JRC | Religion & Culture

2021 Volume 29

The JRC would like to acknowledge the support of sponsors from within the Concordia University community:

Concordia Council on Student Life
Concordia University Institute for Canadian Jewish Studies
Department of Religions and Cultures
Faculty of Arts and Science
Graduate Community Building Fund
Graduate Student Association
Material Religion Initiative
Small Grants Program

We would also like to offer our special thanks to:
Dr. Carly Daniel-Hughes, our very supportive Department Chair, Dr. Hillary Kaell for all her help and guidance in planning Dr. Sarah Imhoff's visit to Concordia in September 2019, Tina Montandon and Munit Merid, administrators extraordinaire, and all our referees, readers, and everyone else who offered their help in the publication of this edition of the journal.

JRC | RELIGION & CULTURE

A Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal
2021 Volume 29

Journal Committee

The Journal of Religion and Culture (JRC) is proudly produced by the Graduate Students of the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia University.

ISSN 1198-6395
Journal of Religion and Culture Volume 29 (2021)

For more information:
Journal of Religion and Culture
Department of Religions and Cultures (FA-101)
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve O.,
Montreal, Quebec
H3G 1M8

JRC logo design: Christopher Burkart
Book Design: T. Scarlet Jory
The font used for this journal is Century Schoolbook.
Affinity Publisher was used to design the layout of this journal.

Cover photo by Jr Korpa on Unsplash

Contents

JRC | Religion & Culture

Contents

Diversity in the Academy

An Introduction from the Editor

Throughout the last couple of years, there has been a lot of talk within my networks about diversity in the academy—diversity in publishing, conference panels, editorial boards, and within departments. The language of "manels" and "manthologies"1 have become common parlance, and it appears as though folks within academia are becoming aware of the dominance of white men within its walls. In the field of Jewish Studies, for example, a recent anthology published by Princeton University Press composed of an entirely male author list caused an uproar and received major criticism from some scholars within the field. In the spring 2019 issue of the Association for Jewish Studies' monthly magazine, aptly titled "The Patriarchy Issue," Sarah Imhoff and Susannah Heschel contributed a piece outlining the ways in which one can be more inclusive in their own scholarly activities and research.2 Imhoff and Heschel urge readers to "Practice inclusion in your own scholarly spaces and research."3 Although considerable work must be done by scholars to diversify our respective fields, conversations about this issue are percolating and actions taken to start seeing progress.

The seemingly simple advice offered by Imhoff and Heschel to "practice inclusion" is easier said than done. Lack of diversity runs deep, and it can be difficult to practice inclusion within academia, which is such an exclusive and male-dominated environment. This is the trouble we encountered with the publication of our current issue of the Journal of Religion and Culture. As editor-in-chief, I am troubled that we were unable to provide a strong model of inclusion and diversity through this edition. We did several things to try to encourage more diverse authorship (extended our submission deadline several times, abolished our initially proposed theme and did an open call for papers), to no avail. This brings us back to Imhoff and Heschel's advice—how can one practice inclusion when women, BIPOC, and non-binary people are not given the opportunity to enter the spaces within which to be included? How can we, as an academic community, better encourage a diverse range of scholars to submit their work for publication? I am wholeheartedly dedicated to practicing inclusion in my scholarly spaces, but it feels impossible to practice such inclusion when the only people operating in my scholarly orbit are men.

I am (slightly) comforted by the fact that our editorial board is representative of the inclusion I desire for the rest of the journal. I am also (slightly) comforted by the scholars featured in the In Conversation section. In Conversation is a space where we share interviews with scholars about their recent research and publications. Although we feature two female scholars and one male scholar, all are tenured faculty. I am aware that this section, while more gender inclusive than the remainder of the journal, is not inclusive of BIPOC, contingent, or non-tenured scholars, and we need to strive to do better.

All this to say, there is work to be done. Advisors need to encourage their non-male, non-white, and LGBTQA+ students to submit their work for publication and departments need to hire non-male, non-white, and non-binary faculty. Only then can "manels" and "manthologies" truly become a relic of the past. Only once considerable cultural shifts take place and diversity at the top echelons of academia is fully embraced will small journals, such as ours, be able to reflect the diversity of the field. Until then, our journal, and others, will continue to serve as a reflection of the lack of diversity in academia.

I do not want the message of this introduction to distract from the quality of the pieces in this volume. We are extremely proud of the entire contents of the journal and the work the authors have put into their pieces. Readers may notice the majority of the articles in this edition are thematically related. We originally sought articles connected to the theme of "Monsters and the Monstrous," but we eventually decided to abandon this theme and do an open call for submissions. Therefore, we have committed to a themeless edition of the Journal of Religion and Culture. After nearly one year of hard work creating this volume, we are excited to share it with our readers. The Journal of Religion and Culture is committed to providing graduate students and early career scholars with a space to share their work, and we are proud to be able to uphold our mission. We hope you enjoy this edition as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Happy reading!

Lindsey Jackson
Editor-in-chief

Notes

1. "Manels" and "manthologies" refers to conference panels and anthologies that are composed entirely of men. It is interesting to note that the Association for Jewish Studies has a mandate for diverse panels at their annual conference and outlines this clearly on their website. I could not find a similar statement or mandate by the American Academy of Religion. For AJS's statement on diversity, see: "Diversity and Inclusiveness," https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/2020-annual-conference/submit-a-proposal/submission-participation-requirements
2. Sarah Imhoff and Susannah Heschel, "Gender Inclusivity: A Preliminary Guide for Jewish Studies Scholars," *AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies, The Patriarchy Issue* (Spring 2019): 34-36.
3. Imhoff and Heschel, "Gender Inclusivity," 34.

JRC | Religion & Culture

Articles

Why is Satan Such a Sissy?

An Exploration of the "Flaming Devil" Trope in Children's Animation

Zachary Doiron
Religious Studies, University of Waterloo

Abstract

In the 1990s, effeminate, flamboyant, and predatory villains populated the screens of many children's animated movies and TV shows. While this trope, often titled the "sissy villain," has received some scholarly attention, a lesser-known subset of this cliché has been completely ignored. This essay offers an analysis of the "Flaming Devil" trope, which describes the various portrayals of the Devil as a queer-coded character. Starting with an exploration of the two most popular Flaming Devils, *The Powerpuff Girls*' HIM and *Hercules*' Hades, this essay will argue that this specific trope can only make sense in the larger cultural and political context of 1990s' United States. On the one hand, the framing of the Devil as a villain comes from the nationwide satanic panic and turn-of-the-millennium foreign policy, which saw the Devil as one of the states' greatest enemy. The inherent sexual and queer-coded nature of the trope, on the other hand, comes from the anti-gay and sex negative rhetoric, which is primarily understood in Protestant terms. Put together, characters embodying the Flaming Devil trope, such as HIM and Hades, are designed to associate queerness with the Devil, which in turn, demonizes queer people.

Keywords: devil, children's media, popular culture, queer, American evangelicalism, villains

In 2017, Jeff Mateer, a President Donald Trump judicial nominee, attacked queer people by saying he openly discriminated against them and believed that transgender children were "part of Satan's plan."[1] This controversial statement revealed, yet again, a long-standing evangelical Christian narrative that associates queerness with satanism and the Devil. Historically, the marginalized have always been associated with religious creatures from the Devil to the Antichrist. Queer people have not been excluded; conservative evangelical

Christians are often the ones waging these attacks on queer people with the hope of saving their souls from being damned to hell. This narrative of associating queerness with evil is a cliché that is often found in films and TV series, especially in children's animation. Villains from *The Little Mermaid* to *Pokemon* are examples of children's media that exposes kids to queer coded villains in their childhood. This cliché is so common that it earned its own title: "the Sissy Villain." Coined by Meredith Li-Vollmer and Mark E. LaPointe, this archetype is employed when a villain's queerness is seen in their design, costume, props, body language, activities, and dialogue.[2] A surprising sub-section of this trope, the "Flaming Devil," emerged during the late 1990s, and it has been largely ignored by scholars.[3] Appearing in a handful of children's films and series, the "Flaming Devil" archetype is a reoccurring motif found in media where the figure of the Devil is portrayed as flamboyant, effeminate, and gender fluid. His gender transgression is often marked by a sly, predatory, and villainous behaviour that is both frightening and discomforting for the supposed heterosexual viewer. The two characters that will serve as the starting point in this discussion are the most popular depictions of this archetype: HIM in the Cartoon Network's *The Powerpuff Girls* and Hades in Disney's *Hercules*. Although these films are not explicitly Christian, understanding this trope requires reading the "Flaming Devil" in the context of the turn-of-the-millennium American evangelical apocalyptic thinking and Protestant-based purity culture. While the villainous nature of the characters of HIM and Hades should be understood in the climate of the 1990s satanic panic, these characters' queerness should be read through the decade's Protestant-based anti-gay culture. Together, the figure of the Devil becomes an avenue to demonize queer people by associating the Devil, who is imagined as being

one of the United States' biggest threats, to stereotypical queer signifiers.

The "Flaming Devil" Trope: The Powerpuff Girls, Hercules, and the Queer Portrayal of the Devil

Like most animated villains in the 1990s, *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Hercules* rely on the "Sissy Villain" trope that portrays their villains in a stereotypically queer manner. The "Sissy Villains" often transgress their perceived gender norms by engaging in frantic and abrupt switches between feminine and masculine qualities. Tania Sharmin and Sanyat Sattar highlight that "many of the female Disney villains are subtly masculine—their faces, body shape, and behavior lend "mannish" traits to their characters" and male villains "are given feminine traits—some bordering on an implicit homosexual characterization."[4] The term "Sissy Villain" can also point to being an umbrella term for other queer coded villains, or, in other words, villains that embody gay stereotypes without explicitly stating their sexuality. The "Flaming Devil" trope, which is often viewed as a subset of the "Sissy Villain", highlights the association of the Devil with campy, effeminate and stereotypically gay mannerisms or style. The homosexuality is never explicit, but the implication is always clearly demonstrated to the viewer.

One of the most brazen example of the "Flaming Devil" archetype comes from the *Powerpuff Girls* episode titled "Octi Evil," where the viewers are introduced to the ultimate villain of the series, an androgynous devilish type character called simply by the masculine pronoun "HIM."[5] Like all *Powerpuff Girls*' supervillains, HIM's design tells the viewers exactly what they need to know about the character's sexual deviancy. Drawn in a

triangular aesthetics, HIM wears knee high black boots with Santa Claus-looking lingerie. His face is covered in drag-style makeup, topped with black lipstick, blush and black eye liner.[6] While all these design choices point to a certain femininity, his name points to the figure being masculine. For example, HIM's features include a prominent traditionally male signifier: facial hair on his chin. In addition, HIM is also voiced by Tom Kane, a straight male actor, whose voice work emphasizes the character's gender transgression by constantly fluctuating between a soft and high feminine falsetto and an angry masculine deep voice. Furthermore, HIM's mannerisms read as quite flamboyant, feminine, sexual and ultimately, predatory. All these aspects of HIM suggest a queer coded villain and one that could very much fit with the popular "Sissy Villain" cliché at the time. Unlike traditional "sissy villains," HIM appears as a stereotypical Devil with his red skin and yellow eyes. He also lives in what the series calls "The Underworld" and he is emphatically nicknamed the "King of Darkness," a title commonly associated to the Christian Devil. Therefore, HIM's characteristics serve to emphasize the archetype of the "Flaming Devil."

In 1997's *Hercules*, Disney, a company well-known for their decadent and campy "sissy villains," introduced its own "Flaming Devil" in Hades, the "God of the Underworld" and the main villain of the film. At first glance, Hades' design is not as queer as other Disney villains or even *Powerpuff Girls*' HIM, yet his stereotypical queerness lies in his effeminate mannerisms, sassy dialogue, and decadent activities. While Hades' costume can reflect the historical clothing of the Roman times, it can also be read as feminine given its long robe-like appearance.[7] What truly reinforces Hades' "Flaming Devil" trope is his flamboyant mannerisms and sassy dialogue.[8] An example of Hades' mannerism occurs in one scene where Hades is seen lounging with a cocktail

in his hand. His posture in this instance gives off a sort of sassiness that has become associated with his character, as well as reinforces a certain effeminancy.[9] A notable example of his sassy dialogue in the *Hercules* series occurs when Hades sings a musical number that only reinforces his gay stereotypes. He sings, in an effeminate manner, that "the Parthenon, that crowning jewel, could use my flair for urban renewal . . . I'm just kidding, I wouldn't change a thing!"[10] Queer theorist Will Letts point out that "[h]is God of the Underworld persona sits incongruously with the role of a designer/decorator, making the juxtaposition quite a queer one."[11] All of these are demonstrated by YouTuber Lindsay Ellis, in her review of the film, who called Hades "Meg's bitchy gay boyfriend," which perfectly summarizes Hades' queer coded persona.[12] Similar to HIM, Hades communicates a certain gender transgression where he goes from the feminine and sassy pale blue flamed persona to the angry and masculine red flamed persona. In addition, Hades also lives in "The Underworld" and his design is done in a devilish manner with his flaming head, yellow eyes and ghostly appearance. While these Devil characters might seem very different on the surface, at their core, they share similar designs and ideas.

Often, when the "Flaming Devil" makes an appearance, it is usually in more adult-oriented animated series, such as *Futurama* or *South Park*; the trope emphasizes the character's sexual transgressions and their flamboyant dialogue and mannerisms only plays into campy gay stereotypes, which is surprising considering children's media's obsession with conservative "family values." However, these portrayals of the Devil, especially in children's animation, do make sense when juxtaposed to the portrayal of the Devil throughout history and the larger cultural and political landscape of the United States at the turn-of-the-millennium.

The Red Adversary: The Devil as Enemy of the United States

From the beginning of the United States' history, the Devil had always been one of the nation's reoccurring threats. During the infamous Salem witch trials, the Devil was strongly associated to sexuality and femininity, especially since women were often accused of having sexual encounters with the Devil and entering his "pact." These sexual encounters with the Devil were often described as "virtual rape" as the Devil took hold of their bodies in a sexual possession.[13] The "witches" were thus labelled sexual deviants and extremely dangerous people that needed to be burned at the stake. The sexual aspect of the witch trail era is definitely seen in modern day depictions of the Devil in children's animation; both Hades and HIM are explicitly sexual creatures as they caress, lick, kiss, and maneuver their bodies in sexual manners, especially alongside their enemies. These sexual acts are constructed in ways that make them dangerous, mysterious, and predatory. In "Tough Love," HIM is seen caressing and licking a brainwashed Professor Utonium in a scene that is quite sexually suggestive.[14] Similar events happen in *Hercules*, when Hades tickles Hercules' chin and caresses his muscular arms.[15] While there is a sexual deviancy present in these acts, there is also a certain gender transgression that is at the heart of these depictions that is not seen in the witch trials. In these films and television shows, the villains act in a very stereotypically homosexualized manner by being campy, effeminate and predatory. The Devil, as understood throughout history, has, for the most part, been portrayed as a heterosexual figure, even when he is at its most sexual. In the 1990s, the Devil resurfaced as a threat with the rise of the "satanic panic," which strengthened the connection between the Devil and queerness.

During the infamous "satanic panic" of the 80s and 90s, the Devil had become associated to many secular ideals such as Hollywood films, and popular culture in general. Although popular culture and evangelical Christianity were not often as closely related until late twenty first century, evangelicals today are more prone to participate in and consume Christian-made popular culture. In the 1920s, evangelicals denounced Hollywood films as corrupting the Christian morality of Americans.[16] As an example of this popularity, *PureFlix*, an evangelical film studio, who created such films as *God's Not Dead* and the infamous anti-abortion film, *Unplanned*, have successfully created mainstream evangelical films putting emphasis on evangelical culture and morality.[17] The evangelical's reclamation of popular culture can be drawn back to the satanic panic, an American phenomenon where anxieties about Devil worshippers ran rampant. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, sexually abusive Devil worshippers were one of the biggest threats to the American way of life. As popular culture became more readily available, evangelicals and charismatic Christians became convinced that Satan was among them and ready to prey on children and teenagers. Many different aspects, such as heavy metal music, horror films, and the popularity of the board game, *Dungeons and Dragons*, all perfectly aligned to create this idea of the Devil incarnate. Looking back ten years prior, in 1970, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* was a best-selling book telling the story of the coming of apocalypse by heavily relying on figures such as the Devil and the Antichrist. The popularity of such a book successfully sowed the necessary seeds for the satanic panic in popular culture discourse. While evangelical Christians accused different individuals of Devil worshipping and satanic ritual abuse (SRA), the McMartin trial represented the extreme culmination of such beliefs. Still the longest trial in American history,

the McMartin trial, which ran from 1984 to 1990, investigated SRA allegations against daycare workers, Virginia McMartin and Raymond Buckey. The accusers stated that their children had been molested by the daycare workers in a satanic underground lair.[18] Today, evidence points toward the trial being corrupted by leading questions from police officers, the over-saturation of satanic imagery in the media, and the mental condition of the main accuser. Even today, there has never been any evidence that confirms the existence of SRA.[19] Historian of horror pop culture W. Scott Poole suggests that the satanic panic was a fear of a perceived attack on middle class American values that is perpetuated by popular culture and popular religion.[20] These values for an evangelical Christian audience would no doubt include the so-called "family values," which condemned homosexuality and queerness.

The satanic panic showed that the Devil was believed to be living among everyday Americans and the only solution was for Christians to come together and solve America's greatest threat. During such event, the Devil became the United States' greatest enemy and had to be defeated. The ideas of a Devil incarnate mixed with conservative ideas towards sexuality and queerness surely set the stage for characters such as HIM and Hades. While the fight against Satan shifted from domestic to abroad, it is important to look at the Christian Right and their impact on the political landscape of the turn-of-the-millennium. The characters of HIM and Hades can only start to make sense in this socio-political era.

Devil Worshippers and Demon Hunters: The Anti-Gay Politics of the Turn-of-the-Millenium

In January 17, 1998, a bombshell accusation arose between the then President of the United States, Bill Clinton, and White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. The accusation included Clinton having a sexual encounter with Lewinsky in the Oval Office. This infamous White House blowjob angered many evangelicals, not for Clinton's blatant abuse of power but for his adulterous relationship, lack of decency, and provocativeness. It was the act of sex outside marriage that eventually had evangelicals calling it the return of Sodom and Gomorrah, a biblical location commonly associated to sexual sins.[21] Why did a conversation about sex in the White House quickly turned into a religious matter? Scholars Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini have also asked this question in their book, *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*. Looking into this bizarre association, they explain that:

> The secular state's interest in regulating sexuality is an interest in maintaining religious — specifically Christian — authority. In cases concerning homosexuality, the Court refers directly to Christian religious tradition to support its position. The direct appeal to religion is all the more remarkable because the government does not fall back on religion as its primary rationale except when it comes to sex.[22]

While Clinton's sexual impropriety eventually resulted in his impeachment, the turn-of-the-millennium cultural and political landscape was specifically obsessed with sexual heteronormativity and purity and any

conversation about sex quickly turned into a conversation about Christian morality.

In the midst of the scandal, the Christian Right was waging a war against the "decline of family values." They rejected anything that could possibly damage the traditional heterosexual American family from popular music to outright pro-gay policies. Although their political lobbying efforts delivered mixed results, their tactics were nowhere short of innovative. The idea was to appropriate popular cultural and trendy activities and give them a Christian make-over. One such practice has been to create Christian sex manuals. Contrary to popular beliefs, evangelicals have always been implicated in sexual culture and concerns. Amy DeRogatis, author of "What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation: Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950s to the Present," explains that evangelicals have created many sex manuals that advocate safe sexual relations within the confines of the Bible and the Protestant Christ.[23] These manuals always advocate for heterosexual sex and any queer approaches to sexual activity is strictly condemned. Similarly, Evangelicals started creating Christian Halloween haunted houses, known as Hell Houses, to warn teenagers and families of the ramifications of participating in queer sexual activities. This conversion tactic quickly grew in popularity and became a controversial practice for plenty of reasons, but mostly for its graphic and exaggerated depiction of abortions and its harmful and offensive anti-gay rhetoric.[24] In each of the theatrical scenes, the Devil cunningly manipulates and convinces its victims to engage in different sinful acts, reinforcing the satanic panic idea of the Devil's worldly presence. In the infamous anti-gay scenes, the Devil is either waiting for an HIV positive gay individual to die in his hospital bed, or he plays the role of a "priest" marrying a gay couple.[25] In either instances, the presence of the Devil in these

scenes communicates that not only is being gay or queer sinful, but that it is part of a grander satanic plan. This, again, provides incentives to associate the figure of the Devil with stereotypical queerness, as seen in these Hell Houses. With the Christian Right movement, Evangelicals were able to reinforce traditionalist "family values" in a language more palpable to teens and children: popular culture.

Looking abroad to the United States' foreign policy, the idea of the "gay agenda" and the Devil continued to thrive, especially at the turn-of-the-millennium with the presidency of George W. Bush and the "war on terror." At this time, homophobic apocalyptic discourses were amplified on a national stage. Religious scholar Erin Runions states that during the early 2000s, the enemy becomes "terrorism" in general and localized in the figure of Sadam Hussein. However, Sadam Hussein also becomes characterized as a homosexualized Antichrist, the main enemy of the United States' "war on terror."[26] While it may be bizarre that these two things become associated together, Runions further explains that "if sexual and civic desire must line up with the apocalyptic narrative of the nation and humanity, those considered to be outside of the narrative are represented through non-normative sexual desire."[27] Runions demonstrates that the enemy of the United States must be on the margins of society, therefore, they must act in ways that are not from the homeland (such as homosexuality), they exude a certain jealousy of the state, and most importantly, they are localized in a fictionalized setting of Babylon. In the "war on terror," Iraq becomes the embodiment of Babylon and thus, violent revenge becomes directed unto this location. Violence and torture directed at Iraq citizens are justified, according to Runions, as biblical allegories become the truth.[28]

Bush's foreign policy ideas were not only implemented abroad but provided the framework for some popular culture, such as the character of the Devil in *South Park*. In the film, *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut*, the figure of the Devil is shown as the effeminate gay lover of Sadam Hussein, a depiction that only makes sense in the political and social context of the Bush era.[29] Runions explains that the portrayal comes from "the longstanding designation of the political enemy as Babylonian Antichrist, the most recent conservative Christian belief that the Antichrist is likely to be homosexual, and the orientalist imagination about Muslim men's sexuality that is central to popular depictions of terrorists."[30] Like *South Park*, *The Powerpuff Girls* and *Hercules*, while not explicitly Christian media, can only make sense in their respective religio-political context. Runions' analysis of turn-of-the-millennium politics can also be seen in the characters of HIM and Hades. For an example, both are localized as being abroad and outside of a western setting. Both are contextualized in a vaguely described "Underworld," which is reminiscent of the imagined Babylonian locale. Both also have a certain obsession and jealousy with the "good" and "normative" land. Their ultimate goal is to possess that land and if they are unable then they must destroy it at all cost. To achieve this plan, they must both kill the main heroes, who serve as guardians of their respective state. At the beginning of *Hercules*, Hades is ridiculed by the other gods, which prompts him to want to kill Hercules and take over Olympus. In *The Powerpuff Girls*, HIM must kill the three heroines in order to capture the world. Just as Runions showcases through *South Park*'s depiction of the Devil, *Hercules* and *The Powerpuff Girls* mimic real understanding of United States foreign policy and the reciprocity between popular culture and politics. These various examples can also be read as examples of the "terroristic" discourse espoused by evangelicals and often

associated to figures like Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein.

As the above illustrates, secular understandings of sexuality and sexual culture in the United States derive from Protestant evangelicalism. The anxiety surrounding sex, homosexuality and foreign countries only make sense in evangelical apocalyptic thinking of the 1990s. When this way of thinking becomes standardized and normalized through the socio-political, these ideas start to seep out of evangelical thinking and into secular aspects of society, more specifically popular culture. Therefore, it makes sense that the figure of the Devil becomes associated with both villainy and queerness. However, the question remains: why children's media?

Big Bad (Gay) Guys: Hays Code, Disney, and the Gender Transgression of Villains

Since the beginning of film making, gender deviant and transgressive villains have been a commonly employed cliché. This employment can be traced back to the infamous Hays Code, a set of rules introduced in 1934 by Joseph Breen to force movies to appeal to Judeo-Christian values, in which "perverse" and anti-religious subjects, such as homosexuality and interracial marriages, could not be broadcasted. In such a climate, the term "queer coding" became associated to characters who embodied queer stereotypes without self-identifying as queer.[31] Although the Hays Code was eventually replaced by the less conservative and current *Motion Picture Association of America* (MMPA) rating system, "queer coding" still persisted. While many film studios participated in the demonization of queer people, Disney has and still is a primary culprit of queer coding. Most recently, *Frozen* has been accused of such offence as the main hero, Elsa, is portrayed as a person that feels

alienated by the world because for her inability to control her ice powers. Many saw her situation, where her parents demands her to suppress her powers, as a metaphor for 'being in the closet, a popular term used to indicate the experience of hiding one's sexuality. On top of that, Elsa is specifically written without a romantic interest in the film, leading many to interpret her as queer. A viral Twitter campaign was even started to push the creators to make Elsa a lesbian by giving her a female love interest in *Frozen*'s upcoming sequel. The goal was to put enough pressure on Disney to right their harmful legacy towards queer people.[32] In the end, after hundreds of written articles on the matter, and with the stars of the film voicing their support, Disney's *Frozen II* included nothing of such. While the ability to create and showcase queer characters are no longer illegal, the legacy of queer coding in American cinema remains a popular trope, especially in blockbuster filmmaking.

While queer coding still persists today, the worst offences come from Disney's 1990s vault of films, commonly called the "Disney Renaissance," in which many of Disney's villains were coded as being queer. Jafar's effeminate voice, Governor Ratcliffe's sparkly dress, and Ursula's campy drag musical number all perpetuate gay and queer stereotypes. Unfortunately, these queer depictions are often shallow and these characters are targets of destruction and ridicule by the film's heroes. Many have noticed the blatant queer coding in Disney villains and while representation of queerness is not in and of itself bad, Disney choosing to only portray their villains as queer and their heroes as heterosexual creates a binary normative view of gender that signals queerness as "evil" or "bad". Gender and pop culture scholar Amanda Putnam explains how juxtaposing these two only reinforces the heteronormative culture:

> However, it is the noxious combination of transgendered characteristics with these characters' evil plots and exploits that makes this spicy blend so unpalatable once clearly recognized—and yet, that combination goes unrealized by most viewers, whether child or adult—accepted without examination, reinforcing the heterosexism of current contemporary culture.[33]

Putnam highlights the problematic nature of Disney's heterosexist agenda and what it communicates to children. Her use of the term "transgendered characteristic" to explain the gender transgressing of the villains is a problematic one. All these scholars touch upon the very important fluctuation in gender characteristics that happens to Disney villains, but gender transgression would be a better term to explain this observation. This term, which harbours a specifically negative connotation, captures not only the essence of Putnam's and the other scholars' observation of the villains' sudden and constant shifts between femininity and masculinity, but also the ways Disney characterize their villains.

The "Sissy Villain" archetype becomes yet another tactic for discriminating against queer folk in a culture already dominated by anti-gay sentiment. Disney's villains, and the villains of other children's animation's, became queer characters because their queerness was a cultural sign that was often associated to "bad" people. The "Flaming Devil" trope is often seen as a subset of the "Sissy Villain" primarily because of their shared demonization of queer people. The popularity of the "Sissy Villain" cliché already normalized the campy gay aesthetic as evil. The given anti-gay cultural movement of the 1990s is a direct influence on the creators of these films and TV series, even if not explicit. At the same time,

the decision to include satanic villains in children's media was influenced by the satanic panic and turn-of-the-millennium politics, which constructed the worldly presence of the Devil. In the final section, I would like to highlight exactly what the consequences and impact of the "Flaming Devil" archetype are.

What if Queer Satan is Good?: The Impact of Children's Media on Kids

One of the crucial questions that comes into play in these discussions is whether or not children truly understand the construction of gender performances. While academics thoroughly analyze these films, popular understanding of children suggests that they are viewers who passively watch moving pictures on a screen. The content and meaning of these images are thought to be completely lost on children and exist purely to entertain the parent that need to accompany them. However, Li-Vollmer and LaPointe point to several different psychological experiments where children are actively developing gender schemata that are associated with gender stereotypes showed in children's media. They state that "children may be more vulnerable to the implicit messages about acceptable versus gender deviant performance because they are drawn to a genre that is rife with strongly gendered messages."[34] Not only do children learn from the media that they consume but they also have a certain control over which media they choose to engage with. They are "drawn to a genre," which suggests that children are not merely passively watching media but actively consuming it. Speaking to this point, queer studies scholar Jack Halberstam brilliantly illustrates how children's animated films are complex and meaningful. By looking at the "Pixarvolt films," he shows that animated movies aimed at children are constructed

in ways that emphasize and highlight childhood experience:

> The Pixarvolt films, unlike their unrevolting conventional animation counterparts, seem to know that their main audience is children, and they seem to also know that children do not invest in the same things that adults invest in: children are not coupled, they are not romantic, they do not have a religious morality, they are not afraid of death or failure, they are collective creatures, they are in a constant state of rebellion against their parents, and they are not the masters of their domain.[35]

To highlight this point Halberstam points to films like *Chicken Run*, where the chickens revolt against their greedy and abusive owners, or *Over the Hedge*, where various animals attack wealthy capitalists destroying their homes.[36] All these examples show that children actively consume media and are drawn to titles that specifically cater to their experiences and interests, which should apply to their gender and/or sexual identity as well.

It is also important to highlight that queer people have reclaimed many queer coded villains and are now regarded as positive characters for the community. As with every art form, watching films and TV series can be a personal experience and the messages viewers get from them is widely varied. Many queer people choose to watch Disney movies with a positive and queer interpretation. According to an anonymous gay writer, his perception of Scar from *The Lion King* has dramatically affected him:

> As a young gay child I didn't register any of this explicitly. Scar's "weak" and "effeminate" persona being demonized appear true to my experiences as a queer child navigating masculinity in the playground…Yet, now as a 20 year old man, I absolutely adore this representation of Scar, and have been able to reimagine him as a sort of anti-hero championing resistance to traditional masculinity.[37]

Reclaiming these queer coded characters not only show the deep lack of positive queer characters in popular culture but how such characters impact queer individuals.

Today, there have been strides towards positive queer character depictions in children's media. *Steven Universe*'s Garnet, whose character is the embodiment of a lesbian couple, has garnered much support from the LGBTQ community. *The Legend of Korra* became the first children's TV series to star a queer lead.[38] The famous children's show, Arthur, opened its 22nd season with a gay wedding as the character of Mr. Ratburn comes out as gay.[39] While all these queer depictions received some pushback by conservative groups, it does not seem to halt progress as more and more children's media celebrate queer stories. Looking at Hades and HIM, characters like these, that came out of 1990s apocalyptic thinking, have become rare entities. The binary "good versus evil" stories, that are lazily applied to children's stories, not only underestimate children as consumers but greatly demonizes an entire group of people. Children's media remains a powerful tool used to teach and inform them of cultural issues of the time. Without diversifying the perspectives, these stories, told from a conservative Protestant Christian point of view, dominate children's films and TV series, while clinging to old, outdated representations of queer people.

Notes

1. Lopez, German. "Trump judicial nominee: I discriminate against gay people, and trans kids are part of "Satan's plan." *Vox,* October 19, 2017. https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/10/19/16504104/trump-jeff-mateer-lgbtq.
2. Li-Vollmer, Meredith and Mark E LaPointe. "Gender Transgression and Villainy in Animated Film." *Popular Communication* 1, no. 2 (2003): 103.doi: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15405710PC0102_2.
3. While the origin of the term is unknown, various internet wikipedias, such as "TV Tropes," are often associated with it. For more information, see the following: https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FlamingDevil.
4. Sharmin, Tania and Sanyat Sattar. "Gender Politics in the Projection of "Disney Villains." *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 2018): 55. doi: https://www.davidpublisher.org/Public/uploads/Contribute/5a2f76c6e2b71.pdf.
5. Kaliher, Kevin writer. *The Powerpuff Girls*. Season 1, episode 3, "Octi Evil." Directed by Genndy Tartakovsky and Craig McCracken. Aired December 2, 1998, https://www.amazon.com/Powerpuff-Girls-Season-1-Classic/dp/B000H2FHJU.
6. For access to images and more information on the character of HIM, see the following: https://villains.fandom.com/wiki/HIM.
7. For access to images and more information on the character of Hades, see the following: https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Hades.
8. "Sassy" or "humorous" remarks are often a trademark of the "Gay Best Friend" trope. For more information, see https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/GayBestFriend?from=Main.Pethomosexual.
9. Clements, Ron and John Musker, dirs. *Disney's Hercules*. 1997; https://www.disneyplus.com/en-ca.
10. Winfield, Jess, writer. *Hercules: The Animated Series*. Season 1, episode 6, "Hercules and the River Styx." Directed by Phil Weinstein. Aired September 7, 1998, https://www.disneyplus.com/en-ca.
11. Letts, Will. "Camp Disney: Consuming Queer Sensibilities, Commodifying the Normative." In *Disney, Culture, Curriculum*, edited by Jennifer A. Sandlin and Julie C. Garlen, 153. Routledge: New York, 2016.
12. Ellis, Lindsay. "Nostalgic Woman: Hercules." YouTube. July 30, 2010. Video, 5:28. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rm7E7dB7uIM.
13. Briggs, Robin. *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, 2nd ed. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publisher Inc, 2002. iBooks, 64.
14. Savino, Chris, writer. *The Powerpuff Girls*, Season 1, episode 6, "Tough Love." Directed by Genndy Tartakovsky and Craig McCracken. Aired December 23, 1998, https://www.amazon.com/Powerpuff-Girls-Season-1-Classic/dp/B000H2FHJU.
15. Clements and Musker, *Disney's Hercules.*
16. Sutton, Matthew Avery. *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*. Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, 120.
17. Arkin, Daniel. "How a faith-based movie studio is seizing the moment in Trump's America," *NBC*, August 5, 2018. https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/movies/how-faith-based-movie-studio-seizing-moment-trump-s-america-n897551.
18. Hughes, Sarah. "American Monsters: Tabloid Media and the Satanic Panic, 1970-2000." *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 3 (2017): 691. doi: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/american-monsters-tabloid-media-and-the-satanic-panic-19702000/D674D558FA7399E91149BFCAB138792D.
19. Hughes, "American Monsters," 700.
20. Poole, W. Scott. *Satan in America: The Devil We Know.* Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2009, 156.
21. Sutton, *American Apocalypse*, 366.
22. Jakobsen, Janet and Ann Pellegrini. *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance.* New York: New York University Press, 2003, 4.
23. DeRogatis, Amy. "What Would Jesus Do? Sexuality and Salvation: Protestant Evangelical Sex Manuals, 1950s to the Present." *The American Society of Church History* 74, no. 1 (March 2005): 99. doi: https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1017/S0009640700109679.
24. Pellegrini, Ann. "Signaling through the Flames": Hell House Performance and Structures of Religious Feeling." *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (Sept, 2007): 917. doi: https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2007.0067.
25. Pellegrini, "Signaling through the Flames," 920.
26. Runions, Erin. *The Babylon Complex: Theopolitical Fantasies of War, Sex, and Sovereignty.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2014, 180.
27. Runions, *The Babylon Complex*, 197.
28. Runions, *The Babylon Complex,* 151.
29. See the following clip for more information on how the Devil is portrayed as Saddam Hussein's lover in the *South Park* film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTk2jXiuo9s.
30. Runions, *The Babylon Complex*, 181.
31. Nurik, Chloe. "50 Shades of Film Censorship: Gender Bias From the Hays Code to MPAA Ratings." *Communication Culture & Critique* 11 (2018): 534. doi: https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1093/ccc/tcy024.
32. VanDerWerff, Emily Todd. "Why Elsa from Frozen is a queer icon — and why Disney won't embrace that idea." *Vox*, Nov 22, 2019. https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/11/22/20975178/frozen-2-elsa-girlfriend-lesbian-queer-review.
33. Putnam, Amanda. "Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films." In *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, edited. by Jonhson Cheu, 149. London: McFarland & Company Inc, 2013.

