CUTTING EDGE
Volume 5: Spirituality in the Modern Western World
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Poem by Richard Bergen
Editor’s Introduction

It is my sincere honour to introduce the 5th volume of Interdisciplinary Studies’ Cutting Edge Journal. The submissions that we have received for our theme “Spirituality in the Modern Western World” demonstrate an inspiringly outstanding disciplinary depth and range. Our goal was to communicate the interdisciplinarity of spirituality, and through that, the spirit of interdisciplinarity. What we present in this volume is not only a testament to the scholarly excellence and effort of each author, but also an illumination of the intrinsic commonality that exists between them. It was through their dedication and patience that allowed our interdisciplinary community the opportunity to share the gift of their knowledge and offer the spirit of our ideal through them.

I had dedicated this journal volume to the theme of spirituality because I believe it speaks to something fundamental to our experiences as human beings. Spirituality often times represents the foundational source of our meaning, history, and community. Yet its ideational depth and specificity are also marked by a discursive ambiguity that holds the varieties of experiences and interpretations under a common umbrella. In other words, spirituality is a highly personal and specific affair that is also impersonal in its discursive ambiguity. I believe that it is precisely within this tension between personal specificity and impersonal discursive ambiguity that a truly meaningful connection can be established across disciplines, and ultimately, across the damaging gulfs of our increasingly fractured modern Western society. The submissions that we have received for this volume signify a prime example in which such an ideal can be expressed – it is to bring the unique personal meaning of each author and unite them under the ‘spiritual’ space of interdisciplinarity.

I would like to thank my Assistant Editor, Rena Del Pieve Gobbi, for her admirable dedication to both the stylistic and logistical foundations of our journal. Our work together had a rare momentum composed of a simultaneous productivity and ease – one that allowed us to take the journal to new and exciting directions that I hope will inspire our readers and future authors to continue their stay with us. I extend my gratitude to all of the reviewers, for their generous and tireless commitment to providing thoughtful and timely comments for our authors. I would also like to thank the faculty advisors, Dr. Barbara Weber and Dr. Walter Kohan, as well as our administrative support, Enid Ho, for all of their continuous support and encouragements throughout the journey of this volume.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of our authors, for providing the scholarly foundation that allows this volume to be possible. Each submission holds a distinct value in their unique disciplinary approaches and contributions – covering topics such as Victorian art, contemporary cinema, Haiku, and metal music. It is through the very gathering of their distinctiveness that the holism of spirituality – both as a topic and as a value – emerge proudly through this journal. We hope that this volume will continue to inspire students and scholars to deepen and share their knowledge, and to do so in ways that transcend the familiarity of our disciplinary boundaries.

— Steven Zhao, Editor-in-Chief
Abstracts and Author Biographies

Praying Hard: Milton, metal music and religious representation

Author: Richard Bergen

Abstract: The intersection of religion and the genre of metal music, involves more interplay and commonality than ‘collision.’ The poet John Milton is the springboard for a discussion of the narrative aesthetics that pervade metal, and goes on to consider theological themes, as well as the symphonic and choral music that fills metal, and is associated with sacredness. A kind of “dim religious light” (Milton’s phrase) pervades metal in its language, ideas, and aesthetics. Moreover, what might be characterized as the ‘sublime’ atmosphere of metal creates a (perhaps) surprising aptness for prayer in song lyrics. This essay concludes with a series of case studies and lyrical vignettes through several sub-genres of metal, to indicate a common theme of religious lamentation and supplication.

Bio: Richard Bergen is an advanced UBC PhD candidate and lecturer from the English department. His focus is English Literature and Intellectual History. He engages in poetic as well as academic writing. Richard enjoys going through rabbit holes of research. Recent work includes the “Ins” and “Outs” of the Allegorical Epic: The Soul’s Warfaring and Wayfaring. He will soon be presenting a talk on Edmund from Narnia and how he can provide insights for how our soul can relate to the Divine. Richard has a lovely wife, Carol, with whom he enjoys hiking and the ocean.

Patriarchy in Crisis: The God myth vs. the American father in contemporary cinema

Author: David Christopher

Abstract: The contemporary moment is rife with divisive political posturing and what Slavoj Žižek predicted would manifest as “new forms of apartheid” that reformulate older forms of racism, misogyny, and particularly religious fundamentalism (Žižek End Times x). This article examines Žižek’s filmic analysis of the predominant modes of ideological obfuscation, from the latest Hollywood blockbusters up to false (displaced) apocalypticism and at violent protests against the global system, and the rise of religious fundamentalism in particular” (Žižek End Times xii). Following his methodology of analysis, this paper takes an art historical perspective towards surveying the rise of cynicism against Christianity in cinema surrounding 9/11 with particular note to the structural similarities between the films The Prophecy (1995) and Legion (2010). While the extent of their specific impact remains embedded in a complex cultural history, it is evident that these films at least participated in the constitution of the current political climate in the West; the apparently progressive and introspective increased vilification of the Christian God is effectively subsumed into a new even more cynically conservative pro-gun ideology, and serves as a recuperative symbol that simultaneously validates ostensibly progressive forms of masculinity while maintaining a troubling patriarchal status quo.

Bio: David Christopher is a Ph.D. Candidate (ABD) in Cultural Studies in Media and Cinema at the University of Victoria (Canada) and a Sessional Instructor in the Department of Art History and Visual Studies, as well as a Faculty Sessional at the University of the Fraser Valley. David also holds an MA in Theatre History from UVic as well as a BA Honours in English and a BA in Economics.
from Carleton University in Ontario (Canada). His various articles on cinema and theatre have been published in such journals as *Theatre Notebook* and *CineAction*, amongst others. Scholarly fields of inquiry include neo-Marxian and anarchist cultural studies, the political economy of culture and mass media, psychoanalysis and repression theory, international horror and apocalypse cinema, science fiction and spectacle, Shakespeare and cinema, Cold War and Soviet cinema, and Canadian cinema.

**A Beautiful Death: *The Roses of Heliogabalus* and the Victorian art of dying**

Author: Kristen N. Matulewicz

Abstract: The 1888 painting by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema entitled *The Roses of Heliogabalus* has been plagued by the juxtaposition between its sensual presentation and the atrocities depicted, leaving audiences both charmed and beguiled. Alma-Tadema depicts a scene inspired by events described in *The Augustan Historie*, in which the young Syrian emperor Heliogabalus, held a banquet in 220 C.E at which he unfurled a false ceiling filled with flowers, delighting in watching the banqueters asphyxiate on the petals. By exploring the Victorian Good Death imagery present in *The Roses of Heliogabalus* in comparison to *A Study for 'The Roses of Heliogabalus'* I demonstrate how the overuse of this imagery results in audiences to be unable to sympathize with the dying figures in the final work. The viewer’s lack of empathy for the dying figures in Alma-Tadema’s work is due to his visual objectification of the dying individuals, paralleling social practices of the Victorian period.

Bio: Kristen Matulewicz is a recent graduate from the University of Victoria with a Master’s in Art History and Visual Studies. Her graduate work explored escapist practices of the nouveau riche during the Victorian period with a focus on the work of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and his immersive environments. She is currently the Education Manager at a Gilded Age estate and National Historic Landmark in the United States.

**(Re)imagining the curriculum with the haiku**

Author: Gwen Nguyen

Abstract: The article presents an analogy between the curriculum and features of a traditional haiku. The specific features of the haiku promote individual aspirations; the interconnectedness of humanity, the world, nature, and art; imagination and creativity; and a fresh mind and compassionate heart. It is proposed that just as haiku promote these features, the curriculum can do so as well.

Bio: Hong-Nguyen (Gwen) Nguyen, is a PhD Candidate in Curriculum and Instruction, University of Victoria, BC, Canada. Gwen has a BA in English linguistics and literature from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, HCMC, Vietnam, and an MA in Applied Linguistics from Saint Michael’s College, Vermont. She has been teaching English to speakers of other languages in Vietnam, the US and Japan, especially at the tertiary level for nine years. She is interested in cultural, historical, and aesthetic discourses of haiku. Currently, she is working with pre-service teachers in an English Language Learning course at the University of Victoria. She has experience with haiku, having published an MA thesis on how to use a haiku approach to motivate learners to learn English.
literature, written haiku as a pastime activity, and used haiku as a tool in teaching language during five years of living and working in Japan.

Letting in Light

I return to an old theme:
Why do I pause, freeze in the cold wind,
When the sun rises?
Why does the dawn dim all responsibilities
in the response it heralds?

Nothing matters now but this luminescent matter.
It is beautiful, yes, but blinds,
and I cannot enjoy one tenth of its view.
I wonder to look –
–the old polarity, and homonymical clue
of the wanderer – I know I must,
ah, commemorate, because I cannot be anything
so great that the sun will remember my corpse.

I pen these notations in guilt,
and bewilderment, and squander,
twenty minutes because some proof
should show in this
light
prism---

some soul should animate my hands, too:
to show to the art wonders
God makes!

None of this event should be scorned;
to make irony out of an incompletion,
an incomplete participation is squander.
A quandary because it is bewildering
is not the same as futility!

Let there be light, to my limited purview!

This, with the same God who creates –
And may my art-ponder betoken a lightened mind.

Richard Bergen
Praying Hard: Milton, metal music and religious representation

Author: Richard Bergen

I am a Renaissance scholar as well as part enthusiast and part analyst of metal music. Whenever I think of a poet or author that is ‘metal’ from the Renaissance era (there are several), the one that comes most to mind is John Milton. Leaving aside for a moment the fact that dozens of metal artists have presented concept albums about Paradise Lost, and countless more employ quotations from various characters in it, Milton effectively embodied or foreshadowed an underlying visionary environment of metal music. Early in his career, he wrote two twin poems entitled “L’allegro” and “Il’Penseroso,” roughly translated as “The Happy Man” and “The Pensive Man”: two competing visions of how it might be preferable to approach life. The former poem proposes a carefree, social, sensory, nonreflective approach to life. Il’Penseroso presents another picture: a deeply reflective, more solitary, somber, prophetic stance. Images that appear throughout this poem include a nun with a downcast look, an ancient shaded forest, a high tower, a goddess who is “O’er-laid with black, staid Wisdom’s hue” (l.16). Near the end of the poem, the speaker’s enthusiasm for the pensive life climaxes in a dynamic scene, which, one will note, has amazing affinity with the metal imaginary:

And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by som spirit to mortals good,
Or th’ unseen Genius of the Wood.

But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister’s pale,
And love the high embowed roof,
With antique pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.
There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full-voic’d quire below,
In service high, and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heav’n before mine eyes. (ll.151-166, 1958)

So many of the tropes from metal music videos, album covers, and lyrical gamuts are present here: the dim setting, an elusive spirit in the Wood, a cloister, a vaulted (Cathedral-like) roof with impressive pillars and complex, “storied” glass windows, as well as the instrument one most expects in a gothic horror movie. The desire for a connection to something that is ancient also comes through in the image of the wood, the stained glass windows, and the antique pillars. Here, too, Milton conveys, through his use of diction, the general sense that a concern with matters of gravitas...
are the most worthy of the Pensive Man ("service high," "bring all Heav’n before mine eyes"). And, of course, music: intense, epic music of anthems clear, with a pealing organ and a full-voiced choir, enough to dissolve the speaker “into ecstasies.”

Now, here are two questions that are potentially more contentious than my series of earlier observations: might the dim religious light be metal? And, is the organ and the full-voic’d choir religious? The remainder of essay will propose, that the better answer to both of these questions is (largely) affirmative. Among other genres, metal stands out as having been heavily permeated by the symphonic and choral music associated with sacredness. The “dim religious light” pervades metal in its language, ideas, and aesthetics. Moreover, what might be characterized as the “sublime” atmosphere of metal creates a (perhaps) surprising aptness for prayer in song lyrics.

The first item to observe is that metal is, generally, fixated on religion: as a lyrical theme, and as a panoply of images. One of the most common themes of metal songs, and albums, and even extending to the ethos of entire bands, is the rejection of institutional religion and profaning of sacred subjects: manifestly so in groups’ titular names, from early bands like Black Sabbath and Judas Priest, to contemporary groups like Lamb of God and Rotting Christ. Names, album titles, and lyrical content couple with the aggressive aesthetic of thunderous drums, downtuned and distorted guitars, and harsh vocals often convey an animus of rejection and iconoclasm. However, the reality is that in order really to appreciate the ideational and aesthetic content of a lot of metal bands, it is very helpful to know, for instance, a bit of arcane liturgical music, how the Sabbath has been understood in Judeo-Christian religion, who Judas is in the narrative of the gospels, how the Agnus Dei features in religious art, and how Christology functions in historical theology. Why should Dimmu Borgir use robes that resemble Gregorian monks and nuns for their choir in their Forces of the Northern Night live concert? Moreover, the many black metal artists that have planted their thematic flag in the ground of misanthropy have so little meaning in themselves. The interest of the theme depends on a history of Judeo-Christian doctrines like the image of God and universal charity. Lamb of God’s Sacrament album functions as a work of art partly because it treats Christian symbolism as an intertext.¹ Theological associations such as bodily suffering, gruesome death, ostracism from society, forgiveness and the antonym of vengeance, as well as being spiritually fit to partake of the Eucharist all come into play as thematic interstices and imagery. Bands that reject religion are still riffing off of religious images, practices, and ideas. Jason Lief (2017) notes that “heavy metal music, more than any other genre, has appropriated Christian symbols and language as a part of its subculture” (p. xiii), and proposes that religion intersects with metal at the level of central concerns and themes that pertain to the role of religion as a symbolic structure and a social enterprise at junctures such as death, the grotesque, and sexuality, junctures into which ideology would normally speak. If a band invokes a biblical demon based on, for instance, a Hebrew name it is still fundamentally invested in the explanatory and associative matrix that the mythological narrative of the religion provides, even if it rejects dogmas presupposed by the writers of the narrative.

