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INTRODUCTION TO VOL. 15 (SPRING 2014)

In this year's issue we are pleased to offer a broad range of writing on language learning and teaching, from the nature and centrality of language to classroom strategies. Varied as they are, the pieces resonate one with another. For instance, Kathleen B. Nielson's keynote address on language as blessing, a literary analysis of the Babel story, contains themes that reappear in the essays, forum pieces, and book reviews. It is not surprising to note these convergences, since as literary or language acquisition scholars our work is informed by our sense of language as God's gift and, more than that, the way God's presence is made known among us.

Kathleen Nielson places the Babel account within a Biblical history of the Word in creation, the Word made flesh, and words in many languages at Pentecost and praising God in John's Revelation. Language, says Nielson, creates beauty, wields power, and shows judgment. The presence of many languages is evidence of God's mercy; it foreshadows the image of all peoples and languages united around his throne.

Language as judgment, illuminating our human condition and our lostness without God, is considered in Kelsey Haskett's analysis of André Langevin's *Dust Over the City*. Langevin's characters, according to Haskett, are alienated by their individual identity crises from those around them and challenge the values of traditional Catholic society. The absence of any kind of absolute creates a void, a lack of identity, and ultimately a sense of failure. Haskett traces the narrative strategies by which Langevin, perhaps unwittingly, demonstrates the need for faith and a spiritual dimension in life by their absence in the novel. At the same time, there is beauty and power in a literary text that bring this judgment home to its readers.

Language offers beauty, power, and judgment, not only in the lit-

erary word, but also as set in song. To make students aware of this potential in language, David I. Smith, Herman J. De Vries Jr., and F. Corey Roberts share with our readers the powerful ways in which the songs and music videos of the German band Söhne Mannheims can help raise moral and spiritual questions in the foreign language classroom. Their essay includes an explication of the texts and a step by step description of how these gifted teachers guide their students to interact with and interpret the texts while raising their awareness of how image and sound both communicate and complement those texts. The linguistic and cultural learning acquired is then harnessed to explore and evaluate the message of song and image and whether they evoke understanding, compassion, and solidarity.

One of the most powerful ways to move toward intercultural understanding and solidarity is through the direct interpersonal exchange of words in an intercultural setting. Our two Forum pieces this year are companion pieces written about yearly January term courses offered in Germany and the Netherlands. Wallace Bratt's thoughtful, poignant vignettes of student and instructor experiences behind the Iron Curtain show how God has provided growth over the decades through encounters with East Germans as part of a program that has recently celebrated 40 years of study abroad. Herman J. De Vries' reflections on structuring and preparing for meaningful student engagement beyond tourism outline planning, process, and outcomes for a sojourn with the other.

The three books reviewed in this issue also offer study of the literary word and of our words with and about the other, in this case the immigrant among us. Sinda K. Vanderpool appraises Kelsey Haskett's recent publication on the construction of female identity in the work of Marguerite Duras, which highlights how family relationships construct and color a woman's sense of identity, as well as how these characters offer insight into the character and perspective of the author, whose words betray her deep need for love to provide meaning and identity. Leslie J. Harkema's review of Jan Evans' study of Miguel de Unamuno's quest for faith both summarizes Evans' careful exposition of the Kierkegaardian influence in Unamuno's thought and offers

thought-provoking questions about this approach to these profoundly felt questions of faith and reason in his life and work. Finally, Sandi Weightman offers a detailed overview of Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang's book on immigration. This timely study includes Biblical and historical perspectives on politics, legal issues, attitudes and concerns, and opportunities and challenges for a Christian response.

It is our hope that the words published here will provoke further dialogue and thought among our readers, so that our appreciation of the beauty, power, judgment, and mercy of words and of the Word may shape our work and sense of calling.

Dianne M. Zandstra and Cynthia Slagter

THE BLESSING OF BABEL'S BABBLE

Kathleen B. Nielson
Keynote Speaker, NACFLA, March 2013

A speaker looks for the intersection of her world with that of her audience. I'm rather used to living at the intersection of worlds, having studied and taught literature but then having taken a turn, to spend most of my time studying and teaching the Bible—which is literature, of course, but not the literature I used to study and teach. That turn, to the biblical literature, has been one of the most joyful turns of my life. What a delight it has been to bring to the study of the Scriptures a love for its literary genres, its art, its masterful shaping. That intersection of literary and biblical studies is a much-needed one in the evangelical world.

All Christians live at the intersection of the stuff of their lives and the content of the Word of God. If the Bible is what it says it is, the inspired revelation of God himself to us, then its living and active words indeed speak into every aspect of our lives and of the whole world God created. But this intersection is especially remarkable for professors who deal daily in words and languages—the very stuff of the Bible from beginning to end, the very means God chose to shine the light of his revelation to the corners of the earth as it is communicated in language after language until Jesus comes again. The intersection of the Word of God and the work of languages is one with many brightly blinking lights.

One biblical story that sets the lights to blinking most brilliantly is that of the Tower of Babel, from Genesis 11. It is a story known by us but so crucial for us that we must not leave it behind. We will look at the Tower of Babel asking this question: *What does this narrative show*

us about language and languages? This is not a question we impose on the text, for the story given here is all about language at the heart of it. It is also a story that asks us to ask questions about the way its words are put together. I study it humbly, not as a Hebrew scholar but as an English reader full of thanks for the way Scripture does not close itself but rather opens itself up to the process of translation, so that peoples of every nation can read and understand and believe.

Reading it out loud is without doubt the most important starting point for understanding the Babel narrative. It goes by quickly, requiring focused aim to taste every word and phrase:

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)¹

What does this narrative show us about language and languages? We'll give five answers to this question.

Language Lets Us Make Beautiful Things

This is a beautifully constructed story, one that calls attention to the symmetry of its construction. It's a story about making—a *bad* making, with bricks. But in the process of telling about that bad making, the narrator is making something very good right in front of our eyes—with words. We begin simply by relishing the making, or the *construction* of this story.

For any narrative, we must of course pay attention to three main elements: character, plot, and setting. In general, in Old Testament narrative, the *plot* is the central element to watch—and in the story of the Tower of Babel this is plainly true. There is no character we really get to know or in which to trace any kind of development. In fact, there are just two opposing collective characters: the people of the earth, who are the descendants of Noah in the generations after the flood—and God. I use the term “collective characters” because, as many have noticed, God refers to himself in the plural: “Come let us go down and there confuse their language. . .” (v. 7). Whether this “us” refers to the gathered courts of heaven or to the fellowship of the Trinitarian godhead one may debate—although the latter option seems the most plausible. After all, we have already had earlier hints of this multi-personed godhead, in Genesis 1:26, when God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” and in Genesis 3:22: “Behold, the man has become like one of us.” The rest of the Babel story simply refers to God as Yahweh, or the Lord, in the singular. What the story unfolds is a clear confrontation between this God and this people. The characters actually serve to point us to the plot, the confrontation, which is the thing to watch in this story.

Almost every even slightly literarily-aware commentator notices how the plot of this little story works. The narrative unfolds in two parts: human plans, and divine response. The story takes the shape of a chiasmus, a literary form that mirrors itself symmetrically from the center out. The second half, then, is a reversed mirror-image of the first half, as in the following diagram:

- A "The whole earth had one language" (v. 1)
 B "there" (v. 2)
 C "said to one another" (v. 3)
 D "Come, let us make bricks" (v. 3)
 E "let us build ourselves" (v. 4)
 F "a city and a tower" (v. 4)
 → G "the Lord came down . . ." (v. 5)
 F' "the city and the tower" (v. 5)
 E' "which the children of man had built" (v. 5)
 D' "Come, let us go down and there confuse" (v. 7)
 C' "one another's speech" (v. 7)
 B' "there . . . from there" (v. 8)
 A' "the language of all the earth" (v. 9)²

This diagram clearly shows that the mid-point of the narrative comes in the ringing phrase of verse 5, "And the Lord came down. . . ." It is his coming down that symmetrically reverses every part of the plans laid in the first part of the story. The very first line in v. 1, "Now the whole earth had one language," is conclusively overturned in the last verse: "the Lord confused the language of all the earth."

I've reproduced the diagram partly because it's fascinating to see, and partly because showing it is so much easier than trying to explain it—as is usually true for a work of art. (The diagram is actually fun to hold in your hands and play with: critics have gone so far as to point out that if you turn the diagram sideways it looks like a tower!) It is important to say, however, that this diagram is almost certainly not the one perfect interpretive arrangement for Genesis 11; rather, it represents a general understanding of the magnificently intricate two-part construct, or plot, of this narrative. The story is beautifully full of mirroring, full of echoes of words, full of the overturning of human plans in the first half by divine power in the second. That's a general summary of the plot, which we will uncover further. But already we can see it: human beings gather to raise themselves to greatness; God puts them down and sends them out. People say, "Come let us"; God matches it exactly with his "Come let us" (which

is surely at least one reason among many that the plural pronoun is used here in reference to God). The outcome is that God's "Come let us" wins!

Even without such a diagram we can begin to find a whole series of echoing words and phrases balancing against each other, some of which the diagram does not include. For example, the people's motivations expressed in verse 4 are directly answered later in the story. Their positive motivation (to "make a name for ourselves") is met in verse 9: their city was given the *name* Babel—which sounds in Hebrew like the word "balel," which means "to confuse"—and which was probably not the name they were after. The people's negative motivation in verse 4 is to avoid being "dispersed over the face of the whole earth": those very words come back around in the narrative, in fact twice, in verse 8 and verse 9. Their desire *not* to be dispersed over the face of the whole earth is precisely met, twice over, by God's repeated response of dispersing them over the face of all the earth.

Just this much peering into the story shows its insistently repeated words that keep on mirroring and playing with each other. Even a non-Hebrew-scholar can peer into the Hebrew text and tell that in the original this echoing effect is multiplied; you can *hear* it if you listen to the passage read aloud—as words and whole clumps of words sound so similar to each other. Old Testament literary critic Robert Alter calls this story's words "interechoing." "This prose," he says, "turns language itself into a game of mirrors."³ According to Alter, if you translated verse 3 most literally, you might come up with something like, "brick bricks and burn for a burning."⁴ Why do we have both bitumen and mortar mentioned there for the brick making? Well, *one* reason may be that these two different Hebrew words are "heimar" and "homer": the words are matching, sticking to each other, mimicking each other. The repeated word "there" sounds like "sham" in Hebrew, and the word for "name" like "shem"—both of which echo with the lineage of Noah's son "Shem" that enfolds this story on either end. Alter suggests translating the final verse: "Therefore it is called Babel, for there the Lord made the language of all the earth babble."⁵

I have to admit: in thinking about all this, my mind did jump back

to some of the word games we used to play as children. My favorite one was about a woman named Betty Botta:

Betty Botta bought a bit of butter;
but, said she, this butter's bitter.
If I put it in my batter,
it will make my batter bitter.
So Betty Botta bought a bit of better butter
and put it in her bitter batter,
which made Betty Botta's bitter batter a bit better!

The Tower of Babel story is elegant, not silly like that tongue-twister, but it does have the same kind of close verbal play in it, verbal play that in just about any form gives delight to human beings—delight in the making of things with words. The narrative of Genesis 11:1–9 is a magnificent making, constructed with an artistry that makes us wonder at the gift of words and language. The very word “language” comes five times in the story, one which deals with language as its subject on many levels.

Language Wields Great Power

The Babel narrative shows us not only that language lets us make beautiful things. It shows us, second, that language wields great power. We not only delight; we also certainly marvel at what can be constructed with this deliberately limited set of vocabulary arranged in such a perfect pattern. It's as if a magician has been able to take just a few building blocks and arrange them into the most amazing castle, right before our eyes. How can one word appear so many times and not just keep but *increase* its power to give meaning? How can it be that a word can change just one letter and gain a whole new meaning? How can words do that, and how can we actually understand? How can the thin line between meaningful articulation and meaningless babble be just a few crucial sounds or letters? Not just the beauty but the *power* of words is at the heart of this story.

Genesis 11:1–9 makes clear that one people *with one language and the same words* can do mighty things. Clearly, these people are aiming for mighty things that displease God. And so God responds. As he “comes down,” God is anthropomorphized in this story, portrayed as responding somewhat in kind to these people. We should understand that he is of course not threatened by their action. In fact, there is huge, playful irony just in the depiction that God has to “come down” to see this great tall tower that is supposed to be reaching all the way up to heaven. From the perspective of the God of heaven, this tower is so small that he can’t make it out—so small that, as students today might say, “he has to, like, come down to see it!” We might think of Psalm 2, where “He who sits in the heavens laughs” at those who shake their fist against him.

God in this story declares (v. 6) that because these people all have one language, “this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.” Since the fuel of their potential evil is their language, the response by God addresses their language: he confuses it, so that they may not understand one another’s speech. This is the mighty punishment of God: dealing with their language. God is both telling and showing us here the power of language, even as he deliberately restricts its power by turning one language into many, so that one group is naturally incapable of understanding or working together with another.

It is remarkable that through all the generations up until that time there was actually just one language. Francis Schaeffer notes this point and comments: “This isn’t surprising, considering the tenacity with which men hold onto language. In Switzerland, for example, there are four languages and there is a language group clinging firmly to each one. Within one of them, the Romansh, there are about 60,000 people speaking two dialects, and this situation could continue practically forever. Therefore, that men with a common origin are speaking one language is to be expected.”⁶ (Schaeffer published those words in 1972, and indeed what he says about languages in Switzerland still holds generally true today—although various popular websites about

Switzerland now estimate between 30,000 and 40,000 people currently speaking the Romansh language.)

My husband and I have become acquainted with a group of Indonesian Christians who are planting schools throughout the thousands of islands of Indonesia. The linguistic situation is complicated, even though many people speak English and want to speak English, because not only is there a national Indonesian language acknowledged and used throughout all the different provinces; there are also several hundred local languages and dialects in which various distinct people groups think and live and move. In order to communicate well and powerfully among the people of Indonesia, one must grapple with powerful layers of languages that must be understood and respected.

Languages Show God's Judgment of Fallen Humanity

What about these complicated layers of language that first came, as Scripture tells us, from God? Third, in the story of Babel we learn *this*: that languages show God's judgment of fallen humanity. In order to grasp this point fully, we have to recall that the Tower of Babel comes at the end of the Bible's opening section, which tells the story of primeval history (before moving on to patriarchal history, that of Abraham's line in particular). The Bible's first eleven chapters give an overview of human beginnings, marked by five main episodes: creation, fall, the story of Cain and Abel, the flood, and finally the tower of Babel. About Genesis 1–11 Francis Schaeffer makes a big claim: "If I am to understand the world as it is and myself as I am, I must know the flow of history given in these chapters."⁷ These five episodes of primeval history tell us the truth about where we human beings came from. That means that this crucial little story of the tower of Babel must be understood in its context as part of this foundational flow of human history. In order to understand the role of God's judgment in this story, then, we have to start at the very beginning—at creation.

When we look from the story of Babel back to the very beginning, what we find first is that language is one way if not the most important way human beings image God their maker. All the beauty and power

of language we see at work in Genesis 11 come from only one source: the Creator God of Genesis 1 and 2. We human beings use words and make with words only in the image of the first speaker and the first maker. The first thing we see God doing in the Scriptures is speaking. He *said*, “Let there be light,” and there was light. Not *after* he spoke. But *in the speaking, by his word* all things were created. And he created human beings in his image, able to speak and communicate in words and make things and name things with words, all reflecting him. I’ve heard it said that we humans are not carnivores or herbivores; we’re *verbivores*—made that way in God’s image.