34. Li-Vollmer and LaPointe, “Gender Transgression,” 105.
35. Halberstam, Jack. *The Queer Art of Failure.* California: Duke University Press, 2011, 47.
36. Halberstam, “Animating Revolt,” 28;44.
37. Anonymous, "Here’s Why We Need To Reclaim Queer-Coding In ‘The Lion King’ Remake.” *INTO*, November 30, 2017.. https://www.intomore.com/culture/heres-why-we-need-to-reclaim-queercoding-in-the-lion-king-remake.
38. Chapman, Wilson. “Five years after ‘The Legend of Korra,’ queer representation in children’s TV continues to evolve.” *The Daily Northwestern*, May 29, 2019. https://dailynorthwestern.com/2019/05/29/ae/five-years-after-the-legend-of-korra-queer-representation-in-childrens-tv-continues-to-evolve.
39. Aviles, Gwen. "'Arthur' character Mr. Ratburn comes out as gay, gets married in season premiere.” *NBC*, May 14, 2019. https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/arthur-character-mr-ratburn-comes-out-gay-gets-married-season-n1005436.

Liberation Mythology:

The Nature and Function of Colonial Myths in Ngũgĩ’s Makarere Novels

Steven Herran
English, The Graduate Center, City University of New York

Abstract

Ngũgĩ's *The River Between* and *Weep Not, Child*, are seminal texts of decolonial African fiction. Situating Kenyan history as a “heroic resistance to foreign domination”, Ngũgĩ entangles the historical archive with heroic and foundational myths, blurring the boundaries of national history and national mythology. Affirming Joseph Mali’s formulation that “historical myths [may] be redefined as histories that are not merely told but actually lived”, Ngũgĩ side steps written archives, explores popular oral tradition, and reconstructs a populist historical narrative “that shines with [the] grandeur of heroic resistance and achievement”.

However, a look at the mythology enmeshed in Ngũgĩ's historical novels reveals a deviation from traditional Gikuyu folktale. Ngũgĩ creates new myths adopting general stories, themes, and characters from Gikuyu mythology. By purposely cohering historical events, and deliberately distancing his myths from narratives fixed in the national conscious, Ngũgĩ structures a mythology that is unapologetically aware of its own formulation. As such, I propose that as a meta-mythology—that is, a constructed set of myths aware of their own artifice—Ngũgĩ’s texts should be seen as a critique on the nature of Gikuyu myths during colonial resistance.

Keywords: mythology; postcolonial; Ngũgĩ; cultural difference; African novel

Participating in a political demonstration, *Weep Not, Child*’s Kiarie stands before a multitude on the eve of the Mau Mau rebellion and moves them with his speech. The Kenyan workers are ready to strike as they demand fair pay from white land-owners and industrialists. In a “low, sad voice” Kiarie addresses his fellow Kenyans and “recounted history,” saying: “All the land belonged to the

people—black people. They had been given it by God. Africans had Africa, the land of black people. Who did not know that all the soil in this part of the country had been given to Gikuyu and Mumbi and their posterity?"[1] Kiarie's rousing account reaches back to prehistory, recalling the divine gift of land to the Gikuyu people's ancestors. His invocation of myth, which awakens the crowd, shines light on the power of mythology as a catalyst and driving force in both Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Makerere* novels, *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* where the genesis Kiarie invokes is first established.[2]

In the demonstration, the invocations of myth animates the participants and helps morph the protest into a violent tumult. Beginning in 1952, the Mau Mau Uprising was the last of many violent nationalist movements against British imperialism. Since the late 1840's the British Empire held land in Mombasa, a coastal city in present day Kenya—it's presence legitimated by Indian Ocean trade agreements with the Sultanate of Zanzibar. However, it wasn't until four decades later that the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) began the conquest of Kenyan highlands. Declared "The Protectorate of Kenya" in 1895, Kenyan highlands were transformed from "a footpath" to a full "colonial administration" in just ten years.[3] Though much of the acquisition was bought from and bartered with native inhabitants, resistance to forceful land expropriation was met with speedy and brutal suppression. It is this history of resistance which most concerns Ngũgĩ's first novels.

As Kenya's most celebrated author, Ngũgĩ's publishing career includes seven novels, three collections of shorts stories, a number of memories and plays alike, and an influential collection of essays and monographs on literary criticism, critical and postcolonial theory.[4] Although most of Ngũgĩ's life work deals with colonialism

in its varying forms (territorial Imperialism proper, neo-colonialism, coloniality, etc.), his first two novels, both written while an undergraduate at Makarere University deal with states of emergency during Kenya's colonial period. Both *Weep Not, Child* and *The River Between* (hereafter *Weep* and *River*, respectively), were given to Chinua Achebe—author of *Things Fall Apart*—as manuscripts during the 1962 "African Writer's Conference." Published two and three years later, respectively, *Weep* and *River* entered the corpus of seminal decolonial texts as the first two East African novels ever published in English; and indeed, the description of decolonial is appropriate as, by the author's own description, *Weep* and *River* are attempts to abrogate what he considers Western and neo-colonial historiography.[5] Thus, Ngũgĩ composes his first two novels to highlight an existent, complex, pre-modern African society and its long history of adapted resistance to imperialism. To do so, he employs the Gikuyu myths available to him at the times of the resistance.

However, a look at the myths that course through Ngugi's first two novels reveals a divergence from traditional Gikuyu lore. Rather than weaving existing myths into his stories, or simply reframing them in the novel form, Ngugi creates new myths—his *own myths*. By purposely cohering events, and deliberately distancing his myths from popular narratives, Ngũgĩ offers an artifice. This artifice, or rather, this meta-mythology, is a constructed set of myths aware of its own fabrication; hence, it should be seen as a critique, as a commentary on the nature of the available material which Ngugi deliberately skirts: the popular, national myths recited at times of colonial resistance. In its commentary, Ngugi's meta-mythology demonstrates that although nationalist, the myths invoked during colonial resistance, and as colonial resistance, are not essentialist.[6] It does this at two levels: first, Ngugi's meta-mythology demonstrates

that although Gikuyu myths are precolonial and even transcendent, Gikuyu mythology—and identity—cannot be imagined outside of the scope of modern colonialism. They are (Gikuyu mythology and identity, that is), as Homi Bhabha describes, phenomena of cultural difference;[7] they are enunciations.[8] And as enunciations, they only exist in concurrence with the presence of the Other, or rather, with colonialism, and not independently. Second, Ngugi's meta-mythology contests airs of essentialist sentiments by portraying the Gikuyu myths during/as colonial resistance as composed by many voices. By often being competing or contradictory, these voices constitute something of a harmonious tension, or perhaps agonistic unity; they are by nature, polyphonous.

Historian Joseph Mali affirms that "historical myths might be simply redefined as those stories that are not merely told but actually lived."[9] As such, mythologies, and the myths that compose them, can also be understood as inherently religious; that is, if one accepts Craig Calhoun's position on the construction of the religious and the secular as temporal subjects. Calhoun argues that the religious is a subject founded as a contrary position towards the secular—a cycle or demarcation of temporality (and its coterminous, spatiality). The religious, then, points to a transcendence of temporal markers.[10] Thus, the mythology invoked and constructed in the Ngũgĩ's novels, although about the past, are concomitantly significant to the contemporary colonial setting they were written in, as well as transcendently pertinent to the future.

In this vein, Ato Seyki-Otu addresses this aspect of mythology in his seminal essay, "The Refusal of Agency."[11] Sekyi-Otu argues that in *The River Between* the importance of the structure of the founding myth hinges on a conditional provision. He contends that the land given to the Gikuyu is not simply a gift but what

seems to be a "divine dispensation [that] turns out to be a fiduciary ordinance, an ethical-political covenant. The land is not to be the object of a votive naturalism: it is for the people to 'rule and till.'" In this way, Sekyi-Otu confirms that the founding narrative "signifies the foundation, origin, and source not of the community's self -knowledge, but of its self-apprehension, not of Kikuyu being, but of the Kikuyu mode of being in the world."[12] His argument implies that the form of Ngũgĩ's rendition of the myth informs Gikuyu identity, particularly in a colonial setting. Nonetheless, Sekyi-Otu's consideration of myth stops at *The River Between*, deconstructing the narrative as a self-contained text; and it is. But, if one were to consider *Weep* and *River* as a spiritual set—accounting for the mythic recitals that dot them—then Ngũgĩ's protracted deployment of myths clarify as a meta-mythology that comments on the myths produced or uttered during the colonial era.

Apollo O. Amoko continued Sekyi-Otu's work in his essay "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*," demonstrating that far from being simplistic, it is an exemplary text which manifests "Homi Bhabha's terms of colonial mimicry…riddled with ambivalence, ambiguity and slippage."[13] Even though the novel embodies a traditional 'English aesthetic' by mimicking style and even emulating biblical tropes, it produces undeniable ambivalence; that is, to use Bhabha's phrasing: it is almost the same, but not quite. It produces an English aesthetic but slips from such form as it very much invested in its own language, both linguistic and symbolic. Focusing on Gikuyu mythology, *River* produces a menacing mimicry in a colonial Kenya. Still, Amoko does not make the connection concerning Ngũgĩ's production of a mimicking myth and its implications as a commentary on the nature of mythology produced or uttered in the colonial context. He neglects to consider

their disparate nature and how such affects said ambivalence.

The most prevalent myths in *River* and *Weep* are the heroic Waiyaki myth and the foundational origins myth. Although the two novels are very different in content, both myths are integral to both texts: *River* deals with the Gikuyu hero Waiyaki—his education, and his mission as an anointed messiah to unite the Gikuyu ridges to form a front against the English settlers, while *Weep* centres on Njoroge, a Gikuyu school boy living through the rise of the Mau Mau rebellion. Throughout the novels, these myths appear in different variations. These variations speak about each other, contradict each other, and indicate their own contemporary creation and usage. Thus, the novels present a self-aware meta-mythology demonstrating its polyphonous nature.

The Myth of Waiyaki

As a meta-myth, the heroic Waiyaki story, which is the narrative focus of *The River Between*, is not an intended representation of actual Gikuyu folklore. It is a consciously devised amalgamation of stories evoking Gikuyu lore and colonial Kenyan history, using names, events, and narrative patterns that resonate in emergent Gikuyu nationalist conscious. What is known about the real Waiyaki Wa Hinga is actually very little. The IBEAC archives concerning Kenyan highlands circa 1890 are scarce and undoubtedly biased. Furthermore, Western historiography has been contested by Gikuyu oral histories. According to the written archive, we know Waiyaki was understood by the IBEAC to be a leader of the Gikuyu; he was a willing negotiator which allowed them movement across the highlands and sold them land to use as a trading post.[14] By 1892, Waiyaki's men and the IBEAC had two violent clashes on account of

appropriated land; and according to an article by Brigadier General Herbert H. Austin, the "treacherous" Waiyaki launched an "unprovoked" and "murderous attack" on an IBEAC representative soon after.[15]

The Gikuyu oral history seems more complete, though is probably no less biased. Waiyaki Wa Hinga, according to Gikuyu history, was the son of an ethnic Maasai man and Gikuyu woman. His father, Hinga, had been adopted by the Gikuyu after his mother escaped an ongoing Maasai war. Waiyaki was elected ruler of the Gikuyu after fulfilling an oath and killing Naleo, a Maasai warrior who led many victorious raids against the Gikuyu. In about 1890, sometime after his election, Waiyaki entered into an agreement with Captain Lugard of IBEAC to settle a trading post in Gikuyu land as a halfway point between Mombasa and Uganda in exchange for peace and rifles. There were two subsequent violations of the treaty that ended in bloodshed. Many IBEAC Swahili and Indian porters died and the Gikuyu emerged victorious. On the evening of August 16, 1892, the angered manager of the post, Henry Porter, invited an inebriated Waiyaki to negotiate a peace agreement, and resulted in clubbing him on the head and chaining him to the flagpole.[16] The next day Waiyaki was exiled to Kibwezi, a town northeast of Mombasa. Waiayki's last words, which echoed in Gikuyu nationalist sentiment, were "you must never surrender one inch of our soil to foreigners, for if you do, future children will die of starvation." Waiyaki never made it to Kibwezi, dying from untreated wounds. He was buried head-first (feet up) in a small hole along the way.[17]

Ngũgĩ's version of Waiyaki elides western archives and merely touches upon Gikuyu oral history. So, there is no question that this Waiyaki is a deliberate concoction, a fusion of Colonial Kenyan history orbiting a ubiquitous hero. In *River* alone he deliberately strings

together the events of the first colonial encounters in the 1880's; the death of Waiyaki in 1892; the female circumcision controversy with the Scottish Methodist Church in 1929; and the development of independent Gikuyu Schools during the 1930's. In *River* these events are woven around Ngũgĩ's fictional Waiyaki from about age eight to his death as a young adult, condensing the historical events of colonial Kenya to a period of fifteen to twenty years. In cohering these events, Ngũgĩ's history disregards historical, linear time in favor of higher, mythical time—one that memorializes these successions as one saga, one event.

River's Waiyaki also permeates in *Weep Not, Child*. Set at least a generation in the future during the Mau Mau rebellion, references to Ngũgĩ's version of the Waiyaki myth, in contrast to the more standard versions, signals an active awareness of its own conception and repeated deployment. As explored later in this essay, allusions to Waiyaki are activated towards the end of the novel to question ideas of messianism and its inherent promotion of patience. Undoubtedly, the narratives surrounding Ngũgĩ's Waiyaki are a deliberate construction of myth, especially as his narrative in no way resembles the historical figure. By consciously cohering events, and deliberately distancing his Waiyaki myth from the heroic narratives fixed in the national conscious, Ngũgĩ structures a myth that is unapologetically aware of its own formulation. As a purposely constructed myth during the Kenyan struggle for independence, the Waiyaki myth should be seen as a commentary on colonial myth itself—specifically on its nature and function.

Ngũgĩ's Waiyaki myth, exhibited in *River* and explored in *Weep*, helps demonstrate the nature of colonial mythology as a phenomenon of "enunciation": the action or continuous process of constructing an Other's

culture as an object of knowledge while simultaneously constructing one's own, as an axiom of self-identification.[18] Firstly, as speech, the Waiyaki myth *in general* (not Ngũgĩ's version), is uttered during a state of colonialism as an evocation of national Gikuyu history. Its narration in a colonial state elicits a reflection on the history and natures of resistance. In turn, this reflection calls for a consideration of national identity, as in: what are we resisting? *Who* are we resisting? Accordingly, Ngũgĩ mentions that these are the types of stories, or histories that shape an image of the Kenyan people; it is the stories of "heroic resistance to foreign domination" and "histories [that] shine with grandeur" that are spoken as a part of the process of national introspection.[19] Hence, the very evocation of the Waiyaki myth, which can be seen as an invocation of struggle, is at the same time an enunciation of national identity and culture. This enunciation (the utterance of the Waiyaki myth) establishes a difference between the Gikuyu nation and the colonizer, thus attesting to how colonial mythology, when rooted in resistance, is a process of cultural differentiation.

While Ngũgĩ's reiteration of the Waiyaki myth exists as part of said process, it also helps to exemplify the nature of the colonial myth as diverse and polyphonous. Ngũgĩ's version of the Waiyaki myth is presented as a clear juxtaposition of the traditional narratives spoken by colonized Kenyans during the political struggle for independence. Carol Sicherman explains that the stories told of Waiyaki are varied, but they mostly concur that he was "Gikuyu warrior-leader who took up arms with other Gikuyu against the invasion of the Kenyan highlands by the British."[20] In stark contrast to the traditional Waiyaki myths told by the Gikuyu, Ngũgĩ presents a very different version. Ngũgĩ's text seems to adopt Christian traditions, staging the Gikuyu hero's life echoing biblical tropes as Waiyaki's projection as saviour crystalizes in

the eschatology of both protagonist and novel. Ngũgĩ's Waiyaki reflects the biblical Jesus from the onset as his alleged heritage foregrounds his journey; Waiyaki, according to his father, was "the last in the line of great seer who prophesied of a black messiah from the hills."[21] As a prophesied figure, Ngũgĩ draws parallels of prophesiers and prophesied(s) between Christian and Gikuyu traditions. One of *River*'s antagonists, Joshua—a Christian convert—finds solace in the prophet Isaiah's predictions of Jesus. Joshua asks: "Had Mugo wa Kibiro, the Gikuyu seer, ever foretold of such a savior? No. Isaiah was great. He had told of Jesus, the saviour of the world".[22] Unbeknownst to Joshua, as Isaiah predicted Jesus, Mugo predicted a saviour, Waiyaki. The parallel between Waiyaki and the Jesus of the Christian canon is most obvious in the novel's climax. Because Waiyaki has been mixing with Gikuyu Christians and establishing modern schools in the region, his loyalty to his people and their culture is questioned by the *Kiama* (group of village elders). Following the biblical narrative, Waiyaki is conspired against and is subjected to a farcical—and pharisaical—trial. Even after speaking to his people "like a shepherd speaking to his flock", asking them, "can a house divided stand?", his trial ends in his condemnation a satisfied, yet guilty mob, and a darkness that subsequently consumes the land.[23]

This configuration of Waiyaki as a Jesus-like figure has been noted by Amoko. However, contrary to Amoko's assertions, this representation need not be read as an example of colonial mimicry. Colonial mimicry implies the event of slippage as an end, as "mimicry continuously produces its slippage, its excess, its difference."[24] This is not necessarily the case with *River*'s Waiyaki. The end may very well be the opposite of slippage, if slippage were a manifestation of difference. What perhaps is at play here, with such a configuration of Waiyaki, is an elicitation of self-recognition. Writing on Ngũgĩ's

Christian symbolism in *A Grain of Wheat*, Govind Narain Sharma contends that Ngũgĩ is a "religious writer"—and before his conversion to atheism, this would ring true.[25] After such conversion, this may still be debatable as Ngũgĩ's works continue to be speckled with Christian allusion and motifs. On this paradox, Ngũgĩ' has stated that he has often "drawn from the Bible" because "the Bible was for a long time the only literature available to Kenyan people."[26] It would follow that a Jesus-figure would be easy for a Kenyan audience to identify. Moreover, in a predominantly observant, Christian population, a Waiyaki figure pregnant with Christian ethics, morals, and aspirations would also be easy to identify with. And here we can better identify the nature and function of mythology, particular with its diversity. As religious objects, that is transcendental texts, myths exceed secular cycles (or determined timeframes, such as generations) and are then adopted and adapted, even by ideologically altered nations. Their diversity, and here polyphony, allow for different portions of populations to identify with. In the case of Waiyaki, who in all iterations is determined to struggle, in one way or another, against the British, both Christians and non-Christians can identify with a call to action.[27]

As for a non-Christian recognition of Waiyaki, *Weep Not, Child* offers an example. Though Waiyaki is not once mentioned in *Weep*, his myth is very much resonant. One evening, Njoroge and his family gather around the patriarch, Ngotho, and listens to him tell the story of the creation of the first man and woman: Gikuyu and Mumbi. As he tells them about the land given to them by Murungo, the Creator, he recalls the loss of their ancestral lands to the British, saying that the "white man [came] as long had been prophesied by the Mugo wa Kabiro, that Gikuyu seer of old;"[28] however, Mugo wa Kabiro prophesied restitution as well. When asked if he thought the prophecy of the restitution of land would be

completed, Ngotho told them: "Once in the country of ridges…a man rose. People thought that he was the man who had been sent to drive away the white man. But he was killed by wicked people because he said people should stand together."[29] Here, the figure of Waiyaki as uniter and liberator emerges detached of any notions of Christian messiahship. The only ideals present in such recitation are those of national unity and territorial autonomy.

Foundational Myth Variations

The myth of origin, or the foundational narrative related in the first passages of *The River Between*, and then reiterated in later chapters, is perhaps the most important narrative of the internal mythology between these two novels. This is because one of the most important aspects of myths of origin is the authentication of national identity. Mali argues that historical communities, like religions or nations, consist of the shared beliefs that their members have about them[selves]. Mali suggests that the very fabric of historical communities, and nations, are made up of these very narratives; or rather, that the myths themselves constitute such communities.[30]

At its core, according to Gerishon Ngau Mwuara Kirika, the Gikuyu myth of origin narrates that *Ngai* (God), the omnipotent, transcendent/immanent deity and creator of all things, created Gikuyu (man). *Ngai* then placed Gikuyu at the top of Mount Kenya and showed him the Valley below, conferring this land unto him and his posterity so long he prayed and sacrificed to Him. Later, Gikuyu was given a wife, Mumbi (creator/molder). Mumbi bore nine daughters and after prayer and sacrifice, *Ngai* gave them nine men with whom the daughters could procreate. The nine tribes come from

these nine couples and the names of the tribes carry the names of Gikuyu and Mumbi's daughters.[31]

Here, it is important to note that Ngũgĩ offers no deviation; there really couldn't be any. The Gikuyu foundational myth does not exist as a written text, an authoritative archive which can be referenced for veracity. Instead, the Gikuyu foundation myth exists in an oral context, as Sekyi-Otu stresses, and thus in many different variations. Since there isn't one version of the foundation myth in Gikuyu lore, or in Ngũgĩ's novels, its use in *Weep* and *River* should be seen as a device used to explore the nature of mythic recitations. As a device, the foundation myth in the novels should be considered a meta-myth, a story within a story. As a story in *The River Between*, the foundation myth becomes a reference point for the rest of the mythology, informing characters about their own identity and plight. It dictates Waiyaki's motivations as he becomes keeper of the myth, struggling to bring back his nation to the point of origin. In *Weep Not, Child*, the foundational narrative accords native characters the rights to native lands and inspires resistance within the community. It also mediates protagonist Njorge's understanding of the colonial situation. The myth pervades both novels but is recounted by different individuals and affects characters in different manners. It's very ubiquity implies a self-unawareness, signaling attention to its function within the novels and the nature of myth in colonial settings.

From the opening passages of *River*, the foundational myth establishes Gikuyu nationhood by linking the Gikuyu nation to Gikuyu and Mumbi. At the same time, it emphatically declares the Gikuyu rights to land. The narration directly and explicitly states that God showed Gikuyu and Mumbi all the land and told them "this land I give to you O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity." Its pithy prose highlights the

straightforward message as if an axiom of national Gikuyu logic. The Gikuyu nation is the progeny of Gikuyu and Mumbi and the soil of the ridges is theirs to till. The only contention or discord demonstrated in the myth's first iteration concerns the ridge from where Gikuyu and Mumbi observed the land: "Not all people believed him for had it not always been whispered and rumored that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno?"[32] Whether or not the land (the entire ridges) had been given to the Gikuyu, as Gikuyu and Mumbi's posterity is not for debate. Moreover, the mention of "had it not always been whispered," demonstrates that such understanding is constituent to the Gikuyu nation, stretching back to its foundation—that the nation and consanguine myth is as old as speech itself.

The next recitation of the foundation myth echoes the same sentiment: "Murungu brought the man and woman here and showed them the whole vastness of the land, He gave the country to them and their children and the children of their children".[33] As per divine decree, the land belongs to Gikuyu and Mumbi and their progeny. The difference in this iteration is the description of Gikuyu and Mumbi's posterity. This rendition is narrated by Waiyaki's father. Such narration inculcates the importance of the land and subsequent recognition the impending threat that is the white man's encroachment. The phrase "their children and the children of their children" clarifies that the land does not rightfully and providentially belong only to Gikuyu and Mumbi and their immediate children–that posterity does not only refer to the first generation. His father's words imply that the blessing of land upon Gikuyu and Mumbi's posterity is indefinite.

The foundational myth in the Makerere novels sets a precedent to Gikuyu nationalism; it establishes Gikuyu rights to land and, as Sekyi-Otu argues, is "an indication

of Gikuyu being- an active identity."[34] This narrative production by Ngũgĩ's is an enunciation of selfhood in a colonial setting, an authentication of autonomous identity. Along these lines, the repetitive recitation of the foundation myth can be seen as performing Frantz Fanon's description of the search for a national culture. Fanon affirms that the

> passionate quest for a national culture prior to the colonial era can be justified by the colonized intellectuals' shared anxiety in stepping back and taking a hard look at the Western culture in which they risk becoming ensnared…[and] determine to renew contact once more with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people.[35]

Here, Fanon describes the work of colonized intellectual's struggling to locate the history and culture of their nation in contestation to the European colonizer. The prevalence of the foundational myth in the Makerere novels is such an attempt. The focus on the foundational mythologies in a colonial context is a reaction to colonial hegemony, revisiting this social charter to affirm origins and identities.

More specifically, in analyzing attempts to foment a national identity Simon Gikandi agrees that it would be imperceptive to view such event outside a framework of colonialism:

> It is impossible to talk of a Gikuyu culture outside the discourse of colonialism. Although Gikuyu temporality inscribes itself by invoking an ancient history - *hingoya ndemi na mathathi* - the people who have come to be known under this corporate identity invented themselves to meet the challenges of colonial rule and domination.[36]

Hence, even though the foundational myth is about times immemorial – eluding the grasp of historicity, and precluding any colonial encounter – its narration in the present marks it as a product of colonialism. So, at the colonial encounter there is an utterance, that is, a proclamation of self and of culture in the face of an Other. In the case of the *River* and *Weep*, the foundational myth functions as an utterance, thus proclaiming Gikuyu identity as that of the posterity of Gikuyu and Mumbi. At the same time, the text itself performs Gikuyu culture by transmitting oral traditions.

In this procedure of utterance lies a process of cultural translation, where each agent (individual or communal) tries to understand the culture of the other using his very own cultural parameters as a point of reference. Concerning this phenomena and the Gikuyu nation in colonized Kenya, Gikandi explains:

> Both colonizer and colonized were…trying to invent their traditions and selves in relation to the realities of the other. The British colonial authority…sought to reorganize the Gikuyu …positioning them in a cultural grid which emphasized white supremacy and the benign authority of colonization. The Gikuyu, in turn, carefully remade and rewrote their cultural narratives and moral economy…valorizing centralizing narratives of common descent, calling attention to a common mythological pantheon, and privileging histories and temporalities that would put them, morally and conceptually, on equal terms with their colonizers.[37]

In this context Ngũgĩ's foundation myth in *River* should be understood less as a pre-colonial myth and more of a reiteration whose function is to comment on the history and present conditions of colonial Kenya.

Furthermore, the value of the myth is not interrupted by the temporal limit that is present. The myth, as a 'religious' text, maintains its value in its transcendental nature and potential.

The myth's potential is shown when its ideas are invoked in *Weep*. For example, when Kiarie announces to the restless crowd that "all the land belonged…had been given to Gikuyu and Mumbi and their posterity,"[38] his invocation does not add anything new to the myth; it only repeats what has always been known: that the land was given to Gikuyu and Mumbi. As a narrative of the origin of the nation and its relation to the land, the myth becomes completely relevant to the contemporary situation. The Gikuyu nation is Gikuyu and Mumbi's posterity and the land is theirs to "rule and till in serenity," not to be worked for the profit others.[39] The potential of the myth is indeed fulfilled, as the axiom of Gikuyu nationhood rings in Ngotho's head and moves him to act as a vehicle for divine birthright. He attacks a black 'traitor' on stage and sparks a violent beginning to the labor strike.

Looking at the foundational myth in the *River* and *Weep* in this context clarifies its nature as an invocation; as opposed to a repetition of a story of national beginnings, it is an invocation of agency and an authorization of autonomy—an utterance of perennial selfhood. If the nature of the foundational myth in the novels is understood as invocations of national genesis and national rights, then such a myth is consequently an event of cultural differentiation.

Furthermore, the invocations of the foundational myth in the novels also demonstrate the nature of the colonial myth as disparate and polyphonous. *The River Between* begins with a narration of the founding myth:

> It began long ago. A man rose in Makuyu. He claimed that Gikuyu and Mumbi sojourned there with Murungu on their way to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga. As a result of that stay, he said, leadership had been left to Makuyu. Not all the people believed him. For had it not always been whispered and rumoured that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno? And had not a small hill grown out of the soil on which they stood south of Kameno? And Murungu had told them: 'This land I give to you, O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity.'[40]

Since its first exposition, the foundation narrative is presented with a sense of ambiguity. The origins of the narrative are unexplained. As a myth there is no author, or authority to determine veracity. Sekyi-Otu explains that the "the story of beginnings is apocryphal and unauthorized. Neither reporter nor referent, neither subject nor object, are accredited with unequivocal, transcendental authority."[41] The claims of a man rising in Makuyu is done anonymously. The proclamation of Gikuyu and Mumbi's sojourn in Makuyu has no attributable source for sake of record or verification. Demonstrating the ambiguous nature of the anonymous myth, the question, "for had it not always been whispered and rumored that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno?" points out this contradiction. The nameless man who "rose in Makuyu" asserts one location of national origin, while others vocalize a different narrative, asserting a different location of origin. Such question, as a counter claim, is also uttered without any authorial identity. This lack of sole authorship, for Sekyi-Otu, signifies a lack of 'transcendental authority." The authority, accordingly, is allotted to the murmurers and whisperers. Thus, the details of the myth are open to change, and variation, contingent only on the

whisperer(s) and the consent of the listener(s), making the nature of the foundation myth divergent and polyvocal.

The original reiteration demonstrates the divergent nature of the myth from the inception of the text. The man who rose in Makuyu had claimed that it was there that the creator Murungu bestowed upon Gikuyu and Mumbi the land in sight. The proclamation of the man that rose from Makuyu marks it as a terrestrial focus of spirituality. Since Makuyu was the hill where the divine interacted with the progenitors and where revelation occurred, bequeathing sovereignty over the land, it is consecrated and raised to supremacy over the other ridges of the inlands. Still, the anonymous "man who rose" was not believed by his contemporaries as they had a different version of the story: "For had it not always been whispered and rumoured that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kameno? And had not a small hill grown out of the soil on which they stood south of Kameno?" The listeners objected as they had previously heard something different from whisperers who had claimed it was Kameno, not Makuyu; and such whispers had qualified their murmurs with proof - there was a small hill that had "grown out of the soil" on Kameno. Hence, the ambiguous nature of the myth, which offers no origins, produces plural versions (competing narratives), establishing a socio-political dispute over the supremacy of the ridges and their respective inhabitants. However, even though the ambiguous nature of the myth produces polyphony, one thing had definitely been established: the land was theirs and they were to rule and till it.

The second time that the foundation narrative is mentioned in River it is yet another variation—a new thread to the text. This account, it should be noted, is pivotal to it's narrative, and to Ngũgĩ's rendition of the Waiyaki myth, as Waiyaki's life and raison d'être is

directly informed by it. Here, Chege takes his son, Waiyaki, up to the hill of God. They sit by a Mugumo tree and Chege asks Waiyaki: "Do you see all of this land, this country stretching beyond and joining the sky? All this is our land… Murungu brought the man and woman here and showed them the whole vastness of the land. He gave the country to them and their children and the children of their children, tene na tene, world without end. Do you see here?"[42] Waiyaki looks up and sees his father was pointing at the Mugumo tree and the mysterious bush around it. His father announces:

> This is a blessed and sacred place. There, where Mumbi's feet stood, grew up that tree...From here, Murungu took them and put them under Mukuruwe wa Gathanga in Murunga. There our father and mother had nine daughters who bore more children. The children spread all over the country. Some came to the ridges to keep and guard the ancient rites… You descend from those few who came to the hills.[43]

Chege is feared and respected by the other elders of the tribe, because "he knew more than any other person the ways of the land and the hidden things of the tribe;" thus, in terms of recitation, Chege is sound carrier of tradition, and as such, offers a credible version of the foundational myth.[44] However, in this reiteration of the myth there are two differences. First, Chege's variation includes the Mugumo tree, identified earlier by Waiyaki as "a sacred tree" and the "tree of Murungu," dominated Waiyaki's soul with its mighty power and presence.[45] Waiyaki understood that this tree was special, significant. After all, it was from this tree that Gikuyu and Mumbi's progeny spread. But it was those that returned to the ridges that would protect the ancient rite; Waiyaki "descend[ed] from those few who came to the

hills."[46] Here, Chege's version imbues Waiyaki with a purpose and a mission—one dependent on Waiyaki's interpretation, of course.

The second difference seen in Chege's version is the omission of Murungu's decree regarding tilling the land. In the first account, Murungu declares that the land belongs to Gikuyu and Mumbi "to rule and till, [for them] and [their] posterity."[47] Sekyi-Otu argues that this gift of land was conditional. The decree of ruling and tilling as a provision, defined for the Gikuyu a "mode of being."[48] However, with Chege's omission, there is no mandate to till land, and the contract between Gikuyu, Mumbi, and their creator becomes a divine dispensation independent of any circumstances. These two differences, varying in degree of consequence, illustrate a polyphony in the foundation myth.

Weep Not, Child continues the pattern established in *River* by adding variations of the myth. In *Weep* the foundational myth receives a bit more attention and detail than in *River*. It was a custom for Njoroge to sit with his father, mother and siblings listening to stories. His mother told stories frequently. However, it was the patriarch who delivered the emotive rendition of the foundational story before the strike of the black workforce and the eruption of the Mau Mau rebellion.