As the famed philosopher and critic Terry Eagleton explains, there is a fundamental agreement between disagreeing parties concerning what the matter is to disagree upon (2017). I often think of Madeleine L’Engel’s observation that the rejecter of religion rejects because s/he cares

¹ An intertext is a “text considered in the light of its relation (esp. in terms of allusion) other texts” (OED).
so passionately about a core tenet of a religion, such as the promise of meaning or the essential
goodness of God; in the context of art creation, and whether it in some sense conveys faith, the
distinction between the anti- and the religious is unimportant (2001). John Milton, the poet
discussed earlier, intended to “justify the ways of God to men” (1.26 1958) through Paradise Lost,
because he knew that there was great cause for an “outcry against divine justice” (p. 202); justice and
freedom of the will were absolutely necessary to establish for Milton, even if it led to an uneasy
postulated that Christianity’s particular commitment to truth as a concept was turned into a tool for
critique of the religion’s historical doctrines: “the sense of truthfulness, highly developed by
Christianity, is disgusted at the falseness and mendacity of the whole Christian interpretation of
world and history” (p. 83). But, even the bands that portray religion as having some integrity or
merit can be appropriately at home in the genre. Ronnie James Dio’s “Holy Diver,” one of the most
iconic metal tracks of the past half-century, is about a Christ figure’s determination to bring salvation
to another world than earth, according to his own analysis. The song feels epic; the hero is strange
and numinous. The narrative feels spacious, serious, and full of dramatic conflict. Accordingly, it is
not the bands that base their artistic content on a rejection of Christianity that feel most non-
Christian in a typical modern sense, but those that participate in questions and traditions more
outside of Judeo-Christian religion, hearkening back to folk religion. Deena Weinstein’s important
book on metal (2009) follows Emile Durkheim’s distinction between a sacred of respect and sacred
of transgression, and theorizes the following about the mythical pagan-Christian relationship in
much of the genre of metal:

Heavy metal’s major source for its imagery and rhetoric of chaos is [. . .] Judeo-Christian
tradition. Although other religions speak to chaos, Judeo-Christian culture nourished the creators of
heavy metal and their core audience. The Book of Revelations, that unique apocalyptic vision in the
New Testament, is a particularly rich source of imagery for heavy metal lyrics. Not only are songs
such as Iron Maiden’s “Number of the Beast” inspired by its verses, it also provides a resonance, a
cultural frame of reference, for the imagery of chaos itself. The other religious tradition from which
heavy metal draws is paganism, the aggregate of the pre-Christian religions of Northern Europe.
Since the use of so-called pagan images is judged by Christians to be a representation of chaos, such
use by heavy metal bands serves as acts of rebellion (p. 39).

Bathory’s album, Blood, Fire, Death, conveys an animus against Christianity, with allusions
to Book V of Paradise Lost (“Dies Irae” and “The Golden Walls of Heaven”), and subsequently
portray a battle with a Norse god and a promise of Valhalla (1988). In folk metal (sometimes termed
“Viking metal”), the influence of polyphony and liturgical music is minimal. But even there, one sees
a similar, and compelling, underlying structure: a real commitment to grappling with foundational
narratives, national and personal myths, a sense that the ideal or the sacred are pervasive realities.
Amon Amarth might try to capture some of the feelings from old conceptions of Ragnarok, or
Ensiferum embodying the heroic story of the Finnish Kalevala, or Týr conferring musical flesh on
the story-world of the Valkyrie.

The gravitas and scope of these stories is, I think, reflected in the aesthetic that metal music
allows for. Often when I speak with others about why I enjoy metal, my answer involves my
fascination with the dynamic range, diverse timbre, and extensive usage of the lowest bass clef to the
highest of the treble. Admittedly, the tempo of metal music is typically fast, and the dynamics tend
to intensity; but, the extremity on one end only makes the light parts all the more impactful on the final music amalgamation. This is a corollary of the reasons for the dark sound from the hyper-masculine harsh vocalist – and the typically tender (light) female vocalist pairing, and why it is such a striking feature of bands like Epica, Cradle of Filth and Battlelore (though there are notable exceptions to this schema). A metal ‘ballad’ or instrumental piano piece has the potential for an unparalleled tonal effect on a metal album, as opposed to, say, a rock or pop album. Concomitant with the possibility (and appropriateness) of the widest array of musical tools in metal is the necessity of immense technical skill to play the instruments. Being able to play metal often requires the stepping stones of being able to play in other genres – consider, for instance, the fact that the most difficult song to play in the popular video game Guitar Hero is the famed “Through the Fire and the Flames” by Dragonforce (of course, there are other difficult genres to perform in as well). There is a ready analogy between the discipline and commitment required to be an intrepid explorer or capable soldier in a narrative, and a technically proficient musician playing music in the metal genre. None of this is to say that metal is the best genre or even the hardest to perform, but the aesthetic poles allow for an extraordinarily diverse exploration of the sturm und drang of the interior life and for metaphysical grappling: Persefone’s Spiritual Migration is one of the best examples I have seen of this.

The vocal performance of metal is extremely demanding as well, with its frequently soaring vocals and sometimes operatic vocal parts. Moreover, huge swaths of metal subgenres have come to be known for their growled, screamed, or retched vocals. It is far too simplistic to think of metal musicians as conveying ‘anger’ or ‘aggression’ or (the more metaphorical) ‘bestial rage.’ The harsh vocal style can be used in several different sub-genres, in different manners, and ranges in its possible texture, timbre, and range. It encompasses aggression, but in large measure, its dissonance, intensity, and marked difference from the regular sound production of vocal chords aims at a preternatural, or a sublime aesthetic. The Oxford English Dictionary defines sublime as those things in nature and art that affect the mind “with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness, or grandeur.” It seems to me that metal artists are attempting to tap into these emotions by sounding otherworldly. The classic work in English exploring the concept of the sublime is Edmund Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1756) in which he argues that “sublime objects are vast in their dimensions . . . rugged and negligent . . . the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive” (pp. 237-8). He returns a number of times to the idea that a profound mood and a different kind of pleasure can arise through the pain of the obscure, the dissonant, and the threatening elements of the sublime: “if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person . . . [these emotions] are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror [. . .]. Its highest degree I call astonishment; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence, and respect” (p. 257). Burke includes several discussions of sound, and notes that loudness can produce a sensation like the sublime: “raging storms, thunder, or artillery, awakes a great and awful sensation in the mind” (p. 151). The foundation of the sublime relates to the finitude of the subject in relation to the vastness of the nature and the putative supernature that surrounds the subject, a topic elaborated upon by Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, and brought into greater conversation with religion by Rudolf Otto’s Idea of the Holy (1923). Otto’s book focuses on the passions of terror and fascination that arise from the “holy” as being set apart and utterly
different (numinous) from the human subject. More specifically, he considers the tremendous of the numinous to arouse feelings of “awefulness,” “overpoweringness,” and “energy” or “urgency” (12-24). My point in bringing up the sublime and the numinous is that the aesthetic features of metal that relate to the dark (e.g., in the harsh vocals discussed above, the consistent use of minor keys, chromatic scales,2 stage props, album art), the dissonant, the grand (e.g., long song formats), and even the fearful, end up instantiating something like that sound that Weinstein characterizes as “the mystery, the nonspecific ominousness” of metal (p.50).3 These elements connect the genre with possible religious interpretations more than they cut them off.

There is another aesthetic element of pertinence to our discussion. The influence of choral music is extremely pervasive in a vast array of metal sub-genres, especially since the mid 1990s, and this seems to have almost nothing to do with the faith commitment of the bands in question. It is an odd paradox because sub-genres that over-represent Christian bands like nu-metal and metalcore are actually relatively absent of the aesthetic instantiation of symphonic metal (Abraham 2015). It is well-known that a huge percentage of the choral music produced in the history of the West has been sacred, based on ecclesiastical and biblical texts – the figure is estimated to be as high as 70%. Hobbs (2006) explains in his survey that “[Christianity’s] myths and liturgy have, at least until the modern era, profoundly shaped the core of the Western musical tradition as a whole. Many of the greatest composers practiced their art primarily as church musicians, writing as well as performing for public worship” (p.62). One can fully appreciate that sacred music is difficult to define, since the “sacrality” of music is based in large part on intent and usage in religious ceremony. Secular music has clearly been continuously affecting liturgical music, and vice versa, because the same composers have almost always written both throughout their lives. An example of secular-sacred similarity that Ruff (2007) points to is the common structures of Palestrina’s legendary church music on the one hand, and his madrigal compositions on the other. Nevertheless, there are several genres that have been the historical catchments for the signification of ‘sacredness’ in the Western World. One place of juncture for the Middle East and the West is chant, which took slightly different forms. Lois Ibsen al Faruqi (1983) explains that “the limited range and contiguity of notes in Gregorian and Qur’anic chant, the prevalence of stepwise progression” was meant to signify a different state from the physical world with its extremes of joy and sorrow (p. 28). Other forms of ‘sacred music’ have aimed at other religious concepts, such as Renaissance polyphony portraying the beauty of heavenly harmony, or the symphonic mass of the Romantic age conveying the glory of God (i.e., in arrangements of the “Gloria”) (Alwes 2015). Beyond these three forms, the organ’s central place in church music is surely not appropriate to overlook. Heritage (2016) has written about Manowar’s use of the pipe organ and “choir instrumentation with pseudo-religious lyrics – that due to their fantastical/mythical context give the piece an aura of hyperreal religiosity – to simulate the aesthetic of Western sacred music” (p. 55). In reality, metal has been a genre of popular music perhaps most heavily permeated by modalities of symphonic and choral music. Groups like Nightwish, Epica, Therion, Tristania, Angra, and Rhapsody of Fire have regularly made extensive use of choirs and orchestras, but the pervasiveness of keyboard pads simulating these sounds is exceedingly common throughout many metal subgenres since the 1990s.

2 Carter (2002) notes that in musicology, movements to the dominant with chromatic inflections imply greater states of tension or unrest (p.234).

3 Here she notes that speed and thrash metal are somewhat of exceptions to the rule of this characterization.
The privileged language of these choral arrangements is Latin (sometimes an elevated “King James” English). Latin, as a language has become the language of the traditional and the serious. It is no accident at all that so many metal bands have Latin titles, or use Latin for album titles; many even use the old ecclesiastical v for the u (as in the beloved meme, Trve Kvlt). And of course, a huge proportion of the Latin in metal is brokered off from the titles of masses, or with slight changes. There is, understandably, a massive overrepresentation of dour phrases like “Dies Irae” (“day of wrath”), but another Latin word used with the greatest ubiquity is aeternum (eternity). One may easily find songs that use mass texts like the Kyrie (e.g., Fate’s Warning’s track with this name), or the “Dies Irae” (e.g., Therion’s metal interpretation of Mozart’s piece, or Bathory’s ‘blasphemous’ take in Blood, Fire, Death). Sometimes the treatment is much more subversive and dark as in Si Monvmentum Requires, Circvmspice by Omega Deathspell, which includes a number of ‘prayers’ and Latin album tracks. But Latin is not quite the only place to find metal appropriations of ecclesiastical culture or a sacral feel; the Polish band Батюшка dresses up in Orthodox clerical garb for its performances, and sings in old church Slavonic; their popular album Litourigya consists of eight Yekteniya, or litanies that relate to theological themes like purification, grace, hope, and salvation.

My paper has been indicating some of the ways that the “dim religious light” pervades metal: in its language, ideas, and aesthetics. All of these elements converge in a common lyrical theme or form of address: it is the “Hard Praying” alluded to in the title, and with which the remainder of this paper will be occupied. One of my nonreligious friends once characterized metal as “the kind of music that cries to the heavens or shakes its fist at the universe, and you’re allowed to overhear it.” According to such a picture, ‘prayers,’ at varying levels on the spectrum of specificity and religiosity, speckle the lyrical landscape of the metal genre. Moberg (2015) finds Christian metal concerts peculiar in the way they incorporate “conventional Christian practices such as collective prayer and praise poses” (p. 80), but outside of these obvious performative stunts, many tracks from a variety of metal sub-genres (outside of the Christian subculture) tend toward the prayerful. This fact is not in conflict with the “broadly defined individualist ethos” that Moberg finds to be a characteristic of metal artists’ oppositional engagement with religion (p. 23). The following discussion will explore a few lyrical possibilities for metal prayer.

The metal genre is far removed from the temper and largely self-assured character of 21st century church music, and one should expect the prayers to feel and sound different. For instance, the believing lyricist of the Finnish band Immortal Souls appropriates the melancholic atmosphere of death metal in the song “Dark Night Under The Northern Sky”:

Walking through this pagan land
My cross gets heavier to bear
But I’ve seen the revelation
Through your eyes my beloved one

Your starlit eyes
Awoke me to see forgiveness on a
Dark night under the northern sky.
Here there is a small inflection of Christian hope mixed with other typical death metal tropes such as the title, the perambulation, and the setting of the forest. Quite a number of prominent groups in the mainstream of metal have songwriters that have publicized their religious commitments; for instance, John Petrucci, a Catholic from Dream Theater, has penned a large proportion of this group’s lyrics, and sometimes brings matters of faith into the grand-scale struggles and conflicts of their albums’ themes. The speaker of “The Root of All Evil,” a song about the seven deadly sins, cries out in distress,

Take all of me  
The desires that keep burning deep inside  
Cast them all away  
And help to give me strength to face another day  
I am ready  
Help me be what I can be

The ostensibly religious content of Dream Theater’s songs can be quite challenging and surprising, throughout. Sometimes the addressee of the persona singing Dream Theater’s lyrics is not as perspicuous, as in the song “These Walls,” which is deeply ambiguous about the parameters of power the ‘you’ possesses; And indeed, the speaker of the song “In the Presence of Enemies” from Systematic Chaos portrays a vexed narrative in which he prays to a “Dark master”; this track has a parodic and dissonant usage of Psalm 23 (“My cup overflows / With my enemy’s blood”), before “[o]ne man rises up / Standing in their way,” and his soul becomes his “own” once more. The conflicts in Dream Theater’s albums occur at all levels of analysis, from the psychological, the social, and the cosmic, and all classes of audience are invoked in this band’s complex discography.