To understand Babel we have to connect with the story not just of creation but also of the fall: of sin invading God’s created world, marring his image in the people he created, and breaking the fellowship of God with human beings and in fact with all his now fallen creation. The sin of Adam and Eve infects all that follows: subsequent stories show humanity struggling with sin, desperately in need of the help glimmering through God’s promise of the woman’s seed that would someday bruise Satan’s head. Both the story of Cain and Abel and the story of Noah and the flood show a humanity sick to death with sin—except for a few who, like Noah, find favor in the eyes of the Lord. After the flood, in which all but Noah and his family are destroyed, the sad fact is that Noah’s descendants don’t do any better—as we find out by watching them here in the story of the Tower of Babel. These are the descendants of Noah. In fact, the chapter right after the flood and right before Babel (Genesis 10) traces the genealogies of Noah’s three sons and documents how they separate into nations, each with its own land and language. Genesis 10 is often called “The Table of Nations.”

The question obviously arises: Why is Genesis chapter 11 *after* chapter 10? Why does Babel’s story of how the nations were divided come *after* the listing of the divisions? As we read Genesis 10 we can in fact discern the point at which the Babel story fits chronologically into the genealogy: it’s in Genesis 10:9–10, which traces the line of Noah’s son Ham. In that line of Ham comes a mighty man named Nimrod, whose name literally means “We shall rebel.” This mighty rebel Nim-

rod, we read, built himself a kingdom in the land of Shinar, starting with the city of Babel.

The story of the tower of Babel, then, is chronologically embedded in the genealogies of chapter 10, where the lines of Noah's sons are traced, but it is extracted and then narrated separately in chapter 11. Perhaps part of the reason for this order is that, even as we begin in chapter 11 to read the Babel story, we already know (because of the background of chapter 10) that these rebellious people will be frustrated in their desire not to be dispersed; we've just read about the dispersion! This knowledge creates an ironic context, one that makes their great aims and great tower seem all the more ridiculous and puny. The even larger context further illumines their rebellion, as we recall God's command to Noah and his sons after the flood, in Genesis 9:1: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"—which of course echoes the same command given to Adam and Eve back in Genesis 1. God's purpose, God's command was for human beings to spread out and fill the earth. Instead, at the Tower of Babel, human beings stop spreading; in fact, as we have seen, they expressly intend *not* to be dispersed. Verse 5 tells us that God comes down to see the city and the tower which the "children of man" have built. That phrase "children of man" can be literally translated "children of *Adam*." That's who this is really about: the fallen human race, ever since Adam. Understanding the historical flow makes it clear that this story of language is a story of judgment on the fallen children of Adam.

Even Babel's *setting*, which we have not yet noted, connects with the larger context of judgment. Genesis 11:2 tells us that these people migrated from the east. This mention of "east" is like a bell ringing for the reader of Genesis, who remembers that after the fall God drove Adam and Eve out and placed the cherubim with flaming sword at the east of the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24). "East of Eden" echoes in our minds—perhaps for us modern readers as much because of John Steinbeck as because of the Bible. The murderer Cain "went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, *east of Eden*" (Gen. 4:16). Later, when Lot divided from Abraham, Lot chose to go east (13:10–12). According to Genesis 11 the people *migrated from* the

east—which most commentators take simply to associate these people with the east and so with a place outside God’s blessing. They settled in the land of Shinar, between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, where led by Nimrod the mighty rebel they built the beginning of Babylon, that city which throughout Scripture not only exemplifies literal rebellion against God but also symbolizes that rebellion—all the way to the book of Revelation, where practically the whole of Revelation 18 celebrates the fall of Babylon, climactic symbol of all those who have proudly shaken their fist against God. In Revelation 18:21 a mighty angel declares, “So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more. . . .”

Throughout the Babylonian civilization were built monumental temple-towers called ziggurats, most commonly built with bricks and mortar—dozens of which have been excavated throughout the area of ancient Mesopotamia. The tower of Babel was perhaps one of the earliest examples of a ziggurat, which often had a temple at the very top filled with astrological signs and symbols showing pagan worship governed by the stars and planets. Building this city and this tower in this place represented rebellion against God at every possible level. The rebellion of those building the Tower of Babel is summed up by the fact that they wanted to make a name for themselves rather than to obey the Lord God and exalt his name.

All this context makes even clearer God’s *judgment* on Babel—this time not with a flood, for God had covenanted never again to judge in that way. At this next tipping point of civilization here at Babel, judgment comes not through spreading waters but through spreading *languages*. It’s an interesting concept: languages as God’s judgment. Some students might find it easy to agree that world languages are a kind of judgment to endure! This judgment clearly divides people one from another; it lets us see vividly how sin always brings division—starting back in Eden where the first sin immediately divided Adam and Eve from each other and then from God. So here at Babel the people’s sinful rebellion brings the division of languages, so that they cannot understand one another. They are cut off from each other, and weakened. They leave off their building, unable to work together further.

Professors of world languages understand especially well the division languages can bring, even as they work to overcome that division through education. It's hard to imagine just how exactly this first division occurred, but it must have been utterly earthshattering the very first time one human being could not understand the speech of another. In our day we know through experience that we can work to overcome that lack of understanding; *then*, it must have seemed as if a huge gulf suddenly opened up between people, and between groups of people. Many today still know the alienation and powerlessness that engulf human beings when we are cut off from understanding words all around us. I most deeply experienced that sense on my first trip to China, visiting several different cities without studying up on the language in advance, and encountering what felt like an overwhelming flow of mysterious words coming from people's mouths and from posted signs into my uncomprehending ears and eyes. Of course the beautiful but seemingly impenetrable Chinese written characters can make it all seem even more challenging to one who has no entry point, nothing immediately familiar to grab hold of and pull oneself into connection. This sense of alienation is actually a revelatory and immeasurably valuable experience.

In Indonesia, by contrast, the national language (Bahasa Indonesian) uses a Latin alphabet, and their words have rather easily pronounceable syllables—so that, when an Indonesian group is singing, for example, a westerner like me can actually join in and look like she knows what she's singing (even though she has no idea what those easily pronounceable syllables mean!). With a common alphabet one can quickly begin to grasp little word after little word and begin to grope toward small points of light in the darkness of a foreign language. A totally different writing system, on the other hand, offers us the hugely important experience of being totally cut off, totally needy and desperate for help—all of which offers a vivid picture of the divisive effects of sin and God's judgment on sin. Professors and students alike benefit from knowing that utterly needy and humbling sense, because it lets us know how intrinsically redemptive is the work of learning foreign languages and thereby connecting with other human beings from whom we have been cut off.

Languages Show God's Mercy

We're now ready to move from judgment to mercy. That's the fourth point: Languages show God's mercy. Not just his judgment but also his mercy. When God confused the languages at Babel, he made it clear that he was keeping these people from greater evil: with one language, remember, "nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them." He was weakening them, dividing them, in effect letting them experience the consequences of their rebellion against him *but also protecting them from greater evil*. This is mercy indeed, to be protected from ourselves, to know that God's restraining hand is on this world, and that everything in it happens according to his timing and his plan. God's division of languages protected the whole world he made, so that at that point in time evil would not be permitted to grow larger than God had ordained. Many evil little nations fighting against each other have nothing of the power that can be wielded by one great worldwide evil state.

When I was preparing for the oral defense of my dissertation, I recall one experienced and slightly cynical fellow graduate student offering me some shrewd advice: he told me that the key to getting through my defense was to prod my committee members away from any possible unified attack on my work: I was to address their critical differences in my answers, and so get them arguing among themselves. This would make them feel significantly involved, pass the time, and take the attention off me! Not that my committee members were evil—but the principle stands that evil divided is evil weakened. The point here is that God's division of these fallen people through language mercifully weakened their potential for evil.

It seems to me that this theological context of God's judgment and mercy should lead us to "celebrate diversity," as we say, in certain ways as opposed to other ways. If what we read in Scripture is true, then the proliferation of languages and cultures cannot or should not be a means to exalt humanity in order to celebrate our own names, so to speak. Celebrating diversity sometimes feels like aiming to make much of ourselves, glorifying the creative human powers that have

developed such varied cultures and tongues. The grounding of this Babel story should probably lead us to celebrate diversity first of all humbly, with a kind of soberness that recognizes who we are, who is the God who made us, and how deeply our oneness with him has been broken—as well as our oneness with each other as creatures made in his image. But then of course we must celebrate thankfully as well, because our diversity in language and culture comes from God himself as a great, great mercy. And mercy is beautiful, always.

It was the languages separating these people that dispersed them over the face of the earth, as God had commanded. So it was these languages that brought them to obedience and that led them in spite of themselves to carry out God's good plan for filling the earth, nation by nation. These languages were a merciful kind of kick in the pants from God.

But there's more here. God's plan from the beginning included the promise of deliverance that would come from the seed of a woman. God clearly planned for that seed from before the foundations of the earth, and it is in these early chapters of Genesis that we see the line of the promised seed coming into focus. We said that Genesis 10 traces the lineage of Noah's sons. But we did not clarify that the lineage of the third son, Shem, is interrupted at the end of chapter 10 by the story of Babel. In the midst of Shem's lineage breaks in the Tower of Babel, and then right after this story Shem's genealogy resumes and keeps on tracing its lineage down to . . . Abram. The Babel story is embedded specifically in the lineage of Abraham, a descendant of Noah's son Shem.

The tower of Babel, then, stands at a crucial turning point of biblical history. It is a turn from the primeval history of the human race, to the history of one nation among many, one chosen people from whom the promised seed will come. The nations had to be formed and divided for this to happen. God was working out his redemptive plan even through humanity's sin and rebellion—which is hard to fathom but beautiful to see. The judgment of these languages overflows with God's mercy. Perhaps that is what we should be celebrating at bottom, when we celebrate diversity: that God chose one nation out of

many through whom to send his Son, and that through his Son, as he promised Abraham in Genesis 12, *all* the nations of the world would be blessed.

Languages Show the Hope of Redemptive History

And so we need a fifth and final point: Languages show the hope of redemptive history. This little Babel narrative reaches all the way back to primeval history, to the very creation of the world; it also reaches far ahead, to the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan to redeem a people for himself from all the nations of the world, according to his covenant with Abraham. From Abraham came a great nation, and from his lineage within that nation came Christ the promised seed, who with his coming conquered the Evil One and undid all the divisive effects of the fall. This promised Christ took our sin upon himself and died in our place, so that in him we might become the very righteousness of God. Christ comes and calls not just one nation but the nations. He sends his disciples to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all nations, bringing back together into one people, *his* people, those who have suffered the divisiveness of the fall. How utterly appropriate that the Apostle John calls Jesus the *Word*—that is, the perfect communication spoken by God to a humanity cut off by sin. Jesus is the perfect Word made flesh, the Word fully sufficient for and fully comprehensible to every tribe and nation of the earth.

It is amazing and important to see what a crucial role *languages* play, in the Bible's overarching storyline. Babel's story of languages *dividing* points forward to languages *coming together* in the most amazing and redemptive ways. First of all, at the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2) the judgment of Babel was in effect reversed, as Jesus' disciples were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak in other tongues, so that those gathered from countries all around were able to hear the gospel preached, each one in his own language. Languages in this scene no longer divide. People in this scene are experiencing reversal of the effects of the fall, as they hear the good news of Jesus who conquered evil for them, as they believe and join his family: no longer the children of Adam

but the sons and daughters of God, through his Son. Languages here in fact *multiply* the glory of God, as multiple tongues tell of his truth. “Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise. . . .”

Certainly many professors and students of world languages have wished that the miracle of Pentecost would have just continued! How wonderful indeed if all the effects of the fall might have disappeared in one sweep, after Jesus’ death and resurrection. But, alas, this is what it means to live between the already and the not yet—knowing that evil is conquered, that Christ has died and is risen and reigns at God’s right hand, but that in this brief time between his first and second coming we are called to go out and proclaim the good news of his salvation to all the nations of the world.

Languages are a relentless part of the redemptive story. They are the stuff of the already-but-not-yet-world in which we live. They are the means through which God enables us to spread the news of Jesus Christ. They are still hard, sometimes agonizing, and too often divisive. But they are also magnificent, because God set them in place from the beginning in order to accomplish his redemptive plan. It helps to read the story of Babel and to remember God’s restraining and merciful hand at work. Many have remarked that we can sense in our time a renewed coming together of all the peoples of the world as in the time of Babel, especially as we connect instantly and easily by means of technology. At the time of that visit to China, I didn’t yet have available an app that provides instantaneous translation of whatever one types or speaks or photographs. Not only does this worldwide unity enable gospel proclamation; it also enables greater and greater evil. It is increasingly true again that nothing we human beings propose to do will be impossible for us. Yet we can without fear observe history unfolding, because we know God’s merciful hand and God’s redemptive plan. The Scriptures do not leave us ignorant of the very end of the story of human history, in which evil shows itself fully only to be fully and finally put away under the feet of the risen Lord Jesus.

What we “language people” should find especially significant is that, at the very end of the story, at the other end of human history,

the languages of the nations do not disappear. The reversal of Babel does not mean that all languages and nations will in the end be forgotten or collapse back into one. No—in Revelation’s glorious scenes of what is to come, multiple languages and nations are repeatedly mentioned and celebrated, pictured in unity around God’s throne. They enlarge and magnify the praise, as they reflect God’s glory in all their diversity. Certainly implied is that everybody understands everybody else; in that sense, Pentecost was just a little hint. The prophet Zephaniah gave a hint long before that, when he wrote: “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord” (Zeph. 3:9). We glimpse the culmination of all these hints in Revelation’s heavenly scenes of what is perhaps the ultimate redeemed diversity. In Revelation 7, for example, we see gathered a great multitude that no one can number: people, it says, “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev. 7:9–10).

The greatest and most wonderful irony of the story of the Tower of Babel is that every single thing those people desired but went after in the wrong way is given to God’s children in Christ. Think about it: *a way to reach heaven*—not through building something by ourselves, but through the work of Christ who laid himself out on the cross and died to make a way for us to enter into the heavenly courts, through him. In the fullness of time, Christ came down for us, to lift us up to heaven. *A name*—not a name for ourselves made by us, but the name of Jesus, at whose name every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *every tongue* confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2). *A city*—think of it, not a city we build for ourselves to reach heaven, but that amazing city which in Revelation 21 *comes down out of heaven* from God, so that we can dwell with him there forever, that city into which will be brought the honor of all the nations (Rev. 21:26). If the second half of the Babel story overturns the first half with the judgment of God, we must say, too,

that the unfolding story of the whole Bible overturns the judgment of Babel with God's merciful redemption.

Here we are, living in the already-but-not-yet of salvation accomplished but with the end of the story still to come—and, meanwhile, called to *disperse* the good news to every nation. Our tendency, of course, like the sinners at Babel, is to resist dispersing, to stay safe in one place and try to make a name for ourselves. That perhaps is a special temptation in the world of academia, broad and globally-minded as we like to think ourselves. It is good to read the Babel story and to remember the God who watches, the God who comes down, the God who judges, but most of all the God who mercifully redeems according to his plan established before the foundations of the world. In his mercy he actually allows us to participate in that plan of redemption by working with the languages of the world—all of which he knows, all of which he gave, and all of which he uses for his redemptive purposes, until Jesus comes again.

NOTES

1. Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.
2. This diagram of an extended chiasmus generally follows the one presented in R. Kent Hughes' *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 168.
3. *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1996), Kindle e-book loc. 1125.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, loc. 1112.
6. *Genesis in Space and Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 152.
7. *Ibid.*, 160.

ALIENATION AND ABSENCE: THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY IN *DUST OVER THE CITY* BY ANDRÉ LANGEVIN

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In André Langevin's Poussière sur la ville (1953), the narrator seeks answers to life's pressing questions while struggling with the notion of God. Alienated from the world around him, from his wife, and from himself, he searches for identity in a society whose values he rejects. Prefiguring Quebec's Quiet Revolution a decade later, his negative reaction to Quebec's religious past and the existential problems he poses lead to an absence of absolutes, communication, and hope, all of which are examined in the light of the Christian faith and the society in which the novel is grounded.