Ngotho's version of the foundation myth in *Weep* is lengthier and more detailed than the versions offered in *River*. In Ngotho's version we receive a view of the world before the inception of Gikuyu and Mumbi: a world in darkness and chaos, with consistent rains afflicting fauna and hindering flora. And in contrast to Chege's version, Ngotho teaches that God's tree, Mukuyu, had existed upon God's mountain before the creation of Gikuyu and Mumbi, and does not choose either Kameno or Makuyu as the location for their creation; his variation of the myth

is not interested in socio-political supremacy of either ridge granted by lore.[49]

Ngotho's version teaches that the appearance of Gikuyu and Mumbi brought light into a world of darkness, making the sun rise and shine, bringing warmth and alleviation for animals.[50] Seemingly, in this version, Gikuyu and Mumbi were luminaries for the world; acting as divine viceroys, ambassadors, and mediators. This of course, is relevant in the context of the rest of the narrative, as Kenya is a British colony. Ngotho's own situation, working on his father's former land as an employee to Mr. Howlands, a British colonizer, acts as an embodiment for the situation of the entire colonial Kenya. The entire lands of Kenya have been taken from the successors of Gikuyu and Mumbi and thus the land is in anguish and darkness; this explains the fact that Ngotho's version is uninterested in local supremacy between tribes. Rather, the purpose of the myth congeals around the problem of a colonized Kenya.

This problem is constantly meditated on by Njoroge. Speaking to his friend, Mwihaki, about the violence and the colonial situation causing it, Njoroge comforts her, assuring that "peace shall come to this land." When she asked him if he really believed that, Njoroge reassures her by claiming that "sunshine always follows a dark night," and that "the sun shall rise tomorrow."[51] Here, Njoroge makes the connection between the darkness and colonial oppression, inferring that the proverbial sun would shine when the lands were at peace, in the hands of their sovereign, the Gikuyu, just as the myth his father recited implied. Here, the text demonstrates the foundation myth interacting with its social context, reflecting the colonial situation. In doing so, this indicates the solution to the woes of the Gikuyu and the torment of Kenya: the re-establishment of the land in Gikuyu hands. This illustration of interaction demonstrates a flexible

nature to the colonial myth, enabling it to develop into a polyphonous text through its ability to be adapted to changing social conditions. On top of the myth's distinct variations, its nature also allows for layers of interpretation to suit any social context, thus affirming it as multivocal.

However, one of the most important differences in Ngotho's version is the condition that does not appear in the prior versions of the myth. Upon creating Gikuyu and Mumbi, Murungu gives them the land that they see and tells them that they are to rule and till it. Then Murungu adds: "sacrificing only to me, your God, under my tree."[52] This addendum creates a binary consequence: the continuous enjoyment of God's provision if observant of the mandate, or the negative outcome of breaking it. This variation offers a reason for the colonization of the Gikuyu people, blaming the colonial context on the ancestors who did not heed the foundation myth.

After this, Njoroge could not contain the nostalgia elicited by the affective recitation, he blurted out "where did all the land go?" Overcome with melancholy, Ngotho responds: "maybe...the children of Mumbi forgot to burn a sacrifice to Murungu. So, he did not shed His blessed tears that make crops grow. The sun burnt freely. Plague came to the land. Cattle died and people shrank in size. Then came the white man…and took the land."[53] This distinction, which explains the nation's condition, demonstrates the ability of the colonial myth to evolve, diverging into discrete versions, which invites the realization that the myth functions as a polyphonous text.

Finally, in *Weep Not, Child*, there is the introduction of the hybrid myth of origins, created by the amalgamation of Gikuyu folklore and the Christian teachings proliferated by Christian schools established by white colonizers. This hybrid myth, though apparently very different from the previous accounts of Murungu's

dispensation to Gikuyu and Mumbi, maintains certain characteristics that arguably sustains it as Gikuyu myth. Njoroge, a 'hybrid' Gikuyu educated in an English established school,[54] believes that the "God of love and mercy… long ago walked on this earth with Gikuyu and Mumbi, or Adam and Eve." Njoroge had come to the understanding that Gikuyu and Mumbi were Adam and Eve. This was not a replacement of one tradition for another; this was an adoption and integration of Christian terminology into Gikuyu folklore. To Njoroge, "it did not make much difference that he had come to identify Gikuyu with Adam and Mumbi with Eve." This is possibly because the alteration of the names or even the inclusion of the Garden of Eden story does not negate the traditional Murungu, Gikuyu, and Mumbi myth. In Njoroge's view, Murungu was the same as the Christian God, and he had given a sacred land to Gikuyu and Mumbi (or Adam and Eve). This land was to be theirs and their children's. Like the story of the Garden of Eden, Gikuyu and Mumbi lost the given land due to disobedience of God's decrees. To Njoroge, the Adam and Eve story fits with his father's foundation myth variation wherein Gikuyu and Mumbi, or their posterity, failed to meet Murungu's expectations. Njoroge's hybrid myth can still be considered a Gikuyu foundation myth as it meets some of its most important criteria. It maintains native Gikuyu names (even if they have Hebrew/English equivalents), which helps authenticate Gikuyu origin. It also maintains that the Creator made Gikuyu and Mumbi and placed them in a sacred land and gave it to them. Finally, it maintains, in accordance to his father's version, that Gikuyu and Mumbi lost the land due to their failure to comply with their Creator's decrees. Most importantly however, Njoroge's hybrid version of the Gikuyu myth sustains that the lands rightfully belong to the Gikuyu people. Njoroge's understanding follows: "the Gikuyu people, whose land had been taken by white men,

were no other than the children of Israel about whom he read in the Bible. So although all men were brothers, the black people had a special mission to the world because they were the chosen people of God."[55]

Njoroge's syncretism depicts Gikuyu and Mumbi's descendants as the children of Israel. In Biblical tradition, the children of Israel have a designated land, a land given to their forefather Abraham for his posterity. This land is their divine birth right. In seeing the Gikuyu people as the children of Israel, Njoroge understands that the land of Kenya is the Gikuyu's divine right. This syncretic version, like that of the Christian Waiyaki, allows for the myth to be deployed as an identifiable catalyst for mobilization. Observant Christian Kenyans can easily recognize the underlying motifs of divine dispensation and fulfill the myths potential.

Even though there are different versions of the foundation myth, some with crucial differences, it must be remembered that they all have a locus on which they anchor: the divine Gikuyu rights to the Kenyan highlands. This demonstrates a focused function of the colonial myth despite its disparate nature. Chege's version in *River* teaches Waiyaki that it is through the families of Kameno that divine interaction takes place. Still, the seers are for the entire Gikuyu nation as are the benefits of the prophecy- which include guarding the rights of land to all Gikuyu and expelling the white man. Waiyaki lives this myth and this prophecy and at times tries to be a savior for his people; thus, his main mission is to unite his people, and to educate them. Deluded or not, Waiyaki believes this is the path to recovery of Gikuyu lands.

Ngotho's myth teaches that it was Gikuyu and Mumbi's presence that brought peace and balance to the land; the land will only prosper under Gikuyu rule. When Ngotho explains a prophecy regarding a chosen one who

would take back the ancestral land, his son, Boro, responded: "To hell with the prophecy…How can continue working for a man who has taken your land? How can you go on serving him?"[56] Without waiting for an answer, Boro storms out. But it may be Boro who perhaps best demonstrates the function of the myth despite its discrepant nature. Boro, who did not heed, nor seemed to believe in such prophecy or myth, kills Mr. Howlands, the proprietor of his ancestral lands. It can be argued that Boro, ironically, attempts to live such a prophecy—a prophecy which exists as an extension to the rights granted by all the voices of the foundational myth, a prophecy meant to fulfill the role of mythology as a point of cultural return; at the same time, Boro can also be configured as reliving the traditional Kenyan Waiyaki.

Conclusion

Using the Makerere novels' mythology as a point of inference and as a commentary on colonial mythology itself demonstrates that colonial mythology is an element of cultural difference. Colonial myths, recited by the colonized, exist in their specific form only at the time that they are uttered. The myth's meaning must then be determined by the context of its utterance. The meaning that it may have had in the past doesn't define its contemporary use. Accordingly, the reception of these invocations is guided by the circumstance of the listener. If we are to be informed by Mali's explanation of myths "as histories of personal and communal identity" that ultimately "define and defend the national community," then, myths uttered in a colonial setting should be understood as part of a process of cultural differentiation.[57] They help inform and shape a national identity in the face of a colonizing Other.

Ngũgĩ's use of myths also demonstrates that colonial mythology is a polyphonous enterprise, supporting different versions of the same myth. Even though the myths vary considerably, at times contradicting each other, and at other times even offering completely different versions of historical personages, they agree enough to serve their function in promoting nationalist agendas. Such agendas include rediscovering a national history, which, as Franz Fanon claims, "rehabilitate[s] that nation and serves as a justification for the hope of a future national culture."[58] This is seen throughout Ngũgĩ' *River* version of Waiyaki which explores pre-colonial culture. They also include rights to religious freedom, as demonstrated by the circumcision dispute in *The River Between* and rights to equal work and pay, as demonstrated by the strike and rebellions in *Weep Not, Child*. Perhaps most importantly, myths function as calls for the liberation and restoration of native lands: the foundational myth serves as cultural charter which asserts the Gikuyu rights to rule and reap ancestral lands, while the messianic Waiyaki legitimizes national unity and struggle against foreign encroachment to retain land through Christian rhetoric. As Fanon affirms, "for a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity."[59] It is for this reason that myths, as divergent as they may be, constantly make a connection between the material land and the sacred, viewing ancestral lands as divine dispensation for all of posterity.

However, what is the function of a polyphonous colonial mythology? What does the discordance accomplish? Perhaps the function of polyphony resides in its nature as a process of cultural differentiation. Anthony Smith writes that myths and memories are activated as "ethnic profiles and identities are increasingly sought," making the invocation of myths

elemental to "the constitution of national identities."[60] Thus, if myths can be understood as national self-identification, then the utterance of mythology in a colonial setting can be understood as an enunciation - which is also an act of identifying oneself to the Other. In this case, colonial mythology is a polyphonous enunciation, encompassing many voices, diverse interpretations to myths, and even different versions of the myths themselves. Colonial mythology is a resonant, cacophonous identification of selves elicited by colonial hegemony.

Fanon proposes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, that "mastery of language affords remarkable power."[61] Though Fanon here referred to a colonized person's knowledge of the colonizer's language, we may be able to use his statement as a point of departure to fully understand myths as speech. If myth functions as speech, and hence as language; if it is polyphonous in nature, and at times discordant, this would frustrate colonial attempts to master the native myths. In effect, the colonial mythology becomes a vehicle for performing a sort of slippage, eluding the identifying grasp of the Other, curbing the attempts of essentialization of the nation by frustrating the homogenization of the national narratives. Thus, as a polyphonous enterprise, colonial mythology attempts to check stereotyping and denies fixity to the colonizer. Its exercise is a resistance to hegemonic monoculture and the Western notions of nation and nationality. However, we cannot assume that this exercise is frozen in a temporality of colonialism. Peter Hitchcock asserts that "when we use terms like *colonialism*, *nation*, and *postcolonialism* they must bear the weight of a ghostly afterlife in neocolonialism, postnation, and transnationalism."[62] Whichever ghostly life that follows colonial Kenya, whether the neocolonial form that Ngũgĩ has spent much ink on, or the increasingly transnational marketplace, mythology—

continuously polyphonous—transcends secular realities and continues to chart paths back to transcendent sovereignty.

Notes

1. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Weep Not, Child*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1964), 61.
2. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between,* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1965).
3. Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992), 13.
4. Within fiction these most notably include *Petals of Blood* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1977); *Devil on the Cross* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1980); *and Matigari* (Johannesburg: Heinemann, 1986). Among his many essays dedicated to these topics larger texts include: *Writing against Neo-Colonialism* (Nairobi: Vita Books, 1986); *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1983*); and Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
5. In a 1978 interview by "Weekly Review", Ngũgĩ stated that Kenyan history has "been distorted by the cultural needs of imperialism", thus necessitating a variant history; Ngũgĩ, Interview. *Weekly Review* (Nairobi) 9 Jan. 1978. 10
6. "Essentialist" from "essentialism", in criticism is the idea of reducibility of a people, nation, culture, etc. Referencing a fundamentalist, and hence, often monolithic, understanding of national identity (usually native), essentialism proposes a brute dichotomy between the identity of self and other; self and foreigner; colonized and colonizer. This presupposes that each identity has essential qualities and characteristics, existent previous to colonization, that can be called upon or reverted to. Decolonial and Nationalist theory and rhetoric are often accused of being essentialist. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Chatto & Windus, 1994), 16.*;* Salman Rushdie "Commonwealth Literature Does not Exist", in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (Penguin, 1991), 67.
7. Cultural difference is a term coined by Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (2nd ed., Routledge, 2004)**.** Bhabha explains cultural difference as process of signification where statements about culture are produced and negotiated. Cultural difference occurs at an encounter. In postcolonial criticism, encounter most often refers to encounter between colonizer and colonized; hence the cultural difference is the enunciations of selfhood, otherness, and the "cultural" difference between them. Such a difference could not exist without an enunciation and an enunciation could not exist without an encounter.

8. "Enunciation" is another term by Homi Bhabha found in *The Location of Culture*; it is closely related to "cultural difference". See note 6.
9. Joseph Mali, *Mythistory*: *The Making of Modern Historiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003) 6.
10. Craig Calhoun, "Time, World and Secularism" in *The Post-secular in Question: Religion in our Contemporary Society*, ed. Philip Gorski, David Kyuman Kim, John Torpey and Jonathan Van Antwerpen. (New York: New York University Press, 2012): 340.
11. Ato Sekyi-Otu, "The Refusal of Agency: The Founding Narrative and Waiyaki's Tragedy in 'The River Between,'" *Research in African Literatures* 16, no. 2 (1985): 157-178, http://www.jstor.com/stable/3819411.
12. Sekyi-Otu, 'The Refusal of Agency,' 161-2.
13. Apollo O. Amoko, "The Resemblance of Colonial Mimicry: A Revisionary Reading of Ngũgĩ' wa Thiong`o's 'The River Between,'" *Research in African Literatures* 36, no.1 (2005): 35, http://www.jstor.com/stable/3821318.
14. For comprehensive constellation of the archive, see Godfrey Muriuki, *A history of the Kikuyu, 1500-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
15. H.H. Austin "The Passing of Waiyaki," *The Cornhill Magazine,* 1923.
16. This is the Gikuyu version of Waiyaiki's encounter with Henry Porter—clearly discordant to H.H. Porter's description.
17. Wambui Waiyaki Otieno, *Mau Mau's Daughter: A Life History* (Boulder: Lynne Riener Publishers, 1998), 38.
18. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 34-36.
19. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "The RW Interview: Ngugi wa Thiong'o." *Revolutionary Worker,* December 15, 1986: 8-10.
20. Carol Sicherman, "Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Writing of Kenyan History," *Research in African Literatures* 20, no.3 (Autumn 1989): 360, http://www.jstor.com/stable/3819170.
21. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 38.
22. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between,* 29.
23. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between,* 96; "A house divided" is an allusion to Matthew 12:25.
24. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 86.
25. Govind Narain Sharma, "Ngũgĩ's Christian Vision: Theme and Pattern in *A Grain of Wheat*," *African Literature Today* 10, (1979): 174.
26. Ngũgĩ' wa Thiong'o, "An Interview with Ngũgĩ'." *The Weekly Review,* January 9, 1978: 10.
27. This identification of (and with) a call to action (in a colonial setting) naturally produces a difference between the colonized nation and the colonizer. The distinction between this and slippage is that in slippage the artifact itself produces the difference; here, with the use of Christian tropes the colonized subject can sincerely identify with the Christianized hero and determined a need for change based on the self-identification.

28. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 26.
29. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not , Child*, 26
30. Mali, *Mythistory*, 4.
31. Gerishon Ngau Mwaura Kirika, "Aspects of the Religion of the Gikuyu of Central Kenya before and After European Contact with Special Reference to Prayer and Sacrifice" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1988) 81-82, http://digitool.abdn.ac.uk/R?func=search-advanced-go&find_code1=WSN&request1=AAIU019781
32. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 2.
33. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 17.
34. Sekyi-Otu, 'The Refusal of Agency,' 162.
35. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 2005): 209.
36. Simon Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o,* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 15.
37. Gikandi, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o*, 17.
38. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 61.
39. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 24.
40. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, 2.
41. Ato Sekyi-Otu, 'The Refusal of Agency'162.
42. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 17.
43. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 18.
44. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 7.
45. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 15.
46. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 18.
47. Ngũgĩ, *The River Between*, 2.
48. Sekyi-Otu, 'The Refusal of Agency,' 162.
49. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 24.
50. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 23.
51. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 107-8.
52. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 24.
53. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 25-6.
54. Hybrid in the sense of being an agent/product of "Cultural Hybridity" as introduced by Bhabha. For Bhabha, "cultural Hybridity is all that may emanate within the interstices of fixed identities, or rather the cultural production from contradictory subjectivities. Hybridity shirks the apparent differences and rejects any assumed hierarchy between them, opening a space for new culture, new subjects. A Long history of people and culture in movement assumes that all cultures are "hybrid", and thus, any cultural essentialism is unreasonable.
55. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 57.
56. Ngũgĩ, *Weep Not, Child*, 26.
57. Mali, *Mythistory*, xii.
58. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, 2005) 210.
59. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 42.
60. Anthony D. Smith, "The Myth of the 'Modem Nation' and the Myths of Nations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 11:1, 1-26 (1988): 12.

61. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (London: Pluto Press, 2008) 9.
62. Peter Hitchcock, *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010): 186.

Spectralvania:

Monsters, Transgression, and Religion in Netflix's Castlevania

Seth Pierce
Assistant Professor of Communication and Homiletics, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska

Abstract

In 2017, Adi Shankar produced the Netflix adaptation of the video game *Castlevania*. The game and the Netflix series revolve around Dracula and his horde of monsters battling the Belmont family's legendary monster hunters. The series is one of the few critically acclaimed video game adaptation created for a major audience. The series was renewed for a second season the day the first season released, and it has since been renewed for a third season. Producer Adi Shankar has a history of transgressive media stemming from his "Bootleg Universe"—high end fan films that have stirred up controversy related to copyrights. He has also claimed that fandom constitutes a new religion that draws on elements of traditional religion. *Castlevania*'s monster mashup reflects this transgressive new religion of fandom, not only in its form, but in the series' religious themes. This article explores the popularity of the *Castlevania*'s monsters through the elements of spectrality, monster theory, and Adi Shankar's claim that fandom constitutes a new religion. It argues that trauma haunts the monsters in *Castlevania* and the series represents a type of transgressive religious narrative that employs occult symbols to off a progressive critique hegemonic/traditional religion.

Keywords: Castlevania, fandom, spectrality, monster theory, religion.

In 2017, Adi Shankar, along with a group of artists, resurrected an old (and now dead, due to Konami's lack of support for new titles) video game franchise in the form of a Netflix original series. The game, *Castlevania*, is a decades old monster mashup involving the Belmont family's never-ending quest to vanquish Dracula and his evil horde. The Netflix series combines the narrative from

Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse and the art from *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*—the most successful game in the franchise—into a new creature that has found a home in contemporary culture.[1]

Film adaptations of video games have a long history of critical and commercial failure. Recent films such as *Tomb Raider* (2001, 2003 and 2018), *Doom* (2005), and *Assassin's Creed* (2016), have failed to gain critical approval, even if some have achieved financial success. However, as Rotten Tomatoes' contributor Alex Vo pointed out, "It's always a horrible night to have a curse in Dracula country, but in real life, Netflix's *Castlevania* just lifted another curse: It's the first video game adaptation to get a 'Fresh' rating on Rotten Tomatoes."[2]

This alleged "lifting of the curse" by Castlevania's bestiary caught the attention of numerous critics. Ben Gilbert writes, "Somehow, against all expectations and logic, the first Netflix original show derived from a video game is very, very good. More impressive: The show is based on the *Castlevania* game series, a long-dormant game franchise" that has a reputation of being "immensely difficult to play."[3] Furthermore, Nathalie Medina points out that one of the voice actors, Richard Armitage, "has confirmed that Netflix's unexpectedly delightful, dark medieval fantasy *Castlevania* show will be getting a third season — and the second season, announced almost immediately after season 1's debut, hasn't even launched yet."[4]

While there have been successful video game adaptations into other mediums, such as board games and comic books, and at least one financially successful and critically acclaimed film adaptation (*The Angry Birds Movie 2*, 2019), *Castlevania* stands out as unique. First, it is produced by Netflix, which allows the creators more flexibility in terms of niche marketing (it is not a show marketed for general audiences). Second, its mature

content has not hampered its success. Despite its genesis as a child's Nintendo game, it has now contributed to the growing phenomena of popular R-rated film adaptations such as *Deadpool* and *Joker*. However, unlike other R-rated adaptions, *Castlevania* is animated. Finally, since Konami abandoned the series years ago, it has gained an audience with people not familiar with the series' long history as a game.

Due to the relative lack of engagement in academia with this franchise a cultural artefact, and its newfound popularity among a general audience, it is a good time to explore *Castlevania* and its contribution to transgressive media that both entertains and challenges viewers. This article explores *Castlevania* through three lenses—Derridean hauntology/spectrality, monster theory, and series producer Adi Shankar's claim that fandom represents a new religion. I argue *Castlevania* not only reflects hauntological spectral dynamics that haunt the audience and illustrate the function of monsters in society; but also that Shankar's claim of fandom as religion is valid. Castlevania reflects an appropriation of occult symbols to challenge dominant faith narratives, without being antagonistic towards faith in general.

Synopsis of the Night

The series opens with a human woman, Lisa of Lupu village, venturing to Dracula's castle to seek wisdom. After a short argument, Dracula welcomes her into his home to share his knowledge and study the various sciences to help people develop real medicine. She encourages him to end his self-imposed exile and travel the world to see the good in humanity. Eventually they marry, and Dracula decides to travel while Lisa studies science. During his travels, Lisa is accused of witchcraft by the Catholic Church and burned at the stake. Dracula

comes home too late to save her, and he appears as a terrifying vision in the flames of the pyre and warns the people of Târgoviște to make peace with their God within one year. In the meantime, Dracula plots his revenge on humanity, but his son, Alucard, approaches him and tells him to call off his plan to exterminate humans—appealing to the memory of his mother. Dracula attacks his son, grievously wounding, but not killing him.

A year passes, the Church is unrepentant, even boastful about killing Lisa. Dracula unleashes his night horde which begin slaughtering people. Trevor Belmont, the last of a legendary monster hunting family, now excommunicated by the Church for allegedly practicing "black magic," reluctantly takes up his family legacy again after saving Sypha. Sypha is a female Speaker, a group of oral historians with magical abilities, who are currently blamed as the cause for Dracula's army destroying people—along with the remaining Belmont who has resurfaced. After demons in Dracula's service overrun the town cathedral, Trevor and Sypha launch a resistance by rallying the townsfolk. During the battle, Trevor and Sypha fall into an underground chamber where Alucard rests—recovering from his wounds. After testing them in combat, Alucard joins them in their quest to stop Dracula.

Season two continues the chronicle of their journey, as well as Dracula's war council seeking to stop humanity. Dracula withdraws further into himself, creating confusion in his ranks. His grief leads to a loss of authority among his vampire generals, who begin making plans of their own—including where Dracula's traveling castle should appear next. A vampire aristocrat, Carmilla, turns some of Dracula's forces against him, and ultimately survives the final conflict (escaping to, presumably, become the villain for season three). Trevor, Sypha, and Alucard confront Dracula, and in a moment of

lucidity when fighting his son, Dracula realizes the monster he has truly become and welcomes death. Dracula is dead, at least for now. Season two ends with Alucard remaining in his family castle, while Trevor and Sypha travel on to continue their fight against Carmilla and other villains in Dracula's army.

Spectralvania

In this section I will apply the lens of spectrality to the characters in the Castlevania series to reveal the traumas haunting them. The figure of the specter[5] as a critical and culture idiom is entomed in Jacque Derrida's *Specters of Marx*. The book is derived from a series of lectures Derrida gave at a symposium at the University of California in response to Fukuyama's "hasty postmortem" of Marxism.[6] He cites Hamlet's statement that the "time is out of joint."[7] This inspires Derrida's concept of "hauntology" which suggests "no time is contemporary with itself."[8] Time is transgressive, particularly when it is haunted by past trauma/injustice—which leads to the figure of the specter.

The specter is a "non-present present," an "almost unnamable thing […] between something and someone" which seeks to "defy semantics as much as ontology."[9] Buse and Stott suggest that "anachronism might well be the defining feature of ghosts, now and in the past, because haunting, by its very structure, implies a deformation of linear temporality: there may be no proper time for ghosts."[10] They also point out that "Ghosts haunt borders."[11] The specter is a metaphor for the "other" haunting the edges of our experience and disrupting our hegemonies—shifting ontology into hauntology.

Haunting and the specter are figures related to past trauma calling for just action in the present for a hopeful future. Blanco and Pereen's *Spectralities Reader* contains

a legion of essays unpacking what they dub "the spectral turn" based on Derrida's work. "The renewed conceptual interest in ghosts and haunting that characterized the 1990s has also been linked to a broader (and somewhat earlier) turn to history and memory, concentrating in particular on dealing with personal and collective trauma."[12] Gordon's oft-cited *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* suggests that, "What's distinctive about haunting is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely."[13]

In *Post-Traumatic Public Theology*, Betcher suggests that physical wounds inflicted on bodies through terrorist action "may carry a species specter" that creates an "affective cloud" that "socially marginalizes people with impairments…"[14] The specter is the apparition of trauma transgressing time, operating with a felt absence, or an "virtual agency of the virtual"[15] seeking justice for the "other" from the living. In sum, the spectral deals with past traumas/lost futures transgressing the present, liminality or in-between spaces, and "others" transgressing the borders of power structures. As Derrida points out, "haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony."[16] From past traumas motivating characters, or the transgressive nature of the characters themselves, *Castlevania* is loaded with haunted hegemonies.

Castlevania foregrounds vampires, demons, and other monsters; but the background is haunted by trauma. While each character has their own traumatic pasts to deal with, it is Dracula's trauma that unites them all and provides the impetus for the action in the series. The loss of his wife sends Dracula into genocidal mania, losing himself in the process. The series portrays this through his irrational level of violence, his lack of fulfillment when his plans are carried out, and through the nature of his

castle—dubbed a "creature of chaos" by Dracula's son in *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*. The specter of trauma is the motivating force of the plot.

In the first episode, after Lisa is unjustly burned at the stake as a witch for using science to create medicine for ailing villages, Dracula declares war on the human race and gives them one year to make peace before raining horrors upon them. Alucard, the son of Dracula and Lisa, half-human and half-vampire, appeals to his father to stop his war plans. Dracula, incredulous at his son's request, replies, "There are no innocents!" Dracula yells. "Not anymore! Any one of them could have stood up and said, 'No, we won't behave like animals anymore.'"[17] Humanity is a monster in the eyes of the vampire. This transgressive trope of making humans out to be the real monsters is a staple of the genre and illustrated in other works such as the *Monster Blood Tattoo* series and *The Witcher* novels (also being adapted by Netflix for a December 2019 release).

A year later, the Arch-Bishop has a crowd of the faithful gathered outside the Târgoviște Cathedral. The clergyman brags about how he justly condemned a witch and the vision of doom Dracula gave them all was a lie from the devil. Suddenly the clouds darken, blood rains from the sky, and the church windows explode—impaling the Arch-bishop and his associates with glass. The face of Dracula materializes in the sky and says:

> One year. I gave you one year to make your peace with your God. And what do you do? Celebrate the day you killed my wife. One year I gave you, while I assembled my armies. And now I bring your death. You had your chance.[18]

Public traumas such as persecutions or executions often result in acts of terror that seek to re-inscribe that terror and humiliation on the bodies of the ones deemed

responsible. Stephanie N. Arel and Shelly Rambo note that, "disfigurement is used to permanently register the pain of one's own indignity in the flesh of another.[19] The hegemonic society that burns the flesh of "witches" will have its flesh permanently disfigured.

Dracula calls on his demonic army to kill everyone present. No one is to be spared, whether infant or grandparent. But the death to all in the immediate vicinity isn't enough. Dracula says:

> And once Târgoviște has been made into a graveyard for my love, go forth into the country. Go now. Go to all the cities of Wallachia. Arges, Severin, Gresit, Chilia, Enisara! Go now and kill! Kill for my love. Kill for the only true love I ever knew. Kill for the endless lifetime of hate before me.[20]

This is the trauma that moves on the characters and sets the plot in motion for the series. Dracula's use of the graveyard metaphor fits within spectrality since graveyards act as a transgressive "heterotopia"/ "heterochony" that hold the past, present, and (depending on a faith tradition's view of the resurrection) future in one place.[21] The world will remain a haunted place even if Dracula succeeds—a monument to the memory of his pain.

By season two all is not well within Dracula's ranks. The first episode opens with a flashback on the night Lisa was arrested for "witchcraft" and burned. Then the episode shows the gathering of Dracula's War Council before the throne as Dracula walks down to meet them, declaring "We prosecute a good war… in killing my wife proven to me they don't deserve Wallachia."[22] The plan is to continue to use "all the creatures of terror that humanity once drove away" and then give Wallachia to the "night hordes" which will "perhaps that will be

better."[23] What the religious hegemony of humanity has suppressed comes back as a tool of trauma to torment and overtake them. In light of ongoing discussions regarding the place of non-binary persons within the Christian community, particularly the Roman Catholic Church's statement that anything outside of male/female is "fictitious,"[24] and Shankar's comment on fandom as being a new religion, Dracula's statement about a "good war" is instructive as to the transgressive ideology of the series. The monsters fight a holy war against the hegemonic persecuting religious power that falsely accused his wife of witchcraft and took her life.

However, humans are not the only ones menaced by transgressors. Within Dracula's War Council two human "devil forgemasters" are employed as generals to reanimate the dead to act as soldiers. This transgression unsettles the vampire Generals—including the Viking Godbrand—who openly question their place as humans among the monsters in a war against humans. This illustrates Derrida's point that *every* hegemony is haunted.

In episode two, the chaotic nature of the war campaign continues to breed strife among the monster generals. When Carmilla, an aristocratic female vampire, enters Dracula's war meeting, she goes for the jugular by asking, in front of his generals, "Why was this new wife of yours never turned?" She continues, "You married, you had a child, and yet you did not make her a vampire, why was that? Were you simply keeping a human pet?"[25] When confronted in Dracula's private quarters, Carmilla defends her actions as only being "intended to unsettle a room full of men" and also uncovering the spectral question "they have all been asking themselves"—giving Dracula a chance to "address it."

Felt absence is a key characteristic of spectrality. Carmilla raises the specter of Dracula's trauma, the felt

absence haunting him, his war, and his minions. In the third episode of season three, Carmilla approaches Hector and observes, "I believe you're actually worried about Dracula."[26] Hector responds in the affirmative and uses a spectral metaphor reminiscent of ashes in Derrida's *Cinders*, to reflect on language and the impossible task of speaking of the horror of the Holocaust. Derrida, describing the cinder, says "a center crumbles and dissolves, it is dispersed in a throw of the die: cinder."[27] A cinder is the de-centered remains of something represented, Dracula has been reduced to a trace. "The fire in him has gone out somehow," says Hector. "It's as if we're looking at the embers of a man."[28]

Carmilla's motives are haunted by her own trauma. She tells the story of being turned and dominated by an old vampire, whom she eventually killed in order to receive her freedom. "I wasn't going to be dictated to by mad old men anymore," she informs Godbrand. "Then I come here to meet with the leader of our nation, and what do I find? A mad, cruel old man."[29] Carmilla's trauma fuels mutinous actions that set her up as the future villain for further seasons. This trauma illustrates how patriarchy is a hegemony haunted by strong women who refuse anything but self-determination.

Before discussing Dracula's final trauma at the end of season two, his castle must be examined as a reflection of its master's pain. Victor Sage observes that within Gothic fiction, the house often acts as an external representation of internal conscience.[30] The labyrinthian qualities of the haunted house reflect the internal struggles of the subject. This leads to personification of the haunted house, or in this case Dracula's castle. This is also illustrated in Netflix's *Haunting of Hill House*, the haunted home (a site of past tragedies) occupied by the Crain family is described in terms mirroring the mental state of Mrs. Crain. While looking at the house's

blueprints she remarks, "This house is schizophrenic." Afterwards her mental breakdowns continue and loss of grip on reality intensify the longer she stays in the "schizophrenic" house.[31]

In the first episode of the series, Lisa enters the castle and marvels at its expansiveness. The design is lifted from *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*. In the game Alucard observes, "This castle is a creature of chaos. It may take many incantations." The castle holds the same power of movement and change that Dracula does. However, as the Netflix series opens, it becomes clear the castle hasn't moved in a long time. It stands alone, across a field of human skeletons impaled on pikes, menacing the edges of human society.

> "You don't travel much do you?" asks Lisa.
>
> "I can travel," replies Dracula. "This entire structure is a traveling machine."
>
> "But, you don't. Do you?" says Lisa.[33]

Only after Lisa is executed does the castle and its master begin to move —and its movements are as devastating as the grief that wracks Dracula's heart. Using a combination of magic and machinery, Dracula causes his castle to vanish in a flash and reappear in a new locale with such violent force that the landscape is torn apart. The impact of the castle's arrival sends debris flying, bodies of water splashing into oblivion, and the skin of any living thing nearby to rip itself from the skeleton from which is clings.

"He's moving the castle again," mutters a vampire general in the beginning of season two. The castle's movements increase as Dracula withdraws into his pain. Arguments break out over what strategic military location the castle should arrive at next in the quest to exterminate humanity. As the conflict comes to a climax at the end of season two, Sypha, one of the three heroes,

uses her power to take control of the castle. The castle fights her efforts. This results in a rapid series of flashes with the castle violently appearing and reappearing in numerous locations—mirroring the struggle Dracula to let go of his grief as well as control his army.

As the fight ensues it becomes clear the struggle with the monster has been a struggle with the ghosts of the past. Dracula fights his son Alucard with wild rage. Alucard tells his father that he didn't kill him before and believes he won't do it now. "You want this to end as much as I do," says Alucard, before speaking the trauma out loud, echoing the suspicions of the vampire general earlier in the season. "You died when my mother died, you know you did. This entire catastrophe has been nothing but history's longest suicide note!"[34] Alucard voices the trauma that has haunted the entire plot, forcing Dracula to confront his pain.

As the words hang in the air and the dust clears, the rage in Dracula's eyes fades and lucidity returns. "My boy," says Dracula, "I'm... I'm killing my boy. And Lisa... I'm killing her boy...It's our boy, Lisa. Your greatest gift to me, and I'm killing him...I must already be dead."[35] The battle ends with Alucard staking Dracula through the heart, and both of them acknowledging each other as father and son.