Many metal bands portray narratives in which a character or a set of characters express prayers in lyrics. Nightwish’s “Gethsemane” employs Jesus’s prayer on the Mount of Olives as the lyrics to its first verse, and the band Vanden Plas reinterprets the song “Gethsemane” from the drama Jesus Christ Superstar. In Sabaton’s Carolus Rex, for instance, tracks like the “Carolean’s Prayer” convey a Swedish army in the Wars of Religion praying the Lord’s Prayer, and have many other references to religious epithets (“Gott mit uns”). Christopher Lee’s album The Omens of Death features king Charlemagne’s reflective prayers on the sins he committed for his affairs of state. Kamelot’s rendering of Wolfgang von Goethe’s Faust stories (in Epica and The Black Halo) thematizes peace with God right from the start, beginning with the track “Farewell” which asks, “Why did God make me feel / there is more to be answered? . . . I will pray for those I have loved.” As the story takes a tragic turn and the hero is deceived by Satan, the protagonist asks, “Why oh why my God above / Have you abandoned me in my sobriety? / Behind the old façade / I’m your bewildered child / so take me across the river wide.” Vision Divines Perfect Machine, concept album on a science-fiction subject, when “illness and most of all death will be no more” establishes as its central conflict the “loss of soul” and alienation from God. The optimistic track “First Day of a Never-Ending Day” inserts a briefly defiant, “I can tell God’s never cared / Never listened to my cries and my prayer. . . . Where are you God?” The speaker of the song “God is Dead” appropriates the deity as the speaker who warns, “Don’t you call my name, I won’t answer / You won’t find me right there by your side / From now on you’re just left on your own / Take your freedom.” As the albums goes on, the listless denizens of the perfect machine begin to recognize “Eternal life made us forget the reason why we’re here,” and the vocalist urges, feelingly, “Tell me, tell me, where I’ve
gone / God, you don’t need to lie / Look into my eyes.” Pleas for forgiveness continue into the album until the almighty responds with the exhortative “[c]all my name, once again . . .” and the singer affirms “[w]e are not alone.”

Here already are several, alternating personae voicing prayers. The lyrics above are clearly addressed to God. The nature of the address is sometimes left more indirect, even as the tone and context of the song suggests the transcendent. Insomnium’s song “Revelation” is deeply unclear if a mortal is the speaker during the chorus, or if the speaker is divine (or, perhaps even, transcendent Nature). The chorus is placed in quotations indicating a different speaker from the other portions:

“I hear the unsaid thoughts,
The silence through the storm,
I speak without the words,
With unbound soul,
I’ll bring forth the Sun,
And hand over the moon,
I’ll hide the evening stars,
And fold them in your heart.”

In a tender portion of the song, another persona exults, “Here at your feet / I rest my head / Hear the roar of time / the birth of stars.” The precise metaphysics of the song are unclear, but Insomnium is clearly playing with ideas about creation and “unbound soul,” as the song puts it elsewhere, a kind of dialogue that brings the most sublime parts of the cosmos in conversation. Another song with similar ambiguity is Nightwish’s “The Escapist” from Dark Passion Play. The song does not use the word God, but its painful supplications all but address the divine. The song queries the nature of reality, the structure of being that the speaker inhabits. The singer identifies herself as a “Paradise Seeker,” and expresses a desire to transcend circumstance: “Out of sight, out of time, away from all lies.” Although the song is clearly enchanted by the prospect of getting lost “in a tale” (as the first verse states), the desire clearly cuts to a religious level, which seems to me intractable with the speaker’s entreaty: “Come someone make my heavy heart light / Come undone, bring me back to life.” One could construe this request as being addressed to an artist or a lover, but to characterize the request as a prayer is hardly a stretch, given the corresponding desire to be brought “out of sight, out of time.” The song also refers to the “journey homeward bound / The sound of a dolphin calling, / Tearing off the mask of man,” which seems preponderantly Augustinian, a reference to the well-known doctrine of the return of the soul to God. The massive sound from the choir, the horns, and the strings in this song all give it the highest level of gravitas, enhancing this take on the song. But of course, Tuomas Holopainen (the lyricist) leaves all of this inconclusive. It is perhaps most apt to think of this song as exploring notions of unrequited desire, seeking an outside source to placate internal anguish.

Anguish is a recurring matter for the band Evergrey. The album The Inner Circle deals at length with abuses of religion and the indoctrination of cults. The album has several personae, but the main speaker is extremely vulnerable and conflicted, even as he manages to articulate rejections of faith and of abusive or hypocritical figures. The last piece, “When the Walls Go Down” does not have a singer, but takes excerpts from a sermon by David Wilkerson entitled “A Call to Anguish”:
Lord, if you don’t help me I can’t get through this
I can’t
Lord, I’m too old for games
Foolish wisdom
And I’m tired of rhetoric, meaningless rhetoric that never changes things
Lord, just help me
Just help me.

The prayer goes on in this manner, with the trembling and shouting voice of an elderly David Wilkerson, and Evergrey providing an intense and forlorn background track, with a weeping string accompaniment. This song does not amount to an affirmation of the institutions criticized so consistently throughout the album, but is held together with these earlier aspersions on human trust, and feels like a necessary end to the album; a final gasp for hope, if you will. Indeed, part and parcel of the claim that metal is invested in a passionate disputation with religion is that artists who criticize religion, in the next breath have prayers, even if they are brutally vindictive. The melodic death metal band Kalmah has a number of songs criticizing religion. In the album For the Revolution, the song “Outremer,” about the “[r]eligious game played by the kings / Piety or arrogance / The reasons for hypocrisy”. But this same album contains the extremely urgent prayers of “Towards the Sky,” and the self-debasing supplication of “Wings of Blackening” (“Master lead me, please, in through your door / Pierce this willing ear just one more time”). Loch Vostok’s album Dystopium devotes at least half of its lyrical energies toward attacking religion in songs like “A Mission Undivine” “Sacred Structure”: “Now denounce all the deities / And you’ll be truly free.” But there is one brief moment in which the vocalist sings without vitriol, and his worn negative stance: “Beaten to the floor / Bereaved of everything I am”. He expresses a religious sentiment in wishing to “be free from sin,” and sings in existential desire: “I’m screaming from the top of my lungs: ‘Why am I here?’ / Lead the way for me / . . . Light the path for me Navigator.”

The aesthetic variables of how prayers can appear in the context of metal albums, or even throughout discographies is exceedingly broad, and our sample here is tiny; but it seems clear to me that the variables invite rather than discourage a prayerful orientation. The sublimity and the seriousness encourage metaphysical engagement. From the “full-voic’d choirs,” to the “dim religious light,” to the “ecstasies” of intensity, to its historical-religious fixations, metal music thrives on a transcendent obsession even as it might incline itself to be an “engine against the almighty.” Milton was famously accused as being “of the devil’s party” for portraying Satan in such a compelling manner in Paradise Lost, and understandably so. Likewise, artists who reject a form of religion in a superficial reading, but who perform in their genre with the highest artistic fidelity, may sometimes transcend the parochialism of a simplistic anti-religious stance.

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4 A phrase from George Herbert’s poem, “Prayer I.”
References


Introversion never could find any kind of secret place of refuge.

The journey inwards is rarely well-provisioned since the commission is nigh-always dire.

Introspection darkens the trenchant eyes of man, casting them into dusty corridors, narrow and black. Fearful glances neither comfort inhabitants, nor draw out contenders with flesh.

When in the presence of enemies, This Knowledge: something must be done! But anger chases shadows and cannot find its object.

The mind darkens even in the pursuit of the truth, of the matter, which is dark.

The will is sick, and is not guided by the anxious soul, which must confess that it has bewilderedly lost its anchor, even while it most firmly and resolutely (but vaguely) cries for a reprieve to one as strong, solid, and silent as a rock.

Richard Bergen
“tantum religio potuit suadere malorum” [“how great the evil which religion induces men to commit”]
— The Roman poet Lucretius.

“Supposing a man-hater [misanthrope] had desired to render the human race as unhappy as possible, what could he have invented for the purpose better than belief in an incomprehensible being about whom men could never be able to agree?” — Diderot in *A Philosophical Conversation*.

“Come ye children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of the Lord” — Psalm 34:11

Patriarchy in Crisis: The God myth vs. The American father in contemporary cinema

Author: David Christopher

It is hard to imagine a more telling symptom of patriarchal culture in crisis than the presidency of Donald Trump. Little could possibly have done more to sap the spirituality of the liberal left. Those of us in that camp remain hopeful for a future that sees the absolute end of such demagoguery, but we would do just as well to look closely at just how we got here. Indeed, the fundamental question of art history remains why this representation (art) at this time (history)? In the context of horror and fantasy, it is fundamentally the construction of what Robin Wood (1985) refers to as the “Other” (p. 199), the monster or monstrous, from which critics have extracted their inspection of social anxieties (founded in a highly self-protective American patriarchal society) against such ostensible threats as homosexuality, feminine agency, racial integration, and economic threats to the capitalist structure. This paper is rather concerned with the source of the ‘Other’. Indeed, popular criticism has encouraged such a focus as a function of looking through the art to critically analyze the social constructs that have informed its creation, to inspect the repressed (not visualized on-screen) source of social anxiety. Looking through the art (past the aesthetic) to the construction of the ‘Other’ often reveals a threat whose source is frequently religious dogma (particularly Christian in ‘Western’ society), and that is aimed squarely at the bourgeois family. Wood (1985) states that one of the characteristics that have “contributed to the [horror] genre’s reactionary wing” is “[t]he presence of Christianity (in so far as it is given weight or presented as a positive force),” a “dominant ideology” (p. 215-6). I argue that an increasing lack of faith in traditional sites of authority, based on academic rationality, and exacerbated by the events of 9/11, has given rise to a vilification of Christian doctrine (which participates with things such as capitalism in American patriarchal social constructs), and which, in turn, created an ideological vacuum in which the mythological construct of the father-god required a reactionary and recuperative recoding, specifically exemplified in the construction of the father-God in the movies *Prophecy* (1995) and *Legion* (2010).

In order to facilitate an exploration of these two apocalyptic films, I take Slavoj Žižek’s *Living in the End Times* (2010) as a timely analytical point of departure. In it he indicates a useful governing analytic methodology: “one of the best ways to detect shifts in the ideological constellation is to compare consecutive remakes of the same story” (p. 61). While *Prophecy* and *Legion* are not remakes per se, I will demonstrate how they follow an astonishingly similar narrative structure that
places them reasonably within the province of comparative analysis that Žižek indicates. A propos of the present analysis, in the same text Žižek (2010) also makes the bewildering claim that patriarchal hegemony is no longer hegemonic. He prompts his reader to consider those critics of patriarchy who attack it as if it were still a hegemonic position, ignoring what Marx and Engels wrote more than 150 years ago, in the first Chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*: “The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations.” Such an insight is still ignored by those leftist cultural theorists who focus their critique on patriarchal ideology and practice. Is it not time to start wondering about the fact that the critique of patriarchal “phallogocentrism” and so forth was elevated into the main question at the very historical moment – ours – when patriarchy definitively lost its hegemonic role, when it was progressively swept away by the market individualism of rights? (pp. 49-50)

With this surprisingly tendential reduction of patriarchal hegemony, Žižek seems to ignore such material social evidence as the gender pay gap and rampant homophobic violence. However, earlier in his text, Žižek (2010) had already stated that “brutal patriarchal authority” (p. 2) was still very much in evidence. When he further states in a 2014 lecture that “people talk about the end of Western universalism precisely at a time when Western capitalism is universal” (Žižek, 2014,12:45 – 12:51), it seems one might read his otherwise contradictory contentions regarding patriarchy in the same light. What I think Žižek is prompting the culturally critical reader to do, then, is to compare discreet versions of patriarchal ideology, and analyze how they manifest under different social or socio-political circumstances. With this in mind, and in the context of these two films, his inquiry as to “What becomes of patriarchal family values when . . . the family and parenthood itself are de jure reduced to a temporary and dissolvable contract between independent individuals” is very much at issue and will be the fundamental question that this paper explores in its analysis of the films in evidence (Žižek, 2010, p. 50). In another context, Žižek (2010) argues that such crises will inevitably result in “new forms of apartheid” (p. x), a point he reiterates in the specific context of racism in his 2014 lecture, “The Need to Censor Our Dreams” (Žižek, 2014). *Prophecy* and *Legion* bookend the events of 9/11 (an event that certainly prompted new forms of racism and rejuvenated older ones) and provide a fertile narrative context in which to explore “changes in the ideological constellation” regarding religion, Christianity, and most specifically, the myth of the patriarchal father-god.

Cynicism against Christianity in America was not new as of 9/11. In Bill Maher’s pseudo-documentary *Religulous* (2008), for example, Maher offers a graphic of quotes from the American founding fathers (complete with a patriotic underscore of the American national anthem) that indicates an earlier disillusionment with the ostensibly negative forces of Christianity and religion.

“Lighthouses are more useful than churches” – Benjamin Franklin; “This would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it” – John Adams; “Christianity is the most perverted system that ever shone on man” – Thomas Jefferson. (*Religulous* 0:32:42-55)

These examples are admittedly tendential and selective. However, amongst myriad other examples in more contemporary popular media, the television series *The Simpsons*, which has long been a comic touchstone to American sensibilities, featured an episode entitled Homer the Heretic in their 1992 season. Homer questions his Christian faith against the exigencies of his daily life as an American father. In the same season, *The Simpsons’* annual Halloween special begins with Homer, posing as Alfred Hitchcock, offering a disclaimer in which he states, “There are some crybabies out there,
religious types mostly, who might be offended” by the episode’s satirical treatment of superstitious taboo \(\text{(Treehouse of Horror III, 0:00:00-50)}\). In Kevin Smith’s 1999 comic feature \textit{Dogma}, an angelic muse (played by Salma Hayek) scoffs, “Leave it to the Catholics to destroy existence” \(\text{(Dogma 00:57:00)}\). These few examples of cynicism against Christianity, however, were very much couched in the ameliorating context of irony or parody. The events of 9/11 amplified such criticism into a cultural fervor with a more serious tenor.

Arguably, the most traumatic historical event to take place within American borders in the past 75 years is the attack on the World Trade Centre Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. “The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, caused perhaps the largest wave of paranoia for Americans since the McCarthy era” \(\text{(Bishop, 2009, p. 17)}\). Social anxieties associated with American foreign policy and violent religious zealotry made an accelerated move into the American social landscape. In its cinematic reflection, Robin Wood describes this geographic movement specifically in terms of a threat to the family. “The process whereby horror becomes associated with its true milieu, the family, is reflected in its steady geographical progress towards America” \(\text{(Wood, 1985, p. 209)}\). While Wood \(\text{(1985)}\) isolates this process as occurring between the fifties and the seventies \(\text{(p. 209)}\), Vivian Sobchack \(\text{(1996)}\), in her essay \textit{Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange} refers to a later era marked by a “mutual spatial relocation to the American landscape and temporal relocation to the present” \(\text{(p. 145)}\). And in the conclusion to Joshua Bellin’s \textit{Framing Monsters} in which he summarizes his perspective on fantasy film’s value as social criticism, he describes America as “a society that perpetually fantasizes monstrous threats to its safety and security” \(\text{(Bellin, 2005, p. 199)}\). But with the advent of 9/11, it was no longer a fantasy. The threat was realized, and it quickly became couched in a religious rhetoric that placed proponents of the Koran and of the Bible respectively in aggressive opposition.