The novels of André Langevin, dating from the early 1950's, are among the first existentialist works to appear in French Canadian literature. While the Quebec novel up until this time depicts a society unswervingly faithful to French culture and religious traditions, and to collective rather than individual values, Langevin's novels mark a distinctive turning point. Although the transition from a rural to an urban setting in earlier postwar novels introduces a shift in perspective (for instance, in Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*), the characters are still anchored in French Canadian society. Langevin's characters, as the authors of *Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française* point out (487), are completely detached from their milieu, wrestling with individual problems that stand in opposition to society and its norms, irrevocably

separating them from those around them. By revolting against society, including the Catholic Church, they suffer from unbearable solitude and alienation and a loss of personal identity. As these same authors indicate, Langevin uses his characters to pose problems without ever solving them, in particular the physical and metaphysical problems of suffering and death, and questions regarding the goodness, justice, and even existence of God (518–20). For the first time in Quebec literature, an author dares to challenge the collective values of society, although he provides no hopeful answers for the future. My study of Langevin's best known novel, *Dust Over the City*, examines the protagonist's metaphysical concerns and reveals the void and lack of identity that results from the absence of a spiritual dimension in life. The rejection of the spiritual in the novel prefigures the Quiet Revolution¹ about a decade later, leading to the secularization of Quebec society, a process to which Langevin's work, as a literary forerunner, contributed both spiritually and intellectually. Reflecting on this in my conclusion, I consider from a Christian perspective how the absences portrayed in Langevin's work have impacted Quebec society today, and if any positive conclusions can be drawn from this novel.

Published in 1953 as *Poussière sur la ville* and translated into English in 1955, Langevin's novel received the Prix du Cercle du Livre de France and was later chosen by Canada's Grand Jury des Lettres as the best novel published in Canada between 1945 and 1960. Casting aside Quebec's traditional religious past, *Dust Over the City* depicts both an individual in search of identity and a newly-wedded couple striving to build a relationship in the midst of a metaphysical vacuum, even as they drift farther and farther apart. Alienated from his spouse, himself, and the world around him, the narrator seeks answers to life's pressing questions, becoming more and more excluded from a society whose values he no longer accepts. The breakdown in communication which permeates the novel is heightened by the narrator's inability to use language as a tool to reach out to others, in particular his wife, and by the multiple barriers which keep him from truly seeing and penetrating the world of the other. While questioning God's existence, he fails to find the absolute he is pursuing in his relationship with his wife,

and the solitude which engulfs them accentuates the impossibility of maintaining a relationship in a world where God and human spirituality are absent. Langevin does more to deconstruct than to construct identity, forcing the reader to ponder the consequences of a life lived without faith.

While Langevin was strongly influenced by the existentialist movement in France, his novel remains firmly grounded in Quebec society, and shows not only a couple in crisis, but also a people confronted with the problem of domination by another culture, as well as by the Catholic Church, a major antagonist in the novel. The English names given to the novel's French-speaking town and its streets reflect a social and geographical reality in Quebec, no small factor in the later struggle for identity. As Christine Tellier indicates, Langevin's town is clearly based on the Quebec mining towns of Thedford Mines and/or Asbestos, the latter being the site of the first strike by Francophone workers against their Anglophone bosses just four years previous to the publication of the novel (571–72). “Toute l'œuvre d'André Langevin constitue une vibrante interrogation sur notre condition historique” [Langevin's whole work consists of a vibrant interrogation of our historical condition] (24), affirms Quebec scholar, André Gaulin, in “Le romancier et essayiste d'un peuple orphelin.” In André Brochu's excellent study, Langevin is depicted as a pioneering figure in the Quebec novel, exploring metaphysical and existential questions and introducing a new dimension of subjectivity and “intériorité” (7) into Francophone literature, thus preparing the way on an individual level for the push toward solidarity and revolution during the 1960's and onward.

The novel relates the tragedy of a young doctor and his wife who have just arrived in the mining town of Macklin, where their inability to fit in, marital breakdown, and desperate search for some form of absolute finally destroy their lives. A deep sense of impossibility hovers over the novel: the impossibility of the main characters to communicate with each other, hence to know each other; their inability to come to terms with who they are in a society from which they are alienated; and their failure to find either temporal or lasting happiness

in a cruelly absurd world. To this we could add the impossibility of the doctor to find answers to his serious interrogations about human suffering and God. The powerful sense of alienation that characterizes the protagonists' lives is strongly reinforced by the theme of the gaze that runs throughout the novel, suggesting that a significant part of human identity is bound up in the way people see themselves and the way others see them. The doctor, Alain Dubois, is particularly absorbed by his observation of his wife and even his own person, without arriving at a better understanding of either, at least until it is too late.

In the first pages of the novel, Alain is scrutinized by a couple of townspeople as he stands outside his apartment with no coat on, in a snow blizzard at midnight. He is staring up at his lighted bedroom window, trying to capture something about his wife, Madeleine, on the inside. While the taxi driver's look is scornful and debasing, the glare of the female passerby reflects the judgment of the town which will soon come to bear upon the doctor. Alain looks right through her without really seeing her, caught up in his attempt to grasp that part of his wife's identity that escapes him, especially since the next-door restaurant owner has revealed that Madeleine spends her days in his restaurant, attracting the curious who come to see what a doctor's wife is doing in a workers' diner. To stress the lack of visual connectivity, the author uses transparent elements, like windows and glass doors, as screens that allow for partial communication but hinder its totality.² As Alain focuses on his apartment window, the snow creates an "illusoire écran" [illusory screen] (4)³ between him and his wife, even as he tries unsuccessfully to see beyond the physical realm into the relational dimension behind it. His biggest concern is that the restaurant owner has revealed a part of his wife's life of which he knows nothing: "Comme s'il avait levé le rideau et m'avait montré derrière une vitre un être dont j'aurais ignoré complètement l'identité et qui eût été ma femme" [As if he had lifted a curtain and shown me through a window a woman whose identity was unknown to me, and who was nevertheless my wife] (5–6). After this first incident, Alain continues at various times to observe his wife at a distance, in the street or on her way out of the restaurant, while he remains hidden behind the partially snow-

covered windows of his car, stunned on one occasion by the pain and solitude he reads on her face. Wanting to reach out to her, he remains locked in his own world, aptly depicted by the metaphor of his car, a space that allows him to observe the outside world and circulate in it without actually being part of it.

Not only does Alain try to discover his wife's identity from the outside, he also tries to grasp his own identity in the same manner, using the technique of "dédoublement" (11), or splitting himself in two, to gain an external perspective of himself. The distance he perceives between himself and his wife is mirrored in the divide he feels between his outer and inner self, as he engages in what he calls "l'étrange dédoublement qui me permet de me voir en étranger" [the strange doubling (of myself) which allows me to see myself like a stranger] (ibid.). Entering his office on the first floor of their building, he feels alienated from the space he has set up for his practice:

"Je suis un intrus. Il faudrait que je me passe la main sur les yeux, que je secoue la tête pour découvrir que je n'ai rien à faire ici. Ce bureau n'est pas le mien et la femme qui dort ou lit en haut ne m'appartient pas. . . Par la porte entrouverte de mon bureau je vois briller sur ma table le stéthoscope que j'avais oublié. Et ce simple objet, qui m'identifie aussi sûrement que le marteau le charpentier, ne m'est plus familier" [I'm an intruder. I just have to brush my hand over my eyes and shake my head, to discover I don't belong here. This office isn't mine, and the woman sleeping or reading upstairs isn't mine either. . . Through my open office door, I see my stethoscope glittering on the table where I left it. And this simple instrument, which identifies me as surely as a hammer does a carpenter, is no longer familiar to me] (8–9).

Alain's identity reposes not in his own person, but in an object, a symbol of his profession, from which he feels estranged. Recoiling at the ugliness he perceives in his poorly furnished office, he realizes that Madeleine, too, profoundly dislikes it, as well as the whole town,

which is equally unattractive. Striving to understand his wife, whom he sees as a passionate being, living for the moment and possessing an animal-like freedom, he knows he will never be able to bridge the gap between them. “Il se terre en elle un être qui ne m’appartient pas, que je n’atteindrai jamais. . . Un peu comme si je ne la possédais qu’à bout de bras avec, entre nous, une opacité infranchissable” [Hidden in her somewhere is a being who does not belong to me and whom I will never grasp . . . it is as if I made love to her at arm’s length, with an insurmountable, opaque barrier between us] (11). Blinded to the reality of his own inner self as well as to that of his wife, he laments the lack of transparency that prevents him from knowing both himself and the other. The reader can see that no proverbial window of the soul will ever open up to shed light on his wife’s identity. Madeleine, for her part, escapes from herself and reality through the cinema and the juke box, identifying with another world that carries her away from herself and allows her to experience her own form of “dédoublement”, according to Alain (27).

This sense of alienation is heightened by the author’s use of first-person narrative, in which everything is filtered through Alain’s eyes. The reader fully partakes of Alain’s inner world, while at the same time sensing the distance between him and the outer world. As Rosemarin Heidenreich points out in *The Postwar Novel in Canada*, Alain “relates the story in the present tense and denies the reader any knowledge beyond the (subjective) experience of the moment” (47), clearly an existentialist perspective. On top of that, his thoughts, incessantly analytical and tortured by doubt, are by no means reflected in his banal and infrequent comments. Thus, the inability to communicate in the novel is reinforced not only by impediments to vision, but also by a lack of words.⁴ While his endless reflections on their short married life show Alain that his wife’s freedom in their relationship is essential, his curt statements with possessive overtones contradict the careful analysis he has gone through to come to this understanding. Madeleine, for her part, lives entirely according to her feelings, and is not given to lengthy discussion or analysis. Between them exists “une ignorance profonde” [a vast ignorance] (26), Alain concedes. Certain

depictions of the couple together unfold entirely without words or end with stormy exchanges that undo any sense of complicity between them. Madeleine also uses feigned sleep to create a barrier between her and her husband. Having built their relationship on physical desire, they are unable to use verbal discourse to communicate when the marriage starts to unravel. Moreover, the maid provides another screen that distances the couple, allowing life to go on without them having to talk to one another: “Thérèse est là pour boucher le trou de silence” [Thérèse is there to fill in the gap of silence] (70).

The very foundation of their relationship, physical attraction and interaction, proves to be as problematic right from the start as the other failed modes of communication. Despite the absence of spiritual roots in their relationship, which Alain readily acknowledges, both partners are searching for an absolute in life which they hope to find in the other, but through finite means, which is all they know: “Nos rapports étaient physiques, essentiellement. J’ai aimé en elle la liberté de son corps et cet amour-là, qui peut affirmer qu’il n’est pas le vrai ?” [Our relations were essentially physical. I loved in her the freedom of her body—and who can affirm that this is not true love?] (114). However, by placing all their expectations in the power of the sexual encounter, they are disappointed, for it fails to bind them together or lift them to a higher plane, as Alain’s reminiscence of their first sexual experience reveals:

“Madeleine m’avait glissé des mains, son âme m’échappait. Je voulais peut-être étreindre l’éternité en elle, connaître la volupté d’immortalité. Mes bras n’enserraient plus qu’une femme lasse qui pensait à autre chose . . . L’instant avait eu la plénitude qu’[elle] désirai[t] et il était déjà mort” [Madeleine had slipped through my hands, her soul escaped me. Perhaps I wanted to grasp eternity in her, to know the voluptuousness of immortality. My arms no longer held anything more than a weary woman thinking of something else. . . The instant had had the fullness she desired, and was already dead] (128).

“À peine établie, la relation amoureuse est détruite” [As soon as it is established, the romantic relationship is destroyed], states Karin Egloff. “L’apothéose tragique qui fige pour toujours le geste charnel semble être pour Langevin, l’image la moins imparfaite de l’amour” [The tragic apotheosis which forever freezes the carnal act in time seems to be the least imperfect image of love, for Langevin] (71). Alain recognizes the inherent impossibility of truly uniting with his wife: “Nous ne pouvons nous acharner à rapprocher nos deux lignes parallèles. Elle mourra seule et cela rendra définitivement vains et dérisoires mes efforts et les siens” [We cannot not force the two parallel lines of our lives to come together. She will die alone and that will make all our efforts vain and pathetic] (133). Defeated in their love life, little remains except to turn elsewhere in search of an absolute, a path Madeleine desperately chooses to tread, while Alain continues to cling to the relationship: “Elle a plus d’ardeur que moi et elle ne s’est pas avouée vaincue parce qu’elle n’a pas trouvé l’absolu avec moi.” [She is more passionate than I and has not admitted defeat simply because she has not found an absolute with me] (133).

Despite Alain’s awareness of Madeleine’s desire for a more ardent love life, the shock he experiences the first time he sees her strolling down the street with her new lover, Richard, is overwhelming. For once his vision is abundantly clear, even though he is looking through the windshield of his car: “la peine ne m’embrouille pas la vue. Ma vision est très nette” [the pain doesn’t cloud my view; my vision is very clear] (80). He feels amputated by the loss, sick at heart, but in recklessly swerving in front of the couple as they cross the street he manages to inject the same panic he has just experienced into Madeleine, looking her right in the eye: “Oh, les yeux de Madeleine! . . . Elle aussi est amputée tout à coup. Cinq seconds. Suffisant pour que nos deux âmes se prennent aux crocs . . . Nous nous sommes pénétrés enfin. Plus d’opacité” [Oh, Madeleine’s eyes! . . . She too is amputated all of a sudden. Five seconds—long enough for our two souls to grapple with each other. . . At last we’ve penetrated each other. No more opacity] (81). Where love has failed to pull down the barrier between them, “la glu de la haine” [the glue of hate] (81) succeeds in

connecting them, but not for long. Alain's anger soon dissipates as he finds himself alone, straining once again to break through the invisible wall that separates him from his wife: "Moi je suis hors du jeu, je regarde derrière une paroi de verre que je ne réussirai pas à briser" [I'm outside of the game, watching it from behind a glass partition I will never succeed in breaking] (82). For the first time he considers having recourse to words, but sees them like any other kind of screen that can hide the truth: "Peut-être reviendra-t-elle, nous nous parlerons. Le langage a encore des possibilités . . . On peut se laisser prendre aux mots, accepter leur écran" [Perhaps she'll come back and we'll talk. Language still has its possibilities. . . One can get caught up in words, accept them as a screen] (84).

Alain's strategies for coping with his wife's infidelity reveal both his human frailty and his existentialist philosophy, which alienates him from the town. He turns to the bottle to dull the pain he soon inflicts upon himself by allowing his wife to keep on pursuing happiness in her own way, with Richard. In a society that holds both masculinity and Catholic values very high, Alain's stance becomes totally incomprehensible. Madeleine's affair in full view of the town is condemned by the priest and is unacceptable to a society that has always placed public morality above individual happiness. Alain argues with the priest, who doesn't believe in happiness on earth, that its pursuit is an essential part of freedom, more important than public opinion. As her husband, Alain has decided to grant her this liberty, knowing full well Madeleine will never be happy, but affirming her right to try: "Je ne peux rendre Madelaine heureuse, mais je n'ajouterai pas à son malheur. Je ne suis plus son mari, je suis son allié contre l'absurde cruauté" [I cannot make Madeleine happy, but I will not add to her unhappiness. I am no longer her husband; I am her ally against an absurd cruelty] (133). Not heaven, but death, is the end of this life for Alain, who wants to fight alongside his wife against the absurdity of the universe and its indifference to human aspirations: "Je la vois morte sans avoir été heureuse, morte désespérée parce qu'elle n'atteindra jamais ce qui l'aurait comblée" [I see her dead without ever having been happy, dead without hope because she will never be able to embrace that which

might have fulfilled her] (132).⁵ Just as the priest sees himself in charge of the souls of his parish, Alain considers himself responsible for his wife's soul, but only in as much as it means protecting her freedom. "Moi aussi j'ai charge d'âme. Je me tiens responsable de Madeleine, non pas de son salut, mais de son bonheur" [I, too, have charge of a soul. I hold myself responsible for Madeleine, not for her salvation but for her happiness] (150), he insists. "Je ne sais pas et n'ai aucun moyen de savoir si l'âme dont je me suis chargé sera sauvé. Mais moi, je lui laisse la bride sur le cou . . . Je lui permets de se damner" [I do not know and have no way of knowing whether the soul with which I am charged will be saved. But I let the reins hang loose . . . I allow it to damn itself] (151). Herein lies the contradiction of Alain's philosophy: knowing that his wife will ultimately *not* find happiness or fulfillment with her lover, he nevertheless allows her to destroy herself in the pursuit of temporal happiness in the name of freedom, which he holds to be his highest value.

