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Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. vii + 249 pp. Maps, abbreviations, notes, and index. $30.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-19-517487-9.

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Mohawk Saint is quite simply the best book I have read (and there are many excellent ones!) on the momentous and vexed encounter of Europeans and Native Americans in the Early Modern world. A must-read for anyone interested in New France or colonial Native Americans, it provides an intimate and imaginative portrait of both the Mohawk Catherine and the French missionaries with whom she interacted in the seventeenth-century Praying Iroquois community of Kahnawake.

Greer notes in his preface that what initially drew him to Catherine Tekakwitha was his desire to learn more about the native experience of contact and colonization. Because Catherine's short life, thanks to two contemporary Jesuit biographers, was "more fully and richly documented than that of any other indigenous person of North or South America in the colonial period" (p. vii), he conceived the idea of reconstructing her biography and thus of personalizing one of the great events of world history: the contact between European and Native American cultures. As he necessarily came to grips with his Jesuit sources, however, he concluded that "it is much harder than we usually care to admit for scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first century to understand either Iroquois or European people of the seventeenth century" (p. x). The project therefore began to transform into a dual biography, examining not only Catherine Tekakwitha but also Father Claude Chauchetière, the first priest to become convinced of her holiness, and secondarily his senior colleague Father Pierre Cholenec. Yet Greer is never constrained by the biographical genre, and he moves beyond it at numerous points to ponder the broader themes of his subjects' intersecting lives: "death, spiritual practices, the body, illness and healing, sexuality, and the boundaries of the self" from both Iroquois and French perspectives (p. x).

Greer's narrative begins not with Catherine's birth but with her death in 1680 at the age of 24. The result of extreme penitential practices, Catherine's passing upended Father Chauchetière's view of her, convincing him in retrospect of her spiritual superiority--indeed, her saintliness. Herein lies, for Greer, the originality of their entwined story. He writes, "it was a remarkable breakthrough, unique in the annals of early modern missionary history, to exalt a native in this way" (p. 86). By beginning at the end, Greer brings the reader straight to the twin issues at the heart of the book: the meaning of Catherine's Christianity and Father Chauchetière's receptivity to the idea of her holiness.

In recounting Catherine's childhood, Greer employs the rich insights of ethnography to compensate for the shortcomings of hagiography. While Chauchetière's sacred biography--in keeping with convention--emphasizes the isolation of his young subject from her sinful surroundings as though his Christian heroine were "only superficially and accidentally Indian" (p. 166), Greer reminds us that Catherine "needs to be recognized as a Mohawk girl, her existence framed by the life of the Mohawk longhouse, her fate bound up in the vagaries of Mohawk history" (p. 57). That this history was complex and turbulent in the second half of the seventeenth century is an understatement.

Catherine was born in the Mohawk village of Gandaouagué (near present-day Albany) in 1656 to an Algonquin war captive who had been adopted (probably into the Turtle Clan) and a Mohawk father. Since the first great epidemic--an outbreak of smallpox in 1634--had reduced the Mohawk population by

as much as three-quarters, such captives likely constituted a majority by mid-century. Due to the Iroquois view of death, in which loss of an individual was a personal injury to clan, village, nation, and the Iroquois League, epidemics fueled a Mourning War Complex in which the bereaved sought enemies for adoption, resulting in massive population turnover. The Gandaouagué of Catherine's childhood was in practice if not in self-conception a diverse multi-ethnic community.

Greer uses the terms "layering," "interpenetration," and "braiding" of cultures to capture the complexity of seventeenth-century Iroquois life. Catherine's mother, in addition to being a foreign war captive, was also a baptized Christian. Catherine was not raised as a Christian, for she lost her mother to smallpox at the age of six (after nearly dying of it herself). Her own conversion to Christianity came later, after the migration of her clan matron, Anastasia Tegonhatsiongo, to the Christian Iroquois community of Kahnawake near Montreal in the 1670s. Over the objections of her clan uncle, who feared losing her as well, she began receiving Christian instruction from the resident Jesuit, Father Jacques de Lamberville, in the spring of 1675. She accepted baptism on Easter Sunday 1676 and joined her clan sisters in Kahnawake the following year.

The names of converted Mohawks such as Catherine Tekakwitha and Anastasia Tegonhatsiongo are a good illustration of the cultural layering process Greer describes. In Iroquoian (and Algonquian) tradition, a person might receive several successive names in the course of a lifetime, each one associated with a particular life stage or rite of passage. Iroquoian names, as clan names, also revived the social identity of deceased clan members. While Greer does not mention it, these names were generally what linguists call "motivated" or "transparent," meaning that their signification was clear (the translated names of the later Iroquois leaders Corn Planter and Handsome Lake are cases in point). While Indian names can become unmotivated or opaque over time, primarily due to language change, it would be interesting to know if Tekakwitha (which bears some resemblance to the name of the legendary founder of the Iroquois Confederacy, Deganawidah) has a meaning in contemporary Mohawk.

In any case, it is clear that conversion to Christianity altered Iroquois naming practices without destroying them. Converts received Christian names upon baptism, but rather than supplanting their Indian names, they were prefixed to them. It is possible that converts, in keeping with the Iroquois conception of the power of names to resuscitate the dead, made particular efforts to emulate the virtues of their saintly European namesakes. Tekakwitha, whose penitential excesses would prematurely end her life, received the baptismal name of Catherine of Siena, a mystic known, among other things, for her extreme asceticism.[1]

Catherine Tekakwitha's new home, Kahnawake, was both a Jesuit mission and a self-governing community of "in-between Indians" (p. 99). Although the Jesuits mediated disputes and supervised the election of captains for civil and religious functions (a division that supplanted the customary Iroquois distinction between war and peace chiefs), "Iroquoian traditions provided a basic framework for collective life" in the village (p. 97). Christian beliefs and practices, like other aspects of European culture, were necessarily incorporated into an indigenous worldview.[2]

In Kahnawake, Catherine made the acquaintance of another newcomer, the thirty-one year-old Jesuit Claude Chauchetière. Born in Poitiers--a center of Catholic reform--of a well-established legal family, Claude discovered his vocation in the aftermath of losing his father at age sixteen. (As Greer points out, the death of the father looms large for this scion of a patriarchal society, while only the death of the mother figures in the matrilineal, matrilocal universe of Catherine.) In commencing his novitiate on his eighteenth birthday, Claude embarked on the rigorous campaign of self-fashioning characteristic of Jesuit spirituality (p. 69). Ironically, to the degree that this program of self-creation aims at mystical union with the divine, it requires the annihilation or eradication of human personality (p. 75). Hence the

appeal to mystics of a constructed other representing the antithesis of the privileged self: poor, savage, uninstructed, female, a phenomenon described by religious historian Mino Bergamo as "mystic exoticism" (p. 77).[3] Thanks to the yearly publication of the *Jesuit Relations* by French missionaries in Canada from 1632 to 1673, mystic exoticism in seventeenth-century France focused first and foremost on North American Indians.

Claude Chauchetière conceived the desire to serve in Canada partway through his training, while teaching in the port of La Rochelle. Within weeks of meeting a former superior of the Canadian mission, he was reciting his rosary in Huron, a practice Greer describes as a form of "cultural cross-dressing": "Claude was playing with his self-identity, venturing symbolically into a sphere where the learned language of theology was never heard" (p. 83). Cutting short his theological studies, he sailed for Quebec in 1676, and after a year of further language study in the Huron village of Lorette, he became the junior Jesuit officiating at Kahnawake.

Although Chauchetière took his final vows in Kahnewake in February 1678, his full integration into the order failed to stem a debilitating spiritual crisis that subsided only after his witness of the serene death of Catherine Tekakwitha on Holy Thursday, April 17, 1680. According to Greer's "speculative reconstruction" of this crisis of adaptation, it resulted from "the collision of mystical pro-savage expectations with the concrete realities of Canadian Indian life." Yet as the priest helped Catherine prepare for death, he "found ways to reconcile his initial stance of mystical exoticism, the projection outward of inverted forms of European norms, with his personal experience of a real human community" (p. 87). "The cure was prolonged,...but it was all set in motion at that moment of recognition when the strangeness of the Other was acknowledged, accepted, and prized" (pp. 169-170). A savage, in other words, could be a saint.

Catherine's life in Kahnewake, as reconstructed in Chauchetière's sacred biography, involved a normal round of agricultural, household, and handicraft work together with participation in intense Christian devotions. In interpreting these devotions, Greer shows how the Iroquois of seventeenth-century Kahnawake "made Christianity their own" (p. 110). Conversion itself can be seen, from an animist standpoint, as "a means of gaining access to the sources of French power" (p. 107). The attempts of Catherine to emulate French nuns were thus partly "efforts to bypass the priestly monopoly and gain direct access to the wellsprings of European spiritual power" (p.112-113). Chastity and ascetic penance, as practiced by Catherine and her circle of mostly young, mostly female, Iroquois, reflected their fundamentally Iroquoian view of female monasticism. The emphasis on collective rather than individual penance was characteristic of a community that drew wide boundaries around the human self, and the particular austerities, including exposure to cold and burning, were traditional Iroquois toughening practices associated with the sacred. What remains unexplained is the almost exclusive appeal of this penitential Christianity to Iroquois women. Iroquois shamanism and medicine societies were not segregated along gender lines, and, if anything, self-torture was more important in the formation of warriors than of matrons. That the most intense outbursts of devotion coincided with an extended war scare only deepens the mystery--not addressed by Greer--of the relative absence of Iroquois men from this spiritual story.

Fueled by Father Chauchetière's enthusiasm, a healing cult associated with Catherine's relics soon developed among local French habitants, only to spread to the colonial elite after his transfer to Montreal and from thence to the court of Louis XIV. Although Catherine's first cure involved farmer Claude Caron, her local following was soon largely female and preoccupied with female medical problems. For their part, the Kahnawake Iroquois never exhibited much interest in Catherine's healing powers, despite Chauchetière's efforts to promote them, owing to their fundamentally different conceptions of illness and death. In Iroquois society, the dead did not maintain long-term contact with the living, and curing was a social event rather than the resolution of an individual problem.

Father Chauchetière drafted his sacred biography of Catherine sometime between 1685 and 1695, and his mission colleague Father Cholenec followed suit shortly thereafter. Where Chauchetière's account of Catherine's life stresses her multiple virtues--charity, industry, purity, and fortitude among them--Cholenec's "revisionist" hagiography focuses more narrowly on virginity as her most important saintly attribute. This emphasis on sexual purity not only positions Catherine's story more squarely within European traditions of female spirituality; it also contrasts sharply with the conventional European associations of savagery and sexual license and helps explain the publication of the work in 1717 as part of the Jesuits' response to Jansenism and deism.[4]

Greer's epilogue, entitled "Our Catherine," explores the vicissitudes of Catherine's memory in modern times, beginning with her appropriation by an American clergy desirous of establishing an American profile for Catholicism untainted by immigrant and urban associations. Their promotion of her cult (together with corresponding efforts by nationalist clerics in Quebec) resulted in Catherine's beatification by Pope John Paul II in 1980. Today the most enthusiastic proponents of her sainthood include members of the Tekakwitha Conference, a Catholic Pan-Indian association based in the American West. Greer astutely compares the Conference to a revitalization movement, arguing that Native Americans torn by competing senses of identity take inspiration from Catherine's "ability to remain fully native while becoming fully Catholic" (p. 204). She has fewer devotees among the Mohawk themselves, who are more suspicious of the white appropriation of her legend.

Even an extended review such as this one cannot do full justice to the richness of Greer's narrative and analysis. Of course, there is always room for more. One intriguing aspect Greer fails to develop concerns the visual imagery of Catherine, particularly in the work of Chauchetière, a dedicated amateur artist. While some of the priest's drawings are reproduced as illustrations (and his painting of Catherine graces the book's cover), there is no sustained discussion of his visual portrayal of French and Iroquois to complement the textual analysis of his writings.

Other criticisms are more in the manner of quibbles. I was surprised by the multiple references to Jesuit "martyrs" in the work of a historian so generally attentive to the cultural construction of myth. As historians Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal have recently pointed out, Jesuits in New France did not die because they refused to abjure their faith--the canonical definition of martyrdom--but because the Iroquois were at war with the French, who were treated no differently than any other war enemies.[5] There are also a number of inconsistencies scattered throughout the text (dates, spellings, calculations of ages), which can perhaps be corrected in the paperback edition that will undoubtedly soon follow. To reiterate my original assessment, *Mohawk Saint* is a tour de force, deserving of the widest possible readership.

NOTES

[1] Greer refers to Tekakwitha as Catherine in preference to the more common Kateri, arguing that the latter name--apparently a Mohawk corruption of Catherine--originated in "an atmosphere of fin de siècle primitivism" as an effort to portray her as more "authentically Indian" (p. xi).

[2] Greer identifies a number of Christian practices and beliefs as particularly suited to transculturation into Iroquois society. The pre-contact Iroquois were already familiar with spiritual specialists and devotional confraternities (in the form of medicine societies), and they traditionally incorporated self-torture, fasting, and sexual abstinence into their quest for the sacred (pp. 112-19).

[3] Mino Bergamo, *La Science des saints : Le discours mystique au XVIIe siècle en France* (Grenoble : Jérôme Million, 1992).

[4] As Greer points out, Jansenists were inclined to view natives as "depraved and largely irredeemable," whereas deists regarded them as "people without religion, guided by natural reason." The Jesuits countered both of these views with "a theory of universal theism that found inklings of Christian faith and instances of Christian virtue spread among the cultures of the globe" (p. 187).

[5] Gilles Havard and Cécile Vidal, *Histoire de l'Amérique française* (Paris : Flammarion, 2003), pp. 63-64.

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