Contradictions in Christian mythology and hypocrisy in Christian doctrine had already become easy targets for academic rationality. Even before 9/11, such an academic sentiment is evident in popular cinema. For example, in \textit{Prophecy}, it is science that solves the mystery of the angelic ‘john doe’. In both the morgue and the police station, the scientific methodology of autopsy and investigation alert Thomas to a biblical conspiracy \(\text{(Prophecy 0:18:55-20:35)}\). His visions of a war in heaven had already caused him to lose his faith, but they do not help him to understand what is happening. It takes science to do that. The morgue scientist uses carbon dating to prove that the fictitious “twenty-third chapter” of the Book of Revelation is a second-century archaeological find and it is Thomas’s literary scholarship that allows him to translate and interpret it \(\text{(Prophecy 0:27:33)}\).

Similarly, in \textit{Dogma}, Loki uses a distinct language of academic sophistry to convince a Catholic nun to abandon her faith. Loki critically analyzes the poem “The Walrus and the Carpenter” from Lewis Carroll’s \textit{Through the Looking Glass} and argues that it is “an indictment of organized religion” and that “following these faiths based on mythological beings ensures the destruction of one’s inner being” \(\text{(Dogma 0:04:15-36)}\). The nun finally asks, “What have I been doing with my life?” \(\text{(Dogma 0:04:52-54)}\). Furthermore, Loki and Bartleby take a specifically analytical-legal approach to God’s law. Following the letter of it rather than having blind faith in the spirit of it, they seek a “loophole” in the contradictory ‘rules’ of Catholicism to regain entry to heaven and end their exile \(\text{(Dogma 0:07:50)}\). In the same scene in which Loki converts the nun, Bartleby explains a method by which they can circumvent God’s edict to which Loki exclaims,
“Outstanding work!” (Dogma 0:08:26). Apparently, Bartleby’s ‘research’ has paid off. Moreover, the movie is replete with satire aimed at the dogmatic mythology of Christianity as they are opposed to the exigencies of reality. Nevertheless, both Prophecy and Dogma occur before 9/11 and merely participate with a rising disillusionment with Christian faith rather than overtly challenging it.

Following 9/11, however, the challenge became more palpable. The Bush administration was unable to satisfactorily identify a definitive ‘Other,’ although it tried to put a face to it with the widespread release of media images of Osama Bin Laden and the Afghan outback. The search for an ‘Other’ expanded to include the threat of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and evolved into a runaway middle-eastern witch hunt. Bush attempted to deploy the post-Pearl-Harbor rhetoric of Franklin D. Roosevelt by referring to the entire region as an “axis of evil” in his 2002 State of the Union Address, but utterly failed to unify popular opinion with his transparent politics. Indeed, factions for and against the vilification of specific middle-eastern targets were even more clearly demarcated while the actual source of the perceived threat remained elusive. The populace experienced genuine anger and became increasingly frustrated: real and ‘innocent’ people died on 9/11. There were real families on those planes: children and fathers. The inability to clearly lay blame elsewhere resulted in an unexpected introspection into American foreign policy and America’s dominant religion – a religion that was now exposed in its participation with the entire patriarchal/capitalist structure. Within ten years of the 9/11 attacks, popular political pundit Bill Maher deviated from comic televised rhetoric to full-blown feature film alarmism and specifically attacked religion. The very title of his feature combines the words ridiculous and religious into the portmanteau Religulous. Maher deploys stock footage of both the 9/11 attacks and suicide bombings early in the feature -‘documentary.’ He not only attacks Christianity, but includes middle-eastern religion in his cynical perspective, prompted by the foregrounding of the two as an overt binary opposition since 9/11.

Framing the events of 9/11, and participating with films such as Dogma, Religulous, Constantine (2005), and others, are the movies Prophecy (1995) and Legion (2010). These films clearly demonstrate a rising cynicism and a change in perceptions surrounding the God myth in Christian dogma. All of the movies expose and interrogate the myth of God’s benevolence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movie /Event:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>God:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Prophecy</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>ambiguous/benevolent force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogma</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>ambiguous/malevolent factor - rules could destroy existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTC Attacks</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>social introspection (especially towards religion/foreign policy) - no identifiable ‘Other’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>ambiguous/malevolent factor - rules could unfairly condemn one to hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religulous</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>malevolent force/threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legion</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>malevolent force realized - child/new patriarchal family must survive / disobedient angel</td>
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Likewise, all of the films frame God in terms of war. In the movie Prophecy, the human protagonist, Thomas, quotes St. Paul’s troubling verse from the bible. “Even now in heaven there are angels carrying savage weapons” (Prophecy 5:46-6:10). The narrative revolves around a war in heaven that has been raging since the time that God gave humankind a soul. The angel Gabriel leads the
antagonist faction against angels still loyal to God in an end-battle that resolves itself on earth. The movie purports the existence of an unknown “twenty-third chapter of the St. John’s Revelations” (Prophecy 20:43-44). As fiction, the “chapter” allows for the narrative to move ontologically in any direction, but with Catholicism on board, the mythology of the film is unable to escape a narrative of war. The movie opens with the angel Simon (played by the charismatic Eric Stoltz) in corporeal form on an earthly plane lamenting that he “never thought the war would happen again” (Prophecy 0:01:05-10). Thomas proceeds to expose further contradictions within the Christian belief system that liken such angels to militaristic assassins.

Did you ever notice how in the bible if God needed to punish someone, or make an example, or whenever God needed a killing, he sent an angel? Did you ever wonder what a creature like that must be like? A whole existence praising your God but always with one wing dipped in blood. Would you ever really want to see an angel? (Prophecy 1:00:50-1:01:27)

Two of these, Lucifer (a.k.a. Satan, played by the charismatic Viggo Mortensen) and Gabriel (played by the equally charismatic Christopher Walken), both originally angelic creations of God, bicker over their claim to war. (Later Christian mythology holds that Lucifer is amongst the names given to Satan, the ostensible ‘first’ angel who rose up against what he deemed God’s tyranny for which he was cast into hell and became the steward of all that is evil. In all three of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Gabriel is variously a messenger of God and some sort of trumpeter whose blow augurs and instigates the apocalypse. Somehow, in all of Prophecy, Constantine, and Legion, Gabriel’s affiliation to God renders him malevolent, or at least ambivalent, perhaps a more esoteric index of such rising cynicism in popular culture against religious doctrine.) In Prophecy, Lucifer insists, “This war is arrogant. That makes it evil. That’s mine” (Prophecy 1:28:51-55). In a less melodramatic, but equally terrifying tenor, Dogma opens with a satiric disclaimer that anticipates a violent religious response to its content (while modestly effacing the propagating power of feature film), which urges viewers to react civilly “before [they] think about hurting someone over this trifle of a film” (Dogma 0:00:37). In a similarly apocalyptic outlook (to that of Prophecy), the reincarnate thirteenth disciple (played by the charismatic Chris Rock) states that if the rogue angels Loki and Bartleby succeed in their designs, “all of [existence] ends in a heartbeat – all over a belief” (Dogma 1:04:34-38). Loki (actually the moniker of a Norse God of mischief) suggests that his redemption with god can be obtained with a “killing spree” in what he deems an act of “divine justice” (Dogma 0:08:28-0:09:00). Similarly, Legion depicts God’s army of angel-zombies visiting “an extermination” on humanity (Legion). The saviour angel Michael (played by the charismatic Paul Bettany) states, “The last time god lost faith in man he sent a flood. This time he sent what you see outside” (Legion). One of the besieged hostages asks what has motivated the zombie army. “Possessed by what? Demons? / No. By angels / In my version the angels are the good guys” (Legion). The notion of malevolent angels is at least reminiscent of Thomas’ lament about angels’ wings being dipped in blood in Prophecy. In any case, all of the movies explicitly conflate God with war and angels with violence.

Within the conflicts in the movies, more and more angels are ‘losing their wings’ so to speak. The Hollywood classics It’s a Wonderful Life (1946) and The Bishop’s Wife (1947) are part of a reactionary series of non-horror movies that clearly establish angels as benevolent under the dominant patriarchy of God and Christian doctrine. The former of the two made famous the adage, “Every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings” (It’s a Wonderful Life). In its visual contrast to this convention, Prophecy is the most discreet. Thomas hints at angels’ wings in his “dipped in blood”
speech, but he is clearly speaking metaphorically. With the exception of the skeletal remains in the desert gulag at the beginning of the movie, none of the angels appear to even have wings; they certainly don’t ‘lose’ them. At the end of *Dogma*, however, the symbolism is clearer. Loki is left with the wounded stumps of the wings he has cut off in an apparent act of repentant self-flagellation for the Armageddon he almost causes. (It is interesting to note also that *Dogma* is the only one of the movies in which God appears in a corporeal form, and as a woman—an explicit dig at the conventional masculinity of the father-god. In *Constantine*, and following it, God’s elusiveness is restored, perhaps as a function of a rising cynicism that questions God’s very existence.) In *Constantine*, Gabriel’s wings are singed into stumps after a violent explosion finally reveals her vulnerability (Constantine 01:50:00). Closing the cycle is *Legion* in which the metaphoric displacement of responsibility for potential Apocalypse introduced in *Dogma* with Loki’s self-flagellation is recoded when Michael also mutilates his wings as an apparently necessary part of his bid to arrest God’s Apocalypse. God seems powerless to stop Michael, or at least disinterested, and God’s will, omnipotence, and benevolence are all called into question.

However, the astonishing structural similarity between *Prophecy* and *Legion* is particularly subverted in the latter. Before 9/11, *Prophecy* posits Christianity as a locus of war and God as malevolent - but the malevolence is subsumed under Lucifer and Gabriel while God remains aligned with the saviour angel Simon. After 9/11, the movie *Legion* depicts God sending pestilence. God’s malevolence is no longer displaced, and he is openly aligned with the antagonist angel Gabriel. In both movies a single angel saviour comes to battle Gabriel in an end-war on earth. The similarity of the narrative structures is obvious but inverted through the notion of obedience. *Prophecy* opens with the saviour angel Simon stating that he has “always obeyed” (*Prophecy* 0:01:01-05) and later he argues with Gabriel, “I’m not sure who’s right, who’s wrong, but it doesn’t matter. Sometimes you just have to do what you’re told” (*Prophecy* 0:43:20-35). In *Legion*, the saviour angel, Michael, has come to assist humankind in an act of disobedience against God. A possessed angel-zombie verbally attacks Michael: “These weren’t your orders,” to which Michael responds, “No. I’m following my own orders now” (*Legion*). At the end of the movie, once Michael has been reincarnated after a battle with Gabriel, Gabriel is incredulous: “This can’t be. You’ve disobeyed him” (*Legion*). In *Prophecy* Gabriel is disobedient to God and attempts to effect the demise of humanity, whereas in *Legion* Gabriel is obedient to God in a similar act of violent extermination against humanity. Both Gabriels, however, occupy the position of antagonist within their respective narratives. By inverting obedience to the father-god, God moves from the symbolic position of benevolence to malevolence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarity in Structure:</th>
<th><em>Prophecy</em></th>
<th><em>Legion</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>War:</td>
<td>in heaven / end on earth - Gabriel</td>
<td>on earth - legion of zombie angels/apocalypse</td>
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<td>God:</td>
<td>ambiguous/benevolent</td>
<td>Malevolent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angel Saviour:</td>
<td>obedient to God</td>
<td>disobedient to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel:</td>
<td>disobedient to God</td>
<td>obedient to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father-god patriarchy:</td>
<td>intact</td>
<td>split – want vs. need / ending</td>
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This structural reversal can at the very least be read as an acceleration of social cynicism. After 9/11, academic rationality, especially as it questions blind faith, comes significantly to the fore. The futility of military retribution against an elusive ‘Other’ amplified the notion that God has abandoned us. *Constantine*, for example, deploys the same analytical rationality as *Dogma*, but it is evacuated of its comedic tenor that is replaced with a more austere melodrama. The lead character (played by the almost charismatic Keanu Reeves) is frustrated by “impossible rules, endless regulations” (*Constantine* 0:23:17) as he attempts to discover a path to redemption for his sin of suicide - a death from which he recovered - and avoid a second (this time, eternal) visit to hell. The rationale behind his behavior is problematic and resounds with the frustration of post-9/11 anxiety. All his efforts at ‘good deeds’ to “buy” his way back “into heaven” prove futile (*Constantine* 0:22:26). Of course, as it is melodrama, he finds the loophole at the end in an act of selflessness. Nonetheless, the movie openly interrogates Catholic rationality while simultaneously conflating religion with suffering: *Constantine* is finally granted access to heaven only by embracing an eternity in hell.

By the time *Religulous* was released in 2008, academic rationality against religion had reached an apex. In 2005, a Statistics Canada subsidiary webpage entitled The Daily reported that “[e]nrolment at Canadian universities recorded its strongest increase in 28 years during the academic year 2003/04. . . . In total, 990,400 students were enrolled in universities in 2003/04, up 6.1% from the previous year and 20.4% higher compared with 1997/98. It was the sixth consecutive year in which enrolment hit a record high” (University, 2005). In October 2009, the website pewsocialtrends.org reported that in the United States, “[j]ust under 11.5 million students, or 39.6 percent of all young adults ages 18 to 24, were enrolled in either a two- or four-year college as of October 2008” (Taylor, 2009). An article on The Free Library by Farlex adds that “[b]oth the absolute number and the percentage of young adults enrolled in colleges are at their highest level ever” (Recession, 2010). Simultaneously, secularism was on the rise. In the tellingly titled 2009 CBC News editorial, “Rise of the non-believers,” Neil MacDonald (2009) reported that

the most recent American Religious Identification Survey says that since 1990, the number of Americans describing themselves as Christians has declined by 10 per cent. . . . There are now 3.6 million outright atheists and agnostics in the U.S., up from a million 19 years ago. Furthermore, those who claim no religion at all are the only demographic that has grown in all 50 states since 1990. . . . In that same period, the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation at all has nearly doubled, rising from eight to 15 per cent. (MacDonald)

Maher likewise reports statistics of a growing non-religious minority at 16 per cent (*Religulous*). His film *Religulous* represents a crescendo of cynicism on behalf of this group, a diatribe in no uncertain terms against the hypocrisy of religion and the avarice and violence it fosters.

The systemic hypocrisy of a non-present God is clearly demonstrated in *Religulous*. The changing sensibility against Christianity and the malevolence of a man-made God appears in Maher’s exposé of the Christian ethic regarding homosexuality. For example, as homosexuality becomes a less peripheral minority and gains widespread social acceptance (same-sex marriage has been legal in Canada since 2005) the Christian position becomes horrifically dogmatic. In *Religulous*, a young lady absolving herself of any responsibility of her hate crime, and inadvertently bringing into the spotlight God’s questionable malevolence, touts a picket sign that reads “THANK GOD FOR AIDS” (as though it were a disease that only afflicts homosexuals); she states, “I don’t hate [gays]; God hates them” (*Religulous* 0:21:53-55). In this context, in Maher’s closing rhetoric, he argues, “If you
belonged to a political party or a social club that was tied to as much bigotry, misogyny, homophobia, violence, and sheer ignorance as religion is, you’d resign in protest” (Religulous 1:36:16-19). Using a language that clearly aligns his progressive social posturing with the plight of the oppressed community of non-traditional gender identities, he concludes that “[t]his is why rational people, anti-religionists must come out of the closet and assert themselves” (Religulous 1:35:49-55). And in a language that echoes the academic ethos of inquiry over assertion, Maher proclaims, “I preach the gospel of ‘I don’t know,’” apparently his arcane version of agnosticism (Religulous 00:10:47-49). He later defends this philosophy further when he argues that such “doubt is humble” (Religulous 1:34:40-42). In fact, the entire structure of the movie is similar to that of an academic essay. It begins with a rational thesis based on ostensibly agnostic inquiry; it closes with a potent and convincing conclusion.

What does all this have to do with the real patriarchal father and the family? While patriarchy may not have “definitively lost its hegemonic role,” as Žižek would have it, it had certainly been significantly challenged, at least slowly being “progressively swept away.” In the face of such disillusionment, the construct of patriarchy (upon which both the traditional family structure and Christianity depend) was in dire need of recuperation. In the movies Prophecy and Legion, similar to the God-war conflation, there is also a father-God conflation. Freud’s version of displacement remains active here as well, although the direction of movement is not as clear. In The Interpretation of Dreams, Freud explains that displacement is a mechanism of the dream-work in which repressed desires are mapped on to more anodyne memories from the waking state that share some sort of symbolic or structural significance, but in a benign form. In both films the notion of a patriarchal family structure, particularly its hierarchy of obedience, freely interchanges with the notion of God and his reign over his children of disparate heritage, angelic or human. In Prophecy, God is positioned as a father to all of Lucifer, Simon, Gabriel, and even the human Thomas. When Thomas conflicts with Gabriel, the interaction intimates Freudian Oedipal relations of the father and son. Thomas asks, “If you wanted to prove your side was right, Gabriel, so badly, why didn’t you just ask him? Why didn’t you just ask God?” to which Gabriel, like a brooding schoolboy, responds, “He won’t talk to me anymore” (Prophecy 01:24:08-45). In the dramatic presentation of the film, the word ‘God’, when uttered by Thomas, has an auspicious phonetic similarity to the word ‘Dad’, and the whole scene plays out very much like two brothers in a sibling rivalry, bickering over and competing for the affection of their father. Legion presents a similar brotherly conflict. Michael explains his reincarnation and forgiveness to Gabriel: “You gave him what he asked for. I gave him what he needed” (Legion 1:27:18-27). God as a symbol of fatherhood, long a pervasive tenet of Christianity and patriarchy, is variously tyrannical and forgiving.

By conflating these ideas (father and God) the movies explore both a micro-shift in the paternal sensibility within the patriarchal family structure and a macro-shift in the ‘faith’ in religion supplanted by a faith in academic rationality. The ideas of both father and God are failing under patriarchal Christian dogma. Unlike Prophecy, in the opening monologue of Legion, God more openly conflates with real fatherhood. A voice-over of the female protagonist Charlie recants her mother’s description of God and the family father that has abandoned them. It is unclear when she is referring to one or the other.

When I was a little girl, my mother would remind me each night before bed to open up my heart to God, for he was kind, merciful, and just. Things changed when my father left a few
years later, leaving her to raise me and my brothers in a [ . . . ] little place on the edge of the Mojave Desert. She never talked of a kind and merciful God again. Instead she spoke of a prophecy, of a time when all the world would be covered in darkness and the fate of mankind would be decided. One night I finally got the courage to ask my mother why God had changed, why he was so mad at his children. “I don’t know,” she said, tucking the covers around me. “I guess he just got tired of all the bullshit”. (Legion)

In her ambiguous description, the abandoning father seamlessly conflates with the God angry enough to smite. From this point of departure, the rest of the movie delineates a division between the two factions. God becomes aligned with an obsolete and dogmatic patriarchy while ostensibly real fathers are aligned with a new model in which to have faith. God is no longer constructing, but disrupting the reality of the social order, in this case, the family.

Quoting her own essay, The Limits of Infinity, Sobchack (1996) states “the horror film deals with moral chaos, the disruption of natural order (assumed to be God’s order), and the threat to the harmony of hearth and home” (p. 144). Sobchack (1996) also argues that drama emerges from the crisis experienced by American bourgeois patriarchy since the late 1960s and is marked by the related disintegration and transfiguration of the traditional American bourgeois family - an ideological as well as interpersonal structure characterized, as Robin Wood so frequently points out, by its cellular construction and institutionalization of capitalist and patriarchal relations and values (among them, monogamy, heterosexuality, and consumerism). (p. 144)

Cumulatively, these observations and examples indicate the conflation of horror, the patriarchal myth of God, and the family father. With these latter two exposed as malevolent, the myth of the family moral order also breaks down. Patricia Erens (1996), for example, argues that The Stepfather (1987) foregrounds “patriarchal power [and] the destructive elements of patriarchy” (p. 354) in her article tellingly entitled “Father as Monster.” Similarly, Sobchack (1996) refers to “the contemporary weakening of patriarchal authority and the glaring contradictions that exist between the mythology of family relations and their actual social practice” (p. 147). In this same vein, Dogma places God in opposition to reality throughout. It is replete with contrasts between the contradictions in Christian dogma and the vicissitudes of real life, with scenes that include an abortion clinic; a dope smoking, sexually obsessed “prophet”; and a demon composed entirely of human feces. Lastly, Prophecy intimates a pair bond between Thomas and the schoolteacher as they attempt to protect the apparently underprivileged aboriginal girl, but the pre-9/11 family dynamic is less obvious than in Legion.

By 2010, the ‘family father’ myth is evacuated of its legitimacy and authority. Early in the narrative of Legion, a young urban family stranded in (the less than subtly named) Paradise Falls awaits the repair of their car. The father figure is a clear depiction of the capitalist stereotype. He is a green-apple-faced Son of Man, sporting an expensive business suit with his debutante wife and their daughter in tow. He is the first to die. He is assaulted by an angel-zombie in the form of an asexual elderly woman, inverting the trope of a male ‘slasher’ killing a promiscuous female. The teenage girl in the suburbanite family, by contrast, is openly sexualized. When questioned by her father as to why she is dressed in such a provocative bourgeois fashion, she sarcastically responds that she was hoping to get stranded in a desert café and to get “double-teamed” by local bumpkins (Legion). The threat to the bourgeois family theme (as definitive of the horror genre as the monstrous-feminine), is deployed
when she later expresses the reasons underpinning her behaviour. Real conflict is characteristic of the family dynamic in the historical subtext of her character. In a more intimate moment with the young, handsome, African-American character, she suggests that it was her selfishness that caused her family to be stranded in Paradise Falls. He responds by telling her that when “you have a family, being bad isn’t so good” (Legion). The content of their interaction mitigates her otherwise unqualified promiscuity. Nevertheless, she dies.

Perhaps more significant to the patriarchal crisis addressed by the narrative, however, is the character Bob Hanson (played by Dennis Quaid), father to Jeep, who is entirely failing in the patriarchal capitalist structure in which he tries to participate. His business venture, the Paradise Falls Café, is an open failure. Nevertheless, he makes efforts to instruct Jeep on how to be a ‘man’ and avoid “making the same god-damn mistakes” that he made (Legion). Jeep, in contrast, is not patriarchal at all by conventional standards. Like Michael to God, he openly disobeys his father. He is emasculated and humiliated by the girl he loves (Charlie) who is pregnant with another man’s child – a definitive example of the seedless-castration that threatens male protagonists in so many modern films. Most importantly, he is un-patriarchal and un-Godlike in that he is un-warlike: he admits that he is unable to “pull the trigger” when threatened by an angel-zombie (Legion).

The disobedient angel Michael champions Jeep and offers a new model of the father-God in which to have faith. He emotes a moving panegyric.

When God chose your kind as the object of his love [the source of Gabriel’s jealousy in Prophecy], I was the first in all heaven to bow down before you. My love, my hope for mankind was no less than his. But I have watched you trample that gift. I have watched you kill each other over race and creed, wage war over dust and rubble, and over words in old books. And yet in the midst of all this darkness, I see some people who will not be bowed. I see some people who will not give up, even when they know all hope is lost, some people who realize that being lost is so close to being found. I see you, Jeep. Fifteen years old, your mother leaves you, and your father withdraws from the world, and you spend the next five years of your young life helping him find his way home. You love a woman who bears the child of another and you love her with no thought of yourself, even though you know she may never love you the way you love her. You, Jeep, you are the reason I still have faith. (Legion)

In this narrative validation, Jeep is positioned as a new model of patriarchal humility and heroism. The movie openly depicts a majority population that is drunk on religious obedience to dogmatic Christian doctrine as a corporeal threat to this newly emerging patriarchal model which may even have a female god at its head (such as Alanis Morrissette is in Dogma), or a non-traditional family patriarchy as its centre.

The apparent cynicism against traditional sites of authority embedded in its narrative and so structurally visible in a comparison with Prophecy, however, works to simultaneously recuperate Christian fundamentalism and American gun culture along with this new model of patriarchy, and lands the narrative squarely in the arena of what Herbert Marcuse (1965) refers to as “repressive tolerance.” One aspect of Herbert Marcuse’s concept of repressive tolerance indicates that the forces of dominant ideology in a capitalist culture tolerate a certain amount of critical dissent in order to create an illusion of agency and to contain and defuse resistance (Marcuse, 1965). In his 1965 essay, “Repressive Tolerance” he states that “what is proclaimed and practiced as tolerance today, is in
many of its most effective manifestations serving the cause of oppression. . . . Thus, within a repressive society, even progressive movements threaten to turn into their opposite to the degree to which they accept the rules of the game” (Marcuse, 1965, pp. 81-83). Marcuse (1965) explains that “[t]olerance toward that which is radically evil now appears as good because it serves the cohesion of the whole on the road to affluence or more affluence” (p. 83). He ultimately concludes that, “whatever improvement may occur ‘in the normal course of events’ and without subversion is likely to be improvement in the direction determined by particular interests which control the whole” (Marcuse, 1965, p. 93-4). Žižek (2010) makes similar criticisms of the seemingly progressive phenomenon of liberal tolerance:

Žižek’s more contemporary choice to recognize tolerance as a social problem renders Marcuse’s somewhat dated formula astonishingly relevant under the current conditions of social upheaval present in a United States with an emboldened alt-right under Trump’s presidency. Neither Žižek nor Marcuse intend to embolden intolerance, but rather point to the trace of disdain inherent in an implication that something is merely worthy of tolerance rather than acceptance. In Marcuse’s formulation, such tolerance works to reproduce and validate the authority, and even the oppression, of the faction tacitly entitled to tolerate. Thus, what appears to be a progressive movement towards racial harmony, for example, only works to mask a rising disdain for the faction tolerated, hidden in closets of social acceptability under leaders such as Obama, and released with fervor under Trump. In the same way, the narrative of Legion, which appears to be a progressive criticism against religious patriarchy merely recodes it into a more acceptable form under contemporary sensibilities and concludes its narrative in a way that ultimately recuperates the patriarchal order as it is.

In Prophecy, Thomas flees from a God that “showed him too much” war (Prophecy). In Legion, the closing sequence is equally telling. The son become father-figure flees the isolated patriarchal traditions of his own father’s futile business attempt. Jeep’s father, loyal to a more traditional model, has failed on all fronts. His wife left him, emasculating him in his parental role, and in his authority. His business failed. Both his family and his capitalist economic prospects are lost ideals. However, with Jeep, a new paternal model emerges, free from the irreconcilable constraints of a patriarchal system that has failed to provide a peaceful environment for it to do so. Jeep represents the disenfranchised un-patriarchal father. Rising cynicism against Christian doctrine becomes a convenient vehicle for the new paternal reality within the patriarchal structure to cry foul and announce its presence – a presence that will no longer accept marginalization and one that fully intends to fight for its position within our culture.

However, in this context, Legion quite clearly recuperates the war-like father-god through an allegory of the disobedience of children as necessary to the father’s enlightenment. The only way the patriarch can learn to change is through the actions forced on him by an enlightened ‘youth’ – the narratively conventional hope for the future. A new model for the father-god emerges – a new model
for the bourgeois family – in which the father-god not only tolerates emasculation and disobedience, but “needs” it. The new patriarchal order, besieged by the faceless masses which are symbolically infected by the ideology of the old order of the god-father, and not only a little reminiscent of Romero’s zombie hordes, is afforded survival by the persistent disobedience of the angel Michael, and the integrity of an equally disobedient son, Jeep.

Thus, *Legion* is simultaneously “progressive” and “reactionary,” and in more than one way (Wood, 1985, p. 199). In concert with the aforementioned ideological examples of repressive tolerance within the narrative of *Legion*, while questioning Christian doctrine, and exemplifying a rising cynicism, both it and *Prophecy* revalidate Christianity by naturalizing it. They simultaneously demonstrate God as a catalyst to violence, but still deploy Christian mythology as the narrative framework of reality. In *Prophecy*, the scientist points out, “It’s not like all of this is real”, ironic within the narrative, and contradictory to the direction that the literal interpretation of the bible takes in the film (*Prophecy* 0:29:00-03). Visually depicting the corporeal horror in which the violence of war results, Thomas points out that the horribly mutilated corpse of the angel “is real” (*Prophecy* 0:29:03-05). Both movies cinematically posit Christian doctrine as ‘real’ by deploying its mythology in corporeal form. Christian angels visit earth and regularly refer to God. Allah makes no appearance in the movies, nor does Buddha, nor Gitchi Manitou (even though the end-battle in *Prophecy* is played out in an aboriginal village). Other religious icons do not even merit mention, and are superseded by visibly white, male angels. In its reactionary vein, the movie revalidates patriarchal ‘normalcy’, and even revalorizes the very God of War that has caused so much trouble.

But this recuperative function of movies like *Legion* to re-establish a form of patriarchal hegemony was not absolute. God is redeemed at the end of *Legion* by forgiving Michael’s disobedience, and the division between paternity and God-patriarchy is blurred once again. As Sobchack (1996) states, “there seems no satisfying way for patriarchy to symbolically envision a satisfying future for itself,” and so, at least in this example, it is simply recuperated (p.159). Alienation is restored under a new model – the acceptance of the paternal anti-patriarchal father, and the ‘othering’ of Christian dogma while leaving a comfort zone for Christian doctrine to be redeemed, or at least re-interpreted, moving God away from militaristic obedience, and towards fatherly tolerance. In the end, the film valorizes the conventional heterosexual bourgeois family and there is a return to repressed ‘normalcy’ with God’s patriarchy restored. And this patriarchy is redolent of the right-wing militant ideology that currently pervades America. As Martyn Zachary states in his paraphrase of Kierkegaard’s analysis of the actions of Abraham in the bible, “Amidst such a complete perversion of the relationship between father/son, parent/child, and even man/god, [so similar to the fall of patriarchy described by Žižek] communication offers no way out” (2012), and like a modern-day Hamlet (the second most read text in Western culture next to the Bible), Jeep must decide “Whether ’tis nobler . . . to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles” in order to vanquish the zombified minions of God. He chooses the latter. In the touching and at least melodramatically inspiring closing sequence of *Legion*, the family (now headed by a new-model father who has learned to “pull the trigger”) drives towards the horizon of their future in a car overflowing with military-grade single-carry weapons. The ‘real’ father in the narrative still recognizes a palpable threat from the dangerous supernatural potential of the patriarchal God, but obviously enjoys newfound security in his own patriarchal role as family protector.
In contemporary hindsight, this conclusion cannot be seen as anything more than a horrific parody masked in melodrama. As Žižek (2010) has astutely noted, “feminism . . . taught us to discover the traces of violence in what appears, in a patriarchal culture, as a natural authority (of the father), [and] we should remember the grounding violence” it engenders (p. 34). The valorization of a self-protective gun culture that this alarming visual depository of weapons suggests has manifested into a culture of relentless mass shootings in the near decade since the movie was released. As the messiah child drives into the sunset newly protected by the mass weaponry of his ‘re-masculated father,’ one is sadly reminded of the Facebook meme which interrogates American right-wing pro-gun sophistry by asking which type of gun Jesus might have carried. The progressive/reactionary duality of Legion stands as only a single narrative symptom of a longstanding cultural trauma engendered by the patriarchal split in the landscape of socio-political sensibilities following 9/11. Perhaps this fact is best exemplified by the near even division of votes for and against Trump in the last election. One interest group on the decidedly pro-Trump side of the divide is comprised of the self-proclaimed evangelical Christians whom Maher derisively states must “grow up or die” (Religulous). In this stultifying and divisive political climate, actually progressive movements are all but entirely arrested, while the rapid deterioration of a livable world continues to accelerate, a world in which our fathers, our children, even a puerile president, must indeed either grow up, or die.

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A Beautiful Death: *The Roses of Heliogabalus* and the Victorian art of dying

Author: Kristen N. Matulewicz

I first experienced *The Roses of Heliogabalus* [Figure 1] (hereafter referred to as *Roses*) and *The Study for “The Roses of Heliogabalus”* [Figure 2] at the Leighton House Museum in 2014. The scene before me was that of a radiant balcony filled with shimmering silk robes and a wave of pink rose petals tumbling across marble. I was in awe of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s use of sensual beauty, fleshy pastels, and glistening marble. Staring intently at a scene of beautiful bodies being blanketed by petals, I found myself drawn deeper into the textural materiality of Alma-Tadema’s Roman world. Only after prolonged looking I realized the figures I originally understood as jovial revelers were actually dying. With this realization my confusion developed. How was it that I stood in front of a painting analyzing the realness of the figures and objects before me, recognizing their figural weight, and the warmth of the sun upon the marble, but had not understood the narrative? My work explores the significance of Sir Alma-Tadema creating his artwork with a seemingly unclear narrative. I will do this though a revaluation of Alma-Tadema’s use of materiality and Good Death imagery in a new reading of one of his later and most misunderstood paintings. I argue that by distracting the audience with beautifully crafted objects, Alma-Tadema draws the eye away from the underlying horrors of *Roses* through full sensual engagement ultimately resulting in a relatable scene of sensual social critique that is deeply moving for past and present viewers. I will show this by comparing the depiction of death in *Roses* to its representation in the study by focusing on themes of inebriation, frivolity, and pleasure in the face of death.

*Figure 1.* Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. (1888) *The Roses of Heliogabalus*. Oil on canvas, 132.7 x 214.4 cm. Perez Simon Collection, Mexico.
Roses depicts a scene described in The Augustan Histories in which the young Syrian emperor, Heliogabalus, infamous to both the Romans and the Victorians for his uncouth passion, overwhelms his “parasites in violets and other flowers, so that some were actually smothered to death, being unable to crawl out to the top” (Robbins, 2014, p. 55). Set against the backdrop of a bright Mediterranean sky and the music of a tibia, Alma-Tadema depicts a group of seven banqueters reveling in the roses rather than struggling against their impending death. The murder weapon, a cream-coloured curtain, flutters from the ceiling in the upper left corner. Pouring from the curtain is an abundance of pink rose petals that cascade over the guests.

Amongst the petals, from left to right, Alma-Tadema paints three groupings of “parasites.” As the false ceiling drops the roses pour heaviest atop the left-most and most active group, comprised of four individuals. Closet to the curtain, a woman attempts to stand against the perceived weight of the roses while beside her, a man wearing a crown with red berries pushes against the roses as they break over his head, still cupping his drink with one hand. Next to him, a man is shown still eating grapes. Tucked away is a woman who is almost completely entombed in the roses, with just fragments of her face visible amongst a sea of petals. She is depicted with dazed eyes and slightly parted lips, an expression used to show impending death. A similar expression is seen on the dying figures of popular artworks such as Henry Peach Robison’s Fading Away, which also illustrates a hallowed sense of serenity and displays the slightly parted lips associated with weak breathing.

As viewers follow the path of the cascading roses from left to right the groupings of victims appear less active. For example, the couple in the center of the canvas seem less perturbed by their impending doom than the previous grouping. The woman, who is wrapped in a blanket of roses, appears unfazed by the plummeting petals as she continues to play with an ostrich fan. Beside her a man crowned with crimson flowers, rolls his face into his arms in a futile attempt to protect his head, appearing resigned to his fate while watching the roses fall.

The action exhibited by the leftmost and center groups is not exhibited in the final grouping of banqueters. In this final group Alma-Tadema depicts two more figures who, although they have managed to elude the wall of petals, show no intention to flee the scene. Alma-Tadema paints a recumbent woman with a sake armband, holding a pomegranate half and staring out towards the viewer and a bearded man in a green tunic and braided crown, gazing towards Heliogabalus. Neither figure captured in a moment of movement.

Comparatively, Heliogabalus and his personal entourage of elites are shown in movement. Watching from a raised triclinium, Alma-Tadema breathes life into the faces of the imperial hosts. Beginning on the left side of the table Alma-Tadema introduces the youthful Heliogabalus who wears a golden tiara and a radiant gold robe. He cradles a golden cup as he impassively gazes down his aquiline nose, watching his guests suffocate. Beside him, holding a pomegranate in her heavily jewelled hand is his grandmother, Julia Maesa. Beside Julia Maesa, is Publius Valerius Comazon, the commander of the Second Parthian Legion. He is dressed in a green tunic, crowned in a laurel wreath, and depicted raising a blue drinking bowl in delight. Tucked away beside the commander is Heliogabalus’s third wife, Anna Faustina. Crowned with white roses, she stares wide-eyed. Beside her, two unknown women laugh and lean for a better view of the rose-trapped guests. In the final spot at the table, wearing a red coral necklace is Heliogabalus’ mother, Julia Soemias, lowering her heavy-lidded eyes and scoffing at the miserable unfortunates.
Lawrence Alma-Tadema became an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1876 and a full Academician in 1879. However, through careful manipulation of the Royal Academy’s requirements of classical painters, Alma-Tadema was able to create an “a la mode” (Wood, 1983, p.116) feel and exhibit his art at the Grosvenor Gallery, “London’s most fashionable exhibiting venue and the stronghold of the Aesthetic Movement.” (Prettejohn, 2016, p. 122) Adhering to Academy standards, *Roses* is carefully researched and bathed in historical accuracy, as demonstrated in the depictions of the imperial elites. Simultaneously, Alma-Tadema “a la mode” style allows him to modify his meticulously crafted detail in a way that does not isolate him from depicting the idealized beauty necessary of an artist showing at the Grosvenor Gallery. By combining these two styles of art practice, in the case of *Roses*, Alma-Tadema chooses to create an ambiguous storyline that relies on the Aesthetic Movement’s sense of creating art for art’s sake to execute his desired effect. Ultimately manipulating his historically accurate figures and objects in order enhance his paintings’ narrative of death, such as the bombardment of dying figures with lush rose petals, thus resulting in a theme of death and a Victorian aesthetic experience par excellence, created by selecting his own perfect nature and painting *that* into material reality. This approach draws the spectators into a subdued state of awe for the plush materials, allowing the darker implications of his art to slowly seep in until audiences are confronted with the understanding that they are appreciating a scene of horror. Alma-Tadema uses this saturation of beauty to help Victorians deal with uncomfortable truths and brings to the forefront of his paintings a dynamic tension between truth and beauty.

With a career built upon representations of meticulously crafted ornamentation cluttered by archaeological accuracy; the “archaeologist of artists” (Prettejohn, 2016, p. 21) has chosen to drastically alter the key weapon utilized in this scene, roses. Alma-Tadema has chosen to forgo historical accuracy to help transplant the viewer into the Roman scene, transforming the instrument of death, the falling violets, to roses, even nodding to this change by placing a garland of violets beneath the imperial table. He crafted these roses with the passion and conviction he held for all his ornamentation. Readying his painting for the spring exhibition, Alma-Tadema had fresh roses shipped weekly from Italy and the French Riviera during the winter months so that each rose had an individual life study to be produced from, even going so far as to drop the roses off his studio’s balcony to study how they fall (Trippi, 2017).

Alma-Tadema’s decision to paint roses cascading over the banqueters rather than violets assists audience in recognizing that this is a scene of murder. Flower language was extremely popular in the Victorian period, so the application of flowers in art would have been associated with the popular Victorian meanings. While the excessive use of violets would be historically accurate, these flowers carried the meaning of truthful, modest, and faithful, all characteristics that this scene is not (Greenaway, 1979, p. 42). In comparison, roses carried the connotations of desire, beauty, pain, elegance, and death: themes that are germane both to the painting and the story itself. By 1888, roses had direct correlations with death, becoming a popular choice for head-stone engravings over the traditional Christian symbolism thereby gaining more visual ties to death and mourning (Curl, 2004). It was also commonplace to see extravagant funeral scenes (both painted and real) of the body or casket shroud in roses. By selecting roses to be killing the guest, Alma-Tadema brings to the forefront of his painting the concept of death. Therefore, Alma-Tadema’s decision to use roses as the murder weapon helps us understand the painting’s location within Victorian ideas of death and dying. Simultaneously, Alma-Tadema’s grandiose use of pastel pink roses does more than illustrate
the narrative of death, his noted obsession with the roses’ craftsmanship can further be used as a means to illustrate his affiliation with the Aesthetic Movement and its “art for art’s sake” ideas. Building on the beauty created by the numerous and individually crafted roses Alma-Tadema strengthens *The Roses of Heliogabalus’* sense of pleasure through his use of Bacchic symbols.

Alma-Tadema references the themes of inebriation, frivolity, and pleasure in the face of death through the careful manipulation of researched artifacts throughout the painting. For example, Alma-Tadema draws the spectator’s eye up to the watchful gaze of Bacchus and his young lover Amphilus, constructed from a photograph he owned of the statue, currently located in the Vatican museum. Alma-Tadema did not limit the symbolism of Bacchus solely to depictions of the god. Highlighted by a gap in the roses, and set below the group of imperial figures, audiences are met with the bronze face of a man with a long beard, deeply furrowed brows, and a wide gaping mouth – the face of Silenus. Silenus, the tutor and faithful companion of Bacchus, is traditionally depicted as an inebriated older man. Here his face appears to gaze out on a quickly disappearing group of Roman vessels and pomegranates. Also hidden among the scene, is a Bacchic frieze across the imperial couch. Alma-Tadema has, through a layer of descending roses, created a delicate image of a woman involved with grape harvesting and wine making: she seems to be entering a state of ecstasy as part of the Bacchic mysteries [Figure 3]. To the right of the fruit-laden table, we see a bacchante energetically dancing with a snake [Figure 4].

![Figure 3. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. (1888) Detail of *The Roses of Heliogabalus.* Oil on canvas, 132.7 x 214.4 cm. Perez Simon Collection, Mexico.](image)

Connecting the symbolism displayed in *Roses* back to the narrative of murder, Alma-Tadema has included images that relate to the traditional iconography of death. The Victorian passion for things antique meant that they understood the symbolic world of ancient Rome. For example, a group of pomegranates rest on the edge of the table: one has been cut in half – alluding to Persephone’s eating of the pomegranate in the underworld. In the painting’s foreground we see another half held by a woman wearing a snake armband and looking towards the audience, illustrating that her death is imminent too.

As a final iconographic element in the narrative of the painting, Alma-Tadema inserts a bacchante. She plays an aulos and wears a crown of ivy atop her cascading hair, focused solely on making music, she is seemingly unaware of the drama unfolding before the viewer’s eye. This Bacchic figure provides a strong counterpoint to the intense focus of Emperor Heliogabalus whose passivity is unsettling amongst the death, violence, frivolity, and pleasure.
While Heliogabalus's passivity may appear uncharacteristic, it is the perceived passivity of the doomed banqueters in the foreground of *Roses* that elicit criticism. I suggest that their passivity is a result of Alma-Tadema employing popular Good Death imagery. The concept of a good death in Victorian culture became popularized by the Christian Evangelical revival, causing the strict roles of Heaven, Hell, and the afterlife to give way, ultimately removing the concept of Purgatory. Victorian Good Death practices were adapted from a longstanding Catholic tradition of “solemn farewells and pious advice to spouse, children, and servants, the resolution of worldly affairs, and the public reading of the will” (Jalland, 1968, p. 18). For the many who experienced the painful passing of a loved one, ideas of a pleasant eternity were of no comfort to them because the Evangelical belief that an individual’s dying behaviors, not just their actions during their lifetime, determined the fate of their souls. Thusly, the religious need for deathbed stoicism during the Evangelical Revival resulted in an increase of medicine used to sedate the dying. Due to the increase of sedation, “people were no longer allowed their own deaths; for, in the name of sympathy and avoiding distress, their families and doctors were allowing them to slip away oblivious to their fate” (Jalland, 1968, p. 108). This practice further removed the terror of death, not just for the dying but for the watchful loved ones as well.

With this fundamental change in attitudes towards death and dying, Victorian artists and artworks reflect “shifting attitudes towards death [which] were complemented by a radical change in aesthetics which consciously rejected the overblown emotionalism of the baroque” (Jupp, 2001, p. 203). As a result, death was portrayed as a clairvoyant moment in which the dying rests, surrounded by friends and family, and calmly makes their peace. This changing mindset was popularized in images such as Henry Peach Robinson’s *Fading Away* (1858), which is filled with an air of dignity and stoicism, reinforcing the idea that death was something that could be controlled by humans. Amidst the vibrant whites and soft focus, Robinson portrays all the required elements for a peaceful passing. The invalid’s eyes gently close as her family gathers around, waiting for her insights and farewells. The older woman, presumably her mother, is already dressed in her mourning gown. She sits with a small book, understood to be either a Bible or a book of psalms – indicating that the small family is preparing the young invalid’s soul for heaven (Jalland, 1968, p. 63).
If we keep in mind the popularization and circulation of this sort of resigned acceptance of death, Alma-Tadema’s depiction of the dying banqueters in *Roses* becomes less jarring. He has conveyed the same stoicism displayed by the young dying woman in Henry Peach Robinson’s work. Alma-Tadema has decided to interpret the narrative, relying on good death practices of his period and pair it with a scene filled with light and sparkling materials, elements that purposefully divert attention from the fate of the dying individuals. Furthermore, his decision to show the same serenity on all nine banqueters’ faces results with the audience unable to emotionally connect with the scene. By comparing *Roses* to its study, it can be observed that blocking the viewer’s empathy was done deliberately, and I argue, done so in order to keep the viewer interacting with the final work as a passive spectator, creating no emotional connection to the dying banqueters. Through altering the original concept for *Roses*, which was more evocative and filled with the banqueters’ twisting poses, Alma-Tadema has replaced these elements with intense material effects in the final work.

*The Roses of Heliogabalus* is unique to Alma-Tadema’s oeuvre because an extant study for the painting exists. Alma-Tadema once stated that “I alter as I go; as the thought comes, the picture shapes new ideas, new positions, new expressions, new everything” (Prettejohn, 2016, p. 153). The study was exhibited with the finished work at the Royal Academy’s spring 1888 exhibition. Presenting the study to viewers suggests that Alma-Tadema saw it as a completed and successful work. I suggest here that it is important to study the sketch in relation to the finished painting because it is the only known preparatory study created by Alma-Tadema for his work and demonstrates a purposeful manipulation of the viewer’s empathy between the study and *Roses*. I highlight that when the two are compared, Alma-Tadema modifies the narrative of death between the two artworks by altering how the viewer interacts with the image through its use of figural movement. Where *Roses* relies on Good Death’s stoic imagery, its study uses kinesis to created empathy from its viewers.

In his *Study for “The Roses of Heliogabalus”* the first thing one notices is that the panoramic view of the Alban hills, the figure of the striking bacchante, as well as the statue of Bacchus are all absent. Instead Alma-Tadema places the banqueters in an oppressively dark interior, drawing the viewer’s eye to the shimmering robes of Heliogabalus and removing the theme of inebriation and thereby, sedation. Appearing to blend into the dark curtains behind them, the elites pour over each other for a better view as they more actively engage with the scene of death before them: raising drinking bowls in celebration, and the form of Publius Valerius Comazon, standing in excitement as he leans over the table.

By closing off the top half of the canvas with dark colours and dense fabrics, Alma-Tadema draws attention to the surplus of lush pink petals which fall in clusters across the canvas. The roses tumble as a mass out of the dark gold and purple curtain on the left side of the canvas and tumbling from unseen origins above the doomed guests, forming three clusters of roses and guests. Perhaps the most significant difference between the study and finished painting occurs with the dying figures buried beneath the avalanche of roses. On the left, a group four figures dramatically twist and strain against the deluge of roses cascading from the curtain as they look to each other for help. The figures closest to the falling curtain seem to be standing and pushing up with straining arms. Where in the final piece Alma-Tadema paints the entombed woman, in the study this woman flings up one arm as she hopelessly attempts to fend off the flowers.
In the center of the canvas, Alma-Tadema places a large silver urn that spins off its axis, emphasizing the weight and force of the falling flowers. Below the tipping urn, is the form of a woman fully smothered by roses, only fragments of her patterned dress and her hair exposed. To her right a pinned man twists to protect himself from the onslaught of roses. Whereas in the finished painting Alma-Tadema highlights the role of Bacchus and an atmosphere of inebriated frivolity, in Study for “The Roses of Heliogabalus” he has created a dynamic swirl of petals and a gyrating krater spilling even more flowers and wine onto the unfortunate guests. It seems as if in the study he opts for a less academic approach to storytelling by having the narrative expressed through movement rather than symbolism.

Beside this buried man, leaning in from the lower right side of the canvas, as in the finished painting, a woman looks out to the viewer. However, the composure possessed in the final work is absent from this rendering. In the study this woman, dressed in a striped tunic, attempts to launch herself onto her feet. With an opening mouth and wide eyes that beg for assistance, she struggles against the mass of petals gathering atop her. As she attempts to flee, she exposes another man behind her who eliminated from the final version. This man, with graying hair, appears fully consumed by the flowers; he buries his face in his hands. Replacing Heliogabalus’s barbarian lover as the final victim is another woman, adorned with dark purple ribbons. A wave of flowers falling from the right side of the canvas breaks over her body as she turns from the viewer to look towards the coming roses, pathetically swatting at the petals with one arm in defense.

In his Study for “The Roses of Heliogabalus,” Alma-Tadema depicts both the doomed banqueters and the imperial entourage in movement. Unlike in The Roses of Heliogabalus, the
foreground figures of the study frantically twist and writhe to free themselves from the falling flowers. Their poses become the mechanism though which the narrative of death is carried rather than though traditional means such as the symbolism seen in *Roses*, shifting the narrative approach from the emotive study to the passive final work, which relies on symbolism to tell its story.

Alma-Tadema has done more than illustrate the “elaborate dignity and stateliness” of antiquity in creating *The Roses of Heliogabalus* (Dircks, 1910, p. 12). By using the glorified past as mirror for contemporary concerns, his paintings beautify the strife of a rapidly changing society. In the case of *Roses*, what first appears as a simple celebration of beauty gives way to much darker themes of inebriation, death, frivolity, and pleasure that subvert the audiences’ initial reaction. By burying the ugly aspects of culture beneath beautiful materiality, Alma-Tadema calls for attentive spectators to carefully scan the different elements of the painting to read the storyline. Thereby, encouraging audiences to continually look deeper into his scenes as they yield hidden anachronisms, which speak to contemporary audiences.

References


Robinson, H. P. (1858). *Fading Away*, photograph, 24.4 x 39.3 cm, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York, USA.


(Re)imagining the curriculum with the haiku

Author: Hong-Nguyen (Gwen) Nguyen

Introduction

More than two decades ago, Aoki (1996/2005) suggested that the curriculum should not only “signify the multiplicity of curricula but also . . . recognize that textured web of connecting lines that, like rhizomean plants, shoot from here to there and everywhere” (p. 419). Since then, many scholars have re-imagined and reconstructed the curriculum based on different texts, creating a complex but coherent combination of voices in the field of curriculum studies (Pinar, 2014). Researchers have drawn upon creative and poetic resources to ponder the concept of curriculum hybridity (Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009). For example, Leggo (2012) promotes “a curriculum of possibility for learning to live poetically in the world, for learning to live in the ecotone, the fecund place of tension where conflicts are integral to vitality, education, and transformation” (p. 141).

In this vein, I still remember how as a young girl I was struck by the impressive brevity and depth of haiku. At that time, the Vietnamese school system was heavily influenced by the traditional teacher-centred approach, and all texts were long and packed with information. Haiku never tried to explain anything, yet, they opened imagination and various interpretations. I fell in love with the tranquility, serene calmness, and simplicity of the haiku. Since then, I have envisioned a dream in which the learning and teaching environment could be as captivating and meaningful as a haiku. Indeed, Matsuo Basho, (1644-1694), a master of Japanese haiku, said that a haiku journey is an endless journey in which everyone may attend and appreciate every aspect of life (as cited in Hamill, 1999). Kerkham (2006) claims that a reader might discover a different interpretation in every encounter with a haiku, while Giroux (1974) says that the meaning of a haiku, as well as the reader’s awareness, grows every time it is read.

In this paper, I suggest that the process of teaching and learning is similar to the haiku journey in its ongoing “being” and “becoming,” the same features that make a haiku powerful also shed light on the teaching and learning path. In other words, curriculum may be represented by the principles of haiku. If we accept the metaphor that Tanaka, Stanger, Tse, and Farish (2014) propose, where the teaching and learning path is like a swamp – “a habitat that is ever-changing, multifaceted and difficult to make sense of” (p. 9) – then, indeed, teaching and learning is a journey comparable to the endless haiku journey.

Features of haiku and principles of education

Firstly, I introduce and discuss how seven aspects of haiku can reflect curricula. In Diagram 1, each aspect of the haiku corresponds to an aspect of the curriculum.
Diagram 1: Haiku principles and education

Renga (the Poetic Game) and Voice and Choice in Education

Zizovic and Toyota (2012) discuss how haiku derive from the waka poem, which features thirty-one syllables in five lines (5-7-5-7-7). During the Heian period in Japan (794-1185), a waka was divided into two parts and appeared in a poetic game of renga (linked verse); a first participant recited the opening verses (5-7-5) and a second participant added the final two verses (7-7). According to Cobb (2002), the first link (5-7-5), known as hokku, was crucial because it set the tone and style of language, the mood, and the seasonal context of the whole poem. Haiku emerged from these hokku and “gradually developed into a more crystallized form” in Japanese poetry (Zizovic & Toyota, 2012, p. 33). In this poetic game, renga, the poets came to the game voluntarily, with their own aspirations.

Likewise, the ideal learning or teaching path based on haiku could start with the aspirations of the learner and the teacher. I consider aspirations to be similar to Dewey’s (1913) concept of interest: “An interest is primarily a form of self-expressive activity—that is, of growth that comes through acting upon nascent tendencies” (p. 21). Dewey (1913) further elaborates that interest is evidence of the way in which one is engaged, occupied, taken up with, concerned about, absorbed by, or carried away by an objective subject-matter. Interest can be direct or indirect, but interest itself is not passive; as long as we are awake, we are always interested in something. Thus, the problem of education becomes connecting learning with the learner’s interests. Dewey maintains that the only way to make learning interesting or possible to the learner is that subjects must be selected in relation to the learner’s present experience, powers, and needs—and not vice versa. In other words, instead of
bringing the learner to a pre-selected set of subjects to be learned, the subjects must be brought to a learner who is ready to learn them. New material must be presented in such a way as to enable the learner to appreciate its relevance and its value in connection with that which already has significance for him or her.

Battiste (2008) also refers to voices and choices of learners and teachers as the learning spirit and advocates education to nourish the learning spirit. If we look at learning and teaching as a game, then both learner and teacher could be actively involved in this process and be engaged not only through watching but also through active playing. And to play such a game or enact such learning spirit, the teacher and the learner have to bring in their aspirations or voices and choices or interests.

Yet, it seems that learners and teachers may have difficulties in finding and expressing their voices and choices in their learning or teaching paths. Neither teachers nor students may thrive in the indeterminacy of finding their voices. Aoki (1993) mentions that teachers, who have to live in the generative space between curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived, might find its indeterminacy uncomfortable. As well, Bray and McCluskey (2015) discuss how learning lacks authenticity, passion, and engagement when learners do not have voices or choices in their study. Although Dewey (1913) suggests that the curriculum should support the interests and aspirations of learners in an environment where participants share their insights critically, reflectively, and cooperatively, much learning in the classroom still focusses on filling learners with information, or disciplinary knowledge, instead of making education meaningful and including authentic aspirations from both teachers and learners.

Nonetheless, other arguments have arisen. For example, Barnett (2009) argues that the curriculum should not focus solely on cognitive material and standardized methods of teaching or learning. Rather, education should attend to the connection between knowledge and the learner’s being and becoming. Thus, if the process of coming to know, as occurs in the haiku journey, is as important as the content of learning, then the aspirations and dispositions that the learners bring to education, and that they develop during learning, are what counts in the curriculum.

The Brevity of a Haiku and What to Teach or Learn

One of the distinguishing features of a haiku is its brevity (Yasuda, 1975). With only seventeen syllables within a few words, the words and the images are well-chosen to be meaningful, poetic, and suggestive. Each word not only contributes to the meaning but also represents an experience which leads to “one breath-long exclamation of delight” (Yasuda, 1975, p. 30). A haiku never discourages the reader, even the newcomer, by its length. On the contrary, it captivates the readers’ attention by its conciseness and focus. Takeda (2013) shares the same viewpoint, saying that the shortness of the haiku reveals the instantaneous understanding or sudden inspiration for writing and awareness. Moreover, Yasuda (1975) believes that the length of seventeen syllables in all languages is similar to one breath, which is a reason for haiku to continue to be written after some hundreds of years.

The content of education, or what we could teach and learn, may be as focused and meaningful as a haiku. If we return to Dewey’s (1938) idea of the curriculum as attached to the learner, we may understand that what to teach or what to learn is meaningful only when it is tied to a learner’s continuous experience and interest. Bray and McCluskey (2015) also suggest that a teacher
should focus on differentiating material and instruction to suit each individual’s voice and choice because learning is possible only when learners are ready to take the initiative and drive their own learning. However, this is seldom realized in contemporary education. The number of subjects learners have to study and the content they have to learn throughout their educational program, places a great burden on both teacher and learner. When discussing the burden of an elementary teacher, Wilkins (2009) says that the elementary teacher is expected to develop an understanding of and pedagogical facility with all subject areas whether or not he or she likes the subjects or enjoys teaching them. Gibbons (2015) and Myles (2015) also point out the difficulties that any classroom teachers in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and many other English-speaking countries have to face when carrying the dual responsibility for both students’ content-based learning and language development process. Education would probably be more effective if learners could focus on subjects of interest and teachers could teach and update their expertise.

Certainly, a content-based curriculum has value. We need people to build bridges and to be doctors. Nonetheless, it might benefit the learner more if the content were more focused and strongly connected to his or her experience. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) propose shifting the goal of education from the mastery of content knowledge of various subject matters to the mastery of the learning process. In the latter, learners are expected to find their own learning goals and to find ways to connect with others around them to function well in the learning process—a process that starts and closely connects with their interests.

**Kigo (The Seasonal Word) and Education and Nature**

Although a haiku is short, it always requires a *kigo*, a seasonal word, in the opening verse. The *kigo* indicates a specific season and has specific poetic associations, such as the autumn wind suggesting loneliness or desolation. Originally, the use of the seasonal word was influenced by classical tradition and by Chinese poetry that came into fashion in Japan in the 1680s (Kerkham, 2006). Kerkham (2006) explains that in poetry the scene is always the emotion and the emotion is always in the scene. The seasonal word sets the natural background for the poem, invoking a sense of place, and it unlocks the reader’s store of experience (Cobb, 2013). Takeda (2013), more poetically, says that as Japanese artists believe that true poems flee from the small shell of the season-indicating word, they try to sing out the changes of the four seasons. In other words, the *kigo* opens the the haiku worldview, in which everything is as precious as it is ephemeral. In one of his famous poems, Basho (1644-1694) captures the change of season and the departure of human beings for a journey (as cited in Aiken, 2011):

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spring departing
birds cry and in the fishes’
eyes are tears
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“Spring” is the key to Basho’s experiential haiku moment and also to the reader’s horizon of imagination within a natural world.

Learner and teacher could likewise live in and with the natural world so that learning and teaching would not be separate from nature. Orr (2011) elaborates this idea when he suggests that all education should be environmental education, teaching “the things that the Earth would teach us,
humility, holiness, connectedness, beauty, celebration, giving, restoration and wilderness” (p. 250). Likewise, Boyer (1995), when discussing the character of an educated person in the new era, emphasizes that the learner or teacher could be aware of the inextricable connection between him- or herself and the natural world. In one more instance, Cajete (2009) states that one of the most important questions that an educator should ask today is how to deal with the environmental crisis. However, “it is rare to find school systems engaging in environmental education, education for sustainable development, or nature-based education that goes beyond recycling programs, superficial climate science, and Amazonian rainforest conservation” (Tanaka, Stanger, Tse, & Farish, 2014, p. 138).

Through a life-span educational program, learner and teacher could always be mindful that they are part of the natural world and, apart from analytical and academic concerns, they could have a basic comprehension of environmental issues and ethics. It is beneficial to know about the arts of growing food, building shelter, using the earth’s energy, and the creation of local products, in order to place oneself meaningful within the natural world (Orr, 2011). Giving young learners a chance to go to different grocery stores to be aware of local and international products, or to take a class in a garden, or to expose themselves to beautiful images of nature help them connect with the natural world.

**Haiga (Haiku Paintings), Education and The Arts**

Central to the meaning and the value of a haiku is the haiga, the painting, in it. A haiga is related to the content of at least one verse in a haiku. The painting is usually drawn in the same ink used to write the haiku (sumi) and its style is likewise abbreviated. As Kerkham (2006) points out, the connection of the haiga to the content of a haiku is particularly important to the overall effect of the work. Since the painting relates to the content of the verse, it can take the reader’s understanding a step further by the addition of some new detail or by the introduction of an associated subject that the verse suggests. McGee (2009) mentions that Basho was the first to add intentionally a few sketches with brush and sumi ink to his writings, in order to evoke the essence of what is seen. He drew, for example, a morning glory vine, a hut by the side of the road, or a banana tree. After Basho, many other haiku masters also considered haiku painting or haiga as a practice of seeing, with the belief that “words and images together convey layers of meaning expressing more than what is possible to say in either words or pictures alone (McGee, 2009, p. 124).

Likewise, in a learning and teaching journey, the learner or the teacher might learn or teach in and through art. Greene (1995) suggests that participating in different forms of art allows human beings “to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed” (p. 123). Thus, as in the use of the haiga, art in education may allow the student a deeper or new understanding of the material.

The urge and capacity to be expressive through art often seem to be suppressed by the time children come to school, as the traditional teaching does not support and favour the arts. If we look at the schedule of art or music lessons in many school programs, compared to that of mathematics or language, we can see how unfairly these subjects are treated. In addition, parents do not want their children to focus on art or music because of an oft-hidden assumption that singing and painting do
not promote one’s career. Greene (1995) discussed how the educational goals in the United States for the year 2000 neglect arts.

Yet, I imagine a curriculum in which every learner and every teacher are sensitively responsive to the universal language of art. Although little information is available regarding how teachers might benefit from such a curriculum, Burton, Horowitz, and Abeles (2000) say that art education helps teachers engage with their work more, and helps them be happier, more cooperative, and expressive while enjoying rapport with others in a school. As Greene (1995) maintains, art cannot be separated from life as it lifts hopes and unlocks learner and teacher imaginations and discovery. Greene (1995) also insists that art could be explicitly and formally cultivated at school (instructing students to attend to shapes, sounds, contours, lines, and to have extended reflective time through dialogue about the arts) to enhance learners’ aesthetic experiences and transformation.

**Zoka (“Egoless” Theory) and Sense of Connectedness in Education**

Haiku poets free themselves from conventionalized and routine points of view and they never use personal pronouns in writing, which helps to make their work “egoless.” Everything described in a haiku is equal, connected, and interdependent. This idea originates in the doctrine of “making all things equal” of the Chinese philosopher, Zhuangzi. In this doctrine, all things in the world arise from the same source with absolutely no way to make distinctions between them (Peipei, 2005). With the understanding that everything has the same value, with no distinctions between higher and lower, superior and inferior, a haiku poet accepts all things as natural and comes into harmony with them.

With such equality in mind, I suggest a curriculum that nurtures the sense of individual connectedness with the school community and with the surrounding world. Within the traditional system, which separates school boards and teachers, teachers and learners, learners and knowledge, knowledge and the world, it is difficult for learners to see relationships and patterns and gain understanding beyond the separate subjects. Ross (2006) mentions that knowledge is not static but a thing of becoming. Therefore, the learner could be aware that, although much knowledge is inherited from the work of others, to learn is to focus on relationships and that knowledge is co-created by all knowers including him- or herself. When discussing what it means to be educated, Boyer (1995) says that: “Becoming well-educated also means discovering the connectedness of things” (p. 16). He explains that education could put learning in a historical and cultural perspective so that the learner or teacher can understand the social and natural interrelationships in which he or she participates. Stating this same point another way, Gardner (2008) proposes two “interpersonal” minds at which education should aim: respectful mind and ethical mind. He means that curriculum should be designed so that teacher and learner may attend to and value the relationships they have with one another, the differences between individuals, and the responsibilities that they share.

**Kuu/Sunyata and The Sense of Emptiness in Education**

Toyota, Hallonsten, and Shchepetunina (2012) claim that among all the differences between European and East Asian culture, the difference in the interpretation of *emptiness* stands out. In European culture, emptiness refers to the lack of stimuli, leading to the state of no sensation. However, empty spaces are very powerful in the cultures of Japan and other Asian countries. They
Speak louder than other possible objects that could occupy the space. Toyota, Hallonsten, and Shchepetunina (2012) define emptiness as “a space that does not necessarily have to be filled and [which] can be left untouched . . . without any additional changes” (p. 6). In other words, the European style tends to present itself in full, which fails to provide viewers the opportunity to imagine or co-create anything. In East Asian, and especially Japanese, cultures it is crucial for curiosity and imagination to interact with those intentional spaces. The concept originates in Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, focusing on the ambiguity that allows and calls for imagination or creativity. This is also found in Japanese Zen Buddhism, which focuses on removing anything from the mind in meditation to achieve enlightenment.

Similarly, empty space in education could invite imagination and creativity. If a teacher and learner cannot make space or create conditions for each other to grow, then education is only a dead valley that has been without rain for several years. I do not mean that only the learner needs the conditions that the teacher creates, rather, the teacher also needs conditions set by the learner to teach. In this interactivity, the teacher is not always the more knowledgeable individual.

In addition, the sense of emptiness in a haiku also reminds me of the importance of a fresh and quiet mind and a heart full of compassion in the learning and teaching path. When the mind is spacious after quieting, it may be open to new experiences (Masciotra, Roth, & Morel, 2006; Jinpa, 2015). When Basho (1644-1694) in one stroke, creates an image of a frog and a pond in a haiku, “An Old Pond” (translated by Aitken, 2011, p. 12), he never explains anything, yet, he creates space to invite the reader’s co-creation and completeness.

An old pond;
a frog leaps in.
the water sound.

Similarly, when the mind is quiet and refreshed, the learner or the teacher can perceive the inter-relationships between teaching, learning, knowledge, and the world, and can do so more clearly.

Compassion is also vital in teaching and learning. Many people think that compassion is a matter of religion and morality, or a private concern of the individual with little or no social relevance (Jinpa, 2015). Yet empathy, compassion, and kindness are inborn, rather than acquired through socialization or cultural exposure, although they require exposure to compassion and kindness to develop fully. Therefore, Jinpa argues that if our natural capacity for compassion is akin to our capacity for language, then a person should have a chance to encounter compassion in his or her formative years. If we make compassion a habit in our everyday lives through regular practice and action, with our family, classmates, and friends, we feel more interconnected and that will lead us to greater freedom—freedom from rigid ways of thinking or self-centred ways of acting and freedom for acting positively and directly for ourselves and for others.

**Haibun and The Journal in Teaching/Learning**

*Haibun* is the diary of a haiku poet. The haiku journal of Matsuo Basho, *The Journey to the Deep North* (citation), is considered to be his masterpiece. *Haibun* consists of the reflections of a *hyohakusha*—one who moves without direction. His *haibun* is an indispensable companion of Basho during his haiku journey, in which he realizes that “Nothing one sees is not a flower, nothing one
imagines is not the moon” (cited by Kerkham, 2006, p. 33). Likewise, in one’s own reflections on life and on haiku, no one knows better than oneself how deeply one goes. In regard to haiku, the reader has to and meditate on whatever it brings to him or her.

In education, each learner or teacher needs the same “journal” to reflect and navigate better the active and complex journey of learning or teaching. Each individual has to be self-responsible for his or her self-study. At the beginning of their book, Make Learning Personal, Bray and McClaskey (2015) cite a famous statement by Alvin Toffler: “The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn” (p. 24). What is implied here is a new purpose for education in the new century, one that focuses on supporting learners “to be” and “to become” leaders in their own learning. Accordingly, Bray, and McClaskey (2015) suggest that a new type of assessment—assessment as learning, which focuses on the responsibility of learners to reflect on their learning and to communicate it to others—is indispensable in any new curriculum aiming at personalized learning. In performing their own assessment, as an adjunct to their own learning, learners are believed to reach a deeper level of understanding as they become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) share the same idea, proposing that it is time to move beyond assessing content knowledge. The teacher and learner should learn to (co)reflect on their teaching and learning capacities, which involve diverse elements of the teaching/learning process and environment, such as roles and relationships, school climate conditions, learning task designs, the frequency and calibre of formative feedback, teacher and student engagement, teacher professional learning, the speed of students’ progress towards achieving specific learning goals, school leadership, system resources and policy alignment, and ultimately, the students’ mastery of the learning process itself.

It might be difficult for both teachers and students to change if they have always been involved in a traditional summative and formative assessment system. I cannot imagine what would happen if learners were given too much control and choice before they had the skills to structure their own learning and regulating effectively. Yet, starting with an activity such as a daily journal during a path full of uncertainties and nuances, the teacher and learner might find it helpful in being more reflective and in gaining, step by step, more ownership over their teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Underpinning the haiku is a curriculum of life that nurtures aspirations, promotes the interconnectedness of humanity, supports imagination and creativity, and cultivates a fresh mind and a compassionate heart. Although haiku seems to offer an ideal curriculum, I am not sure if it can be a perfect one for all. Just as the traditional haiku used to belong to a special group of intellectuals in Japan, the curriculum of haiku would probably not be suitable for beginners. Bray and McClaskey (2015) point out how it is challenging for teachers to navigate the roles of being a co-designer with learners to help them spell out their voice at early ages and the role of being a partner to students or invisible helper at a later point. Dewey (1938) insists that there is no perfect education; neither an old or a new educational paradigm is adequate for all. Yet, as a life-long learner and teacher, I am always yearning for a curriculum that provides a “sound educational experience” that cherishes each learner’s or teacher’s dreams and that promotes both continuity and interaction between each individual and what is learned and taught, as once discussed in Experience and Education by Dewey (1938).
References


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**Finitude, ad Infinitum**

All that is within,
all that has preceded,
and yet is to come,
bears a terrible weight
of glory and shame.
And now,
as each wearied step
wanes at wanting
sandals and spirits,
the mortal is ever---
and again, it is before me.
Shall solace be solicited
and peace proclaimed
in the face of mortal men
on mounted mirrors?
Ever, each clouded step
on dusty roads,
subterranean traverse,
moves closer,
nearer, to forever:

Richard Bergen