In the end, of course, this strategy brings inevitable defeat, as has everything else. The priest succeeds in bringing the scandal to an end by forcing Richard to become engaged to a suitable young woman, thereby separating the lovers. Madeleine in her despair attempts to shoot Richard, wounding him slightly before killing herself. "Elle s'est donnée la liberté définitive" [She had given herself ultimate freedom] (166), concludes Alain, who has never stopped loving her. In reflecting on the medical community's probable verdict of "aliénation mentale" [mental derangement] (168), he sadly comments, "Aliénée, elle l'était depuis sa naissance, comme moi" [Alienated, she was from her birth, like me] (168). Strangely enough, throughout the novel, even while questioning or denying the existence of God, Alain seems to be fighting against Him at every turn. When Madeleine reveals the hopelessness of her situation with Richard, for example, Alain feels a deep pity, and a desire to protect her from divine injustice (132). After her death, he nurses himself to sleep with his whisky, feeling that a huge, merciless hand has knocked over his house of cards. "Il y a dans l'univers langevinien une fatalité qui réduit l'homme ainsi qu'un pantin" [In Langevin's world there is a form of fatality that reduces man to a

puppet] (“La vision du monde” 155), remarks André Gaulin. “La vie est un ‘cirque’ que l’alcool rend plus supportable” [Life is a ‘circus’ that alcohol makes more bearable] (ibid). At the end of the novel, when Alain decides to stay in town and force people to accept him by showing them pity⁶ through his medical practice (the same pity he had tried to show Madeleine), he declares his intention to continue his struggle: “Dieu et moi, nous ne sommes pas quittes encore” [God and I are not through with each other yet] (181). His fight has been against God all along, it appears, not just against an impersonal universe, and the choices he has lived by have been deliberate. Even though one might think that the outcome of his marriage demonstrates that he has failed in his bid to validate his philosophy of life, he perseveres in his fight to maintain his beliefs and lifestyle, unwilling to bend to the evidence of the suffering they have caused. In the end, the pity with which he plans to inundate the town brings very little hope in light of all the despair in the novel.⁷ Several chapters end with a reference to the asbestos dust that falls not only on the city, but also on his soul, which he sees as “couverte de poussière” [covered with dust] (105) as he falls asleep on the sofa, feeling “la tranquillité et la paix des morts” [the peace and calm of the dead] (ibid.).

Alain’s faith and identity issues surface not only in his marriage, but also in his profession, particularly in his dialogues with an older doctor he respects and tries to understand. While an operation always leaves Alain feeling anxious and oppressed, Dr. Lafleur exudes a peace which appears to come from his faith. Alain wonders, however, if its source is really human commiseration rather than the doctor’s religious convictions, which apparently enlighten him without permitting him to see, that is, to understand the absurd (“sa foi l’éclaire sans lui permettre de voir”) (37). For Alain, the suffering of a convulsing child shatters the idea of absolute justice. When called to a farm house one wintery night to deliver a child with hydrocephalus, he later weeps with rage and helplessness in his car, after having punctured the child’s head to release the fluid and allow the baby to be expelled. Completely overwhelmed by his inescapable act, he feels not only that he has been amputated by his wife’s unfaithfulness, but that his hands have also

been cut off by the unavoidable killing of the baby. “Je n’ai plus rien à perdre. J’ai tout perdu” [I have nothing more to lose; I’ve lost everything] (104), he mourns. Little remains of his marital or professional identity. Once again, it seems to him that an invisible force has somehow been against him: “Tout le jour quelqu’un m’a talonné. Il me laissait faire quelques pas et m’écrasait pour recommencer” [All day long someone has been following on my heels, letting me take a few steps and then crushing me, only to begin again] (104). In his next conversation with Dr. Lafleur, he asks how the older man copes with the metaphysical dilemma of physical suffering. Like Camus’ Dr. Rieux in *The Plague*, Lafleur admits, “Je lutte. Je lutte aussi dans la vie chaque fois qu’il m’est possible. Je suis toujours battu” [I fight. I also fight in life whenever possible. I am always defeated] (110). Death, of course, is the ultimate victor. Committed nevertheless to fighting against what Alain calls “l’injustice de Dieu” [the injustice of God] (111), Lafleur concedes, to accommodate Alain, “Vous voyez, nous sommes deux à lutter contre Lui. Il n’y a pas d’autres solutions que de faire notre métier d’homme” [You see, both of us are fighting Him. The only answer is to do our job as men] (111).⁸ It all comes down to the human level, concludes Alain, who, unconvinced by the doctor’s faith, can only accept this level of reality.

With Alain’s rejection of faith and the town’s social mores, Langevin’s novel becomes a precursor to the movement of the following decades in Quebec, in which both the power of the Catholic Church and English domination are toppled, and an era of liberalism ushered in, embracing values very much like those espoused by Alain. And yet, in light of the identity crisis depicted in the lives of Madeleine and Alain (a reflection of the broader identity crisis leading to the upheaval of the Quiet Revolution), the reader might well ask if these values can really meet the needs of a people consciously striving to affirm its collective identity⁹ while largely rejecting the eternal truths that lead to a sense of personal identity and fulfillment.¹⁰ Langevin acknowledges that he has no answers, sadly justifying the negativity he and other Quebec authors express, by averring, “Une littérature de bonheur présuppose une sérénité, une solution, une paix, que nos

écrivains n'ont pas" [A literature of happiness presupposes a serenity, a solution, a peace that our writers do not have] (Langevin cited by Gaulin, "Le romancier et essayiste" 25). Bessette and his co-authors go so far as to compare Langevin's work to that of Dostoevsky for its universality, nihilism, and even greater radicalism, in their view (534). For the Christian reader, the novel surely suggests that if godly principles are replaced by temporal values, and if the God of the universe (as opposed to the institution of the Church) is rejected as the only absolute that can fill the human soul, then the quest for identity, freedom, and happiness will only lead to alienation, if not tragedy, and a breakdown in communication which society with all its efforts can never solve.

From a social and linguistic standpoint, Quebec society has radically changed since the Quiet Revolution, as new laws protecting the French language and culture have strengthened its French identity and totally changed the status of Francophones living in the province. The Church has basically lost its influence in society, and secularism has become the norm, with a new freedom for the individual. Langevin's novel, while supporting this freedom, also pushes us to ask whether true fulfillment can ever be found until the spiritual issues highlighted in the novel are recognized and heralded as essential questions that still need to be answered.¹¹ And although the author does not provide this conclusion, nor, indeed, any positive conclusion, the novel itself may present one of the most convincing arguments in favour of a biblical faith and a spiritual dimension in life, by way of their devastating absence. Moreover, in spite of its pessimism, the novel does provide one ray of hope, in that the protagonist (true to his Quebec roots) remains extremely conscious of his spiritual condition, including his need for an absolute, even while refusing to seek that absolute in God. If this consciousness can be kindled in the reader, despite both the protagonist's and current society's denial of a need for God, then possibly Langevin's novel, with all its seeming hopelessness, will have lighted the way to the first step towards hope.

NOTES

1. The Quiet Revolution, except for some violence in the beginning, was essentially a peaceful struggle for the social, economic, and linguistic control of Quebec by the Francophone majority, with a very strong backlash against the Catholic Church and English business interests that had suppressed the French-speaking population. Writers played a key role in Quebec's transformation.

2. "La 'vision partielle' est importante dans l'œuvre de Langevin," notes Karin Egloff. "De nombreuses expressions soulignent la nature incomplète de la perception des personnages. Une certaine quantité d'effets-écran rendent leur vision encore plus fragmentaire" ["Partial vision' is important in Langevin's works. Many expressions underscore the incomplete nature of the characters' perception. A certain number of screen effects cause their vision to be even more fragmentary] (3). She adds that "[l]e drame du héros de Langevin, c'est de tendre par sa nature à quelque chose que sa condition lui refuse. Sa vision de lui-même et de l'autre est complètement faussée" [the drama of Langevin's heroes (in general) is to reach out by nature to something their condition refuses them. Their vision of themselves and the other is completely distorted] (5).

3. All translations are my own, including those of critical sources.

4. Jean-Claude Tardif's analysis of language in this novel reveals that in life "toute réalité se nourrit d'abord de mots et les regards n'ont aucun sens, les gestes sont dénudés s'il n'y a pas eu de verbalisation au préalable et, si le code s'est montré défectueux au plan interpersonnel," in which case "il ne peut rester qu'un vide" [all reality is fed by words, and glances have no meaning, gestures are stripped bare, if there has not been previous verbal expression, and if the interpersonal code has failed, (in which case) an emptiness remains] (254).

5. "L'image même de l'absurde dans l'univers langevinien, c'est la mort" [The very image of the absurd in Langevin's world is death] ("La vision du monde" 154), maintains André Gaulin.

6. The solution of pity is a desparate one, as Bessette and his co-authors show, "puisque le mal reste intact" [because the suffering remains unchanged] (529).

7. For Gabrielle Pascal, Alain has an idealized but rather dubious form of pity, for his struggle against God is an impossible challenge. He is actually

pursuing a dream designed to increase his self-worth. By creating a parallel between himself and God, he sees himself as superior to God because his actions bring him closer to the human level, even though they will certainly lead to failure, as Pascal indicates (49–50).

8. “Medical experience defined man’s task as that of a fighter in the ranks of men engaged in a combat against divine injustice” (88), comments W.E. Collin in regard to the novel. We might add that while Camus’ doctor fights against the absurd, the religious overtones reflective of Quebec society are obvious in the notion of divine injustice here.

9. “[L]e mythe personnel qui se révèle dans [l]es romans [de Langevin] coïncide bien avec la symbolique québécoise : l’exil et la quête d’une identité sont bel et bien au cœur du pays et de l’homme” [the personal myth in Langevin’s novels concurs with Quebec symbolics: exile and the quest for an identity are truly at the heart of Quebec and of the individual], remarks Karin Egloff (5).

10. “André Langevin démontre inlassablement, non seulement que Dieu est mort, mais qu’aucune liberté n’existe . . .” asserts Gabrielle Pascal. “Dans cet univers, le lieu de l’existence humaine est un ‘enclos muré de toutes parts où il faut descendre seul, combattre seul ses monstres, se désintégrer seul’ (Langevin, *Évadé de la nuit* 104–105)” [André Langevin shows continuously, not only that God is dead, but that liberty does not exist . . . In this universe, the place of human existence is “a totally walled-in enclosure where one must descend alone, fight his monsters alone, and disintegrate alone”] (7–8).

11. David Bond sums up these issues well when he states that “Langevin’s characters are obsessed with the eternal problems of mankind: death, suffering, human solitude, the general meaninglessness of life . . . Langevin uses his novels to examine the metaphysical questions which mankind has always had to confront” (9).

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USING MUSIC AND IMAGE TO RAISE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL QUESTIONS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: EXPLORING THE SÖHNE MANNHEIMS*

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MUSIC OFFERS TO language teachers benefits in terms of language exposure, cultural information, and multisensory appeal. This article describes how the use of music videos offers potential for exploring spiritual and moral concerns, especially as the intersections between words, sounds, and images are explored. Exploring how (in this case) specifically German voices address faith-related questions with specific reference to their own cultural context may at the same time deepen moral, spiritual, and cultural learning. The examples described are drawn from the music videos release by the German band Söhne Mannheims.

Introduction

Over the years various rationales have been offered for using music in foreign language courses. Music may be introduced for affective reasons, to add motivation, relieve monotony, and support engagement (Jolly, 1975; Schmidt, 2003), and the likelihood that appealing songs will be remembered and listened to outside of class may extend learning benefits (Kramer, 2001). Use of music may also directly support

language acquisition by scaffolding the teaching of grammatical constructions present in lyrics; by offering exposure to particular idioms, registers, and vocabulary; and by providing comprehensible input (Kramer, 2001; Putnam, 2006; Urbancic & Vizmuller, 1981; Wheeler, 1994). As foreign language education has broadened its focus from linguistic to cultural concerns (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 1993; Schulz & Tschirner, 2008), so also the case for using music has broadened to encompass its contributions to learning about the target culture, especially in relation to significant social issues and perspectives (Failoni, 1993; Putnam, 2006; Schmidt, 2003).

While acknowledging the value of these approaches, this article focuses on the use of music in conjunction with video to explore the intersection of spiritual and moral concerns (Smith, 2008, 2010; Smith & Osborn, 2007) with culture. Language acquisition concerns are important, of course, and have been explored elsewhere (Esa, 2008; Kramer, 2001), but the nexus of cultural, moral, and spiritual learning explored here needs to be given its own due weight, lest spiritually challenging works become reduced to convenient vehicles for illustrating grammar points. The growth of online media has made it increasingly easy to connect music with the official and fan-created visual representations that increasingly accompany it. We focus here on a particular group of German songs and accompanying visuals, and their use in the context of undergraduate Christian education. Our experiences with using these videos are drawn from intermediate-level German courses at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a Christian liberal arts college in the Reformed tradition with strong academic programs and a curriculum-wide emphasis on connecting faith and learning. Most students at Calvin College are engaged in undergraduate study. Almost all identify themselves as Christian, and they are accustomed to the raising of theologically oriented questions across the curriculum. The German program recently has undergone a shift away from a traditional language-plus-literature focus to a broader engagement with culture and more varied media. The pedagogical approaches described were designed for this context and may well need adjustment for other

levels and contexts of instruction; we will indicate in closing some more general pedagogical implications.