Once Dracula is defeated another haunting scene plays out in the final episode as Alucard is left sitting in the ruins of his family home. As he sits in a chair in his old room, he the phantom of himself as a boy being held by the ghost of his mother. These specters bring him to tears. This reflects Cho's research, drawn from the work of Abraham and Torok, on transgenerational haunting. This type of haunting suggests "unspeakable trauma does not die to with the person who first experienced it." Instead it "takes on a life of its own."[36] Dracula's trauma manifested in violence and self-loathing, and he refused

to talk about it even when directly questioned by Carmilla. Even though Alucard names it at the end, and ends his father's suffering, he is left with phantoms in the hallways of his now empty castle.

The imagery of trauma may appeal to a modern audience due to the public traumas witnesses and experienced each day by the viewing audience. In a chapter entitled, "The Newsroom is No Longer a Safe Zone," media scholar Stephen Jukes outlines the effects of constant exposure to traumatic images/video uploaded by citizen journalists. Studies into secondary traumatic stress reveal symptoms of trauma in journalists due to the affective and "contagious impact" of images they view.[37] These images are not restricted to newsrooms, but also appear on social media.

A few studies suggest that traumatic images displayed on social media affect general audiences. Holman, Garfin, and Silver studied coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings, and found that increased exposure to traumatic events on social media increased viewers acute stress. "Widespread media coverage extends the boundaries of local disasters, transmitting their impact far beyond the directly exposed population and turning them into collective traumas with potentially detrimental health effects."[38] Pam Ramsden found indirect trauma occurred in 20 percent of her research subjects who were exposed to various intense images on social media, and subsequently "scored high on clinical measures of PTSD even though none of the individuals had previous trauma and were not present at the traumatic events…"[39] The graphic violence and trauma in Castlevania mirror the often visceral images uploaded to social media and fulfill a common function of horror genre—confronting the fear of death.

Christine S. Davis and Deborah C. Breede observe that people consume horror as a "coping mechanism."[40]

They note that the horror genre, which *Castlevania* belongs in, "represents a third space in which the living and the dead come together, and provide a way to bring the viewer closer to death in order to develop an acceptance and familiarity with the idea of our own mortality."[41] Horror functions as a "liminal space" (making it spectral) and an "avenue to play with death, examine it, try it out, and experience it, without actually going through with it."[42] *Castlevania*'s imagery and narrative help articulate and confront the affective experience of trauma for viewers exposed to the world's grief online each day.

Transgressylvania

The specter only acts as a metaphor for trauma and past that haunt the present, but also liminal spaces and "in-betweeness."[43] This aspect of spectrality relates will to the concepts discussed in Jerome's classic *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*. "The monstrous body is pure culture" that "is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again."[44] The monster "always escapes because it refuses easy categorization."[45] Monsters resist binaries and are "difference made flesh, come to dwell among us" acting as a "dialectical Other…an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond."[46] Monsters are "transgressive" of cultural norms, which means "the monster and all that it embodies must be exiled or destroyed."[47]

Stephen Asma, in *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, suggests that monsters act as an "emotional caricature" in the mind.[48] Monsters represent a corruption of humanity,[49] power relations based on who is "demonized,"[50] and function as a "cultural category" of omen.[51] Building off the work of Noel Carrol, Asma notes

how monsters are a form of "category jamming" which leads to "categorical slippage" that may explain people are both "repelled by and drawn to" figures of horror.[52] Our need to define the mixed reality of monsters in some kind of category creates a mixed feeling.

Another explanation for the simultaneous fascination and revulsion caused by monsters is taken from Freud. The Freudian concept of the "uncanny" and the subconscious leads Asma to suspect that we see a distortion (doppelgänger) of ourselves in monsters.[53] Because the "original desires and cravings of Id and Ego" are suppressed as people age, images of monsters reawaken them by suggesting a transgressive version of ourselves.[54] Monsters, as a cultural category, are liminal "others" that represent alternative versions of the self. The characters and creatures of *Castlevania* function transgressively from their artwork that represents them, to their actions within the plot that move the narrative along.

While the plot follows *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*,[55] the artwork is lifted from arguable most famous of the franchise, Castlevania: Symphony of the Night. The artwork on this game was done by Ayami Kojima. While Kojima did not work on the Netflix series, an interview with director Sam Deats reveals that the art team "obviously couldn't help but to reference the shit out of Ayami Kojima's work from Symphony of the Night onward."[56] The artwork may be considered in the *bishonen* style, which translates to "beautiful youth (boy)."[57] Characteristics of this style include males being tall with "slim, feminine faces, long hair and sweet smiles."58 The character design, even among many of the creatures of the night, have a *bishonen* feel. This creates a liminal look which transgresses atypical depictions of feminine and masculine qualities.

While each character has their own transgressive ways, a few examples from the three main heroes will suffice. Trevor Belmont comes from an excommunicated family of monster hunters. Trevor is both outcast and hero, savior and sinner, and the common folk aren't sure what to make of him, similar to Geralt of Rivia from *The Witcher* series. Trevor himself is reluctant to engage in any kind of questing, keeping his comments largely sarcastic and dismissive when anyone engages him on a deeper emotional level. Belmont simultaneously makes use of holy relics while condemning the Catholic Church. In season one he calls on a local priest to bless buckets of holy water in order to dispatch demons, only after inciting mob justice against a corrupt priest. He maintains complicated relationships with everyone he encounters, keeping him in a liminal space.

Sypha, the heroine, belongs to an order called The Speakers—a group of wandering scholars falsely accused by the Church for instigating Dracula's hordes due to their use of magic. According to Sypha, they also consider themselves "the enemy of God" and don't write their stories down so God "cannot strike them down in jealousy."[59] Yet they seek to aid the people and defeat the forces of darkness. Making them a liminal group, like the Belmonts, as good as monsters to the Church which seeks to exterminate them. Even the townspeople label Sypha a "witch" upon seeing her display magic powers, which she promptly denies. She also tells Trevor, "I did not ask you to fight for me. I fight for myself."[60]

Sypha's education in folk wisdom and magic represents both a threatening self-determination over against a hegemonic patriarchal system. She is a transgressor and an outcast, but also a hero whose education will lead to freedom from evil. Even an official online Twitter poll revealed that fans believe Sypha to have the "most badass finishing move" over against her

male counterparts in the final battle.[61] Sypha pushes against traditional roles, at times embodying both, contributing to her transgressive character.

Arguably the most transgressive character is Dracula and Lisa's son, Alucard. He is the product of two different races, torn between two different impulses, and friend of those who would kill his kind. In the first episode of season two, Alucard reflects on his identity while drawing pictures of his parents in the sand. He says:

> Alucard they called me, the opposite of you. Mother never liked that. Did you know that? She hated the idea that I might define myself by you, even in opposition to you. She loved us both. enough that she wanted us to be our own people…so here I am choosing to honor my mother by killing my father. No longer Adrian Tepes. Choosing to be Alucard of Wallachia the name of my mother's people.[62]

Despite being caught between multiple worlds, Sypha observes Alucard's loneliness, calling him a "cold spot in the room."[63] Alucard is always "other."

The transgressive nature of *Castlevania*'s characters fit well within a culture that questions binaries. White privilege, patriarchy, and heteronormativity are but a few of the traditional constructs questioned in contemporary culture and in *Castlevania*. The mixed races, monsters, unconventional roles, and even Carmilla's allusion to a fluid sexual orientation[64] resonate with the zeitgeist of a contemporary audiences. This transgressive theme is also present in discussions related to fandom's connection with religious experience.

Liturgy of Monsters

During an interview at Power Morphicon (a gathering for fans of *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*) about fandom and the second season of his Netflix Castlevania series, Adi Shankar claimed that the brands of pop culture constitute "our new religion."[65] Shankar claims, "It's our mythology. And I really think, all the high art today, no one's going to remember that shit in 200 years. They're gonna remember franchises and video games."[66] Film and journalism critic Eric Francisco points out that *Castlevania* is "fueled by Shankar's faith to the kind of generational pop culture."[67] This grows out of Shankar's childhood experience of living in the United States for "two short years" which "impressed upon him mythology that lasted a lifetime."[68] The American idea of changing the world so it can be different tomorrow than it is today is the transgressive mythology that spoke to Shankar in his formative years. This resembles Smith's concept of "secular liturgy" which act as "ritual forces" in culture that operate by "capturing our imaginations."[69]

Fandom has often been compared to religion, with mixed reactions. Andrew Crome writes that religion is often framed as "emotional rather than rational" and is "used to justify bizarre, irrational behavior that makes no sense outside of the religious worldview."[70] Crome notes that sometimes religion deserves this criticism, but "more often than not the religious comparison aims to 'other' both religion and fandom."[71] Interestingly, this comparison is rooted in the "Enlightenment dualistic division of reason and emotion."[72] Those within fandoms, such as the "bronies"[73] of *My Little Pony*, push back by pointing out that fandoms have their own internal logics and rationality, demonstrating "they were on the 'right' side of the rational/emotional binary."[74]

Fandoms represent a kind of cultural monster that not only challenges the hegemony of traditional religion, but

the hegemony of Enlightenment dualism that separates reason from emotion, and the rational from the imaginative. In light of several past discussions about whether fandom and religion belong together, and the wariness of some to embrace that comparison, what makes Castlevania unique is its producer's brazen declaration that it is in fact a religion.

The interviewer notes how "Shankar has weaponized his religion" to cover a wide range of high production tributes to the classics of popular culture in what is known as his "Bootleg Universe."[75] Shankar says, "What we do is we take mythology and we adapt it in a cool way while still preserving the mythology…It's by fans for fans, versus by no one for a corporation."[76] In the article fandom is considered the "new religion," the "internet is a recruitment tool" and "information about them [fandoms] is disseminated infinitely faster than Gutenberg could print the Bible."[77] Shankar believes that brands "be looked at as religions than consumer products" in that they are "as powerful as religion."[78] Fandoms make up "a personal relationship with an entity, a universe" with a "sense of ownership."[79] Shankar concludes by stating that "good entertainment" is "spectacle and truth."[80] *Castlevania*'s success reflects Shankar's religious devotion to his subject matter, as well as other fans of the series.

Within *Castlevania* itself, there exists a complicated relationship with religion. In many of the games the protagonist uses the cross, the Bible, and holy water as sub-weapons to fight the forces of darkness. Additionally, many of the games feature a level based on a chapel with baroque organ music playing in the background. The game *Symphony of the Night* opens with a religious dialogue between Richter Belmont and Dracula:

> "You steal men's souls," cries Belmont, "and make them your slaves."
>
> "Perhaps the same could be said of all religions," replies Dracula.[81]

The game also features a confessional that Alucard, the main character, can sit in. He either sits in the place of a priest, where a ghostly confessor attends the booth (and shoves knives through the confessional wall to the detriment of the player); or Alucard can confess to a ghostly priest who appears to absolve him of his sins.

In *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*, the player takes on the acolytes of Satan, as well as the Devil, while maintaining a critique of God's workings. This back and forth with religious imagery, religious critique, and use of religious artifacts finds its way into Shankar's *Castlevania*. Some believe the series contains a "brazen anti-religiosity"[82] due to the depiction of the Catholic Church, it's banishment and blaming of the Belmont family, and the brutal execution of Dracula's wife as a witch. However, as in the games, the relationship is more nuanced.

First, there is undeniably a criticism of traditional religion. This occurs in the portrayal of the Church as a monster that demonizes anyone outside its strict orthodox. It also occurs in an exchange inside a cathedral between a demonic monster named Blue Fangs who speaks to the Archbishop responsible for Lisa's death:

> "You cannot enter the house of God," declares the bishop.
>
> "God is not here," replies the demon. "This is an empty box."
>
> "God is in all His churches," protests the bishop.

> "Your God's love is not unconditional," the demon informs the
>
> increasingly agitated bishop. "He does not love us. And He does not love you."[83]

Blue Fangs continues to inform the bishop that the work of the clergyman makes God "puke" and "Your God knows that we wouldn't be here without you. This is all your fault." The demon ends his exchange by "kissing" the bishop with its maw of razor-sharp teeth.[84]

Yet, within this exchange God himself is not portrayed negatively. This dynamic is picked up by Alejandra Reynoso who voices the character of Sypha. She is a practicing Christian and gave an interview to Mithical Entertainment about her faith as it relates to her work on Castlevania. She shares how she sees the series revealing the historical reality that the church was not always following Jesus. She even let her conservative evangelical mother watch it who loved the series and agreed that it isn't anti-God, it is anti-religious abuse.[85] This demonstrates how the depiction and criticism of religion in *Castlevania* resonates with some believers.

Other pro-religious elements include the acknowledgement of weaponry, such as Trevor's whip, that has been consecrated in a church in order to give it power. While Sypha acknowledges that her people, The Speakers, are "enemies of God" (due to a fear He would repeat the incident at the Tower of Babel), she also refers casually to concepts like the Garden of Eden when researching a solution to Dracula's Castle's ability to move. Additionally, Sypha practices folk religion that uses magic feared by the Church but praised by the ones she saves. Her blend of biblical knowledge and magic create a unique religious creature within the series.

Even the treacherous vampire Carmilla utilizes the power of faith. Towards the end of season two, she uses a

dead priest, resurrected by Hector, to "bless" the waters of a river, making the lethal to the vampire war council.[86] Religion takes on an instrumental quality in the series, something to be used for good or evil. In this respect Shankar uses his "new religion" of fandom to critique the perceived monstrosities of an old one.

In an insightful article on contemporary religion, Tara Isabella Burton observes that for many "left-leaning millennials" the occult has become a "metaphysical canvas for the American culture wars in the post-Trump era: pitting the self-identified Davids of seemingly secular progressivism against the Goliath of nationalist evangelical Christianity."[87] Burton suggests that the aesthetic of "contemporary millennial 'witch culture' defines itself as the cosmic counterbalance to Trumpian evangelicalism. It's at once progressive and transgressive, using the language of the chaotic, the spiritually dangerous, and (at times) the diabolical to chip at the edifices of what it sees as a white, patriarchal Christianity that has become a *de facto* state religion."[88] Millennials take the symbols of occult practice and fuse them with "the worldly ethos of modern social justice."[89] As people experiment with new religious expressions, they may find the eclectic spiritual mix of *Castlevania*'s fandom appealing, inspiring, or even empowering.

Conclusion

This article has explored the monsters of Netflix's *Castlevania* series through the lens of spectrality as it relates to trauma, monster theory, and the new religion of fandom. The series is fueled by Dracula's trauma at losing his human wife to the monstrous actions of the Catholic Church. It is portrayed through his actions in the narrative as well as the manic and destructive movements of his castle. Given the constant presence of

trauma exposed in the media, viewers may be drawn to the imagery and personification of trauma in the series.

Spectrality deals with liminality and transgression, something that coincides with monster theory. Monsters are thought by some to be transgressive versions of ourselves, which is why we are both drawn to and repelled by them. *Castlevania*'s characters are all transgressive. In an age where binaries are protested, the transgressive nature of the characters may strike a chord with online audiences. Even the form of the show, in addition to the content, transgresses in ways that fit within hauntological remix culture.

Shankar's religious approach to fandom makes use of various mythic tropes and imagery in the series, while being radically devoted to presenting the *Castlevania* material in ways that resonate with long time fans. Traditional religion is critiqued within the form of Shankar's "new religion" of fandom. It's employment of occult religious symbols and dialogue, blended with traditional religion, fit within contemporary millennial progressive occult critique of religious hegemonies.

The trailer for season two of *Castlevania* markets the series with the line, "It takes a monster to fight a monster."[90] Monsters of all kinds terrify other monsters in the show. Whether it is literal monsters, mixed races like Alucard, monster hunters terrorizing creatures of the night, a smart woman threatening church authority, or a medium of entertainment presenting itself as a new religion to attack an old one, monsters abound in *Castlevania*. Perhaps that is the show's major cultural commentary that warrants attention: we are all monsters to someone.

Notes

1. The *Castlevania* series revolves around the Belmont Family and their never-ending quest to stop Dracula and his evil hordes. Each game features a member of the Belmont clan, which varies depending on the historical setting of each game. The player, as a Belmont, fights their way through Dracula's monstrous and massive castle. As players work through each part of the castle, they meet a classic mash up of monsters from Medusa to Frankenstein to the Grim Reaper to do battle with. In the third installment, Dracula's son, Alucard, became a playable character alongside members of the Belmont clan, helping to put a stop to his father. In the series' most acclaimed installment, *Symphony of the Night*, Alucard is the main character attempting to stop his father Dracula's latest return to power.
2. A "fresh rating" means an aggregate score of positive film reviews that is at least 60%. *Castlevania* currently holds a 90% rating.
3. Ben Gilbert, "Netflix Somehow Managed to Make a Great TV Show Based on a Video Game," *Business Insider*, 13 July 2017, https://www.businessinsider.com/castlevania-netflix-review-2017-7.
4. Nathalie Medina, "Netflix's Awesome 'Castlevania' Show Has Been Confirmed For Season 3," *Newsweek*, 9 June 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/netflix-castlevania-show-season-3-confirmed-968414.
5. Simply put, a specter is a ghostly presence that manifests as a felt absence, a liminal thing, or an unresolved pain from the past that breaks into the present.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (New York: Routledge, 1994), viii.
7. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 1.
8. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 139.
9. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 139.
10. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, "Introduction: A Future for Haunting," in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and History,* eds. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999), 1-20.
11. Roger Luckhurst, "'Something Tremendous, Something Elemental': On the Ghostly Origins of Psychoanalysis," in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, and History,* eds. Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999), 50-71.
12. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen, "Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities," in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, eds. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1-28.
13. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.
14. Sharon V. Betcher, "Running the Gauntlet of Humiliation: Disablement in/as Trauma," in *Post-Traumatic Public Theology*, eds. Stephanie N. Arel and Shelly Rambo (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 66.
15. Katy Shaw, *Hauntology: The Presence of the Past in Twenty-First Century English Literature* (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.
16. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 46.
17. Sam Deats, dir., "Witchbottle," *Castlevania,* season 1, episode 1, Netflix, 2017.
18. Deats, "Witchbottle."
19. Betcher, "Running the Gauntlet of Humiliation," 64.
20. Deats, "Witchbottle."
21. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16:4 (Spring 1986): 24.
22. Sam Deats, dir., "War Council," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 1, Netflix, 2018.
23. Deats, "War Council."
24. "'Male and Female He Created Them': Towards a Path of Dialogue On the Question of Gender Theory in Education," *Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions),* Vatican City, 2 February 2019, http://www.educatio.va/content/dam/cec/Documenti/19_0997_INGLESE.pdf
25. Sam Deats and Spencer Wan, dirs., "Old Homes," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 2, Netflix, 2018.
26. Sam Deats and Adam Deats, dirs., "Shadow Battles," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 3, Netflix, 2018.
27. Jacques Derrida, *Cinders* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 51.
28. Deats and Deats, "Shadow Battles."
29. Sam Deats, dir., "Broken Mast," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 4, Netflix, 2018.
30. Victor Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 18.
31. Mike Flanagan, dir., "Witness Marks," *The Haunting of Hill House*, season 1, episode 7, Netflix, 2018.
32. *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, written by Toru Hagihara and Koji Igarashi, developed by Konami, 1997, Disc.
33. Deats, "Witchbottle."
34. Sam Deats, dir., "For Love," *Castlevania,* season 2, episode 7, Netflix, 2018.
35. Sam Deats, dir., "End Times," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 8, Netflix, 2018.
36. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 6.

37. Stephen Jukes, 'The Newsroom is No Longer Safe,' in *Affect and Social Media: Emotion, Mediation, Anxiety, and Contagion*, eds. Tony D. Sampson, Stephen Maddison, and Darren Ellis (New York: Rowman & Littlefield), 170 and 175.
38. E. Alison Holman, Dana Rose Garfin, and Roxane Cohen Silver, "Media's Role in Broadcasting Acute Stress Following the Boston Marathon Bombings," in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States* 111:1 (2014): 93-98.
39. Pam Ramsden, "Vicarious Trauma, PTSD, and Social Media: Does Watching Graphic Videos Cause Trauma?" *Journal of Depression and Anxiety* 6:3 (2017): 54.
40. Christine S. Davis and Deborah C. Breede, *Talking Through Death: Communicating about Death in Interpersonal, Mediated, and Cultural Contexts* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 20.
41. David and Breede, *Talking Through Death*, 23.
42. David and Breede, *Talking Throughout Death,* 23.
43. Liz Millward, "Un áeroport-fantôme' The Ghost of Mirabel International Airport," in *Spectral Spaces and Hauntings: The Affects of Absence*, ed. Christina Lee (New York: Routledge, 2017), 103-104.
44. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3-25.
45. Cohen, "Monster Culture", 6.
46. Cohen, "Monster Culture", 7.
47. Cohen, "Monster Culture", 16.
48. Stephen Asma, *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.
49. Asma, *On Monsters*, 9.
50. Asma, *On Monsters*, 10.
51. Asma, *On Monsters*, 13.
52. Asma, *On Monsters,* 184.
53. Asma, *On Monsters*, 188.
54. Asma, *On Monsters*, 189-190.
55. *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*, directed by Hitoshi Akamatsu, developed by Konami, 1989, NES Cartridge.
56. Peter Glagowski, "10 Years of Purgatory Wasn't Enough to Keep Netflix's Castlevania Down," *Destructoid*, 10 July 2017, https://www.destructoid.com/10-years-of-purgatory-wasn-t-enough-to-keep-netflix-s-castlevania-down-447906.phtml.
57. Sun Jung, "The Shared Imagination of Bishonen, Pan-East Asian Soft Masculinity: Reading DBSK, Youtube.Com and Transcultural New Media Consumption," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 20, (2009): 16.
58. Jung, "The Shared Imagination," 16.
59. Sam Deats, dir., "Last Spell," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 5, Netflix, 2018.
60. Sam Deats, dir., "Monument," *Castlevania,* season 1, episode 4, Netflix, 2017.
61. Adrian Fahrenheit Tepes, tweet on November 23, 2018: https://twitter.com/Castlevania/status/1066106140793040896
62. Deats, "War Council."

63. Deats, "Broken Mast."
64. Deats and Wan, "Old Homes."
65. Eric Francisco, "Castlevania Producer Ada Shankar Says 'Fandom Is Our New Religion,'" *Inverse,* 28 September 2018, https://www.inverse.com/article/49395-castlevania-producer-adi-shankar-says-fandom-is-the-new-religion-power-rangers.
66. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
67. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
68. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
69. James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 88.
70. Andrew Crome, "Religion and the Pathologization of Fandom: Religion, Reason, and Controversy in *My Little Pony* Fandom," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 27:2 (2015): 130-147.
71. Crome, "Religion and the Pathologization of Fandom," 130-147.
72. Crome, "Religion and the Pathologization of Fandom," 131.
73. A bronie (or sometimes "brony") is a male fan of the series *My Little Pony*."
74. Crome, "Religion and the Pathologizatiob of Fandom," 142.
75. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
76. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
77. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
78. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
79. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88.
80. Francisco, "Fandom Is Our New Religion."
81. *Castlevania Symphony of the Night,* Hagihara and Igarashi.
82. Eric Weiss, "Netflix's Castlevania Takes Aim at Religion," *Polygon*, 29 July 2017, https://www.polygon.com/tv/2017/7/29/16062578/netflix-castlevania-religion-corruption-warren-ellis.
83. Deats, "Monument."
84. Deats, "Monument."
85. "Mithical Entertainment Interviews: Alejandra Reynoso," *The Geekly Grind*, 11 August 2017, http://www.thegeeklygrind.com/mithical-entertainment-interviews-alejandra-reynoso/.
86. Sam Deats and Spencer Wan, dirs., "The River," *Castlevania*, season 2, episode 6, Netflix, 2018.
87. Tara Isabella Burton, "The Great Awokening: The Rise of Progressive Occultism," *The American* Interest, 7 June 2019, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/06/07/the-rise-of-progressive-occultism/
88. Burton, "The Great Awokening," emphasis in original.
89. Burton, "The Great Awokening."
90. Mirko Parlevliet, "Castlevania Season 2 Trailer: It Takes a Monster to Fight a Monster," *Vital Thrills*, 28 July 2018, https://www.vitalthrills.com/2018/07/28/castlevania-season-2-trailer/.

Satan-Prométhée:

Une lecture alternative du mal dans le satanisme contemporain

Mathieu Colin
Institut d'études religieuses, Université de Montréal

Abstrait

Parmi toutes les figures du Mal et du monstrueux, Satan est certainement la plus importante. Pourtant, l'ange déchu de la tradition chrétienne s'est vu donner une nouvelle signification lorsqu'au XIX^{ème} siècle certains poètes comme Byron ou Blake ont choisi cette figure pour incarner des valeurs comme la liberté et la rébellion contre les autorités tyranniques et dogmatiques. Satan a ainsi perdu sa monstruosité pour endosser le rôle du libérateur en tant que symbole de science et d'autodétermination, de libre-pensée. Mais Satan-Prométhée, de par son assimilation avec le Titan des mythes grecs, devait être amené à jouer un plus grand rôle dans les courants ésotériques ainsi que dans les nouveaux mouvements religieux du XX^{ème} siècle. Le satanisme contemporain a utilisé cette figure pour codifier une philosophie transgressive, dans laquelle l'individu est mis en valeur et utilise son potentiel. Cet article entend donc démontrer comment le satanisme contemporain, dans sa forme rationaliste, procède à une lecture alternative du Mal en faisant de Satan la figure centrale d'une nouvelle pensée, qui d'une part révèle les enjeux sociaux de son temps, et qui d'autre part questionne le rapport à la corporéité, à l'identité individuelle et collective, ainsi qu'à la transgression des normes établies.

Mots clés: Satanisme, Satan, Mal, Anton LaVey, Église de Satan, Temple Satanique, États-Unis

> Satan represents man as just another animal, sometimes better, more often worse than those that walk on all-fours, who, because of his "divine spiritual and intellectual development", has become the most vicious animal of all ![1]

Lorsque Anton LaVey, fondateur de l'Église de Satan à San Francisco en 1966, rédige cette phrase dans sa célèbre *Satanic Bible* (1969), c'est toute la conception de Satan qui est redéfinie à travers le prisme de la philosophie qu'il codifie dans cet ouvrage : le satanisme contemporain, du moins dans sa forme laVeyenne.[2] Satan, dans cette nouvelle branche de l'ésotérisme occidental, est un concept post-chrétien,[3] bien éloigné des conceptions et des transformations théologiques ou religieuses qu'a subi le diable dans la tradition chrétienne. Ce n'est plus seulement l'entité démoniaque nommée « Le père des mensonges »[4] ou celui que l'on associe parfois à la Grande Bête de l'Apocalypse (Ap. 13:18), figure du Mal absolu et éternel, opposition axiomatique à Dieu. Repris et développé par certains poètes du XIX^{ème} siècle, que Robert Southey nommera la « Satanic School of Romanticism »[5] (Blake, Shelley, Byron), Satan est peu à peu sorti d'un paradigme purement chrétien pour le réinterpréter à l'aune de discours et de narrations prônant la modernité, la science, la rébellion, la libération sexuelle. Satan, éternel rebelle en guerre contre l'Éternel lui-même devient alors, dans ces discours sécularisants résultant de la philosophie des Lumières et du progrès scientifique, le symbole de ces valeurs face à Dieu et au christianisme figurant l'obscurantisme religieux ainsi que le dogmatisme.[6] Satan s'anthropomorphise, se rationalise et mute, jusqu'à devenir indissociable de l'homme dans le satanisme théorisé par LaVey en 1969. Cette branche du satanisme contemporain, que Jesper Aagaard Petersen nommera « rationaliste »[7] dans *Contemporary Religious Satanism* (2009), est définie par certaines caractéristiques qui évoluent encore aujourd'hui : « atheistic, sceptical, epicurean materialism as formulated by Anton LaVey in *The Satanic Bible* and other writings, and then expounded upon by a host of spokerspersons in the following years. […] Science, philosophy and intuition are advocated as autho-

rity ».[8] Satan devient donc le symbole d'une philosophie athée célébrant la figure diabolique comme représentant certaines valeurs antithétiques au christianisme, mais, qui, surtout la considère comme un symbole de la matérialité, et de l'homme lui-même.

Dans cet article, je me propose donc d'étudier l'appropriation, mais surtout la transformation de Satan dans la branche rationaliste du satanisme contemporain. Cette mouvance codifie une version inédite de l'ange déchu, défini non pas par sa monstruosité ou par son caractère malveillant, mais au contraire en le redéfinissant comme un symbole particulier de pouvoir et de réflexion à destination des marginaux et des individus qui se considèrent opprimés par les systèmes traditionnels. Secondement, cette branche du satanisme est athée, matérialiste et ne postule pas l'existence réelle d'une entité démoniaque, la vision de Satan est donc intrinsèquement liée à ce qu'est l'homme, à sa manière d'être-au-monde et d'interagir avec ses semblables, à la vision qu'un individu a de lui-même et de ses actions à travers un prisme symbolique. En étudiant la figure de Satan dans le satanisme rationaliste, nous verrons comment ce qui était considéré comme monstrueux est redéfini en tant que symbole de pouvoir et de marginalité par des individus en quête de sens, qui revendiquent leur vision de ce symbole au sein d'une frange culturelle nommée le « satanic milieu ».[9] De plus, la diffusion internationale du satanisme à partir du succès médiatique de la *Satanic Bible* de LaVey, dont les ventes atteignent plusieurs centaines de milliers d'exemplaires entre 1969 et aujourd'hui,[10] en fait un phénomène incontournable dans le milieu des contre-cultures, mais également dans l'imaginaire occidental, à la suite de paniques morales telles que la fameuse « Panique Satanique »[11] des années 1980 aux États-Unis. Ainsi, étudier la figure de Satan dans le satanisme rationaliste, c'est à la fois analyser une redéfinition de ce qu'est Satan

et ce qu'est l'homme, mais également la façon dont un imaginaire progresse et évolue dans le monde, comment une transformation culturelle, sociale, voire politique s'opère à travers un symbole particulier.

Ce qui suit se penche d'abord sur la figure de Satan chez Anton LaVey et la manière dont l'individu lui est lié, dont il peut en bénéficier symboliquement et matériellement, avant de s'intéresser aux évolutions politiques et culturelles de la figure de Satan dans le satanisme rationaliste à la suite de cette première codification. Ces changements prennent en compte les mutations de paradigmes religieux et sociaux américains et inscrivent l'individu dans une société et dans un rapport au monde. Nous verrons comment un groupe récent, le Temple Satanique a contribué à faire évoluer la figure de Satan, et nous étudierons aussi des formes politiques du satanisme que ce groupe a engendrées, basées sur la transgression et le rapport au pouvoir dans la sphère publique. Nous procéderons méthodologiquement par une analyse historique de l'évolution de Satan dans les principaux systèmes de pensée du satanisme rationaliste, de 1966 à nos jours. Nous nous demanderons ainsi comment la transformation de Satan dans le satanisme rationaliste, à l'aune des paradigmes et des enjeux contemporains, nous informe sur la manière dont l'individu se rapporte à la société à laquelle il est lié en utilisant la force symbolique de cette figure sulfureuse.

Satan : l'Homme-Dieu d'Anton LaVey

Dans la perspective laVeyenne, Satan devient indissociable de l'homme. Ce qu'il faut comprendre, c'est qu'à la manière des écrivains de la « Satanic School», la figure de Satan devient un réceptacle philosophique dont on conserve l'esthétique. Ainsi, la figure du Mal de la tradition chrétienne garde son esthétique diabolique,

mais sa signification devient autre, écartée d'un paradigme chrétien. En ce sens, Satan devient bien un concept post-chrétien en étant dépouillé de sa tradition : «Satan is the Adversary or ultimate rebel and is thus symbolically a stance one takes in the pursuit of self interest and self development. All in all, the Satan of Satanism is heavily detraditionalized and, while nominally tied to Christianity, cannot be understood in strictly Christian sense ».[12] LaVey entreprend alors un bricolage dans le sens que lui donne Lévi-Strauss, c'est-à-dire une tentative de créer un contenu homogène par le biais de différentes traditions, en particulier philosophiques. Ainsi, Satan devient la représentation symbolique de philosophies constituant le cœur doctrinal du satanisme dans sa forme laVeyenne, à savoir notamment celles de Nietzsche (que LaVey interprète à sa façon afin de servir ses théories) et d'Ayn Rand. Satan devient l'Antéchrist évoqué dans l'ouvrage éponyme de Nietzsche, en étant l'incarnation des valeurs nietzschéennes, de la pulsion de vie à la volonté de puissance : « Qu'est-ce qui est bon ? Tout ce qui exalte en l'Homme le sentiment de puissance, la volonté de puissance, la puissance même. Qu'est-ce qui est mauvais? Tout ce qui vient de la faiblesse ».[13] LaVey transforme la figure de Satan en catalyseur de puissance pour l'homme : « Satanism demands study, not worship »[14] rétablissant l'ordre des valeurs qui a été inversé par le christianisme (LaVey simplifie et adapte bien sûr Nietzsche à sa philosophie). Grâce au symbole de Satan, le fort retrouve enfin la domination naturelle qu'il doit avoir sur les faibles et sur ses ennemis : « Hate your enemies with a whole heart, and if a man smite you on one cheek, SMASH him on the other! Smite him hip and thigh, for self-preservation is the highest law! »[15] Le darwinisme social de *Might is Right* (1896) est réadapté, la figure de Satan y est incorporée et interprétée de façon à servir les objectifs esthétiques du satanisme de LaVey.[16] Satan est

l'incarnation des valeurs aristocratiques défendues par Nietzsche, en tant que symbole métonymique d'un ensemble philosophique mettant en avant le culte de l'individu, considéré comme la plus haute valeur qui soit. Satan n'est autre que la voie à suivre dans la volonté de puissance. Car c'est bien là le but suprême du satanisme de LaVey : faire de l'individu le centre de l'univers, son propre dieu. Puisque le sataniste est athée, et considère que l'univers est indifférent à sa présence, alors sa puissance créatrice et son potentiel sont les seuls éléments de divinité dignes d'être vénérés : « Is it not more sensible to worship a god that he, himself, has created, in accordance with his own emotional needs—one that best represents the very carnal and physical being that has the idea-power to invent a god in the first place? ».[17] De par sa symbolique individualiste d'Adversaire (LaVey l'identifie directement à son étymologie hébraïque) des systèmes de pensée dogmatiques, Satan devient ainsi l'outil symbolique duquel dispose l'individu pour apprendre à connaître son potentiel interne. Il est à la fois un symbole de provocation et de révélation à soi-même, et par là fortement marqué de l'idéologie New Age qui théorise la volonté d'explorer une spiritualité de façon individuelle.[18] Pour LaVey, suivant la conception de Lévi exprimée dans *Histoire de la magie* (1859), « Satan n'est donc pas un dieu noir, mais la négation de l'idée de Dieu »,[19] soit son antithèse, l'individu dans toute la puissance de sa volonté:

> When all religious faith in lies has waned, it is because man has become closer to himself and farther from "God"; closer to the "Devil." If this is what the devil represents, and a man lives his life in the devil's fane, with the sinews of Satan moving in his flesh, then he either escapes from the cacklings and carpings of the righteous, or stands proudly in his secret places of the earth and manipulates the folly-

> ridden masses through his own Satanic might, until that day when he may come forth in splendor proclaiming "I AM A SATANIST! BOW DOWN, FOR I AM THE HIGHEST EMBODIMENT OF HUMAN LIFE ! [20]

Dans cette optique, le sataniste n'est autre que la représentation de Satan lui-même : puisque Satan est l'incarnation de la vie charnelle, de la matérialité et des valeurs aristocratiques, le sataniste est bien au sommet de la pyramide humaine. Il n'est plus seulement un athée, il est un « I-theist »[21] concept formé par le successeur de LaVey à la tête de l'Église de Satan en 2001, Peter H. Gilmore. Bien entendu, il ne faut pas occulter pour autant le caractère provocateur de la figure de Satan, qui est utilisée pour faire réagir et offenser. LaVey déclare lui-même que Satan est une figure amusante et utile[22] pour conceptualiser un cadre philosophique en rupture avec les religions traditionnelles, ainsi qu'avec le cadre culturel dominant. Toutefois, l'appropriation et la redéfinition de la figure de Satan dans cette première émanation du satanisme contemporain marquent l'utilisation inédite d'un concept religieux au service d'un cadre philosophique esthétisé, dans lequel Satan remplace la psyché individuelle en s'appropriant des caractéristiques humaines.

Mieux encore, il devient l'individu lui-même. Ainsi, même lorsque LaVey semble parler en termes théologiques[23] de Satan comme s'il existait une réelle entité, ce n'est en fait qu'une stratégie discursive afin de créer un cadre esthétique et théâtral qui a pour but de renforcer l'action individuelle, via une stimulation symbolique : « However, such talk of a seemingly personal Satan is intended to reinforce or empower the individual Satanist's "rational self-interest". Ritual, magic and lifestyle are boosted by such "psychodrama" » .[24] Le théâtre est un élément essentiel du satanisme laVeyen,

car il est lié directement à la figure de Satan lui-même. Dans le cadre d'un rituel, le sataniste sait que ce qu'il s'apprête à invoquer n'existe en fait pas : il s'agit de ce que LaVey appelle « un cadre d'ignorance contrôlée ».[25] Mais puisqu'il s'apprête à utiliser une forme cérémonielle de magie, ce qui est nommé « Greater Magic »[26] dans *The Satanic Bible*, l'individu transcende tout de même son expérience en relâchant ses émotions dans la chambre rituelle, par la catharsis, et « devient » Satan, car il fait acte de création et d'altération du monde, la magie satanique étant vue comme une transformation de la réalité par le biais de la volonté.[27] Le sataniste ne « croit » pas réellement que son action magique ait pu avoir un effet sur le monde physique puisqu'il nie toute sorte de transcendance divine ou surnaturelle, mais le rituel a agi sur ses émotions en lui permettant de relâcher son Être dans la chambre rituelle. En somme, Satan est volonté faite chair. Satan est l'immanence du potentiel humain, un sens donné dans un univers indifférent.

Mais surtout, puisque l'individu devient le centre de son univers, Satan devient le symbole de l'ego du Soi, de l'individu égocentrique. Satan est l'*hybris*, autour duquel l'univers évolue. Chaque individu persévère dans son être en accomplissant ses désirs, en se satisfaisant d'abord soi-même. En ce sens, il est le réceptacle de la philosophie objectiviste d'Ayn Rand : l'individu est à soi-même sa plus haute valeur, et seul l'individu souverain peut ensuite déterminer la hiérarchie des valeurs grâce à laquelle il va agir dans le monde. Pour Rand, l'acte altruiste n'existe pas : un acte est toujours une gratification pour l'ego, qui maximise les résultats bénéfiques pour l'individu.[28] L'acte altruiste est un sacrifice inutile, puisque l'on sacrifie sa plus haute valeur, soi-même : « Objectivism would say: your highest moral purpose is the accomplishment of your own happiness ».[29] Inspiré par Rand, Anton LaVey déclare dans le Livre de Lucifer, deuxième section de *The Satanic Bible* : « It is unnatural not to have desire to gain

things for yourself. Satanism represents a form of controlled selfishness ».[30] La similarité des deux extraits est peu étonnante, puisque LaVey lui-même reconnaissait l'influence majeure d'Ayn Rand sur son travail.[31] Mais surtout, Satan est celui que l'on a tu pendant trop longtemps, et qui parvient finalement à exprimer sa voix. Ainsi, l'individu opprimé, à savoir le sataniste, parvient finalement à se faire entendre et à s'imposer. LaVey laisse ainsi directement s'exprimer Satan dans le Livre de Satan, première section quasi liturgique de son ouvrage majeur, afin que l'éthique contraire au christianisme soit révélée : « We see it as an attempt to achieve the "truth of fantasy": Satan speaks (although he is but a symbol), and through his words the "emotional truth" of life as it is and society as it should not have become, is expressed ».[32] Satan est la voix des élites que la société a fait taire. La figure diabolique ne représente pas que la voix de l'individu opprimé, mais elle est également porteuse d'une éthique. Les Neuf Affirmations Sataniques en sont un exemple, dans lequel le terme « Satan » se confond avec l'individu: « 2. Satan represents vital existence, instead of spiritual pipe dreams! 3. Satan represents undefiled wisdom, instead of hypocritical self-deceit! ».[33] Ce culte de Satan n'est autre qu'un culte de l'individu qui propose une nouvelle éthique, une nouvelle manière d'envisager autrui et son propre rapport à l'existence, puisque Satan est avant tout force de vie et force de la nature, immanente et absolue, qui infuse l'Homme-Dieu que le satanisme laVeyen cherche à créer. Le sataniste est donc considéré comme un être en dehors de la société ordinaire, des masses serviles influencées par l'éthique chrétienne.[34] Il est l'individu qui jouit de sa liberté, de sa sexualité et de sa volonté comme il l'entend, puisque Satan est le symbole de cette liberté retrouvée en dehors des dogmes et des normes religieuses traditionnelles. Satan est cette pulsion de vie dionysiaque retrouvée.

Ainsi, le satanisme de LaVey s'inclut bien dans le paradigme des années 1960 : il s'identifie aux pratiques New Age mettant en avant l'individualisation de la spiritualité et donnant à l'individu une réponse à ses questions, ainsi qu'un système de pensée qui permet de mettre en œuvre sa volonté dans le monde. Il est un élément nouveau du « cultic milieu » décrit par Colin Campbell, ce laboratoire d'expérimentations religieuses issu de la perte d'autorité et d'influences des religions traditionnelles dans l'Amérique des années 1950 et 1960, où les groupes s'organisent selon une idéologie individualiste de « seekership », mettant en avant une quête spirituelle individuelle.[35] Là où l'approche est nouvelle, c'est que LaVey est le premier à codifier une philosophie sataniste, en faisant du satanisme une religion antinomique où l'ego est vénéré en se confondant avec la figure à la base de cette religion, Satan.[36] À travers les tendances philosophiques qu'il symbolise, Satan est aussi une tentative d'ancrer le discours du satanisme dans une perspective philosophique et scientifique, en tant que symbole de la rationalité et de l'athéisme, stratégie déjà utilisée par un certain nombre de groupes ésotériques,[37] mettant en exergue un darwinisme social assumé. Dans le même temps, il sécularise également le contenu ésotérique en mettant l'accent sur la modernité d'une telle philosophie. En jouant sur tous les tableaux, Anton LaVey a fait de Satan une figure ambivalente. Il réclame d'une part son héritage chrétien en insistant sur son image d'antagoniste de Dieu et des valeurs chrétiennes ; et d'autre part, en le situant dans une sphère ésotérique et matérialiste où il est celui qui se confond avec l'homme qui impose sa volonté par une forme de magie cathartique, il fait de Satan un symbole de la puissance matérielle, (entendue dans le sens de matérialiste) et de la chair. Enfin, il le figure comme le symbole de la science et de la libre-pensée d'une élite, détachée du monde et de

la masse, qui comprend les enjeux de la modernité offerte par la société où l'individu est roi. L'approche psychologisante de Satan comme représentant la nature humaine[38] est un élément inédit dans la redéfinition de cette figure au XXème siècle, qui illustre en même temps l'individualisation des pratiques spirituelles et religieuses et l'accent mis sur l'individu ainsi que la nature de son corps dans l'univers. Toutefois, cette vision de Satan, et donc de l'individu, comme égocentrique, élitiste et détaché de la sphère publique va être remise en question en 2012 suite à l'émergence de celle qui est désormais la plus grosse organisation sataniste internationale, et faisant également partie de la branche rationaliste : le Temple Satanique (*The Satanic Temple*).

Le Temple Satanique : Satan comme bienfaiteur et symbole de compassion

L'Église de Satan est restée maîtresse de la branche rationaliste durant plus de 50 ans, avant qu'une nouvelle organisation vienne mettre à mal sa suprématie dans le « satanic milieu » : le Temple Satanique. Celui-ci propose une toute nouvelle lecture du satanisme en tant qu'arme politique et séculariste, alors que le satanisme laVeyen prenait grand soin de rester en dehors de la sphère politique et publique.[39] Bien entendu, cette nouvelle forme de satanisme est issue d'un changement de paradigme ainsi que d'une mutation de l'imaginaire américain, et entraîne une redéfinition de la figure de Satan elle-même. Si le Satan d'Anton LaVey était issu du paradigme individualiste des années 1960, et représentait l'homme dans sa dimension égocentrique ainsi que dans une perspective nietzschéenne, le Satan du Temple Satanique découle lui de la politisation des mouvements athées et non théistes du début des années 2000, nommé « Atheist Awakening » par Cimino et Smith[40] et devient un symbole essentiellement politique

prônant la compassion et l'empathie. Tout comme la « Satanic School of Romanticism, » l'accent est mis sur la dimension bienfaitrice et humaniste de Satan, éloignant ainsi tout caractère « monstrueux » ou purement diabolique qui demeurait de manière résiduelle dans la figure utilisée par l'Église de Satan (notamment par l'accentuation sur le darwinisme social et l'élitisme). De plus, alors que l'organisation de LaVey était un produit de l'expérimentation religieuse du « cultic milieu » évoqué par Colin Campbell, le Temple découle directement des expérimentations au sein du sécularisme à la suite des débats internes des mouvements athées et non religieux provoqués par l'avènement du *New Atheism*.[41] Ce dernier, porté par des auteurs comme Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett et Christopher Hitchens dont les positions extrêmement virulentes à l'égard de la religion ont connu un engouement médiatique après la publication de *The God Delusion* (2006) de Dawkins, ont mis l'athéisme au premier plan médiatique en révélant l'ampleur du phénomène athée dans les sociétés occidentales. Cela a notamment contribué à complexifier le mouvement séculariste, divisé par les débats internes sur les stratégies à adopter (fondamentalisme athée contre accomodationnisme et *secular humanism*, position normative ou constitution en tant que minorité opprimée, nature des actions culturelles et politiques à mettre en place au nom du sécularisme et rôle de l'athéisme et du sécularisme dans la sphère publique).[42] Ces débats ont engendré une véritable fracture et l'échec de la construction d'un imaginaire commun : « The future of the movement is unclear, but the increasing diversity of ideological positions is currently producing fragmentation, with a traditional division between atheism and humanism becoming more complex as changing sociocultural circumstances are reflected in groups that combine these belief systems with political ideologies in novel ways ».[43]

Le Temple Satanique est ainsi le produit de ces divisions et de ces expérimentations. Fondé en 2012 par Malcolm Jarry et Lucien Greaves, il se définit comme une organisation non théiste, sataniste, religieuse et sécullariste dont le principe repose sur un activisme politique bâti autour de la figure de Satan, proposant à la fois une mise à jour du satanisme de LaVey,[44] jugé obsolète, délétère et inadapté aux enjeux contemporains, ainsi qu'une redéfinition de la notion de religion et de la figure de Satan. Premièrement, celui-ci garde les caractéristiques désignées par les poètes romantiques comme Blake ou Byron : Satan est symbole de rébellion, de liberté contre la tyrannie, de libre-pensée contre les systèmes dogmatiques. Toutefois, il devient dans le même temps un réceptacle neutre capable d'accueillir n'importe quelle narration : « This Satan, of course, bears no resemblance to the embodiment of all cruelty, suffering, and negativity believed in by some apocalyptic segments of Judeo-Christian culture. The word "Satan" has no inherent value. If one acts with compassion in the name of Satan, one has still acted with compassion ».[45] En d'autres termes, le terme « Satan » est remodelé linguistiquement parlant : le signifiant conserve l'esthétique littéraire donnée par les auteurs romantiques, mais le signifié est rendu adaptable à tout type de discours servant potentiellement une cause.

Deuxièmement, Satan perd sa signification en tant que symbole de l'élite et de l'égocentrisme, de la nature humaine ainsi que du darwinisme social. En tant que réceptacle neutre, Satan devient ainsi un symbole humaniste au sein d'une narration le dépeignant en tant que modèle de perfection, visant l'amélioration de la condition humaine et l'empathie envers son prochain. Puisque le Temple ne dispose pas d'un ouvrage fondateur tel que *The Satanic Bible*, sa vision de Satan est en fait directement inspirée de l'œuvre d'un écrivain français, Anatole France, qui publie *La révolte des anges* en 1914.

Cet ouvrage est capital : d'une part parce qu'il définit la philosophie du Temple et sa raison d'être dans la sphère publique, et d'autre part parce qu'il met en place une narration et un imaginaire qui faisait défaut aux autres groupes sécularistes. Dans ce livre, Satan est représenté comme un humaniste, libérateur de la race humaine contre le dogmatisme chrétien et la violence de son emprise tyrannique sur le monde. Sous ses ordres, les anges déchus se réunissent sur Terre afin de fomenter un complot qui vaincra enfin l'Éternel, mettant Satan à la place qu'il mérite, puisque la cause première de sa rébellion a été de s'élever contre la réduction en esclavage de l'homme, privé de la science dans l'Eden.[46] On apprend alors que ce sont les anges déchus qui ont, pendant des millénaires, appris aux humains ce qu'ils savent faire aujourd'hui, qui ont bâti leur culture, et qui ont pris la forme des dieux du paganisme pour tenter d'aider les mortels dans leur vie terrestre. Cependant, à la fin de l'ouvrage, Satan renonce à la conquête des cieux : car Satan vainqueur deviendrait Dieu, et Dieu vaincu deviendrait Satan. Ce qui compte alors, c'est la création d'un cadre culturel dans lequel la figure de Satan redéfinit les valeurs portées par les individus : « On combat à armes égales, sur un terrain commun, une mythologie (plus « vraisemblable » et respectueuse des données historiques) s'oppose à une autre mythologie (dogmatique et fallacieuse). Il va de soi que ce qui est fictif devient réel dans la mesure où le monde y croit et, par conséquent, que la lutte entre mythologies, entre narrations est toujours une lutte pour la conquête des âmes ».[47] Ce qui importe, c'est de faire de Satan le porteur d'un cadre culturel qui s'oppose au cadre culturel dominant, en l'occurrence, celui fortement imprégné par le christianisme de la société américaine.[48] Toute monstruosité, liée à l'image donnée par le christianisme, est éliminée de la figure de Satan afin de bâtir une narration contraire qui libère l'individu des carcans

religieux et qui lui permet d'exister dans la société en théorisant une nouvelle condition sociale et spirituelle. Le but du Temple Satanique, à travers son appropriation de la figure de Satan et son utilisation de *La révolte des anges*, souhaite ainsi confronter directement le cadre narratif définissant l'identité américaine comme étant intrinsèquement chrétienne, et définissant ainsi la société dans une optique où le cadre chrétien est dominant en tant que mythe, univers et imaginaire collectif. Comme l'indique Diego Pellizzari : « à la théomachie comme objet correspond une « mythomachie » comme moyen, une guerre qui oppose une narration à l'autre, le mythe reçu contre le contre-mythe estrangeant. Et ce sont les narrations et les mythes, nous le savons, qui organisent notre expérience et donnent sens à notre vie, qui construisent la réalité et tracent les horizons d'interprétation du monde ».[49] En d'autres termes, Satan devient une herméneutique, une autre vision de l'organisation sociale et une clé d'interprétation du monde contemporain.

De là découlent des principes philosophiques qui sont au cœur du projet du Temple Satanique. Si Satan est un principe d'interprétation du monde dans une logique humaniste, alors il conditionne une éthique qui lui est semblable, que le Temple nomme « SevenTenets » :

> - One should strive to act with compassion and empathy towards all creatures in accordance with reason.
>
> - The struggle for justice is an ongoing and necessary pursuit that should prevail over laws and institutions.
>
> - One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone.
>
> - The freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend. To willfully and unjustly encroach upon the freedoms of another is to forgo one's own
>
> - Beliefs should conform to our best scientific understanding of the world. We should take care never to distort scientific facts to fit our beliefs.
>
> - People are fallible. If we make a mistake, we should do our best to rectify it and remediate any harm that may have been caused.
>
> - Every tenet is a guiding principle designed to inspire nobility in action and thought. The spirit of compassion, wisdom, and justice should always prevail over the written or spoken word.[50]

Si la dimension individuelle est toujours présente, elle n'est pas mise en exergue dans une perspective individualiste et égocentrique : l'individu acquiert une souveraineté personnelle qui implique le respect de celle d'autrui, mais c'est bien la notion de l'autre qui apparaît et qui est prise en compte dans la philosophie développée par le Temple. Avec ces sept principes, le sataniste n'est pas un individu isolé mais s'intègre au contraire au sein d'une communauté. Satan représente ainsi cette liberté individuelle les valeurs présentées tout au long des « Seven Tenets. » Ainsi, il est un modèle à suivre dans une perspective d'émancipation et d'empathie.

Si comme chez LaVey, Satan représente également la science et la rationalité, le paradigme dont est issu le Temple Satanique en fait l'aboutissement du processus de sécularisation du satanisme, en devenant l'avatar du sécularisme lui-même. À l'instar du concept que propose Jesper Aagaard Petersen, le Temple affirme un « esotericized secularism »[51] et se dresse également contre une nouvelle diabolisation de la figure de Satan. En effet, si les actions du Temple dans la sphère publique sont

aussi efficaces et médiatisées (on pense à l'affaire de la statue de Baphomet en Oklahoma en 2014, à la « Pink Mass » sur la tombe de Catherine Phelps en 2013, etc.[52]), c'est aussi parce que Satan a une certaine résonance aux États-Unis. Pas seulement parce que 73% des croyants déclarent croire sans trop de doute à l'existence littérale de Satan,[53] mais aussi parce qu'une panique morale, que les sociologues appelleront « Panique Satanique », va se diffuser aux États-Unis puis dans le monde à partir de 1980.[54] Dans le cadre de cette panique, Satan demeure fidèle à son paradigme chrétien, et est donc vu comme l'entité monstrueuse vénérée par des milliers de cultes sataniques présents dans le pays, qui infiltrent toutes les couches de la société, qui enlèvent, séquestrent et violent au nom de Satan. En 1980 est publié *Michelle Remembers*, ouvrage du psychiatre Lawrence Pazder, dans lequel sa patiente, Michelle Smith se souvient avoir été abusée dans sa jeunesse par un culte satanique. L'atmosphère anti-secte qui régnait déjà alors aide à la propagation de ces supposés récits d'enlèvement et de viols, et des centaines, puis des milliers d'autres cas se déclarent alors après la publication de l'ouvrage de Pazder.[55] Si l'on ajoute à cela la rumeur d'un réseau sataniste à l'échelle nationale, une certaine similitude entre des milliers de cas de *survivors* (terme par lequel les médias désignent alors les rescapés de soi-disant groupes satanistes) qui font parfois mention de l'Église de Satan, à l'instar de Michelle Smith, et la présence justement de structures satanistes clairement identifiées qui inquiètent, le mélange est suffisamment explosif pour provoquer une vague de panique à l'échelle nationale. Les récits sont de plus émaillés de détails sordides de viols et de sacrifices d'enfants, parfois commis par des membres de la famille ou des individus haut placés. Les théories du complot et les rumeurs enflent alors suffisamment vite pour que l'Amérique se pense infiltrée par des centaines de cultes sataniques agissant dans l'ombre pour

commettre leurs crimes.[56] Cette panique s'estompera dans les années 1990, lorsque les différents rapports du FBI et des sociologues montreront qu'il n'existe aucune preuve des exactions soi-disant perpétrées par les groupes satanistes : « The satanism panic is of value chiefly for what it reveals about the enduring power of both conspiracy politics and fundamentalist religion in American life ».[57] Cette panique a ainsi pénétré l'imaginaire occidental, qui s'est cru sous l'assaut de forces obscures, au point de soupçonner que même sa culture avait été infectée par Satan et ses serviteurs (voir par exemple la technique du *backward masking* popularisée par Jacob Aranza ainsi que par le pasteur Bob Larson, consistant à passer des albums de musique à l'envers pour y identifier des messages subliminaux à caractère satanique[58]). Puisque Satan était vu comme une entité présente dans toutes les couches de la société, corrompant la jeunesse et abusant les femmes au point de les enfanter (plusieurs récits de *survivors* détaillent comment le diable apparaissait pour s'unir aux femmes durant les rituels,[59] afin de diffuser son empire infernal via un contrôle du corps reproducteur), le fait de se revendiquer comme sataniste dans l'Amérique contemporaine ravive ainsi des peurs issues de cette panique. Durant cette période, après la rationalisation opérée par LaVey, Satan avait regagné son caractère monstrueux et maléfique : l'archétype du Mal, le Malin, frappait les États-Unis au cœur même de sa culture, de sa politique et de son lien social. Certains sociologues et historiens du satanisme, comme Introvigne ou Dyrendal, insistent sur la similarité de cette panique et de ses effets avec la grande chasse aux sorcières de la fin du XV^{ème} siècle, notamment liée à la publication du *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) de Jacques Sprenger et Heinrich Kramer.[60] Dans les deux cas, la peur et la panique reposent sur la conception que le Mal et le monstrueux,

en la figure de Satan, frappent au cœur de la société en infectant jusqu'aux individus.

On comprend bien alors que la figure de Satan est un enjeu dans le satanisme post-panique. Face à cette résurgence de la figure du monstrueux, le Temple a la volonté de sauvegarder et de pérenniser une image rationalisée de Satan, détachée de tout contrôle, qu'il soit du corps et de l'esprit, et souligner au contraire l'émancipation permise grâce à la redéfinition de ce symbole. Ainsi, le Temple Satanique a créé un programme interne à l'organisation nommé *Grey Faction*, qui a pour but d'identifier les groupes et individus colportant toujours les mythes engendrés par la « Panique Satanique » et utilisant des techniques pseudo-scientifiques remontant à cette période pour prouver leurs dires.[61] Ce qui importe, c'est de populariser la figure de Satan comme un symbole conforme aux idéaux des poètes romantiques du XIX^{ème} siècle, à travers des valeurs qui résonnent avec les enjeux contemporains. Puisque Satan est un concept post-chrétien qui peut servir de cadre narratif, l'idée est d'utiliser ce symbole et les valeurs qu'il porte afin de symboliser des luttes et des problématiques contemporaines liées en particulier à l'identité. En tant que symbole mettant en avant le pouvoir de l'individu, la souveraineté de son corps et la rébellion contre les systèmes dogmatiques, Satan est un puissant catalyseur pour revendiquer une identité en marge des identités traditionnelles, et pour lutter contre les systèmes considérés comme oppressifs parce que forçant une identité « artificielle » (que ce soit une question de classe sociale ou de genre). En somme, Satan se politise selon les revendications contemporaines.

Satan en tant que Némésis des pouvoirs traditionnels

L'initiative novatrice du Temple Satanique ainsi que son succès médiatique ont fait basculer la figure de Satan dans le domaine du politique. Si les activistes satanistes existaient bien sûr avant la naissance du Temple, la politisation du satanisme opérée par l'organisation a mis en avant le fait que Satan pouvait servir de bannière identitaire et culturelle, de revendication individuelle et de lutte politique. Ainsi, la défiance par rapport aux autorités et aux institutions traditionnelles, au pouvoir en place, passe par la revendication d'une altérité qui cherche à transcender les modèles de pensées traditionnels, notamment concernant les questions de genre et de classe. Satan finit ainsi par représenter une voie de sortie des logiques dualistes ainsi que des structures sociétales considérées comme normées, normatives et rigides. L'individu réclame ainsi son droit d'exister en dehors de tout cadre institutionnel, qui s'accompagne également souvent d'une critique du système capitaliste comme créateur de structures oppressives. Jex Blackmore, ancienne porte-parole du Temple Satanique, est en première ligne de cette revendication individuelle. Satan s'associe ainsi à la lutte de l'individu contre les institutions, en tant que contre-pouvoir : « Satanism itself, is a philosophy of rebellion and independence. In literary and religious texts, Satan has challenged what he perceived as unjust, tyrannical powers from god to the church and served as an icon of free thinking and free agency ».[62] Les rituels mis en place par Blackmore mettent ainsi l'accent sur l'individu, et loin de promouvoir l'adhésion et l'appartenance à un groupe précis et organisé, la logique de groupe est au contraire dévaluée au profit du pouvoir de l'individu. En libérant l'individu, les institutions tomberont par elles-mêmes, dans la logique de La Boétie et de sa *Servitude*

volontaire (1576). Le but n'est donc pas de faire la promotion d'une idéologie, mais au contraire de combattre l'influence néfaste des systèmes de pouvoir hétéronomiques et normatifs qui empêchent l'individu de se réaliser pleinement. En somme, Satan devient une anti-idéologie, un contre-pouvoir nécessaire, dans une perspective inspirée du marxisme « Describing the ruling class as 'conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood ».[63] Pour ces satanistes, Satan s'oppose à l'idéologie des groupes organisés et vise la fin de la domination des individus en position de pouvoir : « A great deal of unexplored space remains at our disposal to further a satanic ideology owned and celebrated by women and other outsiders who have been most directly impacted by religious moral hostility. We question the authority of the state, as it has proven to be violent, racist, sexist, and classist, and embrace satanism on our own terms as a catalyst for political and social change ».[64] La question du corps et de la souveraineté personnelle est centrale dans le satanisme politique : « Bodily autonomy is central to Satanic philosophy and the anti-choice movement is largely fueled and supported by religious institutions that seek to control women and their reproductive agency. This is why it's a key issue for Satanists ».[65] Satan représente l'individualité explorée, un corps qui réclame son droit d'exister en dehors de toute institution, dans la perspective développée par Georges Bataille : il existe un lien intrinsèque entre l'interdit et la transgression de l'interdit, qui inspireront notamment Michel Foucault dans ses théories sur le pouvoir. Pour Bataille, ce qui relève de l'impossibilité, de l'interdiction et de l'inviolable n'est pas extérieur, mais bien intérieur à l'homme.[66] Comme Foucault le montre dans *Surveiller et punir* (1975), le pouvoir agit d'abord au niveau des corps, c'est-à-dire qu'il s'agit d'opérer un contrôle indirect en créant des systèmes normatifs d'interdit et de péché, sans

que l'homme ne se rende compte que ces systèmes sont imposés de l'extérieur, mais en étant persuadé qu'ils viennent au contraire d'une pseudo-intériorité.[67] Les institutions traditionnelles sont donc perçues dans le satanisme politique comme des structures oppressives et normatives qui empêchent un retour à soi-même. Satan est donc cette expérience intérieure, selon les mots de Bataille, cette individualité retrouvée, et surtout, une identité affirmée.

En effet, Satan devient fortement lié à la question identitaire. Puisque l'on a vu que les formes politiques du satanisme le considéraient comme une transgression des normes et des jeux de pouvoir traditionnels, alors l'individu s'en empare pour faire valoir une identité en dehors des cadres culturels et sociaux imposés par ces systèmes hétéronomiques. Cette crise identitaire se retrouve fréquemment dans les nouvelles formes de religiosité, que décrit Meredith McGuire : puisqu'elles mettent l'accent sur la liberté sexuelle et l'égalité homme-femme, les minorités marginalisées comme la minorité LGBT est ainsi souvent attirée par ces nouveaux courants qui viennent en contrepoint des institutions traditionnelles.[68] Ce raisonnement identitaire est également appuyé par Fedele et Knibbe : « Some of them criticize established religion as patriarchal, misogynist and hierarchical and refuse to depend on an external authority ».[69] Satan devient ainsi le moyen de revendiquer une identité hors d'un cadre hétéronormatif, puisqu'il est un symbole associé à la sexualité à la liberté et à la science en plus d'être devenu un symbole de contestation politique. Satan est celui qui, de par sa nature transgressive, transcende les genres et met en exergue la non-binarité ainsi qu'un nouveau rapport au corps hors de la conception de celle des structures religieuses traditionnelles, regardant avec suspicion les sexualités et les genres qui défient un cadre hétéronormatif.[70] Satan représente ainsi cette transgression du

pouvoir traditionnel, qui se mêle à d'autres figures populaires comme celles de la sorcière[71] (*witch*) qui, à travers les développements ésotériques comme la Wicca et le néo-paganisme, est devenue une identité qui se mêle parfois au satanisme et à son association avec Satan pour faire valoir son identité sexuelle et son identité de genre à travers des imaginaires en conflit avec les religions traditionnelles : « one of the most central elements in this ideal of sexual and political liberation is the power of transgression the deliberate violation of sexual taboos with the larger aim of overstepping larger social norms ».[72] La question du corps, de son identité et de son genre étant au cœur des questionnements contemporains, le satanisme politique représente ainsi une alternative puisque Satan représente cette opposition systématique au pouvoir en place. Dans une logique foucaldienne, puisque le pouvoir crée sa propre répression, Satan symbolise cette répression qui vient à rebours des normes et des systèmes considérés comme dogmatiques, et génère ainsi d'autres modes d'expression du genre, d'autres discours et d'autres modes de sociabilisation. Ce n'est donc pas un hasard si le Temple Satanique connaît un grand succès auprès de la communauté LGBT,[73] ou si les membres de cette communauté sont attirés par la figure de Satan dans des formes rituelles mettant en exergue cette individualité. À travers le symbole de Satan, c'est donc aussi une nouvelle manière de s'identifier et d'organiser sa relation à autrui, et donc par là à jouer sur le rapport entre identité, idéologie et pouvoir. Comme l'explique Jex Blackmore :

> One reason why I use ritual is that it's been an enduring element of the human experience since basically the beginning of written human history or prior to that. It's an incredibly powerful tool as a way of transferring power to people and also communicating to a larger society that we interact with. In this case, we

> really wanted to reinvent and reimagine the aesthetics of a Satanic ritual in a way that's contemporary and design driven as a way to tease out the aesthetic qualities that people are attracted to when it comes to messaging and also use visual elements that are evocative of representations of oppression.[74]

Ainsi, Satan est bien lié aux revendications identitaires des individus marginaux ou des cultures non traditionnelles. Dans un climat de cristallisation identitaire héritée de la Nouvelle Gauche,[75] Satan symbolise la lutte des communautés marginalisées. Le satanisme politique mettant l'accent sur la liberté individuelle, l'acceptation de sa marginalité et de son unicité, de sa nature de rebelle rejetée par les institutions traditionnelles, la figure de Satan est ainsi transformée pour s'adapter aux discours de revendications politiques contemporaines, en tant que symbole de contestation contre toute forme de système vu comme oppressif. Contrairement au satanisme de LaVey, qui faisait déjà de Satan un symbole de libération sexuelle et de liberté individuelle, le Satan issu de la politisation du satanisme dans les années 2010 est indissociable d'un activisme politique inédit qui agit dans la sphère publique et qui transforme la réalité sociale en devenant un nouveau mode de contestation, d'expression et de lien social. Et ceci dépasse le simple « satanic milieu » : en juillet 2013 au Texas, un projet de loi restreignant l'accès à l'avortement est proposé par le sénateur républicain Rick Perry. Une manifestation devant le Capitole d'État est alors organisée, opposant groupes *pro-life* à *pro-choice*. Alors que les premiers entonnent « Amazing Grace », les seconds, à majorité féminine, se mettent soudaine à scander « Hail Satan », en signe de provocation, mais surtout de contestation contre le cadre religieux strict du Texas.[76] Bien que ces femmes n'étaient pas satanistes, Satan sert ainsi de symbole de ralliement à une cause, à

une inversion de la monstruosité. Pour ces femmes, le monstrueux est la violence de l'État contre l'indépendance féminine. Le satanisme politique apporterait-il son soutien à une telle protestation ? Pour Jex Blackmore, cela ne fait aucun doute : « It's to challenge, to be an outsider and accept that, but also challenge these kinds of norms ».[77]

Conclusion

Loin de la figure monstrueuse maléfique construite par la tradition chrétienne, Satan est, dans le satanisme rationaliste, un symbole protéiforme synonyme de liberté et de rébellion qui est toujours le reflet de son temps et qui informe d'un rapport au corps et à l'individu différent selon les paradigmes duquel il est issu. Ce qu'il faut retenir, c'est que le satanisme dans sa forme rationaliste procède à une lecture alternative de Satan, transformant cette figure en symbole de fierté pour les minorités opprimées et marginalisées par les systèmes de pouvoir traditionnels. Nous observons donc un renversement : Satan n'est plus l'incarnation de la monstruosité, mais son ennemi, son Adversaire, le champion de l'individu et de ses droits. Transcendant le dualisme chrétien, il s'inscrit dans une perspective esthétique, philosophique, voire religieuse, qui produit des discours révélateurs sur l'époque de laquelle il est issu. Que ce soit la perte de vitesse des institutions religieuses traditionnelles ainsi que l'individualisation des plaisirs et des pratiques pour le satanisme de LaVey, ou la politisation du sécularisme et l'enjeu autour des identités et du genre pour le satanisme politique après les effets de la « Panique Satanique » où le monstrueux est redéfini dans une perspective chrétienne, Satan est à chaque fois indissociable d'une nouvelle vision du corps et de l'individualité à travers un discours antinomique de transgression qui informe sur les relations et les rapports du pouvoir entre l'individu et sa société. La non-binarité

de la figure de Satan, et son apport identitaire et contestataire est révélateur des conflits sociétaux de la société contemporaine, à travers une réappropriation et une relecture du concept remontant à Milton puis aux poètes de la « Satanic School of Romanticism. » Pour conclure, en paraphrasant Nietzsche : dans le satanisme rationaliste, Satan est certes par-delà Bien et Mal, mais il est surtout humain, trop humain.

Notes

1. Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* (New York: Avon, 1969): 25.
2. L'adjectif « LaVeyen » est utilisé seulement par les chercheurs pour décrire la philosophie de l'Église de Satan ainsi que les groupes qui s'en sont inspirés. En effet, l'Église de Satan ne se décrit jamais comme « LaVeyenne » puisqu'elle tient à rappeler qu'elle est la première organisation à avoir codifié le satanisme en tant que philosophie, et que, par conséquent, elle est la seule institution à pouvoir se revendiquer comme « sataniste », les autres organisations étant vues comme « pseudo-satanistes », « adoratrices du diable », etc. L'Église de Satan perpétue ainsi la philosophie d'Anton LaVey comme la forme unique de satanisme possible en vertu de cette paternité. Le terme « LaVeyen » est donc utilisé par les chercheurs pour évoquer la forme bien précise de satanisme développée par LaVey et l'Église de Satan et la différencier de la pensée d'autres groupes.
3. Jesper Aa. Petersen, *Contemporary Religious Satanism: A Critical Anthology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): 7.
4. Jean 8:44 « Lorsqu'il profère le mensonge, il parle de son propre fond, car il est menteur et père du mensonge »
5. Ronald Van Luijk, "Sex, Science, and Liberty" in *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity*, ed. Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa Petersen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) : 43
6. *Ibid,* 45.
7. Petersen, *Contemporary Religious Satanism,* 7.
8. *Ibid,* 7.
9. Petersen, *Contemporary Religious Satanism,* 7
10. « "The Satanic Bible" traduite en français », *Le Parisien*, le 17 Février, 2006. http://www.leparisien.fr/une/the-satanic-bible-traduite-en-francais-17-02-2006-2006751714.php (consulté le 03 Décembre, 2018).
11. Voir Massimo Introvigne, *Enquête sur le satanisme : satanistes et antisatanistes du XVIIe siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Dervy, collection « Bibliothèque de l'hermétisme, 1997) : 310-368
12. Petersen, *Contemporary Religious Satanism*, 3.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *L'Antéchrist*, (Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folio Essais [1895] 2010): paragraphe 2.

14. Voir Peter H. Gilmore, « What, the Devil? » *Church of Satan*, 2007, https://www.churchofsatan.com/what-the-devil/ (consulté le 03 Décembre, 2018).
15. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 33.
16. Voir Eugene V. Gallagher. « Sources, Sects and Scripture » in *The Devil's Party: Satanism in Modernity,* ed. Per Faxneld and Jesper Aa Petersen, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) : 43.
17. Gilmore, « What the Devil ? ».
18. Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity,* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996) : 21-24
19. Eliphas Lévi, *Histoire de la Magie*, (Paris :Germer Baillière, 1859), 200.
20. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 45.
21. Peter H. Gilmore, *The Satanic Scriptures,* (New York: Scapegoat Publishing, 2007) : 127
22. Anton LaVey, *The Devil's Notebook*, (New York: Feral House, 1992). 29
23. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 57.
24. Graham Harvey, "Satanism: Performing Alterity and Othering" in *Contemporary Religious Satanism : A Critical Anthology*, ed. Jesper A. Petersen. (Farnham : Ashgate Publishing, 2009) : 29.
25. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 120.
26. *Ibid.,* 111.
27. *Ibid.,* 110, vision de la magie éminemment inspirée par AleisterCrowley.
28. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness,* (New York: Centennial Edition,1964) : 25
29. *Ibid.,* 37.
30. LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 37.
31. En déclarant notamment : « My brand of Satanism is just Ayn Rand's philosophy with ceremony and ritual added », voir Foster, « Ayn Rand: Godmother of Satanism », *Pantheon,* June 10, 2011, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/pantheon/2011/06/ayn-rand-godmother-of-satanism/ (consulté le 10, Décembre, 2018)
32. Asborn Dyrendal, James R. Lewis, Jesper Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016): 78.
33. « …The change in situations or events in accordance with one's will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangable. ». LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 110.
34. Gilmore, *The Satanic Scriptures,* 53
35. Campbell Colin, « The Cult, The Cultic Milieu and Secularization » in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, (SCM Press London, 1972) : 127.
36. Dyrendal, Lewis, Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism,* 48.
37. Olaf Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*: *Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001) : 4-5
38. Dyrendal, Lewis, Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism,* 48.
39. L'activisme au nom du satanisme ou de l'Église de Satan est condamné mais les membres sont libres de s'investir en tant qu'individus dans les groupes activistes ou politiques de leur choix.
40. Richard P. Cimino, Christopher Smith, *Atheist Awakening: Secular Activism and Community in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) : 2
41. Mathieu Colin, *Le satanisme rationaliste: de la mort d'Anton LaVey au Temple Satanique*, mémoire de Master 2, (Paris: École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2018) : 81.
42. Stephen LeDrew, *The Evolution of Atheism: The Politics of a Modern Movement,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) : 139.
43. LeDrew, *The Evolution of Atheism,* 213.
44. Voir Shane Bugbee, « Unmasking Lucien Greaves, the Leader of the Satanic Temple », *Vice,* le 30 Juillet, 2013, https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/4w7adn/unmasking-lucien-greaves-aka-doug-mesner-leader-of-the-satanic-temple (consulté le 4, Décembre, 2018)
45. *Ibid.*
46. Anatole France, *La révolte des anges,* (Paris: Rivages poche/ Petite Bibliothèque, Payot et Rivages, 2010) : 160-176.
47. Diego Pellizzari. « Estrangements païens et nostalgies chrétiennes : Anatole France et les dieux en exil, » *HAL Archive Ouverte*, 2017 : 19..
48. Spencer Culham Bullivant, "Believing to Belong: Non Religious Belief as a Path to Inclusion" in *Atheist Identities - Spaces and Social Context*, ed. Lori G. Beamn, Steven Tomlins. (NY: Springer, 2017) : 101-117.
49. Pellizzari, « Estrangements païens et nostalgies chrétiennes », 17.
50. Voir « The Seven Tenets » *The Satanic Temple*, https://thesatanictemple.com/pages/tenets (consulté le 4, Décembre, 2018)
51. Jesper A. Petersen, *Between Darwin and the Devil: Modern Satanism as Discourse, Milieu, and Self (*NTNU-trykk, 2011) : 151
52. Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History*, (New York: Aries, Brill Academic Pub, 2016): 552.
53. Voir Frank Newport. « Most Americans Still Believe in God », *Gallup*, le 29 Juin, 2016, https://news.gallup.com/poll/193271/americans-believe-god.aspx (consulté le 4, Décembre, 2018)
54. Introvigne, *Enquête sur le satanisme*, 310-368
55. Introvigne, *Enquête sur le satanisme,* 312.
56. *Ibid.,* 310.
57. Philip Jenkins, Daniel Maier-Katkin, « Satanism : myth and reality in a contemporary moral panic » in *Crime, Law and Social Change* , vol. 17 (1992): 53.
58. Introvigne, *Enquête sur le satanisme,* 350.
59. Dyrendal, Lewis, Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism*, 109.
60. Dyrendal, Lewis, Petersen, *The Invention of Satanism,*110.
61. Massimo Introvigne, *Satanism: A Social History*, (Leiden, Brill Publishing, 2016) : 551.

62. Jex Blackmore, citée dans Meg Wachter, Jessae Brown. « Satanic Feminism & Body Autonomy: an Interview with Jex Blackmore », *Got a Girl Crush*, le 15 Mai, 2019, http://www.gotagirlcrush.com/archive/jex2019 (consulté le 9, Décembre, 2018)
63. Michael Freeden, « Ideology and political theory » in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 11 (2006) : 4.
64. Jex Blackmore, « Raising Hell: Satanic Feminism's Eternal Legacy », *bitch media*, Le 28 Octobre, 2019, https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/satanic-feminism-eternal-legacy (consulté le 17, Décembre, 2019)
65. Blackmore, citée dans Wachter, Brown, « Satanic Feminism & Body Autonomy ».
66. Georges Bataille, *L'érotisme,* (Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1957) : 67-73.
67. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité : la volonté de savoir*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) : 81-91.
68. Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) : 173.
69. Anna Fedele, Kim E. Knibbe, *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality,* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 3.
70. Fedele et Knibbe, *Gender and Power in Contemporary Spirituality* , 3.
71. Voir Mona Chollet, *Sorcières : La puissance invaincue des femmes,* (Paris : La Découverte, 2019) : 9-38
72. Hugh Urban, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism,* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006) : 259
73. Voir Kate Ryan, « How the Satanic Temple became a Queer Haven », *Vice*, le 24 Juillet, 2017 https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/zmv7my/how-the-satanic-temple-became-a-queer-haven (consulté le 5, Décembre, 2018)
74. Blackmore, citée dans Dahlia Balcazar, « Sympathy For The Devil How Jex Blackmore and the Satanic Temple are Fighting for Reproductive Justice », *bitch media*, le 23 Février, 2018, https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/jex-blackmore-satanic-temple-abortion-rights (consulté le 11, Décembre, 2018)
75. Voir Grant Farred, « Endgame Identity? Mapping the New Left Roots of Identity », *New Literary History*, 31, no. 4 (2000) : 627-658.
76. Voir Emma Roller, « Ted Cruz Criticized Abortion Protesters for Chanting 'Hail Satan.' This Satanist Is Offended. », *The Atlantic*, Le 13 Mars, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/ted-cruz-criticized-abortion-protesters-for-chanting-hail-satan-this-satanist-is-offended/455673/ (consulté le 5, Décembre, 2018)
77. Jex Blackmore, citée dans Charlie, Utz, « Meet Satanist activist and performance artist, Jex Blackmore », *Dazed*, Le 31 Octobre, 2018, https://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/42000/1/satanist-activist-performance-artist-jex-blackmore-america-detroit-good-trouble (consulté le 11, Décembre, 2018)

JRC | Religion & Culture

In Conversation

In Conversation

With Sarah Imhoff
Indiana University, Bloomington

***Participants**:*
Sarah Imhoff (Indiana University, Bloomington)
Lindsey Jackson (Concordia University)

In September 2019, the *Journal of Religion and Culture* invited Dr. Sarah Imhoff from Indiana University, Bloomington to the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia University to discuss her forthcoming tentatively titled book, *A Queer Crippled Zionism*. Imhoff's work analyzes the intersection between religion, disability, embodiment, and queerness. The main subject of the work is Jessie Sampter – a prolific writer, intellectual, and Zionist born in New York City in 1883. Sampter assumed a prominent role in the Zionist movement in both the United States and Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, penning several books on Zionism and eventually moving to Palestine in 1919. Sampter's commitment to Zionism, an ideology that venerated strong bodies and celebrated women's reproductive abilities, was deeply at odds with her own life and experiences. Crippled[1] by polio, never marrying or having biological children of her own, and living a queer life with another woman and her adopted daughter, Sampter's life hardly matched the Zionist ideal. Imhoff's work interrogates this tension and examines the ways in which one's embodied self does not always neatly align with one's political or religious ideals.

During her visit to Montreal, Dr. Imhoff was interviewed by Concordia PhD candidate Lindsey Jackson to delve more deeply into the life of Jessie Sampter.

LJ: How did you first hear of Jessie Sampter and why did you want to write a book about her?

SI: Jessie Sampter shows up in a few books on American Jewish history, but she's usually used as an example of something and in service to a larger point about women in American Judaism. When I was writing my first book on American Jewish masculinity, I wanted to include women's voices about masculinity because it's not just men who think about masculinity. I knew of Jessie Sampter because of those few references to her I encountered during my research for that project. I went to the Central Zionist Archives, where many of her letters and papers are, and looked for examples of how she might describe American Jewish masculinity, particularly in reference to Zionism. She didn't turn out to be super useful for that purpose, but she fascinated me. I decided at that point that I would write an article about this woman, I'll come back and look at these materials again, and then suddenly I was writing a book about her.

LJ: In the introduction you call this book a "weird biography." What exactly do you mean by that?

SI: It's weird for a lot of reasons, but one of the reasons is because we traditionally imagine a biography as chronological. The book is not chronological, it's thematic. Each of the chapters tells Sampter's story in a different way. The first chapter tells her story as a story about American religion. The second tells her story as a story about disability. The third chapter thinks about what it means to tell her story as a queer life. The fourth chapter thinks about theology and politics, and the last chapter examines her afterlives. When I say afterlives I mean the ways she has been appropriated or used and ways that she's disappeared.

LJ: Why is Jessie Sampter's life worthy of a biography and what challenges did you face in writing the book thematically rather than chronologically?

SI: I didn't ever imagine that I would be writing a biography. One of the reasons why I decided this would be a worthy project is that Sampter is fascinating not just for the details of her own life, but because of what she can tell us about bigger questions. Her stories were a way into a bigger set of questions I see as important in religious studies especially—questions about the relationship of embodied lives and religious ideas and ideals.

It was quite challenging writing the book thematically. There were lots of episodes in her life, other people in her life, even particular documents that she wrote, or pieces of books, poems, or essays that could have naturally fit in two or three places so I had to make those decisions. The other thing that I continue to hold as a serious concern is that Jessie lived her life, and she understood it to be a single life, so I don't want it to appear that religion is somehow separate from disability, or that disability is separate from having a queer family. I tried to show those connections among the chapters but that remains something I think about.

LJ: Let's segue into talking about religion and disability. Can you unpack the connection between religion and disability?

SI: Here I find Darla Schumm's work really helpful. She's done ethnographic work in US churches that talks about the ways other people, not people with disabilities, imagine people with disabilities. We often see two main paradigms, and one of them rests on the belief that people with disabilities did something to bring on their disability. If someone has Type 2 diabetes, a chronic illness associated with smoking, HIV – those are really

obvious ones. There is a lot of precedent for understanding disability as a punishment or something you or your ancestors did. The other version of that, the flip side of it, and these can sometimes work together, is that a person with a disability is especially close to God. They're a little bit saintly. Their suffering makes them a little like Jesus. Shumm's work shows how this operates in churches and religious spaces, but you can also see this in a lot of secular spaces. We see this in the way the Paralympics are advertised. The athletes are depicted as overcoming obstacles, magical, or even saintly. You can see this paradigm presented in spaces that are not necessarily religious also. If you spend time in hospitals you would hear a lot of the same talk from both hospital employees and family members. Even family members who would not call themselves religious would use this kind of language.

LJ: Did Jessie Sampter see herself in either of these ways?

SI: Interestingly, no. Sampter is not a person who thinks that suffering is particularly redemptive and she certainly didn't see herself as a sinner who brought on something she deserved, especially considering she had a childhood illness. Also, that wouldn't have made sense with the rest of her theology in which she doesn't really understand a personal God who's tweaking what's going on in the lives of each individual person.

LJ: You use the word "cripple" and "crip" in your work. Why did you use this word?

SI: I went back and forth about this because "cripple" has been used as a derogatory term. But "crip" and "cripple" have been reclaimed by many disability activists and scholars in ways that I can see resonance with

Sampter. Also, Sampter calls herself crippled and there is something affecting about hearing that language that helps us understand how she saw herself and perhaps how other people in society saw her. I think it's useful for those reasons. I also call her a person with a disability. I use that language too. I think that for both historical and for the contemporary reasons of it being reclaimed, it helps us understand something that we wouldn't understand if I didn't use it. That's not to say that I'm without trepidation. People who are not part of that discourse might think I am using cripple in a derogatory sense. I just hope people who are not familiar with this discourse engage a little further to fully understand what the term is doing in the book and that it's not a slur.

LJ: You mention that disability theorists rarely examine the connection between religion and disability. Can you unpack why disability theorists tend to disregard religion in their work?

SI: I think there are a number of reasons why disability theorists have not taken religion seriously. One is that very few of them have training in religious studies. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson wrote a really great chapter that thinks a little bit about religion and disability but that's not a theme that runs through all of her work. Other scholars, like Robert McRuer, spend little time on it or are a little dismissive of it. I think this is for a couple of reasons. One of the reasons is crip theory specifically has modelled itself in many ways on queer theory. For many reasons, some of which are quite legitimate, queer theory has a suspicion of religion. There are lots of ways religious institutions and leaders have marginalized queer people. This is also true for disability studies but it is not wholly true and it is certainly not true in exactly the same ways. We also see in gender studies that religion tends to be viewed as the opiate of the masses and religion as a way to oppress women, queer people, and anyone who is different. I think that's part of the reason why religion tends to be unexamined in some disciplines.

LJ: How did Jessie Sampter engage with religion and what can we discern from her example vis-à-vis religion and religious praxis in the United States more broadly?

SI: In Sampter's own life, when she imagines the world, she draws on a number of traditions. She reads the transcendentalists, but she also draws strongly on the Bible, she reads the New Testament and leads discussions about it with young teenagers, she participates in a séance and doesn't quite decide what she thinks about it but certainly doesn't think it is nonsense. Even though she identified as Jewish, the way she understood the world was that different religious traditions have different and important things to say, profound things about how the world is, how we know things, and what relationships we should be in with one another and with the world. This is a feature of a lot of people's religious ideas and ideals. For example, the number of Christians doing yoga without worrying that it's something different or worshipping another god, or engaging in religious practice from a "rival" religion is quite large in the US. I don't think Christians who do yoga are hypocrites. I think they imagine that "truth" comes from different places. They also might imagine that if they don't believe in another god then doing yoga for them isn't a religious ritual or activity, even though it is partaking in Hindu traditions. I see Sampter as a more obvious and articulate example of the way that many people, both then and today, have a worldview that engages multiple religious traditions without believing what they're doing is fragmented or hypocritical.

LJ: You use interesting language to describe this phenomenon, such as "religious border crossing" and "religious recombination." Why do you use this language to describe Sampter's religious practices and views?

SI: I was looking for a good metaphor that didn't imply that there is such a thing as separate, distinct religions. I wanted a metaphor that would allow us to understand that people can draw from multiple places and not end up with something fragmented at the end. I actively avoid using terms like "cafeteria religion" and "do-it-yourself" religion because I think they are condescending. Terms like these imply that people are selfish and that they are somewhat benighted, meaning they don't understand that these religions are really different and they can't have them together. Sure, there is an aspect of that, but I don't think individual Christians who believe in karma or Christians who go to yoga are not really Christians, or less good Christians, which is what those terms imply.

LJ: You mention in the book that not only did you read Sampter's writings and the writings of her associates, you also embodied her by doing some of the things she would do, such as growing certain plants, visiting places that were important to her, and so on. What did you learn about Sampter by doing some of the things she would do?

SI: Because I work on religion and the body, I am conscious of the way we know stuff through our bodies. We know stuff through our intellect but we also know stuff through our bodies. For example, we know when it's hot, we know what something smells like, or we know how frustrating it is when you plant a bunch of seeds and only a few of them turn out. Not that I imagine you can bridge historical distance and I experienced what Sampter experienced – I reject that. I didn't experience what she experienced. But I do think that being in the places she was helped me understand how they might be both nourishing and challenging for a body. Similarly, doing something like gardening makes you realize it's a long-term commitment, and if you miss a week your plants suffer and maybe they die. You pay attention to the weather in a way that you probably wouldn't have otherwise. What that embodied practice did for me was point my intellectual awareness to other things. I will also say that I started out engaging in these embodied practices not knowing if it would be useful because from the beginning I strongly believed that I wasn't experiencing what she experienced. I can't somehow transcend time. I can't have her experiences. But I do think I learned from my own embodied experiences. I read her letters differently at times. For example, when she's talking about the rest house at Givat Brenner[2], I know what that looks like, I know it's kind of up on a hill, I can see where the original gardens were, I know how people talked about how they were beautiful. I think it makes me a better narrator in some ways, to have some of those details and it pointed me, even intellectually, to things that might not have registered as important or interesting.

LJ: How was Jessie's life a queer one?

SI: I thought a lot about terminology here because I don't have evidence that Jessie Sampter had sex with women, but her life included two modes of being that I think of as queer. One of them is queer desire. In some of her unpublished writing, she expresses sexual desire for women. Not women in general, particular women, and more than one. The other one is queer kinship. In this way it seems to me very useful to think of her life as queer. She spent much of her adult life living with Leah Berlin. They made financial decisions together, she knew

Leah's family very well, and they all lived together when Leah's family first came to Palestine. Jessie also adopted a Yemenite Jewish girl named Tamar. When Tamar was away at school, Leah would go visit her, especially if Jessie wasn't feeling up to traveling. The two women made the decision to live on Givat Brenner together and it was clear from the beginning that when the members of Givat Brenner were deciding if they were going to be allowed it was going to be both of them or neither of them. In pretty much every way, Sampter's family in Palestine was Leah Berlin and Tamar, her daughter, and that's a queer family. This did not mean she was wholly cut off from her family of origin. She continued to be close with her sister Elvie; they sent letters back and forth. Sampter wrote Elvie a letter every week during the whole time she lived in Palestine. She also has biological kinship in that way but that's also what we see that happens with queer families – there is a mix of a family of origin and a chosen family.

LJ: Why didn't Sampter become a well-known Zionist like other American Zionists of the time?

SI: There are a few reasons, one of the main ones I think is she didn't meet a set of gendered expectations. There's a great book by Mary McCune about women Zionists and in it she quotes Henrietta Szold, who is probably the most well-known American Jewish Zionist woman, who famously claimed that male leadership seemingly wanted women for their participation but not their political opinions.[3] This is a long way of saying the gendered expectations of men was that they could be the intellectuals, the thinkers, the planners, and women would be the ones in charge of ensuring that children were cared for and the newest hygienic practices were brought to Palestine, education was appropriate, and hospitals were created. These things were seen as

appropriate for Zionist women, but Jessie Sampter wasn't a nurse, she didn't work in a hospital, she didn't participate in the handing out of milk. She was an intellectual and that was seen as a male bastion. Another reason, and this is a more speculative one, but when people, especially women, don't have living descendants to talk about their own importance, sometimes it's easier for them to get lost. Sampter does have Tamar's family, but they're in Israel, not in the United States, and American Zionists are not often seen as the major, important Zionists. It's fascinating to me because she's connected to so many of the important, famous people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, but she herself is not widely known.

LJ: Although Jessie Sampter isn't memorialized in the same way as other Zionists, she makes appearances in some odd places, like in Weight Watchers booklets and a road sign in rural India. What this tells us about how we remember historical figures?

SI: This tells us something about the information age and the way you can pick and choose small things without knowing anything about where they came from. You can decontextualize and recontextualize. That's not new, we see this in ancient sources, but that's certainly facilitated by the Internet. It's important to remember that we don't always get memorialized as whole people; people can appear through a quote on a sign or on the last page of the Weight Watchers "quote of the day" book with no other evidence about who this person was or why they were important. I'm not making an ethical judgment but it's helpful to remember that sometimes people get remembered in decontextualized ways.

LJ: To end on a broad note, what are you working on now?

SI: I'm not 100% sure this is going to happen but I think I'm going to work on a book about American Judaism, but taking the idea of "America" as not only the United States. So, what does it mean to take the idea of American Jews to include the US, Canada, Mexico, Latin America, the Caribbean? There are rich Jewish histories in these places but there are so many American Jewish histories, even when they are transnational or transnational between the US and Germany, or the US and Eastern Europe. Considering American Judaism in a hemispheric context, what it means to be Jewish in the Americas, is a framing that we have not yet considered.

Notes

1. I use the word "crippled" here to match the language and use of the term in Imhoff's book. Imhoff explains why she uses this terminology in her response to question six of the interview.
2. Givat Brenner is the kibbutz where Sampter lived after immigrating to Palestine.
3. For the specific quotation, see Mary McCune, *"The Whole Wide World Without Limits": International Relief, Gender Politics, and American Jewish Women, 1893-1930* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005): 39.

In Conversation

With Hillary Kaell
McGill University

Participants:
Hillary Kaell (McGill University)
Laurel Andrew (Concordia University)

Dr. Hillary Kaell of McGill University sat down with Laurel Andrew from the JRC to discuss her most recent monograph, *Christian Globalism at Home: Child Sponsorship in the United States* (Princeton University Press, 2020). Christian Globalism combines archival research, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork to delve into the previously understudied experiences of Americans who sponsor children through Christian organizations. Kaell examines sponsors' perceived relationships with the children involved in the programs, with the physical places these children can come to represent, and with the sponsorship organizations themselves. Kaell identifies an important component of these relationships as the "immobile global," or the way sponsors understand and interact with the global world through sponsorship, without ever leaving the United States. In this interview, Kaell also discusses how this recent publication has allowed her to expand on themes from her previous monograph, *Walking Where Jesus Walked: American Christians and Holy Land Pilgrimage* (NYU Press, 2014), and provides helpful advice for graduate students navigating interdisciplinary fields.

LA: Your new book Christian Globalism at Home was very recently published, and has come out during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Has this changed how you will promote this book, perhaps compared to how you have promoted your previous works?

HK: With my first monograph, which came out of my PhD work, I was very new to this profession and I honestly was kind of naïve. I didn't really know how to promote a book, and I didn't do a lot of promotion. Certainly, there's different ways to go about things. Some people publish their first book shortly after finishing their PhD, which was my decision mainly because I had chosen to move to Montreal with my partner, and I wanted to be very sure that there would be no issues in terms of my getting tenure. Frankly, I also knew that I wanted to have a kid and I just wanted to get that book done. But a lot of people don't do it that way. They publish their first book more than eight, nine, even ten years out of their PhD—once they're more established in the profession. I think with those people, they maybe promote a first book a lot more than I did.

It's going to be immensely challenging to promote this book in the midst of a pandemic. It's immensely challenging to get people's focus on anything outside of the very urgent issues that people are grappling with in the context of the pandemic, and in the context of the United States (which is where my work is situated). The recent protests and Black Lives Matter movement—there's a good reason why those things should be on people's radar and should be crucial to how people are thinking and what they're doing. I suppose what I can hope as an author who's just written a book about something that is not directly on those topics, is that people will see—if they pick up the book and read it—that there is a fair number of places where the themes in the book overlap with questions that people should be asking

right now. Questions about power, about race—you really can't talk about child sponsorship without delving into those issues. The questions that interest me primarily in the book include how we think about the world as interconnected, or not. Think about the pandemic not only as an urgent physical virus—as it is—but also as an ideological or conceptual moment for all of us to think about how we picture the world as connected. How is it actually connected? How is it not? What kinds of media are being produced to make us think in certain ways about this thing called 'the globe,' 'the global pandemic?' Princeton Press, my publisher, asked me to write something about the book on their blog in mid-May when I hadn't pretty much left the house in a couple of months—we were really feeling the pandemic in our small world of our little house—so I wrote about reflecting on the book in the context of the kind of media that was coming out during the pandemic. [That] was really fruitful for me. I do hope that other people will see those connections. I guess the thing I'll have to do, is to try to help people with those connections as well.

At a more pragmatic level it will be tough. A lot of what we do when we're promoting books as academics, which maybe grad students are aware of, is that we do so in person. We do conferences, book talks, we go to other people's universities. For next year, I've had three talks that are not going to happen. Even if I just think about the fall, that's already three conferences I would have gone to that have been cancelled. So that's six different opportunities that I would have had to actually be present with people, discussing the book, getting their feedback, that I'm not going to be able to have happen. That's going to be a challenge. The good thing is that because it's my second book, I suppose I feel, to mix my religious metaphors, a little more Zen about the whole thing. I know it's a long game too, so even in a year or two, the book won't be quite as brand new, but hopefully

people will still be interested in discussing it with me, maybe for the first time, given that things are moving slowly during the pandemic.

LA: Christian Globalism examines pathways of globalism through sponsorship, with an eye toward power and the construction/maintenance of structures of inequality. Did you begin this project knowing that a history of Christian sponsorship would allow you to engage these themes, or did these themes emerge as you researched?

HK: To be honest, I didn't really know much about child sponsorship when I started. I'm sure in the back of my head I must have seen some of those commercials on television at some point, but it was sort of outside of my experience. I was certainly aware of, if not child sponsorship exactly, the classic image of the 'child in need.' I also knew that there had been some pioneering and really important work that had been done by anthropologists, media theorists, and feminists in the 1990s about those images of children. When scholars and pundits were writing about this in the 1990s, they were very concerned about power and inequality, and they were deeply critical of sponsorship and its media, which is probably not too surprising for anyone who has encountered sponsorship media before. In that sense, I certainly had power on my mind very early on. I mean, you can Google child sponsorship and these kinds of critiques will come up immediately.

The other thing though that I was aware of, even before starting this project—just by doing a bit of quick Googling—was that that kind of work about inequality and power in these images had a shortcoming, at least to my mind. There was very little discussion of the actual reception of these images. So, it was really a critique

based on scholars' interpretations of these images. Very few people, if any, really went and asked sponsors what they actually thought about all of these images, or hung out with them while they were interacting with these images—that really wasn't a thing that people were super interested in. In a way, that's another form of power, when the critic gets to call all the shots and doesn't ask people who are participating in these systems what it feels like to be a part of the system itself. I knew that I wanted to work with sponsors rather than only doing an analysis of organizational publicity materials. Once I started that research (talking to people, hanging out with people), then I realized a number of other things, too. First was that the organizations that I was studying in the contemporary period had changed significantly in terms of the media they were producing in the 1980s and 1990s. If you look at the media that an organization like World Vision is producing in the 80s, it has made a massive change to how it portrays children in its media today. That 'child in need' African child that we're picturing, who is probably a child in Uganda, Somalia, Ethiopia—there's a few hotspots where children are being photographed for these campaigns—that has changed significantly in the media. The other thing that I realized is some of the organizations had never even followed the model described in academic literature. For example, the Catholic organization I looked at, Unbound—its media never really looked like that, even in the 1980s.

Another thing I realized was that all that critical literature in the 1980s and 1990s largely assumed that the power dynamics that they were witnessing in these organizations arose out of the 1970s. And that makes a lot of sense, since these scholars or pundits weren't thinking about the Christian component. They were thinking really from an economic development perspective: when did these kinds of NGOs arise as NGOS (and, that's really the 60s and 70s), and then what do they look like by the

80s and 90s? They're thinking about it as kind of adjacent to studies of development work rather than adjacent to studies of the cultural impact of Christianity. Once I started looking at it in the latter perspective, as a Christian activity, then I could start to trace these power dynamics back a lot further. Not just seeing them as a facet of NGO work in the 1970s or even in the 1950s and 1960s, but rather I could start tracing these patterns of power back into the nineteenth century to missionary work and even before. That was something I didn't realize I would find when I first started the project; I thought it was going to be a project about the 1970s to the present.

LA: Why did you decide to write a book about Christian child sponsorship?

HK: It definitely evolved out of my previous work, that's really clear to me. Part of it was that I'd encountered sponsorship a few times, especially among the Catholic pilgrims, and it intrigued me how they spoke about it. I just jotted it down in my field notes, and then, in the context of the pilgrimage project [*Walking Where Jesus Walked*], pretty much put it to the back of my mind and forgot about it. It came to my mind again as I was casting about for another project. I think that intuition is really important for all of us as scholars. If there's something that you can't get out of your head, that's probably because there is something there that interests you enough to actually follow it through for a number of years. I decided to take that intuition and run with it. I knew that there were certain themes in the first book that I wanted to talk about more, especially questions about attachments to far-away places, and the role of what academics in my field will sometimes call parachurch organizations (not churches themselves but other kinds of institutions). In the pilgrimage project, I was really interested in tour companies as economic units that are

not parts of churches but are operating alongside churches. Also, I was interested in the interactions between money and religious experience. Those were the three themes from the first project that I still felt had a lot of heft for me. I felt like I was done with pilgrimage, but I wanted those themes to follow through to another project. Sponsorship seemed to offer a way to do that; it seemed to respond to all of those themes in certain kinds of ways.

The context of money was very interesting to me. In pilgrimage, it's this one-shot payment: you pay for the trip and then you go. Oftentimes you don't even exchange a lot of money during the trip because it's all prepaid for you. In fact, monetary exchange is really obscure to a certain degree within the context of pilgrimage. Then there are these few moments where people are buying souvenirs, where money is front and centre, and you might argue, it's a kind of ritualized experience. In sponsorship, on the other hand, it's not a one-shot payment and then you forget about the money—you're actually giving these monthly payments. The idea is that it's supposed to always be on your mind, you are in a continual state of monetary giving. I thought that that might mean the Christians who participate wrestle with the money aspect more, and I think that's true. Money, materialism, consumerism, all these ideas were really important for sponsors. That was one reason that I really wanted to look at sponsorship.

As far as attachments to far-away places, sponsorship seemed to offer new purchase on that theme because in pilgrimage people do, of course, ultimately go to the site. The thing that had interested me in that project was: how do you picture a site (e.g.: the Holy Land)? How do you enact that site in performances at your church (e.g.: nativity plays)? But then, you instantiate it by going to that place. To push that theme further: what about people

who picture a place, or picture this construction of places (the 'global church' for example) but never actually go there? They don't instantiate it. As I became aware in the pilgrimage project, not traveling abroad is actually the norm for most people most of the time. It dawned on me working with the pilgrims going to the Holy Land that for most of them this was the first, and often only, trip they were going to take abroad. The sponsorship project allowed me to look at people that don't even get that opportunity to go to the place that they're picturing, the place that they're sponsoring a child. Maybe they don't want to go. I'm often interested in the seemingly boring stuff of everyday life, so that aspect, the not going anywhere, is truly fascinating to me.

LA: An interesting concept you present within this book is what you have labeled the "immobile global," which can seem like a paradoxical idea at first glance. Did you coin this term? Would you mind unpacking this idea and explaining what it conveys?

HK: I suppose I coined it, but honestly, I wasn't thinking about it as inventing a word. I just thought it was sort of a nice way to title an article that I was publishing in American Anthropologist, which will come out in December. Initially, I floated it to be a title for the book itself, which the press nixed. I didn't think of myself as coining a term that other people should use, but I think the concept itself does go back to people who imagine these attachments to place without actually going to those places. Being "global," then, is an important part of their sense of self. For most of the people I worked with, it was an important part of how they understand themselves as Christians: relating to a creator that they view as equally present everywhere around the world. That concept was very familiar to me because I studied Christians, but I thought of that concept over and over in my head until I made it feel strange. The idea that you are intimately connected to a creator that you picture as globally active right now in the present, everywhere all at once—that's actually a phenomenally complicated concept—and a very strange concept if you just start thinking it over and over to yourself. It's also vitally important to Christianity. If anything, and maybe I'm biased since I just wrote a book about global connection, but I would say it's the most vital concept in Christianity. Without that concept, you do not have this single creator, this creator God, that is ultimately able to see everything, able to be everywhere, able to act everywhere, and of course who is omnipotent—who has power everywhere as well. This global conception is vital to their sense of self, their sense of Christianity, and like I said, a vital link to Christianity itself.

At the same time, sponsors are immobile, since they leave the U.S. rarely, if at all. By "immobile" I don't mean to say that these are people who live these small lives or anything like that. I am specifically interested in that context of these imagined and instantiated attachments that I was talking about before. In other words, what is very statistically clear is that they are not traveling to visit the place where the sponsored child lives. Overall, very few sponsors do that. That's where I am talking about immobility, this idea that through your God you are connected and through your child who you are sponsoring, you are connected to this place, you are picturing this place, you are sending money to this place but you are not actually going to that particular place. I always ask sponsorship organizations how many sponsors go to the sites where the children live. At most, organizations said maybe 1%, but most organizations told me only a fraction of 1%.

I'm a little bit wary of the word immobile just in the sense that, as I said, I don't want to give the impression

that I'm insinuating that someone is living a small life or even a less adventurous or important life. You don't have to go abroad to have an adventurous and important life. But again, I'm underlining this central problematic in the book, which makes sponsorship such an interesting case study: this creation of attachments without physical instantiation. The concept of the immobile global is really a way to reorient the literature on globalization away from people who travel. We have a lot of literature about Christians who travel, who go on short term missions or who are long term missionaries, who are diplomats, or whatever the case may be. I wanted to try to get that focus on globalization away from those rather exceptional people and onto the kind of everyday people who most of us are.

LA: Language is a very significant component of this book. You include "A Brief Note About Language" explaining your use of terminology, you include a glossary of terms unpacking complex ideas, and throughout the book you are open about your hesitations on using certain kinds of language. Why was language such a concern for you in this book and why did you decide to make these hesitations visible for the reader?

HK: I think of myself, in comparison to say linguistic anthropologists, as someone who doesn't think about language nearly enough. I do think that in this particular case, my concern about language did arise directly from my interlocutors (the people I was working with), and that includes contemporary and historical interlocutors. They themselves were so concerned, and are so concerned, about language. In an attempt to suture together Christian communities who were physically far away from each other, they often depended on really marked forms of language. For example, in the book mainly I talk about hymns and prayers: saying the same words, and even trying to say the same words at the same time is a major way that Christians have tried to connect to each other. This was something that I, as a scholar, couldn't ignore. It was really obvious in what people were telling me. First, people in a historical context, and then after that, people who I was meeting and talking to. Also, sponsorship itself is a global project that promises connection through letter writing—and has from its start a couple hundred years ago—so, through the use of language as well. This continually raises questions for the people involved about mistranslations. They are very conscious of the possibility of a mistranslation of a child's words into English, or a mistranslation of their own words of encouragement back to that child. They are aware that there is a mediator as soon as you are translating anything, and that the spirit of the words might be lost in translation. The spirit of the words is very important if you're dealing with Christian encouragement, globally speaking. There's an element of power in the sense that translations don't just happen. Translations happen because of the mediator (the mediator is the organization). When you're writing something to a child, the organization then takes whatever you're writing and translates it for the child and vice versa. Sponsors, on their end, are always sort of wondering whether the organization is being faithful to what they wrote, or not. And frankly, once you start delving into the archival record you see that organizations are doing all sorts of things with translations in order to make sure that what the children are writing or saying fits with certain kinds of normative messages or ideas that the organization wants to promote. I write a fair amount about that in chapter 4, how organizations deal with translations.

As far as language, the project itself made me more aware of it and I think for that reason it ended up playing more of a role in the project. It also played more of a role

in deciding to make my own hesitations evident in the text itself. It made me choose to make them evident to people because I realized that academic work itself is a project of taking what people say or taking what we read in an archive and then making decisions about what you are going to highlight and how you're going to translate that for your readers. Sponsors were very rightly pointing out that there were mechanisms of translation at work that make it hard for people to understand how their words are getting used or how decisions are being made. I decided that I would try at least to bring some of that to the fore in my own writing, to make it clear that although ultimately it is my voice on every page of the book, I could do a little bit of the unmasking of those kinds of processes of translations as they work in an academic setting.

We should be doing a lot more self-reflexive unmasking of how we, in different fields, understand certain kinds of themes, or promote certain kinds of themes in certain kinds of ways. I have, in the back of my head, a few other small projects that could come out of this and help me keep thinking of ways to continue that process of trying to make more evident how scholarship is done. I said I was sort of naïve in my first project when it came out in terms of promotions—I think that's true but I also think that I'm a lot more confident with the second project in the sense that I don't feel like I need to emphasize, in quite the same way, my own self as an expert. I think I always approach my subject matter from a position of quite a lot of humility, but it's kind of fun to be able to just let all that humility out in the open and allow other people to think alongside me in that way. I think I would've been a bit more timid about doing that right after my first project was published when I was just a few years out of my PhD.

LA: Christian Globalism *uses a wide range of scholarship throughout—not only do you draw on anthropology, history, sociology, and religion, but you also engage political, feminist, and eco-theorists, philosophers, and activists. Thinkers like Jasbir Puar, Jane Bennett, Susan Sontag and Timothy Morton come to mind. What were some of the benefits of incorporating such an interdisciplinary approach to your topic? What were the challenges?*

HK: I've always taken an interdisciplinary approach in my studies, from undergrad straight through my PhD in American studies. It just seemed obvious to me that there would be multiple and equally important ways to approach any given topic. When I first start writing I always begin by looking up the topic widely, rather than only looking in the journals that I happen to read most. In fact, I read a lot more widely starting this project—including deep into economic theory and stuff like that—that in the end didn't have a place in this project. But I like the idea that there's all these other conversations happening around these themes and topics amongst our colleagues in other departments, and I like the idea that we might be able to learn from each other. I often just start with a lot of key word searches in a lot of different places. The names you mentioned: Bennett, Sontag, Puar, Morton, those are some of the better known scholars I cite. People probably won't be surprised to see that scholars like that appear in the book's pages, but hopefully citing people like that does offer some basis for cross-disciplinary discussion. Thinking about this as a cross-disciplinary discussion is, I think, helpful. If we both read someone like Sontag let's say, then we can find some common ground even if you're not explicitly interested in Christians, or in capitalism, or in humanitarian work, which are some of the things that I'm more explicitly interested in, in this book. That's really a major benefit I think about citing this wide variety of

well-cited and beloved scholars, who are cited across a variety of disciplines.

The challenge lies in potentially spreading yourself too thin, which probably shouldn't be a surprise to anyone, in not deeply engaging any of the work you cite, or not deeply engaging it enough, perhaps. I think the other challenge lies potentially, for any kind of interdisciplinary work, in not being claimed by any specific audience. I certainly feel that, in purely pragmatic terms, it can make it more difficult to land jobs, to have your work reviewed in journals, to apply for book prizes—all of those things tend still to be rather disciplinarily focused. I'm mentioning this because this is a journal that is geared towards graduate students, and I think for me as a graduate student being trained in the interdisciplinary field of American studies, that was not evident to me. There are pragmatic concerns related to being interdisciplinary. I don't think that's any reason not to reach really widely, I obviously think that's a great move and I do it all the time. But I do think it's something that grad students should be conscious of in interdisciplinary programs (including religious studies).

LA: Your book includes two interludes, and although each is written differently, they are both explorations in narrative style. The first interlude takes place in the nineteenth century, and you use extant letters and archival research to help you imagine yourself in the position of both a child being sponsored, who you have called "Donyen," and her sponsor, Belinda. The second interlude, taking place more recently in the 2000s, is a story constructed based on interviews and digital conversations between Rizal and his sponsor Carol. What was your experience changing gears to write in this kind of prose?

HK: I've never included something like these interludes in anything I've actually published, so I felt like I had to be a little bit courageous to make that leap to include them. But, I actually write in this kind of prose a lot. It's often a way that I'll get started with a chapter, or if I feel really blocked it'll be a way that I'll try to kick-start a day of writing when I'm sitting at my computer and just nothing seems to really grab me or I don't feel like I can get into writing prose. What I do then—and grad students, feel free to try this method!—is that I'll sit down and I'll write a free-form kind of narrative. Maybe I'll start by reading a little bit of my field notes and then I'll just try to write this narrative that uses ideas from my field or research notes, or just an idea that's been kicking around in my head but I haven't put on paper. I'll write a little story, with people who don't even exist. I'll just write it as a narrative because I'm just much more interested—and I mean that's really why I do what I do—I'm much more interested in people, and people's narratives. I'll usually write about a page of this narrative, but then I can read back through my own stream of consciousness, and that will help me identify something that's sparking my interest. It'll help me identify the thing that, as I've put it before, is kicking around in my head that I haven't written down yet. Or, the theme that I maybe didn't consciously think of, but that's coming out in this narrative. Or, what's just the feeling of this narrative? Is this a narrative that feels sad? Is it a narrative that feels like it's all about the prophetic future? Maybe that's the mode that I want to write in in this chapter, or that is going to help get me excited to sit down and write. Once I've written that page, and I've identified for myself the themes that are motivating me, I erase it. I've never actually kept any of these little writing experiments that I do—I always just use them as a tool for myself.

The big leap for me then, in this book, was to take that kind of model and build on it to actually include it in the

book. In fact, I wrote about eight of those interludes. It took me a few months, just writing interludes in different time periods. The reason that it took me so long to write all those interludes, is that for every single one, I was doing tons of historical background research. So, these were a little bit different than the narratives that I just write for myself in the sense that they're all based on a lot of background work that had already been done. Each one of them started with a set of letters, whether it was an email set of letters or an archival set of letters, and then there was lots of secondary source research to fill in the gaps and blanks, especially for historical periods and places with which I wasn't familiar.

Even though I was hesitating about whether to include them or not, I was inspired quite a lot by Saidiya Hartman's idea of "critical fabulation." She talks about how she uses archival materials along with critical theory and fictional narrative as a method to plumb the gaps and the silences of history. She's specifically interested in the gaps that are created when enslaved people are not able to contribute written documents that are then being kept in archives. I don't think that I cite her, but the fact that she has courageously mixed these kinds of methods together in this "critical fabulation," allowed me to feel adequately inspired to include the interludes in the book. And as I note in the book, sponsorship itself is constitutive of gaps and silences. That's what happens, you can't have sponsorship without gaps and silences—it's purporting to create a relationship between two people who live very far away from each other in completely different cultural worlds who never meet. It is a kind of globalism fundamentally built on gaps and silences. But, most notably, the children who are sponsored basically never left narrative records that weren't redacted heavily by the adults around them. The interludes seem like a way to call attention to the gaps. And I'm hoping that they're going to provide, for grad

students especially, some fodder for discussion. Maybe the interludes will even get grad students talking about creative ways to approach sources, or again, gaps in sources.

LA: As you've mentioned, the voices of the sponsored children themselves are often missing from the archival records. With Donyen, for example (the sponsored child featured in the first interlude), what was your experience trying to put yourself in her position, and trying to think about what she would be thinking about?

HK: My experience is always partial, of course. As a person who works in anthropology and history, I know that my understanding is always partial. We're always situated within our own worlds, whether those be our own temporal world, time and place, or our own cultural world. So, I was already aware of the fact that trying to step into Donyen's shoes was going to be obviously partial. But, I did try to do what I read some novelists do, who write fictionalized accounts of historical figures. I read a lot of secondary sources written by historians, who had done a lot of research to write about what it would be like for tribes in that region, what life would've perhaps been like at those mission stations as well, including those particular Methodists mission stations in Liberia. I was lucky because I knew that the girl—who the missionaries call Belinda, but I call Donyen—I knew exactly which mission station she was at, I knew exactly which year she had been there. There is also a fair amount of literature where missionaries are describing—again through the lens of the missionaries—but where they're describing in their letters (including personal letters that the missionaries are writing to people back home, letters that are not for public consumption) what the children have said to them, or they're writing about events that are going on. Basically, to try to put myself in

her shoes, I tried to read as much as I could by historians who wrote about the culture of the Indigenous tribes that I think are probably hers, based on the place she was from and the time that she lived. I was also reading missionary reports from the period about those particular mission stations, and more specifically the children in those particular mission stations.

LA: Did researching this book bring up any new challenges or surprises as you were conducting interviews, researching, and writing?

HK: There are always challenges and surprises, otherwise, each project would really seem the same as the last, and then we would all probably lose interest pretty quickly! Maybe I can just mention a couple related to methodology, which might be useful for grad students to consider. The first challenge was related to what I was doing: I like the term "roving ethnography," which is a term from another anthropologist named Eleana Kim. It means that you are often on the move, so you are jumping in between a lot of different sites. In my case, I was dealing with multiple archives, but also with four different organizational headquarters that were not all in the same place (Colorado, Missouri, Virginia, and California). I was conducting interviews and volunteering in multiple other locations as well—in other states, too. That kind of research is intensive, and it can be really tiring. Every time you go into a new location, a new volunteer site for example, you have to meet new people and get to know them as quickly as you can in order to try to get a feel for what their experience is like.

Another challenge, which is not unrelated, is that I was pregnant and nursing a child during about two years of that research—about a year of being pregnant and then a year of nursing. I don't bring that up in the book itself,

but I think it's really important to state, particularly in a forum that would reach graduate students. I think sometimes we don't talk about such things, and when we don't talk about [them] it creates a major burden especially on young female grad students and faculty to act as if it's always business as usual, even when it's anything but business as usual. For example, I had to choose certain field sites accordingly. One of my field sites is upstate New York—there's really no reason to choose upstate New York as a field site within which to interview Unbound sponsors, other than the fact that I was so pregnant at that point that I wasn't allowed on an airplane. I needed to figure out a place where I could drive across the border (within under four hours because I was also really uncomfortable), in order to continue to research even once I was really pregnant, and once I had this little tiny baby in tow as well. The other thing I should mention is that my partner had to come with me when I was breastfeeding, to help with child care. I couldn't do it on my own. So that's also a real burden on my whole family, frankly, to be able to support me in that research but also to choose sites where we could drive together as a family and where we were able to get home quickly if there was any need, medically or otherwise. When you're driving around with a two-month-old, you want to be able to get home if you need to. All this to say, that's a major methodological challenge of any kind of ethnography—research while pregnant, we could call it. But I also think it's a particular challenge in this roving style of ethnography that I was doing in this project, which is exhausting for anyone, by the way!

At an intellectual level, I think that having a child while writing the book made me more aware of certain dynamics. For example, I included a section in chapter 4 about the dinner table as a central site of Christian globalism, as families discussed the children they sponsored together. I don't know if it would've stood out

to me in quite the same way before my daughter was born—how much time I was spending around dinner tables with people while they read these letters to their kids, or while they kind of lectured their kids on how to be a more moral person, and while they talked to me a lot as a person who now could be identified as a new mother who was going to have to be thinking about these issues too. I had a lot of sponsors bringing up these issues with me and probably, frankly, bringing them up at the dinner table while I was with them because they were viewing me in a new light now that I was showing up with a baby. Maybe I would've understood the dinner table to be a central site of research regardless, but I might not have, I'm not sure about that. I know that other anthropologists, especially female anthropologists, have written about how being a parent has changed the way that their interlocutors conceive of them and interact with them, but I had never gone through that before. I think for me it was a bit of a surprise, but really kind of a welcome one, especially given the parameters of this particular project that lent itself very well to opening up a whole line of other kinds of questions about how these sponsorships were being used vis-à-vis pedagogy of one's own children.

In Conversation

With Russell T. McCutcheon

Participants:
Russell T. McCutcheon (University of Alabama)
Lindsey Jackson (Concordia University)

Graduate students operate in a world of precarity. Future job security is not a guarantee, and graduate students sacrifice an enormous amount (financial security, time, energy, relationships) to pursue their degrees. It is not uncommon for graduate students to question their decision to enter graduate school and the graduation rate among Canadian PhD students in the social sciences hovers around 65%.[1] The world of academia can feel mystifying and difficult to navigate, and there are few practical guides on how to maneuver through this world. Dr. Russell T. McCutcheon's *"Religion" in Theory and Practice: Demystifying the Field for Burgeoning Academics* (Equinox Publishers, 2018) endeavors to fill this gap and serves to aid graduate students and early career scholars in religious studies navigate their way through the field. Touching on a wide variety of topics such as teaching, public scholarship, the job market, and the current state of the field, McCutcheon draws on his past experience as a graduate student, instructor, and now department chair at the University of Alabama to demystify the field for up-and-coming scholars.

LJ: As the title suggests, this book is geared to graduate students and early career scholars. Why did you want to write a book for this audience?

RM: First off, thanks for reading the book and inviting me to converse a little about it. It's a real treat to have this chance.

As for its audience…. As I selected the pieces to include and as I wrote the new material for the book I had early career scholars as my intended audience for a few reasons; as my discussion of the title, early on in the book, makes clear, I took the subtitle from a line in a review of a previous book, *Entanglements: Marking Place in the Field of Religion* (Equinox, 2014), written by then-doctoral student Travis Webster. (And yes, I let him know ahead of time.) There he asks why more senior people in our field are not writing things explicitly for earlier career scholars—I have hunches why that might be the case, by the way…. That earlier book was a collection of replies that I've written over the years but with new and fairly substantial introductions to each that set the scene, as it were, but always with an eye toward a reader at an early stage of their career. I discuss not just the context of the original back-and-forth—of which I've been fortunate to have had a few—but also disclose a few things about the field that I've figured out over my time in it. (I've been working full-time teaching in the field since 1993, which I started doing about a year-and-a-half before defending my dissertation at the University of Toronto.) So the intended audience there was implicit but here, in this book, it's pretty explicit. As someone who, from the start, was not interested in participating in the field as it was (i.e., work that was largely descriptive of what were then portrayed as unique manifestations of the Sacred—don't forget, I was a grad student when the first edition of Eliade's *The Encyclopedia of Religion* was published), but who had an inkling that it could be practiced rather differently, I had some role models, of course, but not all that many. So there was, instead, a fair bit of trial and error early in my career, to try to figure out how to be a scholar of religion when you thought that the category religion was a problem that needed some critical attention; remember, this was before Tim Fitzgerald's first book was out, before Malory Nye's and Tomoko Masuzawa's books were out, and so back when Wilfred Cantwell Smith was among the only voices thinking about "religion"—though Jonathan Z. Smith's now (in)famous line about religion being imagined in our studies, which opened his 1982 essay collection, was still fresh enough that many weren't really thinking too carefully about what to do with it. So, over the years, as a few more of us have come to the conclusion that what some now call a critical approach to the study of religion needs to be explored in more detail, I've concluded that if this alternative model of the field was to get any traction then it would, to whatever extent, probably be because each newer generation, (those who also shared frustrations with the field and who were also looking around for workable alternatives), could find them a little more easily in the literature. So that's what I've done—in part recognizing that I probably wasn't going to persuade many members of my own generation (budding traditionalists far outnumbered the small number of us wanting to do different sort of work in my own graduate program) or those well ahead of me (for they long ago made up their minds). Whether what I write persuades earlier career readers is up to them, of course, but I've wagered that this is the group more likely to be dissatisfied with current options and looking for different ways of doing their work; so one of my jobs is to present them with choices that they might not have realized they had while carrying out research or teaching others. Or, to say it all much simpler, I realized long ago that the intended audience for some of my work was me, thirty or thirty-five years ago—back when I was reading work that I found very frustrating and trying to cobble together a different way of doing the work myself. This most recent book is just the most explicit that I've been about something I've been doing for a while.

LJ: You have written extensively about the classification and categorization of what we call "religion" or "world religions." What kinds of classroom activities or assignments do you incorporate in your introductory religion classes to get students to think more critically about the category of religion? (I personally love the activity where the students read the 1883 Supreme Court decision that debates whether a tomato is a fruit or vegetable!). Why are these kinds of activities important?

RM: I'm a fan of starting out simply in a class—not simplistic, mind you, but working up to what might seem to be the more complicated issue by first tackling something that appears to the students to be rather familiar and thus unremarkable, something of which many of the students feel they're already an expert, if they've even reflected on it, that is. (Aside: at the end of the day the goal of many of my classes is to call that very expertise, that commonsense, into question for them, by eventually making it our object of inquiry.) The simple almost always turns out to be way more complicated than we had previously thought—which nicely paves the way toward examining what we assume to be the more complex, since we now might wonder if its more understandable than we had at first imagined. So yes, that old and misleadingly simple *Nix v. Hedden* court case in the U.S.—in which tomatoes were imported and taxed as vegetables, only to have the seemingly commonsense designation called into question by someone using the technical definition of fruit, the one that a botanist might use (the importation of which was not taxable at the time)—is pretty handy in classes, I find. It's old enough to be alien to the students but its issue is timely, with students always divided on what they think a tomato is—or better put, *ought* to be, for the decision nicely exemplifies what it means to offer a stipulative definition. Using it in class is therefore a classic example of defamiliarization, that Smithian term many of us think

of when recalling that older motto for the field: to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. So, for example, "everyone knows" that there are world religions, six or seven, or maybe eight of them. Or was it nine? Well, let's then take some time in class to look at some older world religions textbooks and see what was commonsense for our predecessors—so I've brought in a sampling of old textbooks that I've collected over the years, and we flip pages and compare tables of contents. You don't have to go back to the time period Masuzawa covered in *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago, 2005) to see how this designation has changed over the years; just look at a textbook popular in the 1950s or 1970s and suddenly it's pretty apparent that those authors thought you needed three separate chapters for Christianity yet one was sufficient for Buddhism—the position and interests of those authors become apparent to students pretty quickly. Or get students reading an excerpt or two from the first edition of Huston Smith's still widely selling intro book and the link between the discourse on world religions and global military dominance is pretty hard to overlook. But I find that starting with this sort of conclusion is pretty daunting, no matter the course or the level, for you're asking a student to rethink what has been taken for granted their entire life—and something that it took a decade or more for the instructor to come to understand, by the way. So, again, let's start with a question with far lower stakes, such as whether a whale is a fish or a mammal, and then let's consider how recent it was that anatomical studies of the natural world up-ended what was once widely known. For, recall that Ishmael, in *Moby Dick* (chapter 32) said as follows: "Be it known that, waiving all argument, I take the good old fashioned ground that a whale is a fish, and call upon holy Jonah to back me." I have in mind D. G. Burnett's wonderful book, *Trying Leviathan* (Princeton, 2007), by the way—and, well, suddenly the fact that the student

just knows whales to be mammals becomes pretty interesting to them, their commonsense suddenly becomes a datum, and they can start to see this seemingly discrete piece of information about tomatoes or whales as a building block of a much larger way that they order their world, to move around within it in a certain sort of way. So maybe from there we can look at those current debates on whether or not Paganism should be included in the world religions textbook, or whether a crucifix is a religious symbol to be excluded from the public square or an innocent expression of "our" heritage and culture (as was recently debated in Quebec, as I recall).

LJ: You discuss how the way you create syllabi has changed since you first started teaching religion courses. It seems you were more concerned with "fitting it all in" earlier in your career. How has your focus narrowed over your career and what do you tend to prioritize in your syllabi (i.e. skills vs. content, teaching what you know vs. teaching students how to know it, etc.)?

RM: Oh, skills, by far. I'm one who (as may be pretty obvious) was influenced in a dramatic fashion by J. Z. Smith, especially with regard to teaching. If you don't know it then I'd really recommend his short essay, "Teaching the Introductory Course: Less is Better," a 1990 piece that Chris Lehrich included in his edited collection of Smith's works on pedagogy, *Teaching Religion* (Oxford, 2013). As Smith does there, you should calculate how many minutes you have face-to-face with your students in any given semester—for me that's 15 weeks or so, meeting twice a week for 75 minutes each time, minus the testing days and the snow days (yes, we do get a few of those in Alabama), and, once you do the math, it's a remarkably short period of time. Add to that the fact that, as Smith goes on, the vast majority of our students (at least here in the U.S.) take our courses to satisfy general education requirements, meaning that we'll likely never see those nurses and engineers and business or communication majors again in one of our classrooms, and you arrive at a situation where the instructor should realize that they need to exercise some careful choices in crafting a syllabus. And part of that realization is that they just can't cover it all, making coverage, as Smith concludes, not what a course is actually all about. (Which reminds me of the PowerPoint presentation on teaching that I once sat through in a Department Chairs meeting, where the person ran out of time and rushed to fit it all in, concluding with the recommendation that, when using PowerPoint in lectures, we should *not* rush to fit it all in—I kid you not.) Instead, as I took time to learn in my career, the content should always be in the service of the choices that I've made, as the instructor, with each item that we study doing work in the course to illustrate something or to provide an opportunity to do a certain sort of analysis, using a certain sort of skill that I want students to learn. So yes indeed, it's skills that I think our courses are all about, which simplifies a syllabus in some ways—I'm wanting them to learn how to *define* something, *describe* something, *compare* two things and then come up with a persuasive *explanation* for why some similarity or difference surprised us. You can't do those operations in a vacuum, of course, so, sure, along the way we're going to learn this and that about these people or those practices, this set of stories and that collection of images, making plain that content and skills can't be separated. But—again, following Smith closely here—none of that material should be presented as if they were found objects that are of natural or inevitable significance. Instead, still sticking with Smith, our job is to make the students aware of how those items got to our classroom in the first place. That brings us back to choices and the way others—to start with, ethnographers and historians, not

to mention colonial administrators and missionaries from an earlier era—crafted their worlds and satisfied their curiosities by making certain things stand out as worth talking about, all of which functions in the classroom as models for what the students themselves are up to and will continue to do long after leaving our classroom: operationalizing interests and crafting a world in which they each act and organize. While I'm not sure what that world will end up looking like, I'm hopeful that anyone who comes through one of our classes will be better equipped to tackle the inevitable challenges of crafting a world in which to live. And that's a tall order, so while a focus on skills can simplify a syllabus in some ways, in other ways it also makes them far more complicated than just a survey of this or that tradition (again, like Smith, I'm not a fan of surveys, and prefer introductions, a distinction he highlighted that I find pretty useful).

LJ: Blogs have become increasingly popular sites for scholars to publish and share short pieces much more quickly than publishing an article in an academic journal. But it is not uncommon for graduate students to be dissuaded from engaging in the digital world (through blogging, engagement on social media, etc.). What are your thoughts on graduate students and early career scholars using some of their energy to create an online presence? Would you consider this a worthwhile use of one's time?

RM: I fully recognize that people have to be mindful of their use of time—it's not an unlimited resource, regardless your career stage. But I'm an advocate of blogs—sure, they're not cool anymore, and who knows who reads them, but anything that challenges early career people to practice writing, especially writing succinctly and with a basic point to be made, illustrated, and supported, can't be a bad thing. Regardless the readership, it's important practice in thinking something through and making your case in plain language (assuming that you're trying to write so that more than just specialists in our own subfield will understand what you're saying). In fact, I've blogged about the relevance of blogging, which then turned into the basis for one of the chapters in *"Religion" in Theory and Practice*—making evident that blogs are not the end of the line; instead, that material can get revised and incorporated into larger pieces that you might write later. In fact, there's sometimes so little pay-off or feeling of accomplishment for those writing dissertations—it takes years to hold a finished product in your hand—that a quick blog post of, say, three paragraphs, that discusses a topic you're working on and illustrates a larger point at a manageable site, can play an important role in helping someone to feel like they're making progress on a project that, at times, surely feels like a mountain that just can't be climbed. I also think of a post that I wrote, on our department's blog—a place where faculty, current students, alums and solicited guest posts all regularly appear—entitled "Scholars or Colleagues?" (April 9, 2015), which reflects on a then recent visit to the University of Chicago where I repeatedly heard how doctoral students should not teach or publish anything but, instead, should solely be engaged in writing a "field-changing dissertation." That I disagree with this advice—well, really, it's an injunction not advice—might be pretty evident by now. Sure, take full advantage of having one main project on which to work while writing that dissertation, but even if you're lucky enough to write one of the few dissertations that has a lasting effect on the field once it's published, that's going to take years if not decades to happen and what are you doing to feed yourself and pay the rent in the meantime? I see the dissertation as a credentialing exercise necessary to enter this profession—that it is not a sufficient gateway is now pretty obvious, what with the

things that have been happening to the humanities job market over the past several decades, not to mention the 2008 economic collapse along with the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on higher education. So, there's also teaching experience and service experience, of course, but let's not forget the sheer luck of being in the right place at the right time. The odds are increasingly against seeing the imprimatur of a graduate school landing someone a job, making "just write a field-changing dissertation" a rather misguided directive, I think. Sadly, too few graduate programs in North America are taking this seriously, such that inventing a C.V. writing workshop isn't really sufficient anymore to help the students we train—and on who some departments rely for generating the undergraduate credit hours that help to justify the department's continued existence—to have lives after our programs. So while increasing attention to the digital world isn't some cure-all, it is one of the areas that departments can explore to help prepare their students for a variety of futures—in fact, it's exactly what our department at the University of Alabama is doing with our new M.A. degree, now entering its fourth year. (I've yet to decide if this model can be extended to a Ph.D. degree as well.) It's designed to help students prepare for doctoral work, sure (and, so far, we've had three of our seven graduates go on to full-rides in good graduate programs elsewhere in the U.S.), but it's also intended to help students who want a graduate degree in the humanities but who don't intend to pursue that sort of future; after all, why shouldn't scholars of religion, at least as we understand them, be helping to prepare people who might eventually work in archives, museums, or go into education or any number of other fields. (One of our grads in now training to be an architect.) So, among the other things that our M.A. students do, they also learn a variety of digital and public humanities skills, they learn how to make their own website and how to set

up and manage a blog, how to record and edit a podcast, how to work with video and so-called big data or online curation. For some students these will just be additional skills in their toolbox but for others, such as those who pursue one of our internships with the University of Alabama Press or a local humanities magazine, these end up being the primary skills that they highlight on their C.V. and which help them to get to where they're hoping to go after they graduate. But, again, it's all premised on rethinking what we're doing in the study of religion, let alone with graduate education. And, speaking personally, you'd be amazed the things that occupy much of my daily time, having been a department chair for 15 years so far—among them are things like getting an undergrad's writing into shape to be posted on our department blog, putting an item on our Facebook page that I think alums might like to see or giving some feedback to a faculty member who manages our Instagram page; simply put, the digital world is so basic an ingredient to department life and success that anyone who dismisses or demeans it in academia just isn't paying attention to the world that their grad students are entering.

LJ: The final section of the book consists of twenty-one responses from Ph.D. students and early career scholars to your theses on professionalization, which I found very helpful and enlightening. As I was reading each response it felt like I was getting advice from a different graduate student. What made you want to include this section in the book?

RM: Well, all along I've been involved in a variety of efforts to get other people into print as well—much earlier in my career I was the co-editor, or for a time editor, of the peer review journal *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* for a total of 12 years (a journal started by two other doctoral students at Toronto) and then for five years

I edited the once well-known quarterly *Bulletin for the Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* (the forerunner to today's *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*). I've also edited several book series and tackled the editing for a variety of collaborative projects—but over the past decade or so I've been increasingly interested in publishing the work of early career scholars (such as two multi-authored volumes in Vaia Touna's book series, Working with Culture on the Edge). So when this particular book was coming together I knew that it needed some novel way to end, and then I thought of the responses that Matt Sheedy had solicited to each of those twenty-one thesis statements about the profession that I had written and published some years before.[2] Those replies all originally appeared—yes, you guessed it—as blog posts (on the once popular Bulletin Blog that Sheedy used to manage). So asking Matt to contact those authors, organize some revisions, and include them all as the final section of the book just made perfect sense to me and I was very pleased that everyone agreed to participate—for it was a practical illustration of much that was in the book, but accomplished by people other than myself, those whose relationship to the current job market was rather different from my own. For, as a long-serving department chair who has participated in a surprising number of searches and hires over the years, I'm certainly connected to it but in a rather different fashion than is an applicant. So having current writers with that sort of connection confirm what I said over a decade before, or even critique and correct it, was pretty rewarding, because it's all about creating something of relevance and use to that specific reader whom I had in mind. For despite how I perceive myself, when I look at a calendar and let sink in how long I've been doing this it's pretty apparent to me that these other authors are increasingly becoming the spokespeople for and thus the proper representatives of the field. Including them, taking what they're writing

seriously, is just the inevitable next step in the natural history of our field.

LJ: This may be a difficult question to answer, but what are some of the main pieces of advice you give to Ph.D. students who are hoping to stay in academia?

RM: If we can bracket our current situation for the moment—and by that I mean the uncertainties of the post-COVID-19 world into which higher ed is moving, whether it likes it or not—then, yes, there's a few things that I'd say and, in fact, have been saying, whether in person if queried or in blog posts or books.

(i) First off, thinking of an earlier answer, I'd suggest to them that, while completing the dissertation is certainly an accomplishment worth celebrating, having a completed dissertation is really just a basic entry requirement to the profession, with pretty much all applicants necessarily having one. And since it usually takes years to assess the contributions of that first piece of work—think of the time it takes to get into print, let alone the years it takes to get reviews written and published let alone for it to find readers—the people reading letters of application are likely going to be looking for other things as well.

(ii) Just what they're looking for, who knows; but speaking for myself, I'm looking for evidence on which to base that always speculative judgment that someone will join our department and succeed here while helping us to continue to succeed (i.e., attract new majors, write interesting scholarship). Being a professor, like many other careers, means juggling balls—class prep, lectures and seminars, grading, proposing new courses, working on a variety of research projects which are all at different stages, committee work in the department or for the university or even the profession itself, writing letters of

recommendation for students, etc. I'm looking for evidence that an applicant can tackle that challenge. Have they taught? Have they designed a syllabus of their own? Have they spoken at conferences and published something? Did they serve on any committees as a grad student or maybe help to host a local speaker or small conference? As I suggested above, some readers might be surprised if they actually saw how someone like me spends much of my work day; although our setting is hardly representative of the field at large, so much of what I do has little to do with what I thought I was training to do when I was a doctoral student. While I hope that this doesn't characterize large swaths of time for all of the faculty in our department, I bet they'd all be able to identify with this, since each adopts a certain part of department life and heads it up—who will plan the annual undergrad research event this year? Who is our liaison to alums? Who is helping to plan the annual guest lecturers? Who is mentoring the M.A. students who are teaching an online course this summer? Who is chairing the search committee? Who will be the undergrad director and who is the graduate director? Not all of that is placed on the back of just one person, of course, and we ensure that new colleagues get a bit of breathing space when they first arrive (such as the new faculty member we added last year, Edith Szanto—a specialist in Islam, or Jeri Wieringa, who we've hired to start this fall—she's a digital historian), but no one who I know just sits in an archive all day thinking big thoughts. Given that this is what's needed to ensure that our department continues to succeed, continues to train B.A. and M.A. students, continues to try to exert some influence on where the field might be going in the future, then judging applicants means looking for evidence that they too will contribute while carrying out their own work and, hopefully, eventually establish themselves as a force in their own subfield.

But, in saying that, (iii) I'd also caution that a little goes a long way—e.g., the learning curve is steep when you first teach your own course but I'm not sure what is gained by teaching 10 of them while a doctoral student. That is, I'm looking for evidence that one can (and increasingly will be able to) do something not that one is already fully accomplished at doing it at such an early stage of their career. Seeing on a C.V. that a book is published already is encouraging, sure, but evidence of familiarity with the publishing process, with working with editors and copyeditors, with submissions and referees and revisions and resubmissions, can be conveyed in a variety of other ways.

As well, (iv) I'd say that, all depending on where you apply (for our field exists in a variety of places, from major research universities to small joint Philosophy/Religious Studies Departments), you might be the only person who works on your topic, so your application materials and, if you get the chance, your campus visit should not assume that you're speaking with other specialists equally versed on the intricacies of this or that. Instead, write and talk as if you're speaking to other motivated and intelligent people who don't happen to know much about your topic—so make connections, ask about their work, exhibit that you're a specialist, sure, but remember that in many cases the ability to attract undergraduate students with engaging and broad courses could be the life-blood of the unit and so they're looking for someone to help in that effort. (If, on the other hand, they're a research-intensive program looking to add their fourth medieval Tibetanist, well, make some adjustments, of course.)

Also, (v) don't get recommendation letters from just your committee, for more than likely they all end up saying the same kind things about your dissertation. Since I'm needing broad evidence of your readiness to join

a thing that's already on the move, you should work hard to have letters that represent your various accomplishments and skills, using the letters to complement and even enhance the picture of yourself that you've painted in your other application materials. Can someone comment on your teaching? Maybe they sat in on one of your classes? Is someone able to give us an insight into what it's like to work with you? Has anyone heard you give a conference paper or seen you organize an event? There's so much more to say, of course, but we've got to get back to that post-COVID-19 world into which we're now moving. The rise of contingent faculty over the past decades has already been noted by many (even addressed in this book) and already been felt by a generation of doctoral students intent on moving into full-time positions in the field. While I don't have a crystal ball, it's pretty obvious that, at least for the short term, the budgetary effects of this pandemic are going to be felt by many schools and will likely compound the trends we've already seen in higher ed. So, for some graduate students hoping to stay in academia, as you phrased it, that may mean trying to stay off the job market for a year or two, in the relative safety of their own graduate program. But when funding dries up someone has no choice, so it means that tough decisions may have to be made—such as how far you're willing to move for what sort of position and pay or how long you're willing to try to find work in our profession. In my case, though I recognize it was in the mid-1990s, when my annual full-time instructor position at the University of Tennessee ended, I applied to one more position, in southwest Missouri, with the shortest application letter I ever wrote and with a stack of rejections in the file already. For whatever reason, I got that job (working there for a total of five years)—it was completely unexpected and came when I was very close to deciding that this career was not for me. I say that to make clear that many of us are

familiar with tough decisions and so I don't envy those who are now entering a far tighter, even more precarious job market.

LJ: One thing that is guaranteed in academia, at the graduate level and beyond, is rejection – rejection from jobs, grants, journals, fellowships (I can go on forever). How have you dealt with rejection throughout your career and what advice do you give early career scholars who have faced (or will inevitably face) rejection?

RM: You're right, rejection is part of the game. For me, given my own approach to the field and understanding of how it has worked and, I'd say, continues to work, the rejections I've received often fueled me and my work. It wasn't difficult to read some of those reader's reports, let alone what was said about either my work or myself in reviews and replies published in journals, as evidence of just how deep the problems were and are in the field. So I took Noam Chomsky's words to heart, which I recall him saying in the 1992 documentary on his work that I saw in Toronto a long time ago, with Stephen Heathorn, who was doing his Ph.D. in the history of British working class identity at the time and who is now a Professor at McMaster—if it were not for such criticisms "I would begin to think that I'm doing something wrong" (his remark, early on in the film, was in reply to a review of his work in *The New York Times Book Review*). So when I was once likened, at the very start of my career, in the pages of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, to a little dog that had learned a new trick, or when the method that I worked with in an earlier book was accused, in a review, of dehumanizing people by calling them data, I took both as opportunities to put an even finer edge on my critique by calling into question the vantage point from which such judgments were made, demonstrating the invested nature of claims that present

themselves as disinterested statements of obvious fact. Not all criticisms can be met in this fashion though, to be sure; some just have to be absorbed, some ignored and shaken off, while some have to be taken to heart and used to inspire revisions and rethinking. The prospectus that became my first book, and which had been my dissertation—*Manufacturing Religion*—was rejected by eleven or twelve publishers (two different people separately rejected it at just one of those presses, in fact) and *JAAR* didn't review it because, or so I was told when I later inquired, a book on the field as a whole was too broad. I never had a campus interview in Canada (I'm a Canadian, by the way—growing up in southern Ontario but with parents from the Ottawa Valley—who also became a U.S. citizen just last year, after working here since 1993). Though the job market now is obviously worse than in my day, it wasn't great then and I still have a stack of rejection letters from all those positions to which I applied at the start of my career, including a post-doc in Indonesia and a small school in Rhode Island that required a pledge of faith from its faculty. In most of those cases you just move on, happy to have been considered. Some rejections are a little more bitter, of course, or at the least ironic, such as the time, years ago, that I was not selected for a position back in Canada but ended up being contacted by the eventual hire, unaware that I had applied, looking for advice on how to teach the courses that had been included in the ad for the position. Later I learned how controversial my name was for the committee, even early in my career, confirming for me again that I must be doing something right. So, depending on the rejections you get, you need to have confidence in what you're doing and just try to keep moving forward, using it as either data or inspiration for as long as you're able. Some rejections have more consequence than others, that goes without saying, of course, and I've been lucky to be able to keep pressing

forward despite them—though, sure, if I stop and think about it, there's a few that I've not mentioned here that still sting.

LJ: To end on a broad note, what are you working on now?

RM: Now? Still making sure students, staff, and faculty are all in the loop and involved during that rapid move to working remotely—which involved figuring out how to run a department remotely, how to transition to new staff members, and how to teach remotely and assist others to tackle that challenge; I admit that this was pretty much all-consuming for a while. I was teaching a large enrollment intro course that semester, and a small grad seminar, so quickly devising ways to help those two different groups of students just to finish the semester in a positive way was also a goal. Now, planning for a fall semester full of variables is an ongoing focus of much of my time. As for my own research and writing, I'm an essayist and so I have a new collection of essays (documenting how little has changed in the field while offering a constructive alternative—with some uncollected but also some new pieces) that I'm near to sending to a press in Europe—a publisher there is currently considering the project. So, with the previous question about rejection in mind, we'll see where that goes. (In case you're wondering about someone at my career stage: sometimes a press might jump at a project that I suggest, based on the idea and a conversation, and sometimes I develop a proposal that goes out for review, awaiting comments and then making revisions to the project and trying again.) Apart from that, much of my work over the past year was mainly focused on editing other people's writings, such as a collection of Willi Braun's essays that's due out in the fall and, along with Emily Crews (who worked at Alabama for the past two

years and who is currently finishing her own dissertation at the University of Chicago), co-editing a collection of pieces assessing Jonathan Z. Smith's contributions to the field (both due out from Equinox in the fall of 2020). Aaron Hughes and I established a book series based on our *Religion in 5 Minutes* volume (Equinox, 2017), so we spent some time finding editors to tackle a variety of topics in the field "in 5 minutes" (i.e., short essays answering common questions that newcomers might ask about, say, Hinduism or Paganism). We're pretty pleased that several of those volumes are all happening right now, each edited by someone else. Aaron and I are also near done editing a new book for Oxford University Press, in which we asked about 20 senior people in the North American and European field to define religion and then to comment critically on each other's definitions, all in an effort to get people talking who don't usually—and we've identified the field pretty broadly in this book. That's taken a couple years to complete and we hope to have it off our desks pretty soon. Then Aaron and I just cooked up a new project last week and another press in Europe is now mulling it over. So, like I suggested above, there's lots of pots of different sizes all bubbling away at different rates. There's an anthology that I keep meaning to get to also and there's a few essays due out in journals or as book chapters in the coming months, so there's always something to do and to look forward to seeing in print.

Notes

1. Rosanna Tamburri, "The PhD is in Need of Revision," *University Affairs,* 6 February 2013, https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/the-phd-is-in-need-of-revision/#latest_data
2. McCutcheon's theses were originally published in Mathieu E. Courville's *The Next Step in Studying Religion: A Graduate's Guide* (Bloomsbury, 2007).

JRC | Religion & Culture

Book Reviews

Canadian Carnival Freaks and the Extraordinary Body, 1900-1970s

Jane Nicholas. University of Toronto Press, 2018. 320 pages. $23.96 (paperback).

In *Canadian Carnival Freaks*, Jane Nicholas offers a detailed examination of the little-studied history of Canadian carnival freak shows, their place in Canadian popular culture, and in particular, the intersections of race, ability, and class as determining factors in the recruiting and marketing of sideshow acts. The study is situated within the broader tradition of disability scholarship and the sub-field of carnival studies in particular. The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of Canadian Carnival Freaks depend largely on the work of American disability studies scholars Robert Bogdan and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, their emphasis on the social and cultural history of disability, and the construction of what Garland-Thomson calls "the extraordinary body" (Nicholas 14). Scholars working within that tradition will find that Nicholas's contributions help close a gap in the social history of the freak show, by bringing into focus the roles of Canadian performers, showmen, and communities in North American carnival history.

Nicholas's work could easily be divided into two distinct sections, though Nicholas herself does not structure the book this way. The first three chapters focus on the history and background of the shows and their operators, as well as the relationship between carnival operators and local and federal governments (American and Canadian). These chapters set the stage for the latter half of the book, which takes a more targeted view. In the last three chapters, Nicholas narrows her focus,

examining the case histories of particular performers, as well as the history of the development of the "normal" body, twentieth-century constructions of childhood and cuteness, and the implications of class, age, race, and ability in defining categories of "normal," "beautiful," "ugly," desireable," and what counts as the productive.

In chapters 1 to 3, Nicholas presents a detailed account of Canadian carnival history through an examination of archival material (photos, newspaper articles, advertisements, and interviews). Though Nicholas gestures to potential gaps in her analysis due to the scarcity of archival material in some regions, and in terms of first-person accounts by performers versus operators and managers (18-19), the overall result of Nicholas's analysis reads as a comprehensive and precise consideration of her material. Her focus, due to these limitations, centres on the provincial contexts of Ontario and Quebec, though she does also provide insight into the western Canadian context. Especially insightful in these opening sections is Nicholas's re-situating of the carnival as a central part of Canadian consumer and popular culture. Rather than banishing the carnival to the margins, Nicholas suggests that carnival operators, such as Patty Conklin (a particular focus of Nicholas, and a giant in the Canadian carnival business), responded to public and government concerns over the tastefulness of carnival sideshows by aligning their promotional strategies with broader social developments in Canadian culture. Specifically, the medicalization of disabled and racialized bodies, as well the development of pediatrics, influenced the way carnival freak show performers were marketed to their Canadian and American audiences. Through a clever reframing of freak shows and sideshows as educational and as medically curious, Conklin and other operators were able to convince reluctant town governments to grant them operating licences (127). In a similar vein, the casting of carnival operators and

employees as members of extended carnival families, allowed freak shows to ally themselves with a broader societal interest in "the family" as a productive ideal (96-97).

While Nicholas's first three chapters are rigorous in their scholarship and provide an enlightening and necessary context to the background of Canadian carnival shows, it is her analysis of the carnival's relationship to childhood, and specifically to child freak show performers, in the second half of the book that elevates the volume. Nicholas is quick to note in her chapter, "Not Just Child's Play: Child Freak Show Consumers and Workers," that much of what historians can access about children's lives in carnival shows is limited. Like many carnival freak show performers, child performers did not control the often manufactured narratives that were created around them (151). This chapter in particular is therefore a patchwork of what information is available, alongside a discussion of the construction of childhood from the 1920s to the 1960s in Canada. Divided into sections concerning child audiences, and others concerning child performers, Nicholas uses the case study of freak show performer Ernie Defort and the Dionne quintuplets to highlight the complex interrelationships between poverty, access to medical treatment, racialization, and recruitment into carnival freakshows (166-171, 190-199). This analysis flows easily into Nicholas's discussion in chapter 6 of the construction of "cuteness," particularly in relation to children and to dwarf performers. In the case of the latter, Nicholas describes how elaborate narratives were often constructed around dwarf performers, who were presented in carnival sideshows as miniature versions of idealized heterosexual family units. The creation of these kinds of narratives "was especially important to the 'cleaning up' of freak shows" (179). Notably, these performers tended to be white, and while the freak show afforded them a positive valence not often felt by other

freak show performers, respectability in the context of the shows did not translate into acceptance outside the context of performing (180-181).

The attentiveness and care with which Nicholas approaches her subject deserves comment. The case studies of Defort and the Dionne quintuplets are told skillfully, without slipping into exploitation or sensationalization, and Nicholas is careful to note that her choice to use limited photographic material in the book is due in part to her desire not to replicate the exploitation of freak show performers (20). That said, the first half of Nicholas's monograph does suffer from minor organizational issues. Although Nicholas's first few chapters use a more historiographical approach, she often jumps back and forward in time, so that figures and historical developments can be hard to keep track of in what is a detailed and complex account. These chapters may therefore prove challenging or less accessible to the layperson or to undergraduate students. That said, Nicholas's last three chapters would be a happy addition to an undergraduate or graduate syllabus focusing on attitudes toward the body in Canada, as well as the history of childhood and spectacle in North America.

Reviewed by: Elliot Mason (Concordia University)

Sovereignty and the Sacred:

Secularism and the Political Economy of Religion

Robert A. Yelle. University of Chicago Press, 2018. 304 pages. $32.50 (paperback).

According to Robert A. Yelle, the last few decades have brought forth an increased scrutiny of secularism as a sustainable political model. *Sovereignty and the Sacred* develops this scrutiny into a broad-ranging excavation of notions of secularism, polity, and religion, and the way these concepts structure our lives. Yelle argues that previously, polities tended to be legitimated through the "unfortunate contingency" of violence, whereas now, they are supposedly legitimated by "popular consent and the social contract" (4). This book attempts to question whether this dichotomy whitewashes the history of religion by promoting a utopian view of our current socio-political system. Yelle also addresses how contemporary political theories have "based their answers on naked reason and the rejection of tradition," pushing away alternative solutions and political models of the past that could be attained through carefully studying the history of religion, specifically, the features of religion deemed illogical and insignificant by Enlightenment philosophy (4).

This book consists of six chapters that trace a genealogical history of sovereignty and the sacred as alternative political models to secularism. This might leave a disconcerting impression on the reader: surely, the way our current socio-political system operates must be more desirable than those that have existed in the past? Yet *Sovereignty and the Sacred* implores the reader to reconsider polity and religion. In chapter one, Yelle argues against the attempt to make history less bloody. He rejects relegating the violence of sovereignty to the

back burner of the historical narrative and promoting the myth that we currently live in an "inaugural age of wisdom transcending past superstitions" (35). Yelle insists that it is not effective or practical to reject the significant function violence "has served in the constitution of polity" (35). Through this process, Yelle engages with the writings of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, among others, to demonstrate the historical plurality of the definitions of sovereignty.

From the Middle Ages to the Reformation era, Yelle traces a history of Christian theological traditions and their larger significance in considering both polity and religion (38). This is inadvertently linked to Max Weber's theory of charisma and ideas on disenchantment, which Yelle argues were "originally an expression of Christian triumphalism" (72). He insists that it would be a mistake by contemporary scholars to identify the beginning of disenchantment, or "de-magicalization," to the era of Romanticism or the Enlightenment (37). It would also be a mistake to separate the discourse of disenchantment from theological discourses from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of which Yelle claims "the roots of the concept were already established" (72). Yelle also challenges Agamben's ahistoricism in his "genealogy of sovereignty" that renders his conception of sovereignty deficient (75), and provides various case studies in subsequent chapters that demonstrate the failure of rational choice theory to explain the concept of sacrifice (102). The book's main arguments are summarily to confront the "untamed and spontaneous" nature of humanity and come to terms with the violence associated with sovereignty (184). What makes this book particularly fascinating is that it is entirely clear that a major motivation of this book is to blur the lines that separate secularism and theology into two distinct histories.

Sovereignty and the Sacred approaches the past through a history of religion that places modernity and secularism, concepts ingrained in our contemporary political and legal systems, under the academic microscope. The book is complex, innovative, and at times, not entirely readable. However, this is not because of any failing within the writing. Rather, the esoteric nature of the content does not make it light reading. At the same time, Yelle successfully conveys a palpable sense of urgency that acts as an underlying strength of this book. It is well-researched, erudite, and delivers a discerning critique of how we fail to account for the violent aspects of the history of sovereignty—to our own detriment. Yelle writes that "the antidote to this ignorance is a genealogy that overcomes the false dichotomy between 'secular' modernity and its theological past" (36). Regardless of whether the arguments within this book can be universally hailed, Yelle is sensible in positing that we cannot "close the door to the past" when studying the relationship between sovereignty, the sacred, and violence (186). Ultimately, Yelle puts forth a new theory of religion that has the potential to be both innovative and liberating in the vein of scholars like Talal Asad and Michael Saler.

Reviewed by: Ruqaiyah Zarook (McGill University)

Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination:

Case Studies of Creative Social Change

Edited by Henry Jenkins, Gabriel Peters-Lazaro, and Sangita Shresthova. NYU Press, 2020. 400 pages. $32.00 (paperback).

Can we make the world a better place? Can we, as individuals, contribute to the breaking and building of social structures? Is it possible to imagine and create better? According to this book edited by Henry Jenkins, Gabriel Peters-Lazaro, and Sangita Shrestova the answer is: yes, yes, and YES!

What constitutes a better world is subjective. However, no matter what the definition, it always begins with one key element: imagination. Imagination is a process used by artists to create worlds not yet thought of—worlds different than our own. Once out there for everyone to consume, these creations have the power to ignite passion across communities; they can settle into the realm of popular culture, and magic can happen. Who can deny the power of the Harry Potter or the Star Wars series, *Black Panther*, or *The Handmaid's Tale*?

Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination is a collection of thirty case studies and essays establishing how "the popular" can be of service to pressing social issues such as racism, civic justice, and/or immigrants' rights. This book makes visible the powerful and useful elements of popular culture. Regrettably, popular culture is too often associated with inconsequential entertainment (assuming that there is something wrong with that notion) because it is not a language in which powerful institutions are fluent. Beyond entertainment, popular culture is an agent of change and influence and, as this book demonstrates, "activists around the world

[are] appropriating and remixing popular culture to fuel their social movements" (6).

Henry Jenkins, the Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts and Education at the University of Southern California, and one of the three editors of the book, defines civic imagination as "the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions; one cannot change the world without imagining what a better world might look like. Beyond that, the civic imagination requires and is realized through the ability to imagine the process of change, to see one's self as a civic agent capable of making change, to feel solidarity with others whose perspectives and experiences are different than one's own, to join a larger collective with shared interests, and to bring imaginative dimensions to real world spaces and places" (5).

The civic imagination may seem all talk and no action and can be frustrating for groups who are action-driven. Still, reading the book, we find that pop culture infiltrates political protests when women dress as handmaids, in reference to Margaret Atwood's famous novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, or people hold three fingers up in the air as a reference to the Hunger Games series. We realize the X-Men tales can help simplify information on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); we see how *Miss Marvel* can inspire young immigrants living in the United States. We are faced with the fact that it is much too easy to reduce popular culture to trivial entertainment. When studied through a lens informed by cultural studies, readers are encouraged to contribute to this line of work or at least, treat popular culture with the respect it deserves.

Overall, not only is this book an overview of great works of art, but it becomes undeniable that "pop culture has power" (8). I, for one, am glad to finally read an academic book dedicated to it.

Reviewed by: Cynthia De Petrillo (Concordia University)

The Preacher's Wife:

The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities

Kate Bowler. Princeton University Press, 2019. 368 pages. $29.95 (hardcover).

Perhaps comedic candour in discussing tough or sensitive subjects is to be expected of Kate Bowler, the *New York Times* bestselling author of the memoir *Everything Happens for a Reason: and Other Lies I've Loved*. Bowler's more recent scholarly work, though, showcases the author's ability to seamlessly incorporate methodical research alongside her signature frankness, wit, and wordplay, making *The Preacher's Wife* a pleasurable and informative read.

Bowler's book examines Christian female influence, power, and celebrity in the United States. *The Preacher's Wife* primarily focuses on the 1970s to the present, with the rise of conservative Christian women of megachurch fame. Bowler also traces women's changing roles in Christian leadership through American history, dating back to the precarious and fleeting power of female missionaries in the nineteenth century. Biographical case studies of some of the most well-known Christian women throughout this history, and into the present elucidate how women have continued to navigate (and manipulate) both changing and obstinate ideologies about gender and sex within the theological, social, and cultural universe of Christianity in the U.S.

This book consists of five chapters, each analyzing a potential role available to Christian women: "The Preacher," "The Homemaker," "The Talent," "The Counselor," and "The Beauty." Bowler defines each titled position, identifies ways in which women embrace, reject, and/or are excluded from each, and demonstrates how

women often alter the confines of these roles to create meaning and significance for themselves. Throughout, Bowler asserts that the most intrusive barrier for women obtaining authority in Christian leadership, historically and today, is the theology of complementarianism. This idea is defined in Bowler's helpful "Glossary of Important Terms" as the belief "that God assigned men the role of headship over the family and the church. It holds that although both men and women bear the image of God, the sexes have separate gifts" (xv). Bowler shows how this theology, which often posits women as "helpmeets" to men, has not only been integral to the prohibition of female preachers and ordination of women in many denominations, but has also been (re)claimed by conservative Christian women as a place of distinction. Some conservative women have used complementarianism in response to emergent second-wave feminist ideologies of gender equality, to differentiate themselves from "women's libbers," who they understand to be theologically corrupt (83). Bowler demonstrates that this distinction among conservative Christian women persists today.

Bowler focuses on conservative Christian women because it is these Protestant denominations that continue to churn out the most famous, well-financed, and/or wealthy Christian women in America. However, Bowler does not ignore liberal denominations and the women within them. Liberal Christian denominations, defined by "their supportive attitudes toward women in the pulpit" (xvi), provide the foundation of one of the book's most interesting and innovative lines of inquiry: the differentiation between liberal women navigating acceptable power (and the limitations thereof) versus conservative women obtaining *influence* outside of traditional or available structures. Bowler argues that liberal mainline Protestant denominations, which embrace "theological progressivism, left-wing politics,

and social justice leanings" (xvi), have not in fact provided significant avenues of leadership for liberal women overall, despite official acceptance of female ordination beginning in the 1970s. Bowler notes that since this time, conservative Christian women have continued to achieve more recognition and material influence than women in mainline denominations. Bowler ascribes this potential paradox to the fact that allowing female participation in liberal Christian leadership created tokenistic authority for a few select women, while not changing the fundamental structures that deny women real power within the tradition (44). Moreover, the illusory availability of formal leadership opportunities discouraged liberal women from seeking out other influential roles, namely in the Christian marketplace. The market, which includes the publication of bestselling self-help books, memoirs, hosting and appearing on Christian television programs, and running women's conferences, has instead been monopolized by conservative women who obtain both "popular power" and cultural influence through the celebrity status that often ensues (49). Bowler argues that conservative women focus their attention on market influence, in part, because more traditional positions of Christian leadership are not theologically of interest to them (and also remain officially closed to them).

A notable, and perhaps initially off-putting, component of *The Preacher's Wife* is Bowler's inclusion of photographs of the individual women highlighted throughout the text. Bowler's decision to showcase the physical attributes of the women being discussed only becomes clear in the last chapter, "The Beauty," where the importance of appearances for Christian women is made known. In this chapter, Bowler expertly shows how beauty standards can dictate how a woman will be perceived within her Christian community, and how such standards are enforced not only by external forces (both

the wider Christian and secular cultures) but also by women policing one another and themselves into compliance. As Christian beauty standards change in conformity or rejection of wider cultural norms, it is a woman's ability to exemplify and represent the expected attractiveness standards that can ease tensions around her religious identity and can determine her influence within the tradition.

Bowler focuses on white women for much of the text because "they were typically the best-known stars, but also because there has always been a much larger print industry to promote them and a marketplace to reward them" (7). Although statistically the megachurches Bowler studied were predominantly white, she also discusses Black women, Latina women, and Asian women where their experiences intersect with her narrative. For example, in "The Talent" Bowler examines positions of influence obtainable by Black women in Black churches (and beyond) through their involvement in gospel music, beginning in the early twentieth century (129). Bowler also makes visible some of the gaps and silences regarding race in existing representations of Christian female power (for example in the aforementioned quote regarding the racist exclusivity of the print industry and marketplace). In so doing, Bowler challenges her readers to think about the reasons behind such exclusions, and the consequences of such erasures.

The Preacher's Wife is a book about gender, power, influence, race, and capitalism. Students and general readers alike, interested in any of these topics, will find this an interesting and important read. Bowler's astute and innovative deductions, sympathetic treatment of her subject, and scholarly rigor will have all types of readers devouring this book—and thinking through some very tough questions as they do so.

Reviewed by: Laurel Andrew (Concordia University)

JRC | Religion & Culture

Reflections on the Field

A Note on Religion as Symbolically Mediated Cosmoaffect

Antonio R. Gualtieri
Professor Emeritus of Religion, Carleton University

Abstract

To paraphrase Ecclesiastes (12:12), "of making many definitions of religion there is no end." Over more than half a century teaching and writing on comparative religion, I have developed many versions. Informed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith's (1962) *Meaning and End of Religion*, the functional elements of religious traditions were fairly consistent. However, what were these elements intended to communicate or evoke? Here was the definitional rub. This note outlines my various efforts over the years—including "worldview," "cosmology and axiology," "cosmovision"—none ultimately satisfactory. My recent discovery of affect theory provides the springboard for a new term "cosmoaffect" to express the meaning I am after.

Keywords: methodology, comparative religion, defining religion, cosmology and axiology, cosmoaffect

I address here the problem of searching for a religiological term, that is, a term appropriate to the attempt to set out an understanding of religion. It is reasonable to hope that a clarification of terms will lead to a useful understanding of what we look at when we study religion.

In most of my lecturing and writing over past decades I have said something like this:

> Religion is a human activity in which persons *participate* in an *historical tradition* that induces and expresses the *faith* or *existential selfhood* of the participants in virtue of the tradition's *symbolic communication* of a

> cosmology and axiology, that is, a vision of the world as it truly is and commensurate values.

The concept of participation has been clear enough; it means engagement with the expressive genres of story, myth, ritual, architecture, music, priests and processions and so on.

There has been more difficulty in articulating what this participation does to the devotee. My answer, as noted, has been that such participation induces and expresses their faith. The echoes of Wilfred Cantwell Smith are obvious; in fact, I am chagrined to discover how repetitive of Smith's (1962) dual concepts of cumulative tradition and personal faith this all is. There are, however, obvious difficulties in Smith's brief definition of faith as the ability to see God. But in pressing for an expanded understanding of faith I experienced problems. I tried the familiar term world-and-value view but generally abandoned it because of its suggestion of a propositional philosophy of life.

Typically, I used the term "cosmology and axiology" but with misgivings because of its association, in some quarters, with space exploration and black holes. I also contemplated the use of "social imaginary" but dismissed this because I concluded both terms were potentially misleading; "social" because it might limit its application to one facet of a comprehensive cosmology—the human social; and "imaginary" with its connotation (at least in English) of fiction, which is radically different from the consciousness of the devotee who sings "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz says in "Religion as a Cultural System":

> It is this sense of the "really real" upon which the religious perspective rests and which the symbolic activities of religion as a cultural system are devoted to producing, intensifying and, so far as possible, rendering inviolable by the discordant revelations of secular experience.[1]

For a time my provisionally preferred term had become "cosmovision," borrowed from David Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovisions and Ceremonial Centers*.[2] Carrasco's work was seized upon because of its provocative inclusion of what I deemed necessary ingredients of a useful definition of religion. "Cosmo" conveyed the sense of the totality of our experience, of what is real and formative. Understandings that focused only on gods I judged too limited. "Vision" pointed towards religion's intended subjective result: a way of seeing, a vision that transcends ignorance and illusion. However, the metaphor of sight still did not capture the full experiential scope of the meaning I was after.

Throughout my teaching and scholarly writing, my attempt to clarify the meaning of religion was complicated by the insistence that my focus was not on doctrines or rational beliefs about the world, given my premises that rational propositions can only inadequately grasp the real lifeworld, but—as I long told my students—on a *feel* for the world. While "feel" has subjective dimensions it also conveys an application to what is experienced as objectively out there and on which the feelings are fixed. The word "feel" also has problems of ambiguity. It may conjure up for some emotional sources of religion exemplified by Rudolf Otto's sense of the numinous with its feeling states of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, by which is meant a non-rational sense of awe and otherness that attracts and draws us at the same time as it overpowers and abases. While relevant to discussions about religious origins and the nature of the sacred,[3] this is not what is meant here.

Recently, I have hit upon yet another proposal that perhaps comes closer to what is generated in the lives of devotees by their religious participation. On reading Hua Hsu's article about Lauren Berlant's affect theory in *The New Yorker* I pondered whether the term "cosmoaffect" would serve my purposes.[4] Further reading, especially of Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*, disclosed a cluster of terms like the following used to convey the thrust of affect theory: non-verbal, pre-linguistic, linguistic fallacy, feelings rather than a set of ideas, the body.[5] But is this not what perceptive religionists have always known? Ritual, for example, typically entails first, the expressive use of the body and second, the cultivation of sentiments of sacrality.

I did not derive my present proposal directly from my brush with affect theory. Rather, I was encouraged to use a term whose sense had long been implicit in my working assumptions in the study of religions. What affect theory also provided was assurance that this was the right track to pursue.

I locate a decisive contribution to this affect line of thought to what I first read in Alfred North Whitehead some seventy years ago. I resonated with his warning about the fallacy of misplaced concreteness: abstractions like ideas must not be mistaken for the concrete world.[6] Additionally, his perception that the principle of causality is neither a formal a priori of reason nor an empirical inference, but rather is the feeling of how one bodily state follows another, reinforced my qualification of logical system and moved me towards the primacy of emotional expression.

Whereas *Cruel Optimism* inclines towards culturally circumscribed probes (like politics, relationships, sex, property, employment), religious affects are cosmological, that is they purport to be authentic responses to the way the world—reality as such—truly is. Beyond this, the

religious person's faith—the internalization of that amalgam of feelings towards the world and from the world—necessitates an axiology or way of life. A single but critical word conveys this connection: "Therefore." Because you experience things in a particular way, you ought, therefore, to behave in a commensurate way.

I believe cosmoaffect is the way I would now want to define what participation in an historical religious tradition does to the participants' consciousness. Admittedly, cosmoaffect is an awkward neologism and its four syllables lose crispness (worldview, for example, has only two syllables in English but suffers from the intellectualist patina it seems to have acquired). The term cosmoaffect covers two important bases: first, it applies to the whole of reality (cosmos) and second, it points to the feeling quality of the existential response entailed (affect).

This does not mean that rational or doctrinal assertions may not be present as part of the devotees' historical tradition, or that they may not be ferreted out by analytic construction. But they are subsidiary to the core of religiousness, which is the affective response to engagement with human existence, historical time, the natural environment, and ultimacy. These feelings towards the elements of our encountered world determine how we look upon them and behave within them.

So now, instead of trying to understand the existential selfhood of an interlocutor by asking "what is your cosmology and axiology?" I may, with more accuracy, ask "what is your cosmoaffect and axiology?" (Admittedly, not an easy way to initiate pub chatter!)

Note that this way of inquiry, by focusing on the faith (cosmoaffect) of participants, puts the emphasis on the subjective side of the "real world/personal faith" relationship. It does, nevertheless, imply a reference to

what is outside the consciousness of the religious devotees who look upon their cosmoaffect as appropriate to the world as it really is and in which they are summoned to live.

My confidence to pursue this direction was reinforced by a re-reading of John Wisdom's article "Gods." Each of the two disputants in John Wisdom's famous parable of the garden in "Gods" had a different *feel* for the garden; one experiencing it as the object of a providential gardener's care, the other as a neglected, unkempt garden.

Their subjective feel was not a result of different access to facts about the garden; they experienced the same empirical facts such as watering and weeding. This could imply that there is no necessary connection between objective facts about the world and subjective feelings towards it. But this would differ from the analysis that I proffer here. In Wisdom's analysis, there is no experimental or empirical basis to validate one feeling over the other; both disputants see the same garden. My argument, nevertheless, posits an existential, experiential connection between feeling and fact. The fact in question, however, is not an empirical justification of particular feelings; rather it is the underlying reality itself.

The advocate of the existence of a tender gardener persists in noticing the garden's revelatory power because he feels that conviction to be appropriate to his feeling of the active presence of an invisible gardener. In other words, the world does really possess those qualities that warrant a particular feeling response. This relation of affect can be represented by a cluster of words like outlook, perception, discernment, arousal, stance, evaluation, engagement.

To back up to where I came in. That we have to navigate within and around a real world outside us is, for most, an incontestable fact. What is debatable and vexing is that the nature of this objective world is not self-evident. What is the best pathway, the least dangerous route, the most enjoyable, and least harmful way to manoeuvre within this world? For that, it helps a great deal to have an understanding of this world into which we are thrown. That is what religions aspire to do; to provide acceptable answers to the existential queries about nature, history, humans, and gods.

In seeking to understand religious persons I ask, first of all, how do the narration of their traditional sacred stories and the practice of their rituals generate their feeling for the historical process? This would convey their likely orientation toward issues of ethnicity, nationalism, identity, and historical teleology. Second, what do they feel about humans? This would cover, for example, bioethical issues like death, advance directives, and questions of sexuality and good and evil. Third, what are their feelings toward the natural environment? This might indicate where they might go on issues of clear cutting, pipelines, open pit mines, and contamination of water courses. Fourth, what is their feeling about ultimacy? Are there powers and beings or perceptions that transcend the everyday and ordinary? Disclose your cosmoaffect and I will understand so much about you that the rest is commentary. Our methodological task as scholars of religion seeking to understand the faith of others is facilitated by using a comprehensive, serviceable focusing concept of religion.