men. In *The First Christmas* the counterpart of the hill-men are the shepherds who have their flock of sheep. It could be for this reason that the children adapted the hill-men to be associated with a coterie of pets. In the story the hill-men relate to Joseph the story of how they came to know about the Baby. Within this telling, there is mention of the hill-men having “to look after their children’s pets and to see that no harm came to them. There was a young mountain sheep, black bear cubs, grey squirrels and some sick birds...” There seems to be a similarity entwined in this passage to the role of the shepherds in *The First Christmas*. While the hill-men visit the Baby, the Men with Wings who told them about the Baby’s arrival are looking after the pets. The Inkameep children have one of the hill-men bring his own pet brown mouse, which he puts on the corner of the cradle and “it stood up on its hind legs, tucked its front feet under its chin and bowed to the Baby. Then it crawled into the lacing near the feet of the Baby, curled up and went to sleep.” Another of the hill-men brings a young mountain lamb and lays it at Mary’s feet. And finally, two humanistic animals are assigned

special significance, Coyote and Chipmunk, are prominent figures in the story. They are referred to as pets and are important characters in Okanagan legends. Chipmunk is identified at the beginning of the story as one of Mary’s pets: “her little pet chipmunk rode with her [Mary].” On the next page Chipmunk is again referred to as her “pet” and “little,” and his name is given as “Kot-se-we-ah”<sup>19</sup>. This takes place when Mary and Joseph need to go to the meeting place of all of the Head Chief’s people and they take with them “her two pets, Top-kan, a young coyote puppy and Kot-se-we-ah, her little chipmunk.” On page 12 it is mentioned that Kot-se-we-ah is “...used to menfolk so they [Kot-se-we-ah and Top-kan] just sat down, one on each side of the Baby, and waited for the visitors.” This passage is referring to the hill-men who have come to visit the Baby. Later, on page 16, as Mary prepares, with tears in her eyes, to leave their home to go far away from the bad Chief, she picks up the Baby and Kot-se-we-ah to embark on a journey, showing the importance of her pet Chipmunk.

Barthes<sup>20</sup> points out that in the type of text that is involved in this analysis, the visual component and its meaning is often duplicated in the linguistic message. This therefore can make the images redundant. Such is the case with the visuals in *The Tale of the Nativity*, which were produced to illustrate, highlight, and amplify the story. But we could also look upon their redundancy in the images as adding significance to these cultural elements. If we look at the images to identify the denotative level of analysis regarding chipmunk, we first see Kot-se-we-ah perched on the back of Mary’s horse on his journey with Mary to see Elizabeth (Fig.4). Kot-se-we-ah is attentive, demonstrated by his sitting up, and positioned right beside Mary. In Figure 6, Kot-se-we-ah is right behind Mary, still close to the Baby which he was beside when the hill-men arrived. Connotatively we could surmise that Kot-se-we-ah’s proximity to Mary signifies his importance and role. In Figure 4 we see a parallel between Mary’s stance and Kot-se-we-ahs. They are both facing the same way; with Mary’s feather in her hat the same as Kot-se-we-ah’s tail.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Hill-Tout, “Report on the Ethnology of the Okanak-en of British Columbia, an Interior Division of the Salish Stock,” in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 41 (1911), 148, explains that Chipmunk is Kokotsaweya in the Okanagan language.

<sup>20</sup> Barthes, 10.

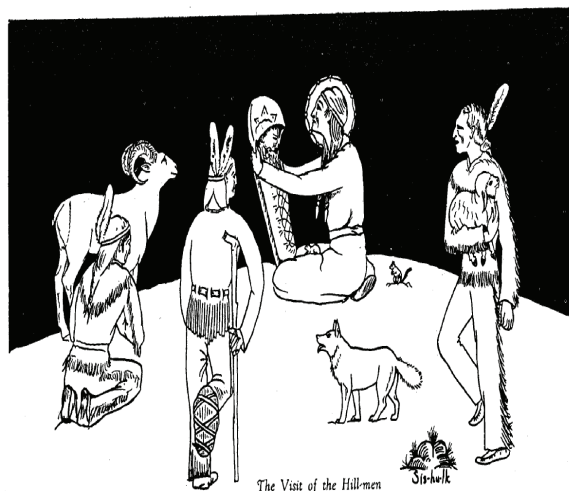


Fig. 6: The Visit of the Hill-men

Landsberg<sup>21</sup> notices that some words, “wee” and “little,” have a diminutive force, while others, such as “large” and “vast,” have an augmentative force. In the text surrounding chipmunk the descriptive term “little” is repeatedly used, which contrasts with Kot-se-we-ah’s significance. Looking at the connotative level Kot-se-we-ah is always associated with safety as is Top-kan (the coyote puppy), as we shall see. Kot-se-we-ah and Top-kan create a pair; a pairing that is associated with Mary and gets passed on to the Baby. Kot-se-we-ah is rendered diminutive also, but is clearly discernible making his presence significant. There is an Okanagan legend entitled, *The Chipmunk and The Owlwoman*, which explains how Chipmunk received his stripes. In the legend Chipmunk’s heart is taken by Owlwoman. In grief, Chipmunk’s grandmother asks that her only grandchild be brought back to life. Through the intervention of Meadowlark Chipmunk receives a new heart made of berries. Coyote, at the end of the legend states that Chipmunk will always retain his striped coat as a reminder to people that there is wickedness in this world. Kot-se-we-ah could be a reminder of this important lesson to the children and also to Mary and the Baby. When the hill-men arrive, Kot-se-we-ah and Top-kan go on either side of the Baby, with their positioning being one of protection.

Here we see Top-kan in the foreground,

<sup>21</sup> Marge E. Landsberg, “The Icon in Semiotic Theory,” in *Current Anthropology* 21:1 (1980), 94.

standing between the hill-men and the Baby and Joseph. He has a slightly angry look upon his face and is watching the hill-men with his ears perked up and his tongue hanging out. As mentioned above in this sequence Top-kan and Kot-se-we-ah are in a protective position regarding the Baby. Kot-se-we-ah is right behind Joseph and looks attentive as well. Coyote is introduced on page nine when Mary and Joseph are beginning their journey to the “Head Meeting Place,” which is the counterpart to Bethlehem in the European version. Coyote is a puppy, referred to as one of Mary’s two pets, and is named Top-kan. In *Coyote Devours His Own Children*, Top-kan is identified in the legend as Coyote’s youngest and favourite son.<sup>22</sup> The next time that Top-kan is mentioned is on page 12 when the hill-men arrive and Top-kan and Kot-se-we-ah move beside the Baby “because they are used to menfolk,” and not afraid. On page 17, Top-kan takes prominence in the story, due to his association with the Child. The text reads:

He was always accompanied by Top-kan, who took it on himself to care for the Child, and when He got tired he would either take up the Baby in his mouth or else coax him to climb on his back and then he would walk very slowly back to camp.



Fig. 7: The Child's Happy Boyhood with His Foster-Father

A few lines after this passage there is fear attributed to the young Boy who has become so fast on his legs that even Top-kan may not be able to catch him. This is where the Butterflies intervene and provide colour and stimulation to the Boy who loves to chase them. Visually, we first see Top-kan in Figure 5, sitting

<sup>22</sup> Donald M. Hines, “Coyote Devours His Own Children,” in *Tales of the Okanogans* (Washington: YE Galleon Press, 1976), 86.

beside Joseph and Mary in a relaxed, attentive position. In Figure 7, Top-kan looks full grown and the Child has both his arms hanging over Top-kan's back. Top-kan is close to Joseph who is fishing. Top-kan's role is textually and visually associated with protection, safety, and companionship. Top-kan is right beside the Child from the day that he was born and we are shown the Child's affection for Top-kan as displayed in Figure 7.

Even though Top-kan has been identified as Coyote's son, I suggest that Top-kan represents Coyote's traditional role in Okanagan stories. Mourning Dove explains that "Coyote was the most important because, after he was put to work by the Spirit Chief, he did more than any of the others to make the world a good place in which to live."<sup>23</sup> *The Tale of the Nativity* relates how, after many years of exile, Mary, Joseph, the Child, Top-kan, and Kot-se-we-ah move to the place where they will live in comfort. In the passage just previous to this, Top-kan dominates the story with his companionship and protection of the Child. The proximity of Top-kan's role in the story to the pronunciation that the family will be able to settle where they want mimics Coyote's role in most of the Okanagan stories. Coyote often appears at the end of an Okanagan legend to deliver the words of the Great Spirit. In *The Tale of the Nativity*, the children have positioned Top-kan's important role at this ending point of the story. Ramsey explains that the Thompson people, a group very close to the Okanagan, recognized functional similarities between "Coyote the Transformer and Jesus the Redeemer."<sup>24</sup> Peers confirms that "Jesus has been identified with traditional beings, particularly male culture heroes, tricksters, and creator figures."<sup>25</sup> The use of human-animal doubling, in this case of Jesus and Coyote, is a feature that occurs in art and literature. Burt<sup>26</sup> explains that often in art it occurs

in what is referred to as situational doubles with the subjects usually representing types with their roles providing a narrative. In literature this doubling is often used as the alter ego, where a similar but separate character is like a "second self." It is through this alter ego that the central character can reinforce the implications of his or her acts. If we consider Jesus and Coyote (Child and Top-kan) in this context, we can see how the children situated the two as close companions.

The multiplicity of readings that are possible from this text depends greatly on the context. One of the problems involved in Barthesian semiotics is that we can only recognize what we already know, which is why obtaining as much information about the context as possible is important. It is assumed that the data within the text is approached with the understanding that the cultural meanings are shared by all. Another problem involves the categorization of words and images. This could be through the stereotyping of object-signs and symbols, like the particular animals, and/or through our understanding of the surrounding text and captions. It is not possible for us to understand exactly what the construction of *The Tale of the Nativity* meant to the children at that particular point in time, but by the discussion so far, and by an investigation into the context of the time, it is possible for us to try and understand.

Blundell suggests that most anthropologists would agree that the meanings signified by the production of a form of art arises within "the context of specific, and variable, social conditions, conditions which are themselves the legacy of prior historical practices and conditions."<sup>27</sup> Blundell continues:

That is to say, artists/authors always produce their works under conditions that are particular to a society at a given historical moment (Wolff 1981:62-63)...Such conditions affect not only the nature of the works that artists produce, but also the ways in which they can do so. As Wolff points out, the "conditions of literary and artistic production are themselves part of, and related to, wider conditions of production in society" (1981:63).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Mourning Dove, *Coyote Stories*, Heister Dean Guie with notes by L.V. McWhorter (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 7.

<sup>24</sup> Jarold Ramsey, "The Bible in Western Indian Mythology," in *The Journal of American Folklore* 90:358 (1977), 442-454

<sup>25</sup> Laura Peers, "'The Guardian of All': Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary," in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, eds. (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), 291.

<sup>26</sup> Marianna R. Burt, "The Animal as Alter Ego:

Cruelty, Altruism, and the Work of Art," in *Animals and People Sharing the World*, Andrew N. Rowan, ed. (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 121.

<sup>27</sup> Valda Blundell, *Changing Perspectives in the Anthropology of Art* (Ottawa: The Golden Dog Press, 2000), 58.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

Blundell also cites Wolff as explaining that the production of artistic endeavours is mediated by rules and conventions that govern the shape that cultural productions take. “This kind of mediation takes us back to the argument that art signifies meanings in ways that are similar to, though not identical with, signification in language.”<sup>29</sup>

The temporal context in which *The Tale of the Nativity* was produced was one that is referred to historically as the “interwar period,” the years between the First and Second World Wars. Prior to the First World War, Ashworth informs us of the strategy of the Canadian government to eradicate all indigenous languages within the school system so as to “control” some of their “subjects.”<sup>30</sup> This attitude continued after the war, with the “young nation state”—Canada—trying to maintain its identity. Helleiner explains what this meant to First Nations children:

Canada, like many other industrializing states, saw a consolidation of a hegemonic construct of childhood as a distinct phase of the life course characterized primarily by economic and political dependency...an increasing identification of such “children” as being “assets” for “the nation” and as such, appropriate targets for state intervention.<sup>31</sup>

Within this dimension, Anthony Walsh was committed socially to the communities in which he existed. Walsh placed a lot of value on the children’s voices and was able to demonstrate to a wide audience just how valuable those voices were, and still are. Through the children’s recontextualization of *The Tale of the Nativity* to include many elements that expressed their culture, they created a text that spoke to other issues that existed at the time. The children at the Inkameep Day School were situated within a very political and historical dialogue, with their role in the production of *The Tale of the Nativity* seen as an important exchange between disparate cultures. The composite narrative that they produced

incorporated their love of animals, the environment that they were so familiar with, demonstration of social relationships existent in their culture, and the significance of children.

## Conclusion

Ramsey notes that anthropology has been neglectful in paying attention to the value of these texts, and that the emphasis has been in the past on transcribing classic aboriginal literature.<sup>32</sup> Ramsey states that “...assimilated Bible stories, Indianized European folktales, and so on—[were all relegated] to the status of impure curiosities.”<sup>33</sup>

Anthony Walsh comments that “[t]he children had a great love of their own legends, and the characters of these tales were birds and animals who spoke and behaved like human beings.”<sup>34</sup> Collins writes about the research that has been done about ascribing human behaviour to animals among the Salish speaking people, which is the language-based category to which the Okanagan people belong.<sup>35</sup> This is based on origin stories which relate the fact that animals originally possessed a more human form, as Collins explains, “The close relationship between man and animal is demonstrated not only by the similarity in their way of life but by the ability of men to change into animals and of animals to change into men in mythological times and even in the present.”<sup>36</sup> These are the stories about the Animal People, who were the first ancestors and were part human and part animal. Once humans were created, animals took their present form. This is the basis for the importance given to animals within the cultures of the Salish speakers, who believed that “because of their humanlike sensitivity, animals must be treated with respect,”<sup>37</sup> leading the culture to train children “not to take animals wantonly for this reason.”<sup>38</sup> Collins states that “similarities rather than differences between man and animal are stressed, and these views have a sound support in folklore and mythology.”<sup>39</sup> Schorcht continues the discussion with a

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>30</sup> Ashworth, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Helleiner, “Constructing Racialized Childhoods in Canadian Political Discourse,” in *Children and Anthropology: Perspectives for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Helen B. Schwartzman, ed. (London: Bergin & Garvey, 2001), 189.

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<sup>32</sup> Ramsey, 443.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Walsh, “Ten Little Indian Actors,” in *The Playshop* IX(3) n.d., 4.

<sup>35</sup> June McCormick Collins, “The Mythological Basis for Attitudes toward Animals among Salish-Speaking Indians,” in *The Journal of American Folklore* 65:258 (1952), 354.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 359.

comparison to the European attitude towards animals: "Human responsibility for animals in traditional European tellings of [a] story is connected to the idea of human dominion over the creatures of the earth."<sup>40</sup> This was seen in the analysis of the animals in *The First Christmas* where the animals consisted primarily of subsistence varieties. Webber notes that the role of folktales in the Okanagan culture, as in most cultures, is to convey messages about the importance of proper conduct towards the natural world and humans.<sup>41</sup> Ashworth also speaks about how the spiritual and moral values expressed in stories illustrate to the children which actions would bring honour.<sup>42</sup> This is illustrated in the work of Wendy Wickwire, who has recorded the stories of Okanagan storyteller Harry Robinson over several years. Ashworth writes:

When Robinson tells Wickwire his version of a European folktale, the story emphasizes the interconnectedness of animal and human realms in typical Okanagan fashion. In "Puss in Boots," for instance, rather than stressing the cat's transformation into human form he stresses the importance of treating cats and dogs "right" because they share the world with humans... In Robinson's version, however, the cat can simultaneously expect to be treated like a prince and remain a cat. And Robinson's story reflects, as he says, 'The way it's supposed to be.'<sup>43</sup>

Since animals dominate Okanagan stories about the time before humans, and are prominent figures in the children's daily lives, the inclusion and focus of animals in *The Tale of the Nativity* illustrates the importance of animals to the children. The children of the Inkameep Day School had animals as active participants in many facets

of their lives: as important subjects in their oral tradition; as sustenance; as pets and spiritual guides; as species who shared the habitat they all lived in; as equals; and as companions in their daily lives. The children produced artwork that depicted animals in their environment from contemporary rodeos, to the Animal People engaged in various activities, to a card showing the "Holy Child with Animal Friends."<sup>44</sup> As well, the children were actively engaged in the process of working on the production of plays based on their legends about The Animal People. The plays included *The Chipmunk and the Owlwoman*, *The Crickets Must Sing*, and *Why the Ant's Waist is Small*. These plays were performed in various communities in the Okanagan Valley and were part of the opening ceremonies of Thunderbird Park in Victoria, BC.<sup>45</sup> Besides the plays, the children were actively engaged in recording songs that were often based on animals, and creating dances, such as the "dance of the eagle" or the "dance of the bear." The assignment of agency and the anthropomorphosis of the animals in the story, through the attributes of understanding, caring, and friendship, signify a strong bond between the children and the animals in their world as demonstrated by the animals' inclusion in *The Tale of the Nativity*.

<sup>40</sup> Blanca Schorcht, "The Storied World of Harry Robinson: Emerging Dialogues," in *BC Studies* 135 (2002), 157.

<sup>41</sup> Jean Webber, *Okanagan Sources*, Jean Webber and the En'owkin Centre, eds. (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1990), 80.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Ashworth, *The Forces Which Shaped Them: A History of the Education of Minority Group Children in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1979), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Schorcht, 157.

<sup>44</sup> See <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Inkameep/english/catalogue/pages/1967-028-054.php>

<sup>45</sup> See forthcoming master's thesis by Cynthia Korpan, University of Victoria, which looks at these plays and their production through the methodologies of textual and visual analysis.



# Conflict in the Classroom: Religion and Republicanism in Algeria and Alsace, 1918–1940

Bronwen Magrath, University of Victoria

## Abstract

*Between World War One and World War Two, successive French governments sought to strengthen the Republic by fostering a sense of patriotism among youths in colony and metropole. Classrooms became battlegrounds where linguistic and religious identities were constructed, resisted and reformed. Comparative case studies of Alsace and Algeria reveal the continuities and contrasts of French policy within France and across the empire. Education policy as created by the Republican government was not uniform throughout the interwar period, but was constantly reformed to meet needs on the ground. By focussing on the way cultural identities were created and recreated, this article seeks to demonstrate how individuals and groups on all sides of the colonizing relationship interacted in education.*

France's Third Republic, in place from 1871–1940, witnessed the establishment of the nation's first state-funded primary school system. This education system was far from politically neutral: it was designed to strengthen the Republic by wresting control of education away from religious orders and by universalizing the use of the French language. The imposition of French education inspired considerable resistance in rural provinces and the overseas colonies, where local religious and linguistic culture clashed with French designs. The process of imposition, resistance, and reform will be examined through a case-study analysis of French education in Alsace and Algeria. This comparative approach takes a cue from recent work by Edmund Burke<sup>1</sup> and seeks to place western and non-western history on the same plane in order to reveal commonalities of experience.

This article explores the intersections of religion and education in Alsace and Algeria in order to demonstrate how policy conformed to fit

competing concepts of education. The bulk of academic literature on French education has concentrated on the destruction of religious customs by the central government through assimilationist cultural policies.<sup>2</sup> It will be argued, however, that religious custom in Algeria and Alsace influenced and modified the realization of these policies. Far from imposing a uniform secularism on these two regions, the French government had little choice but to reconcile its resolute *laïcité* with the tenacity of local religious faith.

Alsace and Algeria present an interesting comparison for a number of reasons. In both regions, religion and language set local populations apart from those of interior France and clashed considerably with the Republican ideals of secularism and linguistic unity. In the former, the vast majority of people spoke a German dialect and understood little, if any, of the French language. Furthermore, Alsatians were religiously observant and had not experienced the separation of church and state that occurred in France in 1905. Similarly, most Algerians observed Islamic religious custom and spoke either Arabic or Berber. As in Alsace, the religious establishment in Algeria was often openly hostile towards the French authorities, whose secularism and demands for linguistic unity were at odds with the convictions of most Alsatians and Algerians.

I seek points of comparison between the education projects in Algeria and Alsace in order to situate the imposition of cultural identities as a world historical process. It is important, however, to note that experiences in these two locations were fundamentally different. In Algeria, unlike in Alsace, there was a recognized and emphasized racial difference separating the local population from the French colonizers. Education, like most colonial institutions, was highly racialized. A two-track school system provided two distinct educational experiences: one for European settlers and a small number of Algerian elites, the other

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke III, "The Terror and Religion: Brittany and Algeria," in *Colonialism and the Modern World: Selected Studies*, ed. Greg Blue et al. (London: ME Sharpe, 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> This is a criticism recently levelled by James McDougall in "The Shabiba Islamiyya of Algiers: Education, Authority, and Colonial Control, 1921–57," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24:1 (2004), 147–154.

for the Algerian masses. The curriculum at the former was identical to that used in France, while at the écoles franco-indigènes lessons were loosely based on metropolitan curricula, but with a heavy emphasis on agriculture and manual labour. This emphasis, as well as the generally low quality of instruction at the écoles franco-indigènes, made it difficult or impossible for students in this system to gain acceptance to a French secondary school or university.<sup>3</sup> This is a striking difference from education in Alsace, which was designed to facilitate the integration of young Alsatians into French society.

Rather than addressing the question of motivations for colonialism, or determining to what extent the Third Republic sought to enact reform rather than maintain domination, I instead focus on how education policy was reformed and transformed in the interwar period. This analysis allows me to compare the experience of two regions whose political status was clearly different but who shared similar struggles in defining cultural identity in the face of imposed education systems. In this way, the colonial history of Algeria is seen as part of the same historical processes that shaped modern European history rather than as something that developed in isolation.<sup>4</sup>

The Third Republic, as a firmly secular government, sought to distance itself from the religious affiliations of previous French regimes. The early imperial incursion into Algeria, however, had a distinctly religious flavour. Colonial apologetics had justified military action in 1830 as a mission to liberate the natives from the oppressive Ottoman regime and to offer to them the benefits of Christian civilization. Charles X, in declaring his desire to carry out a campaign against Algeria, explained to parliament “the resounding redress which I hope to obtain in satisfying the honour of France will, with the Almighty’s help, turn to the profit of Christendom.”<sup>5</sup> The King’s

religious zeal seems to contrast with the official rhetoric that promised to respect the Islamic tradition of Algeria. Written evidence of France’s goodwill came in the form of a “convention of capitulation” signed by French General Bourmont and the Turkish Pasha on 5 July 1830. This document stated that “the exercise of the Muslim religion shall be free. The liberty of the inhabitants of all classes, their religion, their property, their business and industry shall remain inviolable.”<sup>6</sup> The very day the document was signed, French soldiers in Algiers managed to contradict each of these liberties and attacked Algerian people, property, businesses and holy sites with an unchecked eagerness.

From the earliest days of imperialism in Algeria, the French carried out a systematic assault on religious institutions. Mosques in both urban and rural areas were closed on suspicion of harbouring anti-French attitudes. Even more destructive for Islamic institutions was the steady transfer of lands from Algerians to European settlers and the resulting destruction of local religious authority. The French government confiscated communal lands, or *hubus*, which, in addition to providing financial support for religious leaders, funded Koranic education for Algerian youth and paid for the upkeep of schools. Left with no source of income, Muslim schools had to rely on private funding in order to stay open. This was not easy to come by, and many Koranic schools closed permanently in the first decades of the colonial era. The dismantling of Muslim schools led to a sharp increase in illiteracy, which worsened with time as one generation disabled the next. Several historians of Algeria have argued that Koranic schools were traditionally well attended and that their focus on scriptural readings meant that Algeria in fact had a higher rate of literacy than France in 1830. Although this is difficult to prove or to contest, the confiscation of *hubus* and the closure of politically-suspect schools certainly left a large hole in Algerian education.<sup>7</sup>

At the outbreak of World War One, French armies entered southern Alsace and remained as an occupying force until 1918. Ever conscious of its image as liberator, the French government was careful not to carry out any reforms to local institutions that could inspire hostility from the local population. The issue of

<sup>3</sup> Fanny Colonna, *Instituteurs Algériens: 1883–1939* (Alger: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1975), 57–58.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Burke III, “Theorizing Histories of Colonialism and Nationalism in the Arab Maghrib,” in *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib*, ed. Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Charles X, quoted in John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 48.

<sup>6</sup> Collection des Actes du Gouvernement Depuis l’Occupation d’Algèr,” reprinted in Ruedy, 49.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Schilling and Elsa Harik, *The Politics of Education in Colonial Algeria and Kenya* (Ohio University Press, 1984), 27, and Ruedy, 103.



religious education was particularly sensitive. Alsatians were deeply concerned that a return to France would mean an end to the Concordat between church and state, and by extension, the dissolution of religious education in the province. Throughout the war, however, France assured Alsatians that the religious character of their schools was not open to reform. As in the pre-war period, Alsatian students were taught a minimum of four hours of religious instruction each week. Local teachers were, of course, already trained to teach biblical history and rudiments of the catechism. In classrooms run by French soldiers, a priest, pastor or rabbi was present to handle religious instruction. Although French authorities requested that, whenever possible, religious teaching should be carried out in French, this was rarely followed or enforced.<sup>8</sup>

Promises to respect local religious tradition in Alsace continued in the immediate post-war period. Alexandre Millerand, first as commissaire général of Alsace and then as president of France in 1923, reiterated that Alsatian traditions would not only survive but also flourish under French leadership.<sup>9</sup> In the eyes of many Alsatians, however, France was a threat to local religious culture, particularly in the sphere of education. French public schools had been secularized since 1882, and the French state had not provided financial support for religious orders in almost twenty years. Education was highly centralized, at least officially, and it was nearly impossible for administrators and politicians to imagine how to maintain religious instruction without compromising the values of a republican education. For Alsatians, the concept of separating church and state was as foreign as it was for Algerians. Religion played a very visible role in public life. Moral instruction, by which was meant instruction by religious leaders, was seen as the essential purpose of education. Just as Koranic schools focussed on teaching the scripture of the Koran, schools in Alsace spent much of the day teaching biblical passages in preparation for the holy communion or confirmation. Two visions of education, one rooted in religious instruction, the

other in republican citizenship<sup>10</sup>, appeared bound to clash as Alsace became more closely drawn into the French hexagon.

In the early 1920s, religious instruction remained officially untouched in Alsatian primary schools. Four hours weekly were spent on religious subjects, taught either by a qualified teacher or by an appointed clerical leader. French authorities did, however, manage to undermine religious influence in schools by replacing Alsatian teachers with instructors from the interior of France. Arguing that the loyalty of German-trained teachers could not be assured, the French fired 921 Alsatian teachers, roughly one in every six, at the end of the war. Most school inspectors were removed or demoted, leaving all positions of power within the education administration in the hands of implanted French officials. Local presses throughout the 1920s decried the influx of French teachers and administrators as an encroachment of secularism and illustrative of France's "colonial" attitude toward Alsace.<sup>11</sup> Teachers and officials from France, trained as they were in the secular school of the republic, were accused of being anti-religious and deliberately undermining the faith traditions of their young and impressionable students. By indoctrinating the youth with laïcise, it was argued, the French were covertly seeking to destroy the religious culture of Alsace.<sup>12</sup>

Removing religious orders from the education system was far more difficult than firing regular teaching staff. Catholic priests and nuns in Alsace were still protected by the Concordat between church and state, and any attempt to take them off the government payroll would be interpreted as an imposition of France's 1905 secularizing laws. There was considerable reason to fear local uprising if confessional schools and teaching orders were banned outright. Instead, teaching orders came under control of the French state, which could monitor their teaching and cap their numbers. Catholic orders were therefore recognized as an important link between France and the Alsatian population, and maintaining an amicable

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Harp, *Learning to be Loyal: Primary Schooling as Nation Building in Alsace and Lorraine, 1850–1940* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1998), 181.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>10</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 336.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Goodfellow, *Between the Swastika and the Cross of Lorraine: Fascisms in Interwar Alsace* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1999), 23.

<sup>12</sup> Heimatbund, "Lettre des Member Catholiques de Comité Central de la Ligue des Alsaciens-Lorrains (Heimatbund) à Sa Sainteté le Pape Pie XI (Strasbourg, 24 janvier 1927)," reprinted in Oscar de Ferenzy, *La Vérité sur L'Alsace* (Paris: Librairie Bloud & Gay, 1930), 453.

relationship with them was a powerful way to instill patriotism among the Catholic masses in the newly incorporated province. Furthermore, as Stephen Harp has argued, most French governments of the interwar period saw utility in state control of religious schools. In France, the secularization laws had led to the blossoming of a system of private religious schools completely out of the realm of state control. In Alsace, the French government continued to exercise authority over religious education.<sup>13</sup> This allowed the central government to emphasize lessons on French culture and nationalism that could offer a competing alternative to religious-based identity.

The seizure of hubus land in Algeria left religious establishments in the colony with no means of financial support. The French Ministry of the Interior, wishing to dissuade hostility and recognizing that French-friendly imams were powerful political allies, began funding mosques out of the colonial budget in 1843. This gave French authorities tremendous power over the religious establishment, enabling them to decide who could act as spiritual leaders and teachers to the Algerian faithful. It also allowed the French to determine how many religious leaders would serve the public, perhaps as a way to limit the role of religion in the day-to-day lives of the colonized. The decision to financially support an “official Islam” was purely pragmatic: The cost of funding, and therefore controlling, Muslim establishments was minimal in comparison to the cost of allowing them to operate freely.<sup>14</sup> Just as in Alsace fourteen years later, the separation of church and state so central to republican philosophy was not to be applied to Algerian society.

Of all the Islamic institutions supported and controlled by the French government, the madrasas were the most strategically important and their cooption by the French inspired considerable hostility among the Muslim population. Madrasas, of which there were three in Algeria, were Islamic secondary schools that trained the elite for positions of leadership in the religious and political life of the country. They had existed long before the arrival of the French, but the face of education in these institutions was drastically changed by the colonial power. For every Algerian teacher there was a corresponding French instructor, thus

allowing for a bilingual education and for constant surveillance of curriculum, students and teaching personnel. Students were accepted into madrasas based on the loyalty of their family, not necessarily for their intellect, piety or credibility among the Muslim population for whom they would be leaders.<sup>15</sup>

The public school system in Algeria, unlike the madrasas, maintained the French secular ideal: there was no religious instruction included in the primary school curriculum for Algerian students. This may seem somewhat surprising in light of the fact that the French government provided financial support to French-friendly mosques and effectively controlled the madrasas. Algerians themselves requested religion in school because, like many Alsations, the majority of Algerians did not recognize the benefit of a secularized state. They remained dubious of French schools precisely because of their perceived anti-religious nature. There were suggestions made by prominent Muslims that French schools could attach themselves to pre-existing Koranic schools, thus attracting a broader range of students and allowing both systems to flourish. The proposal was, however, wholly rejected: the official line was that religious instruction in public schools was “une dérogation à un principe fondamental de la législation scolaire française: le principe de la laïcité.”<sup>16</sup>

In keeping with the secular nature of French education, the textbooks of the écoles franco-indigènes contained very little reference to religion, and what was mentioned was rarely positive. An examination of primary-level readers, which were more or less based on superficial descriptions of the Algerian lifestyle, reveals that Islamic practices and institutions were not considered useful or appropriate material. Algerian culture is instead explained through clothing, food and typical occupations.<sup>17</sup> The standard history textbook used in the final year of Algerian public school contains a small section on Mohammed and the birth of Islam as its sole reference to the Muslim faith. A 150-word description provides a very basic understanding of the prophet, his teachings and the Koran. The text explains how the Arabs engaged in a holy war across Africa and into Europe, finally halted by the victorious

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> M.F. de Paemelaere, “Rapport sur l’Algérie,” *L’Adaptation de l’Enseignement dans les Colonies: Rapports et Compte-Rendu du Congrès Intercolonial de l’Enseignement dans les Colonies et les pays d’Outre-Mer, 25-27 Septembre 1931* (Paris: Henri Didier, 1932), 25.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example A. Davense, *Les Premières Lectures de Mamadou et Bineta* (Paris: Librairie Istra, 1930).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>14</sup> Ruedy, 101.

Franks in 732. In what is now Algeria, the author elaborates, Arabs forced the indigenous Berber population to adopt Islam or face either death or exile. According to the text, “sous la domination arabe, l’Afrique du Nord ne connut pas la paix et l’ordre que les Romains lui avaient assurés pendant cinq cents ans.”<sup>18</sup> It is telling that the only discussion of Islam in Colin’s history textbook is one of violence and oppression, emphasizing peace and stability as hallmarks of Western imperialism. Colin’s textbook, in teaching this version of history to Algerian youth, demonstrates France’s policy to undermine Islamic and Arabic identity in the colony.

Textbooks used in Alsatian schools generally avoided religious topics. This is not surprising as four hours per week were dedicated to religious education and officials probably saw little need for including it in the core subject areas. The textbook most frequently used for French instruction at the primary level was Bruno’s *Le Tour de France par Deux Enfants*. By far the most popular reader of the Third Republic, the *Tour de France* had two editions: one which predated the 1905 law separating church and state, and one revised edition brought out in 1906. It was this second one, cleansed of any references to religious practices or heroes, that was shipped in large quantities to teach the young generation of Alsatis about French language and culture. Interestingly, by this time the reader was declining in popularity elsewhere in France, replaced by more modern texts.<sup>19</sup> The book, featuring two orphans from Lorraine, was seen as ideal reading material for Alsatis even while it was considered outdated for other French students. This is probably because *Tour de France* was written as part of the early-republican effort to create a sense of patriotism and to combat the cultural authority of the Catholic Church – goals very much at the forefront of education policy in Alsace. The message of the book is clearly articulated through the words of the young protagonist André, as he successfully stops an argument over whose province is the finest in France:

‘Alors, pour nous mettre en accord, disons donc que la France entière, la patrie, est pour nous tous ce qu’il y a de plus cher au monde.’  
‘Bravo! Vive la France! Vive la patrie Française!’ Dit d’une même voix le petit équipage.<sup>20</sup>

Mona Ozouf and Hans Siepe have argued that in the 1906 edition of *Tour de France*, religious values were translated into republican values in order to create what has been termed a “church of the republic.”<sup>21</sup> Jean-Michel Bardos, who wrote the epilogue to the centennial edition in 1977, explained “Dieu expulse, la patrie peut occuper toute la place.”<sup>22</sup> This was of particular importance in Alsace, where the continuation of religious education was seen as potentially jeopardizing to the cultivation of “Frenchness” in the province. Where the earlier edition thanked God for certain accomplishments, such as the night the boys spend on Mont Blanc, the later edition praises France for the beauty of the mountain. The term *mère France* is often used as a substitution for Dieu as the boys give thanks for their safe journey and praise the wonders they see around them.<sup>23</sup> In this way, textbooks used in Alsatian schools served to quietly instill some of the goals of the republican education project while still allowing religious instruction in public schools.

For the first five years after the war, education in Alsace remained as an uneasy truce. French teachers were still streaming in from the interior and their lessons and textbooks were often criticized for their secularity, but religious instruction remained in the curriculum. In 1924, however, the climate of negotiation came to an abrupt end with the national electoral victory of the cartel des gauches under the leadership of Edouard Herriot. Soon after assuming the role of Prime Minister, Herriot gave a speech to the Chamber of Deputies articulating his plans for the full reincorporation of Alsace into the French state:

Le gouvernement est persuadé qu’il interprétera fidèlement le vœu des chères provinces enfin rendues à la France en hâtant

<sup>18</sup> Edgar Colin et al, *L’Algérie: Histoire et Géographie, A l’Usage des Cours Moyens et des Classes de fin d’Études* (Alger: Baconnier Frères, 1949), 56–58.

<sup>19</sup> John Strachan, “Romance, Religion and the Republic: Bruno’s *Le Tour de France par Deux Enfants*,” *French History* 18:1 (2004), 99.

<sup>20</sup> G Bruno, *Le Tour de France par Deux Enfants* (Paris: Librairie Belin, 1906), 194.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Gildea, *Education in Provincial France, 1800–1914: A Study of Three Departments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 254.

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Michel Bardos, “Epilogue,” in G. Bruno, *Le Tour de France Par Deux Enfants* (Paris: Librairie Belin, 1977), 317.

<sup>23</sup> Hans Siepe, “L’Imaginaire Histoire dans *Le Tour de France par Deux Enfants*,” *Storia della Storiografia* 14 (1988), 160–180.

la venue du jour où seront effacées les dernières différences de la législation entre les départements recouvrés et l'ensemble du territoire de la République. Dans cette vue...en ménageant les intérêts matériels et moraux des populations, d'introduire en Alsace et en Lorraine l'ensemble de la législation républicaine.<sup>24</sup>

The introduction of "l'ensemble de la législation républicaine" was a clear attack on the religious culture of Alsace. Napoleon's Concordat between church and state, which had been abolished in France in 1905, was no longer to apply to the two reclaimed provinces. Although these laws were to have broad effect, including the cessation of state salaries for religious orders, the focus of discontent among both clergy and the general public was on the defence of religious education.<sup>25</sup>

Within Alsace, particularly rural areas of the province, Herriot's legislation was bitterly contested. The application of anticlerical laws triggered a wave of protest, with 50,000 demonstrators arriving in Strasbourg to demand the preservation of confessional schools and teaching orders.<sup>26</sup> The protestations against Herriot's reform reached a peak in early 1925. Bishop Ruch, a fierce defender of confessional schools, organized a province-wide school strike in March of that year. He urged parents to keep their children home from school until the government in Paris recognized their rights to control the education of Alsatian youth. Many local priests assumed leadership roles in the strike, encouraging young members of their congregations to remain at home and reassuring their parents that such a move was for the benefit of their children's moral education. Across Alsace, particularly in the rural areas, classrooms were left almost empty on strike day.<sup>27</sup> Within a month, due in part to this intense public pressure from Alsace, Herriot's government fell from power. The new Prime Minister, Paul Painlevé, recognized that the sensitivity of the education question was such that imposing secular

schooling ran the risk of alienating Alsace from France. Favouring long-term integration over ideological uniformity, the Painlevé government abandoned the secularizing legislation and allowed the Concordat to remain in place in Alsace.<sup>28</sup>

Only for a brief period under the Popular Front government of 1936 was the question of religious education revisited. Like the *cartel des gauches*, the Popular Front, as a Radical-Socialist-Communist coalition, found it difficult to reconcile the idea of Alsace being part of the French Republic while still allowing its children to be indoctrinated with religious education. In July of 1936, Léon Blum and his education minister Jean Zay introduced an additional year of primary education across France, requiring students to attend school until age fifteen. In Alsace and Lorraine, however, a further mandatory year was added three months later in order to compensate for time lost to religious and German instruction. Although state schools across the country were to receive additional funding to offset the cost of the extra year, the Chamber of Deputies voted 382 to 200 to withhold any financial support for religious schools in Alsace or elsewhere. As a further attack on confessional schools, the Blum government decreed that any schools willing to phase out religious instruction would not have to add the additional year. One outspoken critic of religious education argued that such a move would provide the necessary incentive to draw students away from confessional schools and into the public system.<sup>29</sup>

To enforce this new law, the government imposed fines on Alsatian parents who took their children out of school before age sixteen. Hardest hit were agricultural and working-class families, who were predominantly Catholic, and who relied on their adolescents to share in the family's work. They were neither willing to lose another year of labour nor to give up on religious instruction. Many departments subsidized parents for not following the law, thus negating the incentive of the levied fines. When the Blum government fell from power in 1937, its successor realized that the extra year of schooling was impossible to coordinate or enforce, and it was quickly dropped as legislation.<sup>30</sup> Subsequent French governments have continued to uphold the Concordat between church and state in Alsace and to provide funding for the confessional school system.

The post-war period in Algeria offers a complementary illustration of how classrooms became

<sup>24</sup> Edouard Herriot, quoted in Jean-François Chanut, *L'École Républicaine et les Petites Patries* (Paris: Aubier, 1996), 266.

<sup>25</sup> Harp, 193.

<sup>26</sup> Harp, 193.

<sup>27</sup> Goodfellow, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Harp, 194.

<sup>29</sup> Chambre des Députés, *Journal Officiel des Débats Parlementaires*, 16<sup>th</sup> Legislature (1936), 1683–84.

<sup>30</sup> Harp, 195.

the focal point for political and cultural negotiation in the Third Republic. The French began an ambitious school-building program in 1920 that continued in the following decades. Although the number of Algerian students in the French education system rose considerably in the decades after World War One, from 33,000 before the war to 100,000 in 1938, this was still only a small fraction of the school-age population.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, this education was limited to Algerian boys: there were very few options for girls in either Koranic or French school systems.<sup>32</sup>

Since the French could not meet demands for education, they had little choice but to allow Koranic schools to fill this gap. In order to exert some control over these schools, a number of regulations were introduced in the interwar period to restrict the influence of religious education in the colony. Koranic schools were supposed to operate only in the evenings and on weekends, so that they were not in direct competition with French schools for the recruitment of students. Despite the shortage of schools serving Algerian students, the French routinely shut down any Koranic school that attempted to teach during school hours and within the three-kilometre limit of an école franco-indigène. These closures predominantly affected urban and semi-urban areas where French schools were more numerous, forcing families to choose between a French education or none at all.<sup>33</sup> By allotting Koranic schools a secondary role in education, French educators were attempting to minimize the cultivation of a Muslim identity among urban Algerian youth. The influence of Islam on this segment of the population became a central concern of the French administration in the 1920s, as Algerians grew increasingly restless under colonial rule.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the efforts of the French Ministry of Public Instruction, Islamic education continued and thrived during the interwar period. While there is little doubt that the civilizing mission aimed for the

assimilation of Muslim Algerians into European culture, this undertaking was, on the whole, unsuccessful. Despite the adversity of the colonial situation, Islamic education survived French encroachment and, in many ways, thrived as an alternative to the European school system. The demand for education could not be met by French schools alone, which opened up a market for traditional and reformed “free schools.”<sup>35</sup> Until the late 1920s, Muslim education remained the domain of traditional Koranic schools, which continued to flourish until post-independence. In the early 1930s, as a response to the growing desire for “modern education,” several free school systems developed as hybrids of religious and secular pedagogy. These schools offered places of learning for students who could not or would not fit into the franco-indigène system, who wanted an education that was simultaneously “westernized” and Muslim.<sup>36</sup>

The Islamic reform movement, led by the Association of Reformed Ulama, was the organization most active in the field of education.<sup>37</sup> The reform ulama believed that public engagement and education were essential to the revitalization of Algerian culture. Beginning in 1931, they began constructing a reformed Koranic education system that attracted 10,000 students by 1939. Reflecting the fact that leadership of the movement was drawn primarily from among the elite of Algerian society, the reform ulama had great respect for the intellectual achievements of the European world. The curriculum at their free schools included literature, history, mathematics and science as well as the traditional emphasis on Arabic language and scriptural reading. Religious teachings emphasized a purified and “scientific” examination of sacred texts, pious leaders and Islamic history. Although Algeria was the focus of scholastic lessons, the ulama stressed that Algeria was part of the Muslim world and fostered a sense of Islamic identity that went beyond nationalism.<sup>38</sup>

The colonial administration was extremely careful in its dealings with the reform ulama and their system of free schools. According to official policy, France was supposed to respect the right of Algerians to

<sup>31</sup> Alf Andrew Heggoy, “Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict,” *Comparative Education Review* 17:2 (June 1973), 185–86.

<sup>32</sup> Ruedy, 105.

<sup>33</sup> Heggoy, “Arab Education in Colonial Algeria,” *Journal of African Studies* 2:2 (Summer 1975), 154–156.

<sup>34</sup> Heggoy, “Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict,” 184.

<sup>35</sup> Allan Christelow, “Ritual, Culture and Politics of Islamic Reformism in Algeria,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 23:3 (July 1987), 261.

<sup>36</sup> Said Ali Alghailani *Islam and the French Decolonisation of Algeria: The Role of the Algerian Ulama 1919–1940* (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Christelow, 261.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 169–71.

conduct the religious and moral education of their children. It was recognized that any movement to curb the influence of the religious reformers could result in significant popular unrest.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the reform Koranic schools were in direct competition with French-run primary schools and paid little attention to French regulations concerning their hours of operation and location. Many of the free schools were within the three-kilometre limit of a franco-indigène school and all operated during regular school hours. Beginning in the early 1930s, the Ministry for Public Instruction threatened repeatedly to close down schools that did not conform to these laws. The ulama, knowing full well that the French would face enormous resistance if they were to act on these threats, continued to disregard regulations governing Koranic education. Laws were then introduced requiring fifteen hours of French instruction per week in all Koranic schools. This rule, too, was ignored. Although most ulama were fluent in French, they often refused to speak it and certainly rejected teaching it to their students as a matter of principle. The colonial government had little choice but to allow these transgressions, not only out of fear of protest, but also because the reformed schools were educating an increasing number of Algerian children who would not have otherwise found room in French classrooms.<sup>40</sup>

The secularism so central to French public education policy did not apply to Algeria's religious population because attempting to limit the influence of Islam was recognized as a dangerous strategy. French authorities instead sought to limit the reform ulama's contact with the broader Algerian population outside of their primary schools. As previously mentioned, the colonial government allowed a breach in the separation of church and state through its financial support of French-friendly mosques and imams. A 1933 circular declared that any religious leader connected with the Association of Reformed Ulama was not permitted to preach from the official pulpit—and many unofficial mosques had been forced to close for financial reasons.<sup>41</sup> Although this exacerbated tensions between the co-opted religious sects and the “unsanctioned,” it did little to quell the influence of the reform ulama.

Their system of Koranic education grew throughout the colonial period, reaching a peak of 50,000 students by 1950. The Association did not survive the War of Independence, but the puritanical Islam it preached exerted tremendous influence on the post-war cultural terrain of Algeria. The ulama slogan “Islam is my religion, Arabic is my language, Algeria is my fatherland,” recited by students at the reform Koranic schools, became the official motto of the Algerian Republic.<sup>42</sup>

Local protest against secularizing education certainly had a powerful effect on the education systems created in interwar Alsace and Algeria. Although the ideology of *laïcité* was considered a central tenet of French republicanism, political expediency allowed for a reinterpretation of this principle to suit local contexts. The French government, always conscious of nationalist and autonomist agitation, was hesitant to incite hostility through perceived attacks on the religious establishment. At the same time, allowing religious schools to exist outside of the French system was recognized as a potential threat to central authority. The classroom could be the site of much anti-French sentiment, particularly if that classroom emphasized its spiritual nature in contrast to the secular French state. By monitoring and even controlling Koranic and confessional schools, the French government hoped to influence the sort of cultural identity that was cultivated in the classroom. Local populations, through their ongoing resistance to French education ideals, also sought to influence the sort of cultural identity fostered in the classroom. The result was a flourishing of local religious culture that significantly altered the practice of education policy during the Third Republic.

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<sup>39</sup> Christelow, 257.

<sup>40</sup> Heggoy, “Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict,” 188.

<sup>41</sup> Ruedy, 135.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

# What the Age Demanded: Power and Resistance in Premodern and Postmodern Texts

Carolyn Salomons, University of Alberta

## Abstract

*Linkages exist between premodern and postmodern texts in such areas as the construction and maintenance of power, as well as in the varieties of resistant experience. Power is something that we all participate in—primarily through what we know, wherein knowledge equals praxis. If knowledge is something we do, then our choices about what we know can be places of resistance. Premodern examples of such resistance can be found in St. Augustine, the desert fathers, the mystics and the “little saints” of Aquitaine. Are these examples so different from postmodernists? Anarchy is not advocated, but an awareness of the constructs of power that we encounter not just in the academy but also in every day life. We live in an age that demands “a mould in plaster,” where reality equals reality TV. Yet pockets of resistance “punctually come forever and ever.”*

The age demanded an image  
Of its accelerated grimace,  
Something for the modern stage,  
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries  
Of the inward gaze;  
Better mendacities,  
Than the classics in paraphrase!

The “age demanded” chiefly a mould in plaster,  
Made with no loss of time,  
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster  
Or the “sculpture” of rhyme.

Ezra Pound  
“Hugh Selwyn Mauberley”<sup>1</sup>

Postmodernism concerns itself with  
presentation. Rather than allowing one privileged  
method, one essential form, a “consensus of taste”

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<sup>1</sup> “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley II” by Ezra Pound, from PERSONAE, © 1926 by Ezra Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

which would make possible the ability to “share collectively,” postmodernism works without rigid structures. The process of presentation then permits new structures, new rules that are created by virtue of having been created.<sup>2</sup> A departure perhaps, certainly the presentation becomes something open ended. Stripping away layers of form, we see these departures as constant resistance to hegemonic discourse, hegemonic power. Tellingly, a common reaction to the philosophical ideas of postmodernism is also one of resistance, a reluctance to impart any value to such ideas. Charges of impracticality, meaninglessness, or dismissing postmodernism as some kind of linguistic game that does not matter in the “real world” are often noted.<sup>3</sup> Where does this resistance come from? Do those who resist fear what might happen if essentialisms are deconstructed? In the very short memories of the contemporary age, we quickly forget that such absolutist ways of thinking are products of modernity.

The premodern Western world, while informed by Christianity and therefore married to religious thought (and the essentialist language and constructs that go along with this belief system), does hold linkages with postmodern ways of thinking. Such linkages only become more visible as scholars increasingly attempt to use postmodern “tools” to gain new understandings of older texts. Far from being “ideologically driven”<sup>4</sup>—trying to force premodern texts into postmodern constraints (an oxymoron)—a natural flow and fit exist between these temporal periods. Teasing

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<sup>2</sup> The quoted material is based on the work of Jean Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1984) as quoted in Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xv-xvi.

<sup>3</sup> For a concise argument against postmodernism, specifically with regard to the field of history, see Peter Zogorin, “History, the Referent and Narrative: Reflections on Postmodernism Now,” *History and Theory* 38:1 (February 1999), 1–24.

<sup>4</sup> Philipp W. Rosemann, *Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), iix.



out linkages among constructs of power, language, and resistance allows for new ways of considering these concepts and constructs, not only as historians or “scholars,” but also as people. Theoretical work, yet not necessarily impractical: perhaps this is what our age demands. Instead of contenting ourselves with an image of what is real, we expose ourselves to what is underneath that facade; we break the “mould in plaster” which constricts us. We learn to resist order, and let disorder be. This is not “scholarship for scholarship’s sake,” but a type of exercise which salvages what enlightened modernity would ignore: a “darkened” past that needs to be explored (to continue the quest metaphor) to allow us a keener sense of how we got to who we are.

These linkages appear in various constructs—most notably for this paper, the construct of power. I do not consider power a fixed attribute, capable of being attained, but a place of inconstancy. Michel Foucault’s explication speaks to this; rather than allowing power to be an external monolith against which individuals have little or no effect (unless they are “in positions of power,” a paradigm that supposedly allows one access to “control”<sup>5</sup>), he exposes power as omnipresent and inescapable. Power informs all social reality and relationships: we all contribute and partake in power creation.<sup>6</sup> The relationality and interactivity of power makes it something dynamic and thus mutable. In this sense, then, far different from that external force, power pushes from within.<sup>7</sup> The concept of power is typically seen as a disturbing one, with an assumption that the wielding of power always results in negative effects.<sup>8</sup> As an

alternative approach, consider that power does not make things bad; it makes things dangerous.<sup>9</sup> The danger lies in a variety of places: power becomes dangerous when wielded selfishly or, perhaps more so, when wielded unwittingly.

Since power is relational, the place of the Other cannot be neglected. Language and institutions are two primary nodes where interactions with others occur, and as such, are extremely useful in examining the relationality of power. Looking to J. Joyce Schuld’s explication and synthesis of the works of St. Augustine and Michel Foucault in both language (specifically rhetoric) and institutionalism will allow us to uncover some instances of the creation of power, and its effect on alterity.

Because of its multifaceted rather than comprehensive nature, resisting power does not require a colossal undertaking; it can be done on smaller levels, in smaller arenas, in smaller ways. Being aware of the ways in which we all participate in power relations then becomes of paramount importance. In addition, we need to be able to step back and be aware of ourselves within the matrix of power relations. If we regard it, in Foucault’s terms, as “a machine in which everyone is caught...an invention that even its inventor is incapable of controlling,”<sup>10</sup> we only reiterate feelings of powerlessness, which misses the point. As Foucault explains, he is here speaking of the “vertiginous sense” of such a construct, but on closer and more considered thought the vertigo disappears. Awareness of everyone’s participatory roles in the creation of power then results not in “an absence of moral responsibility but rather a complicated sense of communal and individual responsibility that are elaborately interwoven.”<sup>11</sup> We all equally are able to resist power.<sup>12</sup>

We find a place of resistance, congruously, in language. Language, the medium by which we all interpret the world, has been used to create and uphold constructs of power. Therefore, to co-opt language as one place to resist these constructs is an intentional step. Awareness of language becomes the strand of commonality running between postmodern and pre-modern texts. The deliberate use of arcane language by postmodernists daunts many who would attempt to familiarize themselves with postmodern concepts. However, it is deliberate, and as such, has meaning. In part, postmodernists apologize for the dense language

<sup>5</sup> The concept of power as an attribute is troubling, not just in how it necessitates a hierarchical world, but also in how it introduces a controlling aspect to alterity; relations with others become fraught with struggles over “who wields the power.” In my understanding, as informed by Michel Foucault, even in relationships where one party supposedly has more power, and can therefore “control” the other, both parties contribute equally to the creation of the power construct. In addition, the one who supposedly has no power might very well be wielding a type of passive or manipulative power, less conspicuous but no less potent.

<sup>6</sup> J. Joyce Schuld, *Foucault and Augustine: Reconsidering Power and Love* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2003), 14.

<sup>7</sup> Schuld, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault would have us consider instead the creative and constructive aspects of power. See Schuld, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Schuld, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 67.

by touting it as the result of an attempt to express something inexpressible, or a necessary technique used to subvert reason.<sup>13</sup> These cursory explanations, while important, can be fleshed out by harking back to Christ's use of parables—something he did deliberately to exclude those who heard him from understanding his message, or to differentiate between those who were willing to choose to understand, and those who were not.<sup>14</sup>

While this concept of arcane language fits well with premodern religious traditions, many postmodernists would hesitate to align themselves with Christ or any Christian tradition, for fear of becoming entangled with notions of essentialism. However, parallels can be drawn between the two if they are confined to intellectual rather than religious traditions. The desert fathers approached language with great care; they were especially aware of the serious weight of language, and did not advocate frivolous speech.<sup>15</sup> While Christ may not have been concerned with frivolous speech per se, the gospel passages do speak to the conscious use of arcane narratives and obscure sayings. Such deliberation is also evident in the ontological argument of Saint Anselm, who shows his awareness of the limits and fallibilities of language to express God.<sup>16</sup> This same sense of fallibility comes out in mystical writings, which, as explicated by Michel de Certeau, use language in much the same way as Hieronymous Bosch used figures: using a familiar system to attempt the representation of something we have never seen or heard before. There are different elements in each instance of abstruse language, both premodern and postmodern, yet they are held together by strands of resistance. If language is acknowledged as limited, then such obscure writing must be approached with a willingness to work for comprehension. Reason and logic alone will not help; there must be a willingness to suspend reason, (perhaps) to discover a personal connection with the language. This arcane language necessitates a time-consuming process for

comprehension to flourish and many revolt against such a lengthy business, unwilling to take the time to explore and allow understanding to emerge. Modernity taught us to be efficient, something which pre- and postmodernism does not value as highly.

Arcane language positions its users on the margins, quite often by choice. More than a linguistic device or literary construct, or even part of a postmodern theory, the margins have a location, an active quality to them quite outside the realm of language. The process by which a life is lived can be a place of resistance. Life “as a work of art”; something which allows “personal flourishing.”<sup>17</sup> Some choose to live in this manner, the desert fathers, for example. Or perhaps we can look to other “emptied selves”—Michel De Certeau's idiot woman, or Surin's “Enlightened Illiterate.” Wildmen, or nomads, as De Certeau calls them, fit into this category. Others are pushed into the margins by the institution of which they are a part, as was the experience of the “little saints” of Aquitaine. What these beings have in common, aside from the non-nomological character of their existence, is the way they all create a place of resistance. They create it with their very lives, subverting reason through their choices, or through their experience. Humility marks this existence, through the emptying of their selves, which seems, paradoxically, to imbue them with a marked transformative power. The effect of these lives on those who witness their example is telling.

### Constructing Power

In ways unique to each of them, Michel Foucault and Saint Augustine both challenge privileged discourses of their respective times, discourses that contributed to the construction of power. Since they are privileged discourses, they operate on a cultural or state level. Relationality persists here, as rhetoric can speak to the relation between one state and another or the relation between members of the same state. Augustine engages the former type of rhetoric, while Foucault attempts to deconstruct the latter. The common theme of both is a striving for certainty and perfection. The danger lies in the obscuration of rhetoric in “noble-sounding endeavours” of improvement.<sup>18</sup> Attempts to better the world are uncovered as proud beliefs in one's own perspective as free of selfishness and therefore unhindered in applicability. “Hopeful acts of arrogance,” Schuld calls

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<sup>13</sup> Wyschogrod, 233

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 13.11–15, Mark 4.11–12, Luke 8.10.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Burton Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 3.

<sup>16</sup> St. Anselm, “Proslogion,” in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1986), 239–244.

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<sup>17</sup> Schuld, 74.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

them.<sup>19</sup>

Where can we find hope in what Schuld calls “the rhetoric of glory?” This rhetoric exaggerates the differences between the “enemy/them” and “us/the defenders-of-whatever-may-be-threatened-by-the-enemy.”<sup>20</sup> Maintaining such difference allows orators to dull the plight of any victims of their policies. Atrocities are justified with the rhetoric of glory and listeners participate by allowing themselves to believe this demonizing of the “enemy” (it matters not if the enemy changes). We can allow no hope for the Other in such a relationship; all hope must be placed in the destruction of the enemy, in order to make the world safer. Perhaps some altruism exists for the state subscribing to such rhetoric if it believes it acts in the best interests of other states in addition to itself. Whether such actions are asked for or condoned by those other states does not matter. The only relevance given is to the destruction of the enemy at all costs.

The “just war” best exemplifies this type of discourse: a war in defence of one’s country in the face of an unprovoked attack, or a war to prevent such an attack in the future. The first critique stems from the “seductively simplistic terms” such wars are couched in: right and wrong, good and evil, terms which ignore the moral ambiguities of this kind of act. As Schuld puts it, “aggressive actions, precisely because they are aggressive, can never be completely free of the moral transgressions that they are supposed to eliminate.”<sup>21</sup> At best, such acts are performed with the actors unconscious of the powerful damage they wield upon the Other. At worst, the actors become enamoured with the concept of glory, and become blindly tyrannical. A mentality of knowing what is best for other states sets in, and the original motive (to bring peace) vanishes. Those who are subject to such acts do not respond in gratitude, much to the bafflement of the acting state, but become resentful, and perhaps respond with sporadic and vicious attacks on their so-called saviours.<sup>22</sup>

Augustine likens such kingdoms<sup>23</sup> to “gangs of

criminals on a large scale,” especially once questioners remove the concept of “justice.”<sup>24</sup> This, however, begs the question: who or what determines the meaning of justice? A “just” thing for one state is “unjust” for another. This deconstructs the whole concept of a “just war” as such a thing cannot exist outside of the realm of rhetoric.

Augustine was speaking of the wars of Rome and the desire for conquest that drove the Roman Empire. He strips the “rhetoric of glory” to show its inherent deceptiveness in that it covers up “bare violence with the dazzling splendour of victory.”<sup>25</sup> It is somewhat alarming to read Augustine’s view of this rhetoric, and realize how similar it sounds to a great deal of the rhetoric that North America and Western Europe use today to talk about the Muslim world. The idea of achieving peace through violence has currency even today, allowing us a particular view of one sadly distinct and seemingly inescapable linkage between the pre-modern and the postmodern world.

Equally inescapable is the rhetoric Michel Foucault attacks—what Schuld calls the rhetoric of progress. The rhetoric relies on objectivity, not glory, for its privilege.<sup>26</sup> Who, steeped in a modern mindset, can dispute objectivity? “The facts speak for themselves” is today a buzz phrase difficult for many to counter. As Schuld explains, such rhetoric is “shielded by [its] purported lack of any biasing conviction or agenda, [its] ‘scientized’ canon of norms, and [its] pseudo-medical technologies and regimens.”<sup>27</sup> For Foucault, such a position, both to speak from, and from which to be spoken to, is especially dangerous because of the unobtrusiveness of the coercion.<sup>28</sup> “Progressive” technologies like Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon exemplify this: not only would it restrain and control a population, but it also is lauded for “maximizing the potential serviceability of each individual,”<sup>29</sup> as though serviceability were a measurable commodity. This ideology stems from the modern desire to bring order to disorder, an enterprise with an inherent danger. We see here the same danger that Augustine encountered in the rhetoric of glory, that is, the dulling of human feelings. Foucault goes further, by examining penal systems, and especially capital punishment.<sup>30</sup> Those who would witness an execution find themselves

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 163. The exception for Augustine, Schuld notes, are wars sanctioned by God, such as those recounted in the *Old Testament*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>23</sup> The term may be anachronistic to use today, but the concept is timely.

<sup>24</sup> Schuld, 165.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 203.

witnessing people going about their daily jobs—that it could be someone’s job to take life; that such an occupation could seem normal, necessary, is at the very least, chilling.

Couching such enterprises in the language of science, of the law courts, of medicine, lessens the weight of the decisions made by those who determine the fate of others (criminals or the mentally ill). The same can be said of military language, which terms innocent civilian bloodshed as “collateral damage,” a meaningless, ambiguous non-phrase, and calls an attack on the enemy a “surgical strike,” as if it was a necessary pain to ensure the health of a “body.”<sup>31</sup> The supposed objectivity and neutrality of those making these decisions, those speaking such language, allows them to do just that with very little reaction from those who are witnesses. Foucault shows us that the attempt to “clean up the streets, restore order, mop up the ‘mad’” does as much harm as good, but the harm is “papered over,” things must be kept “tidy.”<sup>32</sup>

As an example of just such an attempt to impose order on disorder, Schuld turns to Foucault’s work on the plague-ridden seventeenth-century town.<sup>33</sup> She explains that Foucault does not take exception to the controlling efforts to save lives, but the unintentional result of those efforts—the realization, fleetingly, of “a “disciplined society” free of “rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder.”<sup>34</sup> This creation of a “social grid” on which citizens are fixed (and fix themselves) determines and internalizes a very controlled sense of self-awareness and awareness of the Other, which complicates relationship for Foucault.<sup>35</sup> We thus inform relationship with a dread of disorder and an abhorrence of diversity. Eccentricity, even individuality, becomes deviant.

I would argue that this same mentality can be found not only in prison systems and plague-struck French towns, but also in many other forms of modern life. Let us take the imposing of order on time as one such example. Modern life is

increasingly dictated by temporal routine, hours parceled out in small doses, “measuring out one’s life with coffee spoons.” As this happens, it grows harder not to succumb to what M. B. Pranger calls “death in the afternoon.”<sup>36</sup> Perhaps this death is a natural response to the creation of unnatural order in life. It became a space in which medieval monks struggled tremendously, seeking to experience unceasing ecstatic joy in “the treadmill of meditation and reading,” an unnatural and impossible task.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps we struggle less today, however, and more readily succumb to the death, allowing it to wash over us.<sup>38</sup>

For a concrete example, we can look to a university, where members attempt to be in class on time and get restless after fifty or eighty minutes, knowing well when a lecture is scheduled to end. The workplace gives another example: the day broken up into routine activities, punctuated by small amounts of “free” time. Even our entertainment is meted out in doses: movies, symphonies, plays, and TV programs—all assigned specific time slots around which we negotiate. I am not advocating anarchy, but I am advocating awareness, as are Foucault and Augustine. They both see a need to “jar citizens out of apathy . . . to incite them to remain critical of the status quo.”<sup>39</sup> This would apply to their own work as well. Although Augustine criticizes the Roman Empire and its devices to impose order, he, or Schuld, allows it as something necessary to maintain a “peaceful existence in the city.”<sup>40</sup> A necessary evil (I do not use the term ironically), resulting from humanity’s fall into sin, and therefore something inescapable for members of any society. Foucault does not share Augustine’s metaphysical analysis, nor does he provide any enclosed alternative to these social institutions. He cannot, for he does not speak from a set of “foundationalist norms.”<sup>41</sup> He offers instead an “ad hoc critical enterprise” which allows for open-ended readings of society, of history, of the world.<sup>42</sup> This diversity is beneficial in that responses will then

<sup>31</sup> The language of today’s advertising industry follows a similar pattern, as words calculated to make the listener feel a lack and the promise of amelioration of such a lack with the purchase of the product.

<sup>32</sup> Schuld, 205

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>36</sup> M. B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity: Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 4–5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 5. Ecstasy and joy are not unobtainable, but the experience can never be unceasing.

<sup>38</sup> Edith Wyschogrod comments on this issue in a slightly different context—that of the banality of death in today’s “information” age, where we are daily bombarded with the sights and news of death, so much so that it becomes meaningless. See *Saints and Postmodernism*, xiv.

<sup>39</sup> Schuld, 205.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

be richer, and possibly more creative.<sup>43</sup> In many ways, these responses can be read as resistances. Since we have looked at some cases of how language creates power, we continue in that vein and look to language as a place of resistance.

### Language as Resistance

Resistance requires a conscious decision; awareness of the structures of hegemony as outlined by Augustine and Foucault is not enough to ensure resistance. The forms which this resistance takes vary, which fits with Foucault's desire for rich, creative responses. Perhaps an aesthetic ideal is achieved, life as a "work of art." The process matters more than the result, and the process leaves us not free from all control, but rather able to perceive and thus determine the kind of controls that govern us and how these will affect our intersections with others.<sup>44</sup> In this process, knowledge becomes an act, not something we "have" but something we "do," and therefore never neutral.<sup>45</sup>

Knowledge, then, also becomes a choice, a decision. More than something to be swallowed and assimilated, we participate in what we come to know. As much as we help to shape the power delineations of relationship in our lives, we also shape the knowledge that aids us in constructing those very relationships, our own sense of self, our own reality. This choice can be as simple as not choosing in the sense that a person could refuse a position of reflection, could adhere to and never question the hegemony of the cultural discourses with which each of us are daily confronted.

Not surprisingly, one place where renegade choices evince themselves is in religious spaces. Monks and mystics: both are on the margins, living in enclosed physical spaces or solitary spiritual spaces, wrestling with language.<sup>46</sup> As examples of these types, we look to explication of the hermeneutics of the desert fathers by Douglas Burton-Christie, and to Michel De Certeau's work on mystical language.

The desert fathers are highly sensitive to the importance of language, and use it deliberately in a variety of ways: narratives, question and answer, riddles and even silence. Burton-Christie, informed by Paul Ricoeur's theories of language, examines the interaction of the monks with their texts, displaying again a linkage between premodern and postmodern texts.<sup>47</sup> Ricoeur speaks of the interpretive process of communication (what I would call a decisive approach to knowledge) in terms of "word events": "language set[ting] something in motion [and] . . . [thus] existence is illumined."<sup>48</sup> For the desert fathers, a "word event" not only means pondering the Word of God, but also the words of their elders, and these word events have the power to transform lives.<sup>49</sup> It happens in what Ricoeur calls the "dialectic of event and meaning," where participation in the process of understanding allows the text to "project a world," and the "challenge of interpretation is . . . to engage that . . . world".<sup>50</sup> This evokes Foucault's open-ended readings of the world, as each text has the capacity to unfold in continuously new possibilities of meaning, depending on how each is interpreted. It might be helpful to think of this, as Burton-Christie does, as a conversation with a text.<sup>51</sup> Varied questions and answers mean that for each individual, one text can develop into different conversations, depending on when and where and how the conversation takes place. "In this model," says Burton-Christie, "neither the text nor the interpreter is a static object."<sup>52</sup> Lives are transformed through this model because of this act, not simply because we interpret the text in a certain way, but also because the text interprets us, allowing for reciprocal agency.

The weight of such a concept of language bears down on those who approach it, ensuring a deliberation and carefulness to their conversations. Especially for those who, like the desert fathers and those who sought their counsel, believe that these are words of salvation. Words here were never uttered without the awareness that they were meant to be "taken up and integrated into the hearts, minds, and actions of those who received them."<sup>53</sup> In addition to this salvific attribute of language, the desert fathers realized the power of words to wound, destroy or condemn.<sup>54</sup> Burton-

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>46</sup> I use the word solitary deliberately; mystics, as will be discussed later, are often frustrated by the limitations of language. Yet they persist in the attempt, which I believe speaks to a desire to be understood, to share their unique experiences.

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<sup>47</sup> Burton-Christie, 18–23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 134. Though Burton-Christie does not use the term

Christie exposes a tense ambivalence towards language on the part of the desert fathers, and the need to “test” all the participants of a speech event: the word, the participant who speaks it, and the one who hears it. The struggle to control the tongue, to guard well what issues from the mouth was part of the lifelong journey these monks were taking. The elders, it appears, had less trouble than the younger monks did. Through the process of living a life of close and transformative interaction with language, they were purified of selfish motivations and desires.<sup>55</sup> Control over language was possible, as long as one worked at it. Another place to make a decision, then, for in order to subvert “worldly words” a monk needed to turn his or her heart towards God, and the words would be rendered impotent.<sup>56</sup> A result of this life long quest which transformed the elders was awareness of this “reciprocal influence of the heart and the mouth.”<sup>57</sup> Careless words, speech without forethought, and above all, the awareness of the power of language all speak to a method of resistance for the desert fathers.

Using language deliberately may not seem like any type of resistance; however, the awareness and its resultant questioning are the places where we find resistance. If we recall Augustine and Foucault’s critique of privileged discourses, awareness was the paramount concern for them. An awareness of the power of language is frighteningly lacking in today’s world. Attention spans diminish with the proliferation of Internet access; instant gratification teaches no patience. Words become meaningless—as shown above in the brief discussion of military language. Interpersonal relationships are also affected: the skyrocketing divorce rate renders the word “commitment” empty; we do not witness a death, but a “passing.” These are but a few examples. For the desert fathers to take such care over the words they used ensures them a position of resistance.

Far more resistant, however, is silence. Something almost unheard of in the discordant cacophony of the postmodern world, silence highlights an awareness of language. Choosing silence over speech limits the danger of careless words, the destructive possibilities of language.<sup>58</sup>

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“condemn” I feel it is appropriate to include it.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 135, 146.

Silence was also, for the desert fathers, not only the way to create a place where awareness of God would thrive, but also the best means of “communicating the essence of the spiritual life.”<sup>59</sup> This could be done through action, through highlighting what was said, or more impressively, through a demonstration of what would happen if one only ever spoke the words of God.<sup>60</sup>

More than this, however, silence provides a place to linger when language fails us. The alternative is to create new forms of language; to allow the meaning of words’ fluidity; to accept the mendacity of language — in short, the space of *la mystique*.<sup>61</sup> *La mystique* shares the desert fathers’ view on the reciprocity of lingual interpretation. Michel De Certeau introduces the notion of the “mystic fable,” the transformation of speech (religious speech) since the sixteenth century from an absolute truth into a fiction that relies on an interpreter to “obtain the knowledge it expresses without knowing it.”<sup>62</sup> This transformation occurs with the proliferation of writing, which has developed into a mistrust of speech, a marginalization of the spoken word. With the “triumph of writing,” the mystics are squeezed to a place on the edges of the field over which writing has triumphed: the place of “the child, the woman, the illiterate, madness, angels, or the body.”<sup>63</sup> I see this as important in light of Foucault’s analysis of contemporary privileged discourse. The discourse of progress relies heavily on the written word, and the spoken word is suspect. Ideas, theories, concepts, events, all must be rendered into writing before they can be true.

What happens to *la mystique* when the mystic attempts to render it into language? “At nova res novum vocabulum flagitat” says Lorenzo Valla.<sup>64</sup> But what sort of word can be used to capture the object of *la mystique*? This, claims De Certeau, is why the scientific field of *la mystique* disappears: its object is

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 146–47.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 147–49. I am referring here to the “curious” story of the monks who remained silent save to chant the Psalms, at which point tongues of flames would come out of their mouths and ascend to heaven.

<sup>61</sup> I am deliberately using the French adjective to specify the discourse of mysticism. Michael B. Smith’s use of the term validates my point concerning the limitations of language, and the invention of language.

<sup>62</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Volume One: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>63</sup> De Certeau, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 75.

“the unstable metaphor for what is inaccessible.”<sup>65</sup> La mystique acknowledges the inability to articulate God, the experience of God, in human language.

Why speak at all then? The object is unstable, the language limited. Why speak? The mystics speak because they must. In Spanish, the human and divine communication is expressed in one word: *conversar*. La mystique concerns itself with communication, and that entails both speaking and listening.<sup>66</sup> In the sixteenth century, what discourse there was did not satisfy. “No saben decirme lo que quiero,”<sup>67</sup> “They do not know how to tell me what I want,” laments Juan de la Cruz. Something is missing, “what should be is missing.”<sup>68</sup> The absence demands speech and speech demands a hearing. La mystique means not just to teach those who “do not know,” but also to teach those who speak. Juan de la Cruz shows his awareness: “It is a harsh and painful thing for a soul not to understand itself and to find no one to understand it.”<sup>69</sup> We are back in the place of interpretation, not only needing the text to interpret us, but the listener as well. Reciprocity provides a place where we learn to understand what we say.<sup>70</sup>

The problem of methodology remains: how to speak this “unstable metaphor”? De Certeau outlines three “illocutionary mechanisms” that set the scene allowing la mystique: a break, an empty place, and the representation of that place.<sup>71</sup> The break constitutes a decision regarding the *modus loquendi* on which both the speaker and the listener agree. The agreement consists not on an acceptance of the inherent or absolute truth of language, but the inherent lie: “language as an endless betrayal of the intention.”<sup>72</sup> We are left with a “beautiful but illegible handwriting,” like the figures of a painting by Hieronymus Bosch.<sup>73</sup> The words seem familiar, but on a closer reading, all meaning is lost. Language becomes subversive in its meaninglessness, again, positing the

inarticulateness of the divine. The agreement, the contract between the mystic and her or his addressee, and its subsequent speech act create an empty place where la mystique becomes possible. It is a place where the rules of language are suspended. The mystic must fill the empty place; he or she must “found the place from which he or she speaks.”<sup>74</sup> In this case, legitimacy does not stem from external sources, but “in the name of what speaks [from] within [the speaker] . . . the Real (in mystic discourse) or the Speaking Word (in prophetic discourse).”<sup>75</sup> The “I” of la mystique then “takes the place” of the Other; the “I” speaks in lieu of God.<sup>76</sup> Distinctions between the Real and the “I” collapse, legitimizing the speech act. What this act needs now is a “space of expression.”<sup>77</sup> A theatre, if you will, for language here works as a fiction, representing “the cosmos that served as a language for the speaking creator.”<sup>78</sup> Fictitious, mendacious, even imaginary: “the sayable continues to be wounded by the unsayable.”<sup>79</sup>

As a locus of resistance, la mystique strips language of its objective, essentialist significance. Facts no longer can speak for themselves, because facts have become fictions. Even my word processing program offers a list of words that connote “unreliability,” “pretence,” “conjunction” as synonyms for “fictitious.” As if all language were not built on pretence, as if some words were absolutes. La mystique uncovers the fallibility of language; it shows us the precariousness of assuming that words are fixed somehow, can bear the weight of objectivity that we would like them too, or are capable of ordering disorder. We have asked much of language, with la mystique what we ask collapses in on itself. We enter into a non-place, not the non-place of la mystique’s religious experience, but a contemporary non-place, where language fails to express the inexpressible. Inevitably, some retreat into silence, their life lived as a place of resistance. Absence becomes their only presence.

### “Art as Existence”: Resistance as Movement

Michel Foucault questions the specialization of art, categorically limiting it to objects and allowing the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 157–158. The usage of *conversar* evokes the desert father’s interpretive hermeneutic.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 158. I believe this quote is translated incorrectly in the text; what follows is my own translation.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 70.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 178. This evokes my opening remarks about postmodernism creating rules by virtue of having created them.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 78.



creative force to be taken up only by those designated as artists.<sup>80</sup> “But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art?” he asks.<sup>81</sup> Schuld explicates this idea as one which would allow individuals to construct their lives under this rubric of “personal flourishing,” necessarily asking for endless diversity of lifestyles.<sup>82</sup> We thus encounter arcane lives, rather than arcane language. These lives are also on the margins—some are there by choice (many of the desert fathers), others are squeezed out of their societies, considered “dangerous, even pernicious” (the “little saints” of Aquitaine).<sup>83</sup> Tellingly, we find ourselves in the realm of religious life again, a useful exemplar, it would seem, as some aspects of religious life concern themselves with questions of personal flourishing, or, put another way, “a quest for holiness.”

One such quest is the reformatory desires of the “little saints” of Aquitaine. They represent, according to De Certeau, a “mystic resistance,” which, though “powerless” was able to create a place of “difference” which “sallies forth from its repression to go elsewhere.”<sup>84</sup> Much like *la mystique* creates a “non-place” in which to speak, the “little saints” created a place of resistance within the Jesuit order, a resistance which did not disappear but lingered in the margins, lingers today. Therefore, they are partakers of power. Interestingly enough, De Certeau provides us with differing perspectives of the “little saints.” We see how those in positions of power viewed them, and we see how they view themselves. The first view is laden with concepts of negativity: an “extremely dangerous affair,” “that peculiar spirit,” “[t]his new and foreign spirit of devotion,” something “distant from the common conduct of the society,” and a “contagion.”<sup>85</sup> De Certeau reminds us not to be too harsh with the leaders of the Jesuits, as they were still scarred by (and scared of) the experience with the *alumbrados* in sixteenth-century Spain.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Schuld, 73.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>83</sup> De Certeau, 242.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 252–53.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 252. An interesting side note: Ignatius Loyola was brought up before an ecclesiastical commission to answer charges relating to his connection with and sympathy for the *alumbrados*. He was dismissed with an admonition.

However, even without this experience, an order which concerned itself with obedience was not to take lightly the “disobedience” of some of its younger members. The head of the order, Muzio Vitelleschi, admonishes one reformer not to “deviate from ‘the common norm of our Institute.’”<sup>87</sup> Here, power is upheld through obedience; therefore, deviance, disobedience must be admonished.

Was this disobedience? The particulars of the “peculiar spirit” were not of a rebellious resistance, but an escapist resistance.<sup>88</sup> De Certeau speaks of the “void” on which the institution was centred, a void created by “leaving God for God”—moving away from contemplation towards action. For contemplatives this created an interior desert, “an exile internal to prayer,” which rendered their desire uncertain.<sup>89</sup> For “men of action” the actions themselves became substitutes for conversation with God, and they were left (eloquently) practicing a “dull gray discipline,”<sup>90</sup> reminiscent of the “death in the afternoon.” The “little saints” resisted that exile, that dull gray discipline. What they willed was not of import—preparation before God is useless, since God prepared “a truth” to present instead, something at times fierce and explosive, a “furor” of mind, and a wildness.<sup>91</sup>

The “little saints” were squeezed to the margins: some left the order, some fell ill, some died, Surin was left “insane.”<sup>92</sup> But they were not forgotten; their papers were collected, a text put together, their lights continue to flicker.<sup>93</sup> Their space of resistance was small, but durable.

The “little saints” did not choose, nor seem to relish their position on the margins. Their confessional letters speak to this.<sup>94</sup> Yet they were all unable to retreat from that position, to move back to the centre. The margins, it would seem, chose them. For the desert fathers, the separation from society involved choice and desire, for the withdrawal to the desert not only placed them physically on the margins of society, but also displayed a dramatic rejection of society, and all that it valued.<sup>95</sup> Burton-Christie echoes Schuld’s call for personal flourishing: “In [breaking the bonds which tied human

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 258–59.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 259–60.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. The presence of the “little saints” in De Certeau’s text speaks just to this point.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 255–56.

<sup>95</sup> Burton-Christie, 54.

beings to the dominant powers of the world], they revealed to themselves and to their contemporaries that it was possible to achieve a profound level of freedom.”<sup>96</sup>

Burton-Christie calls this “freedom from care”<sup>97</sup> and this freedom covers more than just a break from the norms of society. It also involves renunciation, which encapsulates a plethora of concepts. Renunciation of physical things constitutes a segment of this, certainly, as vows of poverty, abstinence, and fasting are taken. Renunciation of the will takes up another part, and I would argue that this involves more than abandoning pride, or desire; there is a self-emptying, a negation of the self. The self becomes free to be filled by different things: God, the Other, a belief system, even texts. Renunciation is obvious in the desert fathers, but we find traces of it in the mystics as well, and even Augustine addresses the concept as Schuld’s work indicates.

Renunciation of physical objects was necessary for the desert fathers because they knew that possessions, or the desire to possess an object, could “consume the soul,” leaving no room for God.<sup>98</sup> This does not mean that renouncing all their worldly possessions and desires came easily for those who aspired to such acts, and the desert fathers were enjoined to look to Abraham, and attempt to “make the moves” to follow him, and be prepared to sacrifice everything.<sup>99</sup> Even to make such an attempt is marginal behaviour, certainly. If anyone were to do so in contemporary society she or he would be deemed eccentric at best. Not buying into the propaganda which tells us that possessions can make us happy, (something apparent [apparently] even in the fourth century) can be done only by a conscious decision and a continuing method of acting.

Even harder to maintain is the renunciation of the will, of oneself. For the desert fathers, this meant not only to deny oneself, but also to surrender to the will of another, an elder.<sup>100</sup> Obedience becomes the Other, the will of the self is renounced, and the empty place is filled with only obedience. In a similar fashion, the mystics decide to surrender to the will of God, a continuous decision, invoking a constant departure from the

will of the self.<sup>101</sup> The mystic is thus emptied of self, and now the mystical experience can take place, in space of the “I want nothing, not even God” (for to desire God is to experience will).<sup>102</sup> Yet both figures share the surrender of the will to words. The discourse of the mystic, as we have seen, is in a place where language is fallacious, even diabolical, and still the mystic speaks. The monks in the desert were aware, in a similar fashion, that the power of a word relied on the attitude, the will (or lack) of the receiver.<sup>103</sup> Burton-Christie speaks of the “willingness to carry out the words of Scripture”<sup>104</sup>—is this willingness not a surrender? This practice of Scripture leads to a transformation. In this sense, the monk has emptied himself of self, he has “appropriated the text on a very deep level—in a sense [he has] become the text.”<sup>105</sup>

Abba Pambo teaches that this place, this place of renunciation is where martyrs are found. This slips us back to Augustine, and his deconstruction of Rome’s “rhetoric of glory.” In his writings on martyrs, humility and self-emptying are obvious. Their response to suffering is to practice charity: “they requite brutality with patience and forgiveness . . . they gain victory in being vanquished and losing themselves for others.”<sup>106</sup> All that they did, all that they managed to do, they ascribed to God, not themselves. These sacrifices inspire; the “self-emptying acts of mercy” fill up the community with those who have seen and heard.<sup>107</sup>

And here is the crux: it is this very humility, the emptied monk, mystic and martyr who has gained an “immense power.”<sup>108</sup> For Burton-Christie, this displays itself in a power over the demonic, the ability of the desert fathers to confront evil and cast out demons.<sup>109</sup> Augustine tells us that the martyrs had the ability to transform others, to inspire people to join the Christian community. He also speaks to personal humility, which takes the form of confession, and how it has the power to “disturb the pride of others.”<sup>110</sup> It also has the power to remind us that our own self-identity is continually in flux, and for Augustine, and others in the Christian tradition, the only way to find a self is to lose it.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 216–217.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>101</sup> De Certeau, 165–168.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Burton-Christie, 157.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Burton-Christie, 258.

<sup>106</sup> Schuld, 168.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Burton-Christie, 255.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 256–258.

<sup>110</sup> Schuld, p. 123.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 218, Mark 8.35 (variation thereof).

De Certeau presents us with perhaps the most evocative examples of self-emptying. First, we are given the story of the idiot woman.<sup>112</sup> She is “lost there in the Other,” excluded, yet “rendering possible an entire circulation.”<sup>113</sup> What are the effects of this deviation? Once exposed, “wisdom is born,” the sisters are transformed.<sup>114</sup> De Certeau also recounts Jean-Joseph Surin’s encounter with the “enlightened illiterate.”<sup>115</sup> Surin leaves his country, goes into the “wilderness.” When you leave the safety of your country, when you enter the margins of the wilderness, you may encounter angels, demons, madmen. Surin encounters an “angel” in the guise of a crude, unlettered peasant boy, who nevertheless “astonishes” him with his wisdom. Surin welcomes this “treasure” and learns from him “many wonders.”<sup>116</sup> Like the idiot woman, the young boy has no place in the institutions of the church. He was born and lives on the margins, a youth, yet in the time and space given him he has grown wise. In Surin’s joyous, rapturous reaction to the boy, in his breathless letter recounting the adventure of meeting him, are we witnessing a reaction to a work of art? The idiot woman as well, venerated by the renowned monk—does he see in her a work of art? He prays to be found worthy.

## Conclusions

I began by looking for value in postmodern presentation. I sought to expose whether disorder could allow growth, could allow personal flourishing. A certain type of person flourishes in such a space. The desert fathers did, their sayings and their legacy are with us today. The idiot woman and the enlightened illiterate both flourished in their obscurity—in the disorder of the kitchen, in the crudity of the “wilderness”—so much so that recognition was painful. The “little

<sup>112</sup> De Certeau, 32–33.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 36, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 38. I question this transformation, much as I realize it diminishes my point. The sisters take on the madness of the idiot woman (“me too me too”). They venerate her because the monk venerates her. Do they know why? They take on her madness like an ill fitting dress. They have not emptied themselves, merely tried to fill a non-empty space with her practices. It sits uneasily on them.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 207–10.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 207.

saints” tell another story. They did not choose the margins, and poignantly, they do not flourish, but sicken, die or go mad. Choice matters, then. Resistance cannot be imposed.

But how did we get to who we are? Does looking back through history tell us why we live in an age that is more content with images and moulds than with reality?<sup>117</sup> Perhaps this age is not as unique as I once thought. Perhaps Ezra Pound was speaking not merely to the modern condition, but also to the human condition. Certainly sifting through the past, examining the linkages between premodern and postmodern texts, uncovers possibly the most significant linkage. In all of this work—the desert fathers, St. Augustine, sixteenth-century mystics, Michel Foucault—the linkages show a simulacrum of responses, which beg a simulacrum of that which provokes the response. The rhetoric of Rome is not so different from the rhetoric of Western countries today. People today rarely deviate from the common norm of their “institute.” Silence remains suspect. Art is institutionalized. Time is fixed in an unvarying routine which ages us prematurely. Many of us remain unaware of the power of these constructs, of how they fix us on the social grid and inform our relations and our identities.

This is not how we are meant to be. Pockets of resistance would not spring up throughout the landscape of history were this not the case. I see it in myself: I think of the monks battling the “death in the afternoon” as I struggle to fix my attention to this very paper. I want to write; I am interested, even passionate about the subject. But the writing is painful: perhaps that is a natural response to the imposition of order on my disordered thoughts. Yet this order is needed; I could not hand my audience a jumble of notes and hope to be understood. So I follow in the footsteps of the desert fathers, and approach each word with deliberation, with awareness. A type of resistance, and perhaps new rules are created by my language, by virtue of having been created. My sentence structure, my use of tenses (questioned by readers—are they resisting?) reflect the “reveries of my inward gaze.” Ah, but who am I? One person writing one paper; what affect could that have? What affect could it not have? For it is my open-ended and creative response to this very subject matter that has taken my attention here. The age demands this of me: this is my pocket of resistance, my choice.

<sup>117</sup> This contentedness thrives despite the bizarre and ironic proliferation of so-called “reality” TV, which actually speaks to my point, since there is nothing real and everything artificial about such programs.

## A Spider Woman Story

Janice E. Young, University of Victoria

### Abstract

*Spider Woman, the Cosmic Weaver, as healing symbol and image of empowerment, found a prominent place in the linguistic landscape of second-wave feminist discourse. Although not synonymous with feminism, feminist spirituality emerged as a strong current within the movement, a current which continues today. In Gyn/Ecology, a highly influential text of this era, Mary Daly shows the link between language, myth, and oppression and sets women to the task of recognizing ways in which our words and stories betray us. Further, she sets us to design words and stories through the power of Spider Woman imagery and textile metaphors. Using Daly's work as a springboard, the following essay traces the emerging role of Spider Woman in developing a "gynocentric language" and a new linguistic landscape, evidenced in women's writing as it continues into the new millennium.*

### Prologue

In the beginning  
Is the thread of thought,  
A strand of consciousness that spins out  
Over the void, across galaxies,  
Until it anchors itself on a far away star.

Between the beginning  
Of the thread and the resign point  
Of its journey lies the emptiness  
Of all the universe, the whole potential  
Waiting for the song of life to take form.

In the beginning  
Spider Woman spins and sings  
The song of life  
The web of be-ing

### A Spider Woman Story

In the beginning there was thought and her name was woman  
She is the OLD woman who tends the fires of life  
She is the OLD woman spider who weaves us together  
She is the eldest God and the one who remembers and  
RE-MEMBERS<sup>1</sup>

My journey with Spider Woman—the Great Goddess as Weaver of the Universal Web of Life—began a long time ago, probably more than I am consciously aware of. This primordial divinity, also known as the Mother of All Life, Great Mother, First Woman, Old Woman, Isis, and myriad other names throughout the world, made herself known to me during my undergraduate years in the Women's Studies program at Malaspina College. During this time (1994) I was also introduced to Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology*, a radical text which has been influential in my academic analysis ever since. I admired then, as now, Daly's courage and tenacity in bringing the Goddess to visibility, highlighting her role as the Sacred Spinner and Weaver of All Life. Whether weaving is actually an innate component of women's spirituality, or whether spinning and weaving are applied as metaphors for the energetics of women's perceptions and process of creations, is less important than the role of Daly's work in bringing to light the way women's "fibres of being" have been damaged through the process of colonization. Although Daly's 1978 text has subsequently been subject to criticism and scrutiny, especially with charges of Eurocentrism, she is among the first authors of the "second wave" of feminism to detect ways in which seemingly disparate threads, when woven together into an interconnection of design, show the patterns of destruction imposed on women—and by association, children, men, and ultimately all societal relations, through the process of colonization and its warrior culture. Achieved through legislated domination of women's lives, the restriction of women's activities, and diminishment of female divinity, the patriarchal society offers, at most, a fragmented existence for women.

Daly's work is also groundbreaking for connecting the processes of women's oppression

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Anderson, *A Year by the Sea: Thoughts of an Unmarried Woman* (New York: Random House, 1999), 103.

through violence in Western civilization with the global domination of women, global violence, and the domination of the earth and violence towards all living there, with this politico-religious warrior culture known as patriarchy. Within this newly established social construct, the Goddess as Universal Life-Weaver/Creatrix and Sustainer of All was replaced with an Almighty Warrior God/Ruler of All. Concurrently, recognition of women's own divine aspect was repressed, along with sovereignty of her physical, mental, and emotional aspects. Women's place in society was, ultimately, reduced to the virgin/whore binary, which not only served to further diminish her multifaceted nature, but also to reduce her worth to that of a sexual commodity.

Gerda Lerner traces this process in her text *The Creation of Patriarchy*. While her work focuses on the Judeo-Christian religion of the ancient world, her analysis clearly focuses on the evolution of Mother Goddess-centred society to Warrior God-dominated society, and their resultant cultures. The reformation of the Western world, while gradual, simultaneously took hold in other parts of the world as well. The process was violent—cultures were destroyed and languages and other symbol systems eradicated or reinstated with new meanings. The Goddess, for example, did not completely disappear overnight. She was first reassigned as submissive queen to the Warrior King God and later further diminished through fragmentation into a pantheon of disempowered goddesses, each representing an aspect or thwarted aspect of the Great Goddess. For example, within many sects of Christianity we find in the background Mary the Mother of Christ, or Handmaiden of God. While she occupies in some of these sects a submissive space in relationship to “God the Father,” in others she is revered as “Mother of God,” and represents, for many women in Western culture, a thread of connection to the Great Goddess of ages past.

Is it any wonder that so many women are embracing what has been referred to as the “Return of the Goddess” of the late twentieth century, with its associated possibilities for a wholeness of expression, and in a number of ways following Mary Daly's tactics of “spooking,” “sparking,” and “spinning”<sup>2</sup> anew a gynocentred cosmos? First, as Daly points out, we must recognize the lies and deceits for what they are. We must see that within the dualistic construct of the

English language lie the roots of male domination over women. Further, our social and religious dogma and cultural myths have served to reinforce this paradigm, some say for at least 5000 years of Western civilization. For the most part, pre-existing linguistic designs and symbol systems were destroyed and only through fragmented artifacts and threads of memory does evidence of pre-patriarchal culture exist at all. The work of Marija Gimbutas (1982) provides a key to reframing or redefining ancient goddess amulets and other cultural remains by imagining a new mode—a feminist vision—of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> What if? What if women once held a place of esteem and authority both in human and divine form? And what if a matri-centred culture embraced the creative and procreative gifts of womanhood and cherished the earth as our sacred home. How then would the remains of these ancient times speak to us?

While Gimbutas was revisioning Goddess symbol remains of pre-patriarchal cultures, other feminist scholars, including Merlin Stone, were rethinking Goddess mythology. What if the patriarchal descriptions of the various goddesses had been fabricated from socio-politico-religious propaganda? What would we see if we looked beyond the prevailing interpretations and re-fashioned Goddess figures as autonomous and powerful? How might the human societies be differently organized when the Creator of the universe is imagined as a female divinity—Great Mother—who encompasses all of these aspects and more? And further, what are the implications if mortal women are seen to embody and reflect this divine energy, as suggested by Jean Shinoda Bolen in her 1984 publication *Goddesses in Every Woman: A New Psychology of Women*?<sup>4</sup>

Daly, too, acknowledges the divine spark within women and prompts us to embrace our divine nature. For Daly, there is a process for reclaiming the lost Goddess energy, and she sets us forth “spooking,” “sparking,” and “spinning.”<sup>5</sup> Spooking means looking deeply into the background or the shadows of the myths within

<sup>2</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* [with a “New Intergalactic Introduction” by the author] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990). OC.

<sup>3</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses of Old Europe, 6,500-3,500 BC*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman: A New Psychology of Women* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Daly, op. cit.

which we are taught to seek truth. Sparking engages the gynergetic spark of female friendship, another strand of healing energetics worth pursuing, because as Daly observes, along with restricting women's roles in society, patriarchal culture also restricts female friendships. Under patriarchal rule women are instead encouraged to be in competition with each other for the attention of men, and to focus their energy on fulfilling the needs of the male members of society. Women's circles and rituals to honour the Goddess and to celebrate and mark the passing of the season and cycles of life have become part of the past (at least to all public appearances) with women's energy being re-routed to serve a Warrior God and mortal men.

Second-wave feminist discourse challenged this paradigm with the emergence of women's "consciousness raising," Goddess worship circles and rituals, lesbian activism and, for some, separatism. What if the primary focus of women's lives was no longer on men, but rather first on ourselves and our mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, and lovers? What if our focus was not solely to support the experiences of men, but also to embrace and celebrate our own experience of being alive. What happens when women join creative energies together?

"Spinning" is what happens according to Mary Daly—spinning and whirling into new dimensions. When female energies connect, Spider Woman energy is activated. This divine gynergetic energy is at work re-weaving our world. With the assistance of new technology, women not only can join threads of thought, experience and creativity with those close at hand, but with a global women's network. Spider Woman's web is this web of connection—and the emergence of a New World design for humanity. Extending Daly's theory, Donna Haraway (1991) looks at the need to create new myths for this new era.<sup>6</sup> She proposes that these energetics of connections are not only being activated and recognized on an inter-human basis, but are also activated on an inter-species basis.<sup>7</sup> What appears to be in process is integration, unity and restoration of the global web. A proliferation of Spider Woman imagery is emerging—the spider, the web, the weaver, the loom, thread, fibre and textiles—especially in post-1970s women's writing, which can be seen as related to the second wave of feminism, and in

consciousness raising activities regarding violence towards women and the eradication of the earth. Eco-feminism also has roots in this era with the web becoming an often-used symbol of the interrelatedness of all beings on earth and beyond. Again, we see Spider Woman energetics at work. What seems most clear is the healing modalities of Spider Woman energies and the movement towards mending the fragmented consciousness of humanity and earth, with a focus on woman-healing, and rightly so, since these energetics resonate with the female divinity that has been oppressed in patriarchal societies.

As is evident here, the focus of my present research is woman-healing, and by extension, community and planetary healing, through Spider Woman energetics as evident in contemporary women's writing. To date, my journey with Spider Woman has been a ten-year sojourn, beginning in 1996 with an essay in a Women and Fiction course where I applied Mary Daly's theory of women as spinners to Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Here, I portrayed Clara as the Spider Woman in the centre of her own personal and societal web, weaving the strands of her world together. In a subsequent course I used Spider Woman energetics and a web modality to discuss the ways in which women integrate experience and potentials. But it wasn't until April 2000 that Spider Woman truly spoke to me, as Grandmother Spider energy, at a gathering of shamanic arts practitioners in the hills north of Tucson, Arizona. I participated in a healing ritual in which Grandmother Spider was invoked to bring healing to each participant in turn as we chanted and danced the restoration and healing of each personal web. Threads were revived, reinvigorated, renewed, and restored. Some needed to be replaced or reinvented, to resonate with each personal web design, mandala, or life destiny. We also sang to the global net—the web that connects all life in the universe with itself and others—to help repair the enormous damage that has been done. During the ritual I was given an image—the image of Grandmother Spider mending the web, spinning the web, tending the web—and I knew that my research project, which at that time was forming around revisionary mythology in women's writing, would focus on the images and symbols of Spider Woman energetics as a healing modality in contemporary women's writing. Women today are spinning new

<sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, LLC, 2003).



stories for a new time, birthing a new consciousness, conjoining with other healing and reintegration forces to shift our cultural paradigm away from the Warrior God construct.

Since beginning my research, the evidence of the importance of Spider Woman energetics in contemporary women's writing is overwhelming. It seems that wherever I go I find more examples of the importance of weaving as a motif for women writers. One day, while at home on one of the Gulf Islands of British Columbia, my neighbour Karen McLaughlin, an artist and writer, showed me her original version of a project entitled *Choral*, subsequently published as a novel.<sup>8</sup> Karen unscrolled over the length of her studio the beginning portion of what had once been presented as an installation art project. About three feet in width, the continuous page was actually separate panels, each composed of three sections—above, middle and below with each section presenting a different perspective to the narrative. The sections had been stitched together, as had each panel. The thread of Spider Woman gave form to Karen's narrative art which when fully displayed circumnavigated an entire room. As a novel, *Choral* retains some of the narrative play, but the thread design, which interconnected the panel pages on each side, was replaced by the bookbinding, giving a markedly different presentation to the story.

Another “close-to-home” example of Spider Woman energetics in women's writing was discovered in the office washroom of my Chemainus chiropractor in the form of a little booklet. I found it just sitting there, a small, hand-bound book made of recycled paper, self-published, entitled *Threads* (1999), written by Chemainus artist/writer Sylvia McIntosh Verity. Inside, on the first page, this poem greeted me:

To My Reader

From my heart to yours

May the threads of your life weave a pattern  
of beauty both dark & light

A tapestry to remember.<sup>9</sup>

Spider Woman energetics and imagery in contemporary women's writing are found, as these two examples illustrate, both inside and outside of the spotlight, but remain numerous nevertheless. Theorists such as Miriam Peskowitz would hold true that women employ a weaving motif because society, historically,

has situated women in the occupation of weaving, and that weaving has been culturally imposed on women along with other modes of stitchery and thread-based arts, thereby providing us with a comfortable metaphor.<sup>10</sup>

This raises the “chicken and egg” question of which came first. What kind of weaving did women do before the patriarchal world took hold? Still keeping close to home, I would like to bring to light the novel *Daughters of Copper Woman* (1981) written by Anne Cameron, in which Cameron retells, with permission of a group of Vancouver Island Native women storytellers, myths and legends about First Woman, who was also called Copper Woman. Copper Woman gives birth to four couples—one white, one black, one yellow, one brown—who, after a flood, disperse to the four directions to create new worlds. All four couples are related to Copper Woman and all are related to each other, but separation has caused forgetfulness<sup>11</sup>. Copper Woman leaves her earthly realm, turning her bones into a broom and a loom, and, becoming Old Woman, with the loom weaves “the pattern of destiny.”<sup>12</sup>

A later book, also set in a Native community on Vancouver Island, is *Bone Bird* (1989) by Darlene Barry Quaife. This book also refers to the Spider Woman deity in the form of First Woman, whose knowledge and energetics, as in *Daughter of Copperwoman*, are carried by an old Native woman. In *Bone Bird*, a “living thread”<sup>13</sup> of the teachings of First Woman keeps the circle of life in balance. If, as in the case of this story's young heroine, Aislinn, the circle of life is out of balance, through the teachings of First Woman balance can be restored.

A final selection for this introduction to Spider Woman energetics in contemporary women's writing is *I Remember Union* by Flo Aevia Magdalena (1992) which, although promoted as fiction, is claimed by the author to be a channeled retelling of the story of Mary Magdalene. Rather than the oral preservation of cultural mythology incorporated in the novels by Quaife and

<sup>8</sup> Karen McLaughlin, *Choral* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Sylvia McIntosh Verity, *Threads and Things* (Chemainus, 1999; lettered by hand by the artist).

<sup>10</sup> Miriam Peskowitz, “Unweaving,” in *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 13 (Spring 1997), 137–144.

<sup>11</sup> Anne Cameron, *Daughters of Copper Woman* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1981), 145.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>13</sup> Darlene Barry Quaife, *Bone Bird* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 1989), 119.

Cameron, Magdalena's story exemplifies revisionary mythology. Drawing on oracular and visionary sources, she offers a new version of the story of Mary Magdalene and her role in the life of Christ. In her novel, Magdalena plays with language and form through the use of concrete poetry and installation verse. Central to her imagery is the "fiber of being" and the healing of humans through realizing that there is no separation that all is union and within that unity, each life has a unique and purposeful design.<sup>14</sup>

I mention these texts (which I selected from an ever-growing list of Spider Woman stories) to illustrate the importance of weaving as a healing metaphor in women's writing. Spider Woman energetics is one theme that women chose to employ in our literary works as well as in other creative endeavors such as poetry, visual arts, and performance art. As the Great Primordial Mother/First Mother/Great Goddess, She has been reinstated in the consciousness of many contemporary women. The web is a modality of our healing and conversely our healing is the healing for the web of life. This is a time on earth that the teachings of the primordial Weaver of all Life, the Great Mother Goddess—known by hundreds of names around the world—is vitally important for the continuation of life on earth.

For the main body of my research for my master's thesis in English literature, I chose to study three novels and novelists widely recognized within academia. My study looks at ways in which Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker and Paula Gunn Allen bring the healing energies of Spider Woman to their fictional writing, as well as the ways in which Spider Woman energetics manifest in their personal and political lives. Each is, in her own unique way, an activist, catalyst for change, and role model for today's women, as well as a literary artist utilizing language, image, metaphor, and form to bring healing to the wounded web of the world.

I come to this project with trepidation. I have restarted my writing again and again. I have fragments scattered around my office and random papers in my filing cabinet. This work is an integral part of my being—to be called by Spider Woman to bring her healing energies in contemporary literature to light, and to show how by both writing and reading Her words, there will be transformation. The vibration will be a healing one. It is a challenge to know where the personal and experiential ends and the academic analysis begins. How do I integrate the spiritual with a literary-based inquiry within the tradition of academia? I suspect that I will include threads of thought from several diverse yet connected sources—contemporary literature and critical theory, ancient myth and revisionary myth as well as mysticism, theology, and philosophy, with a healthy sprinkling of feminism over all.

My vision for this work is that it be a vibrant web and a reflection of unity. I dedicate this web to Spider Woman, with whom I walk daily. To walk with Spider Woman is to walk with all beings of all time, all places and all space.

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<sup>14</sup> Flo Aeveia Magdalena, *I Remember Union: The Story of Mary Magdalene* (1992), 101.

## Notes on Contributors

**Beverly Bouma** recently completed her master's degree in sociology at the University of Victoria. Her article, based on original research, was written for an Institutional Ethnography course under the guidance of Dr. Dorothy Smith. Beverly's master's thesis, entitled "Coming Out Straight: Role Exit and Sexual Identity (Re)Formation," was a qualitative study that examined the social processes surrounding changes in sexual identity. Throughout her academic career, Beverly's research efforts have focused on the intersections of sexuality, gender, and religion.

**Alison Nicole Taylor Campbell** recently defended her master's thesis in the history of art, design, and visual culture at the University of Alberta, in which she examined the display of religious objects at the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. Her paper investigating Jim Logan's *Let Us Compare Miracles* was written in response to a class on post-colonial contemporary Christian art. Alison was instantly drawn to Logan's work, recognizing the rich complexity of the use of Christian and Western art symbolism paired with First Nations' imagery.

**Robert H. Dennis** is a doctoral candidate in the department of history at Queen's University. While his past research has examined the cultural role of hockey in Quebec and natural resource development in British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador, his doctoral project examines Roman Catholicism in Toronto during the Depression and World War II periods. In addition to the English-Canadian Church, he remains a keen observer of the contemporary Vatican.

**Cynthia Korpan** is an MA candidate in the department of anthropology at the University of Victoria. Her thesis is looking at plays written by the children who attended the Inkameep Day School in the Okanagan region of Canada in the 1930s, and the artwork that references them.

**Bronwen Magrath** recently completed her master's degree in history at the University of Victoria. Her thesis focused on popular resistance against the imposition of French education in Algeria and Alsace in the interwar period. She is currently working in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in the field of community-based education.

**Carolyn Salomons** is an MA candidate in the department of history and classics at the University of Alberta. Her area of interest is religious identity in late medieval and early modern Spain, and her master's thesis will explore the impact of the "purity of blood" statutes on Jews, Christians and Muslims in that time and space. A portion of this paper was presented at the 2005 History and Classics Graduate Student Conference, at the University of Alberta.

**Janice E. Young** (nee Moyls) resides on Thetis Island, in British Columbia. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Malaspina University College, and is currently completing a master's degree in English at the University of Victoria. The essay in this volume is the prologue to Janice's thesis, which explores the ways in which Spider Woman imagery serves as a healing metaphor in contemporary women's fiction and mirrors our social impetus towards weaving connections and creating unity both within and beyond ourselves.

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**Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria**  
**P.O. Box 1700, STN CSC, Victoria, B.C., Canada V8W 2Y2**  
**[www.csrs.uvic.ca](http://www.csrs.uvic.ca)**



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