Xavier Naidoo and the Söhne Mannheims

The examples discussed below are drawn from the work of the German band Söhne Mannheims (Sons of Mannheim),¹ a Mannheim-based musical collective that has been one of the most prominent recording acts on the contemporary German music scene for the past decade. In one four-year period, lead singer Xavier Naidoo had singles in the German charts, either solo or with the Söhne Mannheims, for 169 weeks out of a possible 208. Chart performance of his albums has been matched only by artists such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Bruce Springsteen (Fuchs-Gambock & Klotz, 2002). The band reflects influences from rock, pop, R&B, rap, and reggae and is drawn from a shifting collective of musicians with various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, many of whom are Christian. Naidoo himself was born in Germany to immigrant, South African parents, and has also been involved in the collective Brothers Keepers, a transnational musical antiracism project led by Afro-Germans (<http://www.brotherskeepers.org>). Alongside love songs and broader reflections on life, there is a recurring emphasis in the music of the Söhne Mannheims on social commentary and criticism, particularly concerning race and social marginalization. These are common themes in German rap music (Putnam, 2006); less common in the German pop music context is the Söhne Mannheims' sustained lyrical engagement with Christian religious themes. While some features of their theology and some behavioral choices of band members can be and have been questioned, they have remained engaged with questions of faith and justice and their intersection. It is this combination of religious reflection and wider cultural engagement expressed in music and image that makes their work of particular interest here. In what follows we will discuss the classroom use of five music videos drawn from the period represented by the triple-platinum selling album *Noiz* (2004) and collected on the DVD *Power of the Sound* (2005).²

Wenn du schläfst

Although *Wenn du schläfst* (When you sleep) was the fourth single released from *Noiz*,³ it offers a useful entry point into the concerns of the Söhne Mannheims. Students can first be assigned the song lyrics to read as homework, with audioonly access to the song. Delaying exposure to the video, while delaying some gratification, opens space for students' own visualizations to emerge. The music is mellow and melodic, the tone is soft and warm. The text presents a lyrical *ich* (I) repeatedly assuring an intimate *du* (you) that "I want to be close to you / at night when you sleep." This is interspersed with reflections on fragility, vulnerability, and the need for protection "in the darkness of the world."⁴ Students are then asked (individually or collaboratively) to script the beginning of a music video to accompany the song, sketching and labeling the opening frames in storyboard fashion. They are to consider how to represent the identity of the speaker and the "you" being addressed, and to choose a setting and situation. The resulting storyboards are shared in class.

Over several years of using this activity, responses have been remarkably consistent, typically reflecting a small number of archetypal narrative situations. Two possibilities dominate. First, there are always situations involving a (male) lover speaking to a (female) beloved. Second, there are always scenes set in a child's bedroom, with a parent (usually a father) singing over a bed or crib. Both scenarios invite a brief discussion of what textual features prompted assignments of gender and choice of scenario. Often, though not always, a third, darker interpretation emerges: perhaps the desire to "be close to you / at night when you sleep" is sinister, and this is a stalker; the tone of the music, however, militates somewhat against this interpretation. Fourth (perhaps because we work with Christian students in a Christian educational institution), students commonly picture God addressing humanity or some individual, despite some lines in the lyric that militate against this interpretation.

Three of these are standard pop culture narrative genres; the fourth is also readily to hand for Christian students. Identifying these

genres—and noting that they emerge not from individual creativity (why did we arrive at common answers?) but from particular cultural narratives—opens space for brief discussion of what we might mean by “love.” Each version is a love story, yet “love” is not univocal (Lewis, 1960). We have a palette of romantic attraction, paternal care, divine compassion, and erotic obsession (naming these in German extends students’ vocabulary as well as invites differentiated moral reflection). At this point it is useful to turn to the growing number of fan-created online slideshows, collections of images assembled to illustrate the song. These offer limited but worthwhile access to the song’s reception history within Germany; what have German listeners pictured while listening? Here the romantic option clearly dominates, with a cascade of pictures of hearts, young lovers, and sunsets.⁵

The official song video subverts all of the above readings. After an initial shot of the earth from space, the viewer sees a collage of fleeting scenes involving different real-world individuals. The lyrical “you” who needs protection finds no single counterpart in the video—unusually, there is no central character. The “you” turns out to be a global collage of elderly people on buses or preparing to sleep alone; homeless people sleeping on the street; children in school, at play, and foraging on rubbish dumps; refugees and immigrants; child soldiers; prisoners and prison guards. The desirable young female or cute sleeping child of the romantic or parental narratives is replaced by the homeless, the hungry, the foreign, the dispossessed, together forming a visual litany of the marginalized. The focus throughout on individual faces and the rhetorical focus on *du* (singular) prevent the addressee from becoming a vague collective. Each face represents a concrete potential recipient of care. The final frame contains bank donation information for World Vision—also an unusual feature in a pop video. The warm ambience of the music and the love theme in the lyrics are thus bent toward a more radical understanding of love as compassion toward the marginal.

Students can be asked to discuss how this video differs from other videos accompanying hit singles, and to list the different kinds of people represented in the video (another vocabulary-building activity that

contributes to differentiated perception of others). Challenging questions emerge from the juxtaposition of lyric and image: How many of those represented do you honestly want to be close to at night? Does seeing their faces arouse any concrete impulse to protect, care, and draw near? What kind of worldview might enable Xavier Naidoo to sing these lyrics over these images and mean it? Returning to the lyrics, we are now in position to reassess their affirmation that since “an eternal light protects me” and said to me, “I just want to be close to you,” now I in turn “want to be protection for you.” By this point there is considerable potential for moral and spiritual reflection. It has emerged not simply from the lyrical focus of the song (which can be heard simply romantically), but from the dissonance created by focusing students attention on the tensions between the pop culture narratives that they naturally associate with the music and lyrics and the compassion-oriented representations of humanity in the song’s video.

Mein Name ist Mensch

The song *Mein Name ist Mensch* (My name is human) is linguistically highly accessible. The lyrics offer simple familial nouns, repetition of numbers, and a palate of colors. The senses are mentioned as well as basic elements of air, light, and bread. The lexicon is hardly beyond an elementary learner’s level, yet the song sings of existential issues as it explores what it means to be called human. *Mein Name ist Mensch* is actually a cover of a 1971 original by the band Ton Steine Scherben. Though the lyrics are not the Söhne Mannheims’ own, their video offers an original artistic interpretation of the song and echoes strategies from the video to *Wenn du schläfst*. Indeed, the video offers a vision of humanity and the human story.

In the paragraphs that follow, we offer a suggested reading (“viewing”) and interpretation of the music video. More accurately, as with *Wenn du schläfst*, the video interprets the song and becomes the band’s own artistic statement. Pedagogically, the existential claims of the lyrics invite important pre-viewing and pre-listening exercises. Students can be asked to answer basic questions in the target language: What

is a human being? What are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters? What is a good life? Who are our enemies? What are the main problems in our world? Will we overcome them? When? How? Depending on exact language level, responses to such questions could be scaffolded through provision of vocabulary and phrases representing a range of possible choices and through preparation of written responses using reference materials. Once such questions are in play, students are primed to interpret the song and video.

Musically, the song moves from a single voice, almost chanting, through multiple voices into crescendo choruses that end in a jam of frenzied guitars, voices, and drums. It is a powerful song that demands the listener's attention. In rather stark juxtaposition, the video is, technically speaking, restrained and static, basically a black-and-white slide show. The slides show only people, most of them shown full-face, gazing into the camera, but some located amid historic scenes of violence and cruelty.

The first two stanzas work together to situate the inclusive vision of humanity: "My fathers are black / and my mothers are yellow / my brothers are red / and my sisters are pale." The narrative voice also claims to have two eyes and be able to see what is going on, already implying some kind of covered-over wrongdoing. In verse three an external adversary is introduced: "We have an enemy / who steals our days." Finally the song turns to the hope of harmony and victory in the human struggle: "Earth will belong to all and each will have what they need." In this progression there is a notion of an original human condition—a community of human beings who are all connected and each the other's keeper. They are humans with awareness and abilities, but beset by evils all around. Then there is the eschatological vision of future reconciliation, where all can flourish. There is urgency to this vision as the song's coda repeatedly cries out: "The time is ripe."

The next pedagogical step is to push students to articulate how the music and video articulate this vision. Students can now be asked to describe the scenes and images of the video. In group discussions (aided by frame stills) of what is present and absent in the series of images (again, lists of possibilities can help scaffold the discussion), students

come to recognize that the images present people—not their possessions, not their dwellings, not their achievements, not celebrities, but ordinary people, and a vast cultural array of them at that. Often they are downtrodden. The band members are depicted at numerous times—individually and collectively—but are inconspicuously blended in. The images of the human family suggest its racial and cultural breadth; here again students can be asked to list the diversity of individuals represented in the video. Humanity is defined by its familial interconnectivity, yet there is no isolated nuclear family here. Family members are all listed in the plural (fathers, mothers, brothers) and are of all races and colors.

The second stanza underscores human responsibility and action—with eyes and ears we perceive, discern, and act. The third describes the fallen and broken nature of human action. Here we see images linked with the adversary, who “has many names.” The first few images show alcohol and drugs, but as the video proceeds, overwhelmingly, the enemy is represented as human violence, war, beatings, and executions. Acts of horrifying cruelty are depicted in images partially familiar to us from photo-journalism—from mass graves of WWII to assassinations in the Cambodian Killing Fields to cruelties of the Vietnam War to protests against George W. Bush’s war policies. There is scope here to engage students in trying to identify the various specific cultural references, and to discuss what view of the “adversary” is implied by the fact that no single historical incident, societal factor, or political entity is accused, but rather an array across time and cultural space (compare *Babylon System* below). The darkness and brokenness of this world is here not simply personal vice, but rather powers and principalities that perpetuate war and violence.

In a classroom setting, the video’s conclusion calls for reflection as deep as students can muster—within, but stretching, the limits of their language skills. Students can summarize the hopeful vision and perhaps utter their own hopes—possibly using future tense constructions. The final stage of *Mein Name ist Mensch* moves beyond struggle toward an envisioned harmony. We see children dancing, musicians playing, a father resting with his children, people smiling, and some

enjoying a glass of wine—in short, people having their basic human needs met. But even more so, the victorious images show humans joined together in communal celebration, overcoming divides, or striving together toward a peaceful goal. Here again, the outcome is not merely personal and individual but points to a renewed social environment; the images of masses at the fallen Berlin Wall and of peaceful protests stand out in this regard.

There is no sentimentality about the trajectory of hope; the video accents the struggle of it all (“I know we will fight”), and therefore the images turn stark and somber again at the end. More weapons, more bloodshed, even assassinations. The band members insert themselves again at this point, now kneeling, heads down, arms tied behind their backs. This is a recurring visual and textual theme with the *Söhne Mannheims*—the notion of solidarity in suffering. The band seems to say that it is not acceptable for them as artists to simply observe and lament from a distance (compare *Dein Leben* below); they too must join in the suffering.

A word still needs to be said about the most powerful cinematographic effect in the video: the persistent gaze of the paraded faces. Over and again the picture zooms in on penetrating eyes. The stark, black-and-white images with their frank, direct gazes stress the humanity of the individuals depicted and invite discussion of how this differs from the ways in which humans (perhaps especially women) are represented in more familiar pop music videos. This video is ethically demanding of the viewer. Just as the band members insert themselves photographically into the slide show of humanity, we the viewers are also drawn inextricably into this retelling of humanity's story. The video portrays the oppressor and oppressed; the video suggests that we have to insert ourselves into the picture, we have to choose sides. It offers a compelling example of the potential of a stark photographic image to provoke ethical reflection, and invites consideration of the kinds of images generally used in language classrooms and whether they are capable of similar contributions. Topics for concluding class discussion could include having students identify which images moved them the most, what evils they would

choose to represent if making such a video, and how they can find ways to engage and work for change.

Vielleicht

Two German films set in Berlin, the quintessential site of the German postwar experience, form a helpful backdrop to viewing the video for the song *Vielleicht* (Maybe). *Wings of Desire* (1987) and *Run Lola Run* (1998) have become classics with their compelling representations of the ambivalence of national identity and their narratives of new beginnings and overcoming alienation. In *Wings of Desire* we see Berlin in the mid-1980s from the perspective of angels who watch over the city. Filmed in black and white, the story moves at a deliberate, even lethargic pace as it follows the trenchcoat-clad angel, Damiel. As it turns out, countless angels roam the skies tasked with comforting the city's inhabitants as they mull over the disappointments and torments of their mortal lives. The angels—and by extension the viewer—hear the thoughts of those in their charge. Damiel becomes fascinated with a trapeze artist and, wanting to fully experience all that mortal life has to offer, moves from the timeless, immortal world to the temporal world in order to pursue a relationship with her. This transition is marked cinematically by a movement from black and white to color, and spatially by Damiel's movement through the Berlin Wall from east to west. In the end, life's beauty is affirmed by Damiel's naive enjoyment of quotidian reality and his enthusiastic participation in interpersonal relationships.

Run Lola Run portrays a different Berlin, with a frenetic, techno-music-driven pace and a bold panorama of color. While Berlin in the meantime has been reunited in a new post-*Wende* Germany, the brokenness of human existence remains as Lola stumbles upon various interpersonal crises in each of her runs. In an innovative cinematic device, Lola passes the same bystanders in each of the film's three sequences, after which each person's future unfolds in a series of snapshots that change depending on different choices and variables. The goal of Lola's run, however, is the same each time: to save Manni,

the love of her life. In the first two sequences this quest fails, with the death of Lola in the first and of Manni in the second. Unable to accept failure, Lola effectively wills herself and Manni back to life to try again. In the third and finally successful sequence, both Manni and especially Lola demonstrate an almost superhuman agency as they emerge not only alive but deeper in love and even a little richer.

In *Wings of Desire* and *Run Lola Run*, overcoming alienation and creating or preserving community involve affirming human life in a *carpe diem* moment of agency. Set little more than a decade after *Run Lola Run*, the song and accompanying music video *Vielleicht* by the Söhne Mannheims enter into conversation with these earlier works on precisely this issue, offering a Christian counterpoint to both. Using cityscape imagery similar to the first half of *Wings of Desire*, the video deals with analogous issues and includes cinematic citations of both earlier films. An element that sets the video apart, however, is that it refrains from showing easily identifiable landmarks, which promotes a sense that, unlike the previous focus on Berlin, this could be any modern European city. In addition, while the cinematic cues in *Vielleicht* encourage viewers to look for similar themes of German identity and new beginnings as in *Wings of Desire* and *Run Lola Run*, the video proposes a different path for overcoming alienation, as it is not through an enthusiastic affirmation of life but rather through death that the individual enters into community. Whether this death is symbolic or literal is left unanswered, but there is a clear transition from loneliness and suffering into redeemed community.

The video follows three storylines set in a post-industrial European metropolis. While the initiated viewer might recognize it as Mannheim, the specifics of place are not significant and the video does nothing to highlight them. What matters are the stories of the three separate characters, whose lifeless bodies are featured in sequential close-ups after an opening panning shot of the city skyline. While the color palette is reminiscent of *Wings of Desire*, the narrative structure of the video tips its hat to *Run Lola Run* in the way it integrates flashbacks into presenttime narration and then shows the resolution of each situation. After opening images of the bodies of a young woman

and two young men, the video cuts to scenes of how each died. The woman jumps from a high-rise building, one man is run over by a truck and the other drives his car into a wall. During each flashback the video intermittently cuts to members of the Söhne Mannheims standing grouped around each person's motionless form—another citation of scenes in *Wings of Desire* where angels encircle suffering mortals. In the fourth and final minute of the video, under the watch of the singing band members around them, each of the three comes back to life and returns to someone dear to them. The woman returns home to a young child, one man returns to a friend in his car, and the other embraces a woman waiting on a bridge. In each storyline, individuals choose, in isolation, to end their lives. Yet, after dying, they awaken surrounded by layers of community and are reintegrated into a network of relationships. This movement from alienation to belonging is difficult and requires more than an enthusiastic affirmation of life. In fact, what is required is exactly the opposite, as in each narrative strand the individual dies in order to enter into a new, redeemed community.

Using this video in an intermediate college-level German class, instructors can show students scenes from *Wings of Desire* and *Run Lola Run* and assign them, in groups, 1) to think about what Daniel and Lola value most in life and 2) to write five sentences in German describing how each goes about getting or preserving it. Students are quick to recognize that both Daniel and Lola pursue relationships that break the alienation characteristic of unredeemed human existence. To participate in such a relationship Daniel gives up his immortality and Lola, as indicated in the title, runs. In the context of having just learned an appropriate range of German verbs, intermediate-level students are well equipped to describe the actions of each main character. Students can be provided with word banks and instructed to select and manipulate appropriate nouns, verbs, and adjectives to recount and explain scenes showing Daniel and Lola in action. A good starter example is readily available in the German title *Lola rennt* (Lola runs), which succinctly describes the film in terms of activity. In subsequent class discussion, the activity of the characters can then be highlighted, raising the issue of human agency and how in each film

movement from alienation and death into new community and life is in the hands of the individual—an individualistic view that pervades modern Western culture but is inconsistent with a Christian recognition of the inherent pitfalls in programs of individual self-betterment.

Following these introductory segments from *Wings of Desire* and *Run Lola Run*, students then read the lyrics for *Vielleicht* and watch the music video in class. A thematic link to the films emerges as the first half of the song lists a litany of suffering culminating in a turning point in the second verse: “2000 years after you / everything here lies in pieces.” The third verse offers a resolution highlighting communion with Christ as the only true means for overcoming alienation: “The only thing that counts is the connection to you / and it would be the end of me if I lost this connection.” As an assignment for the next period students reflect on the diagnosis offered in the chorus of the song:

Maybe they aren't listening
Maybe they don't see well
Maybe they lack the sense for it
Or they lack courage

The next period begins with a discussion of the chorus in the context of the larger issue of Christ and human community, and students consider how the song's lyrics underscore the message of the visual narrative that the path to reconciliation is through death and rebirth into a newly ordered, Christ-centered community. At this point one may introduce Bible passages that help frame an understanding of the music video as a whole (music, lyrics, and images) as infusing a Christian voice into a cultural discussion of the nature of true community. Psalm 46:10 (“Be still and know that I am God”) and Matthew 13:14–16 (“They hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes”) both echo the chorus and emphasize the need, not for self-redeeming action, but for openness so that Christ might enter our lives and heal our brokenness. In this context the chorus is both a diagnosis and a negative formulation of a solution based on a passive openness difficult to attain today, 2000 years after Christ. In the end, working with

this popular song by the Söhne Mannheims offers students insight into an important aspect of Christians' aspiration to reflect Christ in community with others, as well as a vision of resurrection lacking in otherworldliness. Yet this takes place in a specific cultural context and therefore also helps students begin to understand how questions of alienation and reconciliation might be framed in a German Christian voice using German cultural references.

Dein Leben / Babylon System

The final two videos form a pair, thematically linking two songs that were released on the same single in 2004. The song *Dein Leben* (Your Life), with its plea that the hearer exchange “empty gazes” for a “hope greater than the ocean,” is an explicit call to reflect on despair, meaning, and hope, grounded in the contemporary German social context. Well-dressed members of the band are depicted driving an expensive car through the German countryside; en route they pass three characters, each suffering apparent hopelessness. Using stills from the video, students can be asked to speculate about what form of “emptiness” each represents and what German cultural concerns each might connect with. We see a young woman carrying a rope, apparently contemplating suicide while ogled by males from a passing car, a man climbing the stairs of his office block carrying a pile of documents and teetering on the edge of the roof, and an elderly man painting pagan symbols on trees in the forest. While there is leeway for interpretation, these appear to evoke the *Leistungsgesellschaft* (performance society), a maledominated culture, and a return to the forest (a recurring presence in the German imagination) to seek spiritual consolation in a post-Christian neo-paganism. Each character, the video suggests, faces a lonely dead end.

In a musical and visual interlude a blind African beggar is helped to his feet by a Jamaican passerby as white men in business suits pass obliviously. He raps in English (there is an opportunity here to discuss the shifting roles of English and German in recent German music [Neumann, 2004]), offering an overtly Christian call to repentance.

Students can be asked to list ways in which this voice is marginal. He is on the street, at the foot of an office building, poor, economically unproductive, from an ethnic minority group, and sings in English; a distanced, dislocated relationship to Germany's Christian heritage is implied. After this interlude, reversals occur (and require interpretation). The woman uses her rope to create a swing; the worker throws his papers from the building and descends to the street; the older man erases his paintings and looks to the sky instead of the trees. Salvation implies a concrete realignment of the individual's relationship to the surrounding culture. As the nature of each repentance is discussed, the question of the band's role can be raised. Band members have been shown wealthy and carefree, spectatorially removed from street-level social obligations. In an inversion of the parable of the good Samaritan, they encounter three victims by the roadside. Twice they drive by without stopping; the third time they stop, emerge onto the street, and Naidoo fetches a sledgehammer from the back of the car and uses it to smash the windshield. An intertextual reading of this alongside the biblical parable highlights the connections that the video is making between biblical themes and contemporary German culture.

The chorus of *Dein Leben* hints at where the story must go next: "Kümmere dich um dein Leben, und dann kümmer dich um uns" (take care of your life and then care for us). What should we do once we are saved? The second video, in which the forces of *Ordnung* (a lyrical leitmotif in *Dein Leben*) turn out to be the *Babylon System*, picks up the story. The music gains a more urgent pace and a stronger focus on rap elements. The characters from *Dein Leben* join others in a marching column and advance on a fenced-off building as the lyrics turn to protest against the oppressions perpetrated by the "Babylon system." Armed police with dogs guard the gates; the old man from *Dein Leben* climbs over and is cornered. The young woman follows; a young police officer reacts and releases a shot, killing the woman (and, interestingly, providing a further echo of *Lola rennt*). The crowd swarms the gates, and the video ends amid overturned barricades.

Babylon System is not only a reference to the book of Revelation but also the title of a reggae protest song by Jamaican artist Bob Marley in

which the image of the Babylon System articulates a religious protest against the West's oppression of those of African descent (Middleton, 2000). The imagery in the video, meanwhile, echoes a focus on social protest in early American hip-hop videos such as Public Enemy's *Fight the Power*.⁶ The oppressions implied are more diffuse in the present video (the lyric expresses opposition to various political systems, refusing a specific political target in a manner reminiscent of *Mein Name ist Mensch*).

Band members appear in a split role, both among the protesting crowd, in solidarity, and in an indeterminate space outside the action, dressed in black and commenting like the chorus of a Greek tragedy. There is a striking conjunction of word and image at the moment when the woman is shot. The couplet accompanying this event is "Willst du Zeuge sein wie ich, steh auf und zeig Gesicht" (if you want to be a witness like me, stand up and show your face); the moment of the gunshot coincides with and emphasizes the word *Zeuge* (witness), the German and English equivalents of the New Testament term *martyrs* or martyr. The exhortation to "stand up and show your face" accompanies the woman's backward fall to the ground, which iconically recalls the taking of Jesus from the cross. Standing up to be counted may paradoxically entail laying down one's life for one's brother and sister; power is found not in aggression but in weakness and self-sacrifice.

"Show your face," we are urged. There are three close-up shots of the woman's face before she climbs the fence: the first with eyes closed, her gaze focused within; the second with eyes wide open, in a frank and determined recognition of the situation; the third with eyes half closed, gathering resolve. These three shots encapsulate part of the video's answer to the question of what one is to do once saved, and reflect motifs in the lyric: look within, check your inner values; look without, see truly the condition of the world; resolve to be a witness, to lay down your life. In counterpoint stand parallel close-up images of the face of the policeman who fires the fatal shot—who acts compulsively, without an inner compass, and reacts with guilt, shame, and awareness of isolation.

These personal themes are set within a recognizably German cultural context. The images of fence-climbing and barricades recall well-known images from news broadcasts of the occupation of the German embassy in Prague during the last days before the fall of the Berlin wall. The intertextual resonances of this imagery can be illustrated by showing scenes from the 1995 movie *Nikolaikirche*. In a key scene, congregants at the Nikolaikirche, a church in Leipzig, move out of the church into the streets in nonviolent protest against restrictions on freedom of travel and assembly in 1989. The protest is violently dispersed by police. In the pastor's office the news images from Prague appear on a television. The *Babylon System* video takes these motifs and provocatively applies them to a unified Germany, suggesting resistance to the social myth of the liberation of evil East Germany by virtuous West Germany; Western society is identified as containing its own bondages and need for liberation, and so again protest is connected with the need for self-examination. Students may be asked to discuss what they see as requiring resistance in their own cultural context, and what form they think that resistance should take.

The cultural and intertextual references have been described to underscore the connections between spiritual, moral, and cultural learning. Themes of injustice, self-sacrifice, despair, and hope are universal; raising them within a German course is most authentically and fruitfully done in connection with study of how they are articulated in German-speaking contexts. We find that students who are used to Christian music with a more personalistic and devotional focus may be challenged by the degree of cultural engagement represented in these videos.

Conclusion

As we noted at the outset, music may be used for a variety of reasons in the foreign language classroom. We have focused on the potential for promoting moral and spiritual reflection in a way that remains rooted in specifically German cultural references and concerns.

While any given choice of musical or visual resource will open up

its own particular possibilities and directions for exploration arising from its specific context and subject matter, we suggest that some general lessons can be learned from the above account. First, a focus on the moral and spiritual need not mean that such questions are allowed to float existentially free from the particular linguistic and cultural context that is the object of study in the foreign language classroom. Furthermore, the wider educational question of whether religion and theology should remain in a separate curriculum area or be integrated into the whole curriculum recurs within cultural study in foreign language courses: do moral and religious questions only occur as part of a separate subtopic (such as “religion in Germany”), or can they be more authentically tackled as they arise in popular culture and in relation to other cultural themes, reference points, and concerns? We have tried to show some of the potential of the latter approach.

Second, focusing on how artists have used specific images to further interpret their own music and lyrics, drawing on a specific visual tradition through evocations of existing images and tropes, offers the chance to explore how the resources of a particular culture are harnessed for moral and religious questioning. Attending even more specifically to the ways in which the intersection of word, music, and image is used to challenge existing assumptions (about the nature of love or of protest, for instance, in the examples discussed here) offers an alternative to the more passive consumption of music videos to which many students are accustomed, and opens up spaces for self-critical reflection. Finding pedagogical strategies for first evoking and making explicit the standard cultural schemata that reside in our imaginations and guide our expectations before comparing those schemata to the choices made by video artists is likely to sharpen critical reflection on the ways in which those choices seek to challenge us.

Third, encouraging attentiveness to matters such as how people are represented in music videos, what is implied about their humanity, and whether the images presented are capable of evoking responses such as compassion and solidarity further connects viewing of music videos with spiritual and moral growth. Attention-focusing strategies are therefore an important part of dealing with this kind of material.

In sum, while music and music video can have value simply for their combination of language exposure, cultural information, and multisensory appeal, at least some mainstream music videos offer rich potential for exploring spiritual and moral concerns, especially as the intersections between words, sounds, and images are explored. Exploring how (in this case) specifically German voices address moral and spiritual questions and the relevance of Christian answers with specific reference to their own cultural context may at the same time deepen moral, spiritual, and cultural learning. Doing so through the medium of well-made music videos may make the process both more affectively engaging and, to the extent that the songs are listened to further outside of class, more lasting.

NOTES

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1. See <http://www.sohne-mannheims.de>.
2. At the time of writing, the individual song videos are also accessible on YouTube:
 - *Wenn du schläfst*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8EX2ezwU8g>
 - *Mein Name ist Mensch*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlXv9YsAjQI>
 - *Vielleicht*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B8IaNFt8vA>
 - *Dein Leben*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyBLk4WNN2o>
 - *Babylon System*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKOh-HzKCE4>
3. The first three studio albums by the Söhne Mannheims were titled *Zion*, *Noiz*, and *Iz On* (“It’s On”, with German pronunciation), all variants on the root word *zion*.
4. We cite all lyrics in our own English translation for the purposes of this article. The original lyrics to each song are easily located online, such as at <http://www.lyricsbox.com>.

5. See, e.g., <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ofu6cULjgo>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlFuleXtjWo>. Some of these videos contain nudity, so it is advisable to preview them before selecting which ones to show in class.

6. See, e.g., http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_t13-oJ0yc.

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FORUM

The Forum is intended to promote dialogue by providing space for shorter pieces of writing, including opinions and suggestions, brief responses to papers, reports of research in progress, meditations, and descriptions of pedagogical strategies

SELECTIONS FROM *BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN*

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The following selections come from from Wallace Bratt, et al., Behind the Iron Curtain: The Calvin College German Interim Abroad in East Germany 1971–1989 (Calvin College: 2013) and are reprinted here with permission of the author.

Key to a Kingdom

It began in an unlikely way on a damp January Monday in Wittenberg, with soot-stained snow covering everything and a heavy pall of yellowed, polluted air hanging over the city. The Interim group was stomping its collective feet, trying to stay warm while waiting to be admitted to the historic City Church, Martin Luther's preaching church during Reformation times. But there was a problem: the church's custodian was nowhere to be found, and our guide could locate no one with a key to the locked door. Finally, in mild desperation, she decided to go to the parsonage and ask the pastor himself to open the church for us.

Very soon our guide reappeared, with the key-bearing parson in tow. Our group, tired of waiting, gladly traipsed through the doorway the pastor had opened for our tour of the church, but I decided to stay outside with him and ask a few questions about his congregation and the Christian church in East Germany. Standing in the snow, the two of us held a brief but intense conversation that came to an abrupt close when our Interim group once again emerged, ready to resume its chilly walk through the city.

Two years later another Interim group visited Wittenberg to view the same traditional tourist sites, including the City Church. Piqued by my conversation of two years before, I asked Marianne, my wife, to stay with the group and keep the East German tour guide mollified while I dropped out and tried to re-establish contact with the pastor.

Pastor Hellmut Hasse answered the door himself and invited me into his modestly appointed study. We talked for nearly 90 minutes over coffee and cookies and soon found that we were kindred spirits. We discussed a variety of topics, most of them related to the East German church and his own family, and we exchanged addresses, but not before I had expressed the wish that he visit Calvin College in Grand Rapids, a daunting project unlikely of fulfillment, given the Socialist government's highly restrictive travel policies. Exhilarated by our conversation, I rejoined Marianne and our students and made light of my temporary disappearance to the tour guide.

That providential visit gradually opened up East Germany not only to Marianne and me, but to great numbers of Calvin students as well. Through Pastor Hasse we were able to structure as part of our Interim schedule an extended coffee hour in which our students sat at tables with church congregants and talked openly about the situation in East Germany, while our guide—not happy about the event, but resigned to it—took refuge in one of the city's meager cafes. Because of Pastor Hasse and his wife, Christel, East Germany was no longer merely a tourist destination for our students; it now had a human face. And it was a face that welcomed our presence each year over again, helped us better understand our experiences in that country, and led us ever

more deeply to an appreciation of what it meant to be a Christian living in an aggressively atheistic country.

And in the Lord's providential mercy, it all began when the church's custodian was nowhere to be found on that bleak Monday, and Pastor Hasse trudged through the snow to the church, key in hand, to let us in.

Lost and Found

The one thing none of our students wanted to lose in East Germany was his or her American passport. When it did happen, despite all warnings and precautions, it caused problems for both the faculty mentor of the Interim group and the East German guide—to say nothing of the student whose loss it was. The passport could not be replaced in the DDR, and it was the only final source of identification in case of illness or other problems. In addition, Western passports were valuable on the black market and thus, if found by an intrepid East German, probably could have been turned into cash, if one were savvy enough to find a buyer.

But one of our students, a charming, happy, but also very responsible young woman whom everyone liked, did manage to leave her purse with all of its belongings, including her money and passport, on the seat of an East Berlin streetcar one Saturday morning. Only after the streetcar was long gone did she discover what had happened. Our guide's reaction was one of decisive upset, as she paced back and forth, muttering over and over again, "*Ach, du meine Scheisse,*" a vulgarity somewhat less coarse in German than in English. But we all knew what she meant. Finally the guide stuffed some East German money into my hand and sent me, together with the student, to the nearest police station in search of the wayward handbag, noting that I had been in East Berlin several times and surely could make my own way.

Our group having left for the city of Weimar without us, we walked to the precinct station and appealed for help to the officer in charge. Stern and non-committal, and probably not overjoyed at having weekend duty, he placed us in a small, windowless room and told us

to wait. Dog-tired, I dozed off repeatedly, with my head resting on the wooden table at which we were sitting, asking the student to wake me each time the sharp click of the officer's boot heels announced his coming. After a long wait and several requests for more information, he finally told us the purse had been found at the end of the streetcar line, which was a long way beyond the city limits. After giving us general directions for getting there, he dismissed us into the damp January air outside.

Not having the heart or energy by that time to go to that distant location by public transit, I decided to take a taxi, since fares were minimal anyway. However, cabs were few and far between in all of East Germany, even in its capital city, Berlin. Finally I spotted one and appealed to its driver, who had just removed the "Taxi" sign from his vehicle, to take us to our destination. To my weary chagrin, he was adamant in his refusal to do so, saying it was past noon on Saturday, he was officially off duty, and his wife was expecting him home.

There was only one way to get him to change his mind, and I resorted to it. Feigning innocence and telling a downright lie, I lamented that we had another big problem: we had only West money with which to pay him. All of a sudden it was no longer Saturday noon and his wife was no longer waiting for him. He told us to get into the cab at once; he would be glad to help us out. Western currency was highly valued in the East, for with it one could shop at exclusive stores offering imported, high quality goods accessible only to people with that form of cash. The lure of such monies was too much for our cabbie to resist.

After a long, bumpy ride we arrived at the railway police station to which our student's purse had found its way. The office in charge, a gentleman in his late 50s, proudly showed us the purse and asked us to examine its contents in his presence. They had not been touched; both the passport and Melanie's funds were just as she had left them earlier in the day. Greatly relieved, we thanked him and eventually found a train that took us to Weimar, where the Interim group had already settled in for the night.

All's well that ends well. But since that day I've occasionally mused

on what happened back then. The DDR was a member of that East Bloc so long labeled by us in the U.S. as atheistic and godlessly Communistic, whose morality was dubious, since it was without Christian underpinnings. Our judgments back home were harsh and often indiscriminate, unless we were dealing with high profile dissidents. Yet the fact that the wayward purse survived intact had to be the result of a chain of honest action (or inaction) on the part of many East Germans who must have seen it. It had had a long ride in a highly visible place before it was finally secured by the authorities and returned to us. Any one of a number of people could have taken it or emptied it of its contents. But no one did.

In my dealings with the cabbie, on the other hand, I resorted to a kind of marginal bribery to achieve my ends. True, I did him a favor of sorts by my tactics, but not because I wanted to help him on his way. I chose to manipulate him for my benefit. I took advantage of the situation.

The thought, I must admit, has never kept me from a sound night's sleep, but I suspect that on that Saturday in January those unknown East Germans were my moral superiors.

Music in the Socialist Air

Travel in East Germany in January back then took grit. Most of the time the sun remained stubbornly elusive while we made our way from one city to another and from one cultural monument to another—memorials that often were of little interest to most of our students. What did poets like Goethe and Schiller, for example, mean to them? Or those poets' gravesites? Add to that the short days, which meant that we began our mornings in dusky light and concluded our days barely short of sunset. And then there was the rain. Or still worse, the snow, which never got plowed. And the long walks with feet damp from slogging through slush. And the waiting for our guide to decide we had had enough for that day.

One abysmally gray, messy day in Weimar capped them all. It had all of the elements necessary to provoke impatience and invite weariness.

ness. Late in the afternoon, as the time for our departure from that city neared, I was meandering in a milling crowd toward our designated point of meeting when I heard beautiful singing. The kind of song in that, in that dismal setting, could have made stones weep. I rounded a final corner, wondering where it was coming from, and saw about 20 members of our group on wet benches they had pushed together, sitting with arms locked, as they sang into the dusk some simple Sunday School songs they had learned as little children in a happier, warmer, and drier place. Songs that would not leave them, songs that pierced the gloom, as the old hymn puts it, even the gloom of that dark, dank late afternoon in Weimar. Maybe not world class, but for me it surely was Kingdom class.

One of the student members of that impromptu choir later admitted to worrying whether what they were doing “was illegal, or if we were disturbing the peace.” Yet for him it was worth whatever risk, real or potential, it might have involved. “I felt the security of a group of great friends I had made on the Interim,” he wrote in his short essay, “plus that warmth of feeling and knowing that God was looking down at us and smiling.”

I suspect He was.

Tough Questions, Unpredictable Answers

The East German speaker, a certain Herr Giessler, had just completed his presentation on life in the DDR to an Interim group and asked for questions. Calvin students were not notably voluble when given opportunities to respond to lectures, partly because of weariness, partly because of their feelings of linguistic inadequacy, and partly, perhaps, because asking intelligent questions about East Germany required a more ample background than they felt they had.

One member of the group did have a question, however. She had seen and heard enough to raise the question that trumped all others, but which polite guests customarily did not ask in that setting. She knew of the DDR’s restrictive social policies, its obvious maltreatment of the environment, its inhospitable stance toward Christianity, its

brutally enforced laws against leaving the country, its curtailment of freedom of speech and assembly, and its shortages in so many material areas.

And she knew in a general way of the generous claims the Socialist government made for its attempts to establish a just and equitable society in which all people could flourish and find fulfillment, claims that fell significantly short of being met in the DDR.

Against that background the disquieting question our student felt compelled to ask that afternoon in Leipzig was simply, “*Sind die Menschen hier glücklich?*” (Are the people here happy?)

Herr Giessler was quiet for a few moments, wondering how to respond.

He could have given the party line in response to that question; he could have blunted its force with a hail of words blurring the issue; he could have painted an unrealistic picture of how things were in his country; he could have figuratively fled and taken refuge in the vague promises of a coming Communist utopia.

Instead he suggested that the group come on the day following to his apartment, where he would try to answer the question. He was taking a risk in doing so, but he did it anyway.

As a result of that invitation and the discussion that took place the next day, the question that perhaps should not have been asked—namely “Are the people here happy?”—eventually opened a world of new experiences, a second set of new personal connections that after the *Wende* eventually led to the daughter of the Giesslers serving as Foreign Language Assistant at Calvin, and new insights from which our entire department and its students gained richly in the years following.

Asking politically incorrect questions sometimes brought significant rewards.

People Like Us, or Exorcising Political Demons

The students who participated in the 1986 Interim reacted to their experience in the DDR in a number of ways, just as the members of all the other groups doubtless did. After spending up to a week in East

Germany, most of the '86 contingent felt a deeper appreciation for their lives in the United States.

And it was for many, perhaps for most of them, not first of all a matter of the material prosperity they enjoyed back home. It was primarily the freedoms that were theirs as U.S. citizens, freedoms not enjoyed by inhabitants of the DDR, such as the right to free speech, the privilege of untrammelled travel, the right to peaceful assembly, and the right to practice one's faith without being disadvantaged because of it. One student summed it up succinctly: "Most importantly, my experience in the DDR made me a more thankful person."

For some of them the week in East Germany increased their awareness of the inequalities in our own system. Though "not convinced that the DDR's system is the solution," one member of the group noted that "being in the DDR caused me to stop and think of the injustices of our own brand of capitalism. I am not proud at all of the way many use our system and am envious of [Socialism's] goal of equality."

For others the experience in East Germany brought them to reflect on the purpose of their own lives. One student wrote these poignant lines: "After talking with the atheistic Socialist student in East Germany, I just thought: Here I am, free American, white, Christian, a college student. What does God expect of me in my life? The DDR made me think a lot."

For at least one of the Interim participants those thoughts were on the possibility of armed conflict with the very people we were meeting, presumably our enemies. "In a future war," he wrote, "we or our children could be fighting the same students we talked with in the DDR. Meeting these students made war a more personal thing for me. Wars are not fought by governments, but by living, breathing people with goals, ambitions, and fears."

From the perspective of our Calvin German department and the perspective of the Kingdom, there was one common additional response that was particularly satisfying. It had to do with exorcising political demons, shattering preconceptions, and coming to see the citizens of the DDR not as political enemies, but as ordinary people "just like us," as several students put it.

Though our Interim participants were not cold warriors in any sense of the term, the fabric of their education and life experience, including the news reports they had heard, had created strong stereotypes of what East Bloc people were like and the conditions in which they lived. One student was particularly open in exposing his prejudices, writing that “they [the citizens of the DDR] don’t even have government TV monitors in their homes.” Although most Interim members were not captive to such drastic preconceptions, at least some of them expected to find in the DDR a humanly alien people dominated by Marxist thought.

Those stereotypes disappeared not because of any theoretical counter-arguments advanced by learned political scientists. Their disappearance was the result of countless informal conversations our students held with East Germans of varying ages, occupations, and political convictions. The fact that such conversations could even take place is a tribute both to the language preparation given by Professor Lamse and to the interest and openness of our students. These conversations took place in a variety of settings. Several particularly meaningful interchanges took place in cafes or pastry shops (*Konditoreien*). Many were the result of acquaintances struck up on the train. Some took place in church settings. One took place in a disco; still another in a grocery store. Some even were the result of conversations with members of East German youth groups. Another happened when two middle school-aged girls, using the hood of a car as their desk, were hurrying to finish a distasteful homework assignment due the next hour. And the list of such settings could go on indefinitely.

Some of these DDR conversation partners were generally satisfied with their lives and pointed to some of the advantages of living in that country, like full employment and universal medical care. Others were mostly curious about the United States and the lives of our students. Still others were harshly critical of their government, one going so far as to term his country “*ein grosses Gefängnis*” (a big prison). Others wanted mostly to talk about family and their hopes for their children. But whatever the topic, their conversations reflected a common hu-

manity, common hopes and dreams, common worries, common joys that were at heart no different from those of our students.

One Interim participant described what he had undergone as follows: “My impression of the DDR changed after I looked past the limitations and the physical aspects of the country and focused on the people. Once I got past my preconceptions, shaped largely by the media, I realized that these people are just like me.” Still another put it this way: “People are people, even in the DDR. Children, when they fall down, cry; parents have children and love them; people put one pants leg on after the other.”

Our experience was not complete, in a sense. In one student, at least, it left a sense of undefined longing, as he wrote: “Although I was happy after a week to leave, I left something behind, and I know that I will return someday to discover what it is.”

Whatever it is, it surely had something to do with people “just like us.”

Worship, Church, and Meeting Other Christians

Worship in the DDR was something quite special for most of our Interim members. Some entered the country anticipating the persecution of Christians, but they soon learned that there were no imprisoned East German martyrs for the faith in the radical sense in which we commonly use the term. [...] At the same time, our students knew that the church in the DDR existed in an aggressively atheistic milieu. Freedom of religion was guaranteed in the country’s constitution, but the state had at best a very limited view of what religion entailed. The exercise of personal piety was one thing, but worship that included addressing any of the plethora of social or political ills in the DDR was another and met with early repercussions. Our students also came to understand that practicing, churchgoing Christians were disadvantaged in regard to the professions they wished to enter, teaching prominent among them, to say nothing of even minor leadership positions in their society. For most younger DDR citizens, at least, it could cost something to be publicly Christian.

One of the meaningful informal conversations a small group of Interim students held on a train was with a young family whose wife and mother was active in the Lutheran Church's youth programs. After conversing with this family, discussing church life in Germany and what some of the costs of being openly Christian were, as well as talking about Christian education at Calvin, this family had to leave the train. The young mother's farewell was simple, but it stayed with our students. It consisted simply of "Auf Wiedersehen im Himmel" (Good bye 'til we meet again in heaven).

As we began to realize that we could request attendance at public worship as part of our program in the DDR, Jugendtourist at least allowed us free time on Sunday mornings for attending church services, sometimes even designating the church to which we were to go. During one Interim it became clear that the planners felt that church was church, Catholic or Protestant, and sent us to a Roman Catholic service in Erfurt. It was a memorable experience.

The large church we attended, St. Severius by name, was packed, something we had not been accustomed to seeing in West German services. Sprinkled among the congregants were young soldiers wearing the uniform of the National People's Army—not spies, but worshippers. It was cold, beastly cold, and the church was not heated. You could see your breath, and our Interim students were glad they had dressed warmly. The homily was simple, yet relevant both to the situation in the DDR and in every other context. Its theme was Christ's "Folge mir nach" (follow me). Whatever the time and place, follow me.

After we established contact with Pastor Hasse in Wittenberg, new opportunities opened for us. Simply attending a worship service of his congregation deeply impressed many of our students.

Beginning with the mid-80s, Hellmut and Christel Hasse arranged for a couple hours of planned conversation with those members of the church able to come. Seated with them at small tables, we shared coffee and baked goods, and everyone could talk freely. It was those afternoon conversations that affected many students most deeply of all. One of them wrote as follows: "The final example that completely shattered my view of DDR people being as cold and gray as the build-

ings was the afternoon in Wittenberg. These people didn't have the freedoms I enjoy, but they still found peace and happiness from God in a situation where I might resist God because he had placed me in that difficult environment."

We in the West sometimes tend to reserve our praise and prayers for Christians or churches that stand up heroically in an alien environment and are models of radical discipleship. But at least one student understood that sometimes churches live in a situation in which such heroism is scarcely possible. The DDR, he sensed, was one such place. And he lamented that "Christians like me have these martyr ideas that Christians under pressure in hostile environments should stand up and confront the government, not really understanding what they [the Christians] are going through. Christians like me," he continued, "who can stand afar and point a finger and try to tell them what to do."

Worth remembering.

REFLECTIONS OF A STUDY TRIP LEADER

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Author's note: I presented an initial version of this essay at the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education (in 2013) under the title of "Study-Travel Abroad to a Heritage Culture." The present essay is a significant revision and expansion of one portion of that original essay.

Recently, I had the privilege, during our January Term, to lead a group of undergraduate students on a study trip to the European Low Countries—the Netherlands and Belgium. My institution calls this month between the semesters the "Interim," so I've been labeling my course "Dutch Interim Abroad." This past January was the seventh iteration of this particular course and, having reached this Biblical number of completion, it seems a good time to pause and reflect on why and how I'm leading these study trips. I humbly offer these comments in hopes that others might take pause to reflect on the purpose of their own travel and study-abroad trips with students.

At first blush, the answer to why, as a foreign-language instructor, I would take students abroad seems so obvious as to make the question absurd. Of course we want to get our students into the places, languages, and cultures that they study. But I've found it useful to force myself to articulate a more specific goal. I'm settling on the following wish for my students: *that they may engage with an other and sojourn in that other's place.*

Let me unpack aspects of this aspiration. My dictionary defines "engage with" as "establishing meaningful contact or connection with." I

want students' contact and connection with the other to be more than superficial. It must be concrete, not abstract. Meaningful engagement requires time and interaction, which might entail slowing down and pursuing dialogue. The urge on study-abroad trips is often the opposite: to hurry on to the next thing; to snap the picture and move along. But drive-by glimpsing is not engagement.

There must also be an "other" whom one encounters. Again, this might seem so self-evident that it's not worth saying. But anyone who's observed a group of, say, well-to-do westerners traveling through a foreign country while isolated in a massive coach bus—stopping at the token rest-area McDonalds as they buzz past villages from city to city—knows the proclivity to have as much of "home" with you as possible when you're in the place of the "other." And with the electronic gadgets today, the sounds we hear can easily be the same old music—earbud provided—that we'd be listening to at home. Furthermore, with satellite-connected devices, one can be half a world away and still be "back home" for hours of the day via social media sites. It's all too easy to still be at home, mentally at least, while being abroad. It takes effort and intentionality to dispense with the trappings of home that can be easily taken along or recreated while abroad.

Ideally, our engagement with the other ought to happen during a sojourn in the other's place. Sojourn is a word (both as noun and verb) with both semantic flexibility and precision that suits this subject matter well. As a verb, sojourn means "to stay somewhere temporarily." Of course, when we travel with students abroad, we're not moving there. We're not relocating; we're coming back at some point. It's temporary. But sojourning still implies, on some level, the notion of "staying." There's a different dynamic at play than one of constant motion. Sojourners accept their impulse to "stay" in a place, even within the broader context of the temporariness of the experience. There's a healthy tension here worth striving for: we'd want our students to want to "stay put" even in the context of a "brief stay" in our target culture.

So how do we do this? How do we ensure that our students sojourn during a travel abroad experience—even one that may last only a few weeks? Here are a couple of thoughts.

There must be interaction with the other: doing, undertaking something between the visitor and the visited. This works very well when the “other” is another person. Interaction with another person can happen, of course, on many levels. You can bump into someone on the street and say “excuse me.” That’s a kind of interaction. You can also sit down across from someone, look her in the eye, and have a meaningful conversation. That’s another kind of interaction. Obviously, the more of the latter kind, the better. In the context of Christian education, students need to be reminded that all those in the target culture are also made in the image of God. The more we can get students conversing with people in the host country, the more that shared humanity will become self-evident. You can travel in the Netherlands to see tulips and windmills, or you can sojourn in the country and seek meaningful conversation with fellow human beings. It’s not a purely either/or proposition, of course. But in a sojourn the greatest effort must go into meaningful interaction.

I’ve learned from colleagues in the natural sciences (whose own Interim in the Netherlands for science students I joined for a week some years ago) that there can also be meaningful interaction with a non-personal other. As a teacher focused on linguistic interaction, it took me a while to recognize this. My colleagues’ course focuses on geography, landscapes, urban design, and the like. Indeed, one can learn to see space and landscape as a legitimate “other.” There is a “geographic other”; there is a “technological other”; a “cultural other” too. Here as well, one must do more than glance at such “others” and call it good. For example, when encountering in the Netherlands a “topographical other” in the form of a polder below sea level, one must truly encounter it. Have the students walk the surrounding dikes around a polder, descend into it, stand still in it, listen to the sounds, observe the colors, and conscientiously make notes about the experience. Likewise, when my students engage with the “cultural other” of a 17th century painting collection, I can have the students, for example, choose a Rembrandt, stand still in front of it for at least 15 minutes in solitude, take notes, and report later back to the group on the experience. It’s our job as instructors to

enable the “depth” of an encounter or interaction—be it personal or impersonal—to take place.

An experience abroad must also be a de-centering experience—another key objective. By definition, of course, all experiences abroad are de-centering. But the tendency for many a traveler is to minimize that phenomenon and either bring as much of home along with them or find as much of home while they are there. It’s the de-centering that makes reflection on one’s own life and situation possible. De-centering takes many forms, but ultimately the act of stepping out of the familiar into the foreign puts students in a position to observe that which they have unconsciously taken for granted, and either affirm or reject it.

How can we bring students off their center enough for them to meaningfully reflect on and assess their core values? Here are few more thoughts.

Preparation is important, and it’s multifaceted. There’s the instructor’s preparation with respect to the site. The place visited should, as much as possible, be known by the instructor and the encounter should be personal and relational. This means working with known local contacts. It means making the preparations as much as possible by yourself. Resist paying a travel agent for everything.

This all means that traveling abroad becomes a year-round enterprise. It means cultivating relationships—if not friendships—with local organizers. It means keeping in touch with them—by sending holiday greetings, by sending thank-you notes, by inviting them to visit you, say, during summer months. It means that one year’s trip is connected to another, and that your study-travel course or trip becomes a larger organic entity that stretches over years and various iterations of that trip. Ultimately, it means a new way of imagining the economics of your travel. The investments are far more than financial. You receive favors from local contacts and hosts that are monetarily non-quantifiable. You invest in small gifts for your local hosts. You don’t do this as a clever strategy or bribe, but because you yourself become invested in the persons in your target culture. In the alchemic magic of the Kingdom of God, this means that you often receive more than you give, or you give more than you receive. And these exchanges defy the

constraints of precise accounting. This gets messy for your bookkeeping and your financial services department. The more human your travel becomes, for example, the harder it is to produce a receipt or an accounting for everything you do or receive. Unexpected expenses come up because opportunities to do good things for your local contacts come up. You grab these opportunities. And unexpected savings come up too. People do you favors; treat your students to this or that; tell you to just keep the money you set aside to “pay” them. You need to be conscientious and responsible with the money your institution and your students have entrusted to you—obviously. But it’s also our job as professional travel-study abroad leaders to educate our institutions that there must be some flexibility in the budget for such trips.

Preparation also means, at the least, cultural training and, better yet, language training. If your institution teaches the language of the culture you visit, why not make a minimum level of proficiency a prerequisite for the course? That’s risky, I know, because you exclude potential students. The way I deal with that is by giving priority admission to students who’ve invested in at least one semester of Dutch language learning. If your students can’t learn any of the language of the target culture, how about a couple meetings for mandatory cultural orientation? This allows also for all important attitudinal preparation. Students can be primed on the concepts and implementations of hospitality, gratitude, curiosity, respect, honor, and the like.

Preparation also involves getting yourself and the students involved in spiritual preparation. This might mean intentional prayer, in advance, not only for things like safe travel and a good time, but also prayer that the group might be a blessing to those they encounter and prayer that the group might find ways to show kindness to those they’ll meet.

What about when the group is on site? How can we best be intentional about the encounters and the experience? I’m convinced that the answer is in finding the right mixture of structure and spontaneity with engagement and reflection.

Part of helpful structure means regular briefings on what’s coming. Structure includes specific assignments, where students, say, look for

or gather information from a place or from a conversation. Structure also means that students understand that questions must be asked after someone gives you a presentation. Structure means that someone from the group must thank a local guide after a walking tour. But as instructor, I find that I must also show restraint in the briefings. You don't want to tell them everything they might encounter—just enough to orient them, but not too much to spoil the experience of discovery. As I said, students need to participate in discussions organized with locals, but students need the freedom to express themselves in their own way (even if I know that how they say it might be somewhat culturally inappropriate). Another place where it's good to embrace spontaneity is when the unplanned happens. Once when checking out of a hotel to catch an international train, the promised taxis (which I had arranged) the evening before, never arrived. Looking at our watches, we realized that we were going to be in serious trouble. I knew it. The students knew it. Inside, I was nearing a panic, knowing how much it would mess up then entire day if we didn't catch our train to Belgium. By the grace of God, I decided that, no matter what, I was going to remain calm and collected. The students, though at first also very anxious, began to calm down too. It was a moment for me as instructor to model a kind of traveling skill that I hoped my students would also learn. Finally, taxis began arriving, but not the minivans we had requested, but rather economy sized cars that would force us to split up into four or more groups. Ultimately, I had to simply tell the students where to go at the train station and what to do. They were unintentionally on their own. In the end, it all worked out—though with only minutes to spare.

That's the sort of situation that all instructors on study-travels abroad have experienced at one time or another. There are nerve-racking, headache-inducing moments, but I want to suggest that we prayerfully prepare ourselves to embrace such moments for what they are and for what they can teach us. Sojourning abroad means relinquishing much control. This relinquishment squares fully with the reality in the Christian life that our lives are not in our own hands, that we are dependent on God (often via others) for getting through every day. To break the illusion (and the favorite American narrative) that

we are masters of our own destiny can be often easily done when one sojourns as a stranger in a strange land. We need to see and to train our students to see this disillusionment for the gift that it is.

Perhaps the single most effective and rewarding element to structure into a study-travel experience is a home stay. On course evaluations, students overwhelmingly claim home stays to be the highlight of their experience. Home stays happen through many programs that readers of this journal are a part of, so I realize that I'm preaching to the choir. But it's good to pause and take stock of the unique treasure that a functioning home-stay arrangement for students can provide.

A home stay impresses on students, perhaps in a unique way, the notion of place. A home is where people and place find full and authentic expression. In the home, students encounter the differences of the foreign place up close and personal. They also come to see connections between people and place in an embodied way, for ultimately it is people that make a house a home. At the same time, through the grace of hospitality, students develop empathy and understanding for the people in their differences. In a paradoxical way, this understanding (and even embrace) of differences is made possible when one recognizes the commonality of our shared humanity. Such are not, of course, the first thoughts that occur to students while in the home stay, but they can be coaxed into reflective articulation after the fact if we put careful questions to our students in debriefing.

Every study- or travel-abroad experience has its own opportunities and its own challenges. Specific goals for students will always be determined by level of prerequisite language skill, place visited, length of stay, available financial and human resources, etc. But it seems to me that the template presented here could fit, no matter the context: let's aim to have our students "engage with an other and sojourn in that other's place." Engage with—make real contact, establish connections. Go deep with the "other"—no fly-by snap shooting. And seek to "stay put" long enough for depth of learning and meaningful encounter to happen. Let's teach our students how to sojourn in a place as fellow image bearers of God, grateful for hospitality and eager to understand the others whom they encounter.

REVIEWS

Kelsey Haskett, *Dans le Miroir des Mots: Identité féminine et relations familiales dans l'œuvre romanesque de Marguerite Duras*. Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 2011. 498 pp. ISBN 978-1-883479-63-6.

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In this analysis of Marguerite Duras's literary work, Kelsey Haskett insightfully and meticulously studies feminine identity—and ultimately Duras's identity—as teased out through family relationships in many of the female characters of her novels. Haskett demonstrates a thorough understanding of the entirety of Duras's life and literary fiction, but focuses her analysis on the following nine novels: *La Vie Tranquille*, *Un Barrage Contre le Pacifique*, *L'Amant*, *L'Amant de la Chine du Nord*, *Les Petits Chevaux de Tarquinia*, *Moderato Cantabile*, *Dix Heures et Demie du Soir en Été*, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, *Le Vice-Consul*, and *Détruire Dit-Elle*.

Haskett focuses a substantial chapter analyzing the primordial blood relationship between sister and brother. Being raised in Indochina far from their cultural heritage, Duras's older and younger brothers profoundly impact her identity, formed fundamentally in childhood. Sometimes controlling and cruel, sometimes passive, often absent (through death or choice), the brother becomes for the female character in the durasien novel her very reason for being and an ideal of the self. Whether the brother dies, leaves physically, or seeks a female lover, the sister experiences a profound loss and spends her energies seeking to replace his lost affection and love with other men. However, the sister can never attain the closeness with her brother that

she seeks because the lover she can attain only serves as a substitute for the absent brother. This recalls Narcissus's affection for his twin sister, ultimately leading to his own destruction. Without the primordial love of the brother, the sister unsatisfactorily projects her desires on others.

The second and third chapters of Haskett's book probe female identity as mother and daughter. Essentially raised with an absent father, Duras centers her young characters' early development in relation to the brother and mother. Many of the maternal characters in these novels dote affectionately on a son while excluding the daughter from affection even as the daughter seeks desperately to gain the mother's love. Negative, tragic, and desperate longing characterize the desire of the daughter to gain the mother's affection. Without ever knowing a mother's love, the daughter is negated as a part of her family, foreshadowing her experience of feeling erased as a member of society later in life (109). On the other hand, once the main character becomes a mother herself, she subsumes herself completely in her maternal role. Sometimes excessively clinging to her child or children and hiding behind them to avoid society, the mother's emotions jump from exuberance to depression, from hate to tenderness, from violence to sudden indulgence (179). The mother depends on her children as the main source of her identity, and if that relationship is broken, the mother may seek solace in death. Yet her obsessive focus on her children only reveals a selfish need to fulfill her own desires at the expense of her children's. In the end, the children experience a mother who is emotionally detached, cold, and depersonalized (183).

The fourth and fifth chapters consider female characters as wives and lovers. Marriage, in Duras's work, is characterized as an unavoidable state that could never fulfill the needs or desires of a woman. Haskett reveals an evolution in the wifely roles over the course of Duras's oeuvre. In her early novels, Duras's female characters are inferior, erased, sometimes imprisoned, and overshadowed by their husbands. Beginning with *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, however, the wife begins to self-actualize but her self-actualization involves intentionally seeking to exclude herself from any reciprocal relationship. Finally,

in *Le Vice-Consul*, the wife has an esteemed place in society, taking action, making her own decisions, and eventually overshadowing her husband—even in his esteemed role as ambassador. From experimental and passive beginnings, the female characters as lovers gradually assert themselves in relation to their male counterpart. However, as in *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, she seeks to see herself replaced and erased by another woman (her ideal self) as her lover and this other woman have an affair, from which she is, by design, excluded. Self-destruction (as evidenced even in the title *Détruire Dit-Elle*), insanity, and ultimately, death, ensue.

The final and extensive chapter pulls together the threads of varying female characters, revealing an astute understanding of Duras in relation to herself. While not all of Duras's novels are autobiographical *per se*, her female characters as a whole reflect the author's own interpersonal relationships, struggles, and identity. Overall, Haskett presents a nuanced picture of the interior world of Duras who sought to know, understand, accept, and love others—but more profoundly herself—while never succeeding. Haskett's analysis provides deep insight into a complex, beautiful, and often anguished literary figure even as writing, for Duras, was a means towards deeper self-knowledge. At their core, Duras's novels express a deep need for love to find meaning and identity. Christian readers will certainly recognize that only the transcendent love of God could possibly fill such a void. Without the presence of a transcendent reality in Duras's work, love is always sought after but never attained, even in death.

Any scholar interested in twentieth-century psychoanalysis, Duras's important contributions to feminist literature, and the question of female identity should read Haskett's important study. The choice of novels coupled with nuanced and close textual readings of the characters make a substantial case for the central thesis of the book: that we come to know Duras by grappling with the plight of her female characters.

Jan E. Evans, *Miguel de Unamuno's Quest for Faith: A Kierkegaardian Understanding of Unamuno's Struggle to Believe*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013.

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Jan Evans' new study of the role of faith in the thought and life of Miguel de Unamuno provides a helpful and enlightening take on a topic that critics of Unamuno have struggled to address adequately for decades. I distinguish between "thought" and "life" in Unamuno's approach to belief in order to highlight one of the greatest contributions of Evans' study: she takes pains to point out that for Unamuno religious belief was not merely an intellectual matter, but rather his reflections on faith shaped his actions throughout his life. As Evans writes in her introduction, Unamuno's conviction, shared with Kierkegaard, that "[t]ruth only becomes truth as it is acted on in passion and becomes embodied in a person's life" had "practical, ethical and political consequences" (Evans 5, 7). Therefore a rigorous account of Unamuno as an agent in Spanish history and a man concerned with faith must recognize the link between the two: the fact that his actions "sprang from his faith" (7).

In the chapter following the introduction, Evans situates her topic of study firmly within this framework with an overview of Unamuno's biography that pays particular attention to his spiritual life—and which, unlike other analyses, does not limit itself only to the much-commented-upon religious crisis of 1897. She then proceeds in the next several chapters to define the intellectual parameters of Unamuno's faith by way of a philosophical affinity that many scholars (including Evans herself) have investigated in the past: that between Unamuno and Søren Kierkegaard, whose writings the Spaniard read extensively—and in Danish—during the first years of the twentieth century. Here Evans productively incorporates the findings of her earlier book, *Unamuno and Kierkegaard: Paths to Selfhood in Fiction* (Lexington Books, 2005), as she points out that while Unamuno espoused

many aspects of Kierkegaard's thought—the emphasis on the need for truth to be lived out, the roles of doubt and suffering in faith—he also diverged from the Dane in significant ways. Turning to two other important influences on Unamuno's view of faith—Blaise Pascal and William James—Evans argues (as others have done before) that Unamuno's faith is distinct from that of Kierkegaard in that it falls short of an orthodox Christian belief and remains in a Jamesian will-to-believe, or, in the Basque writer's own idiom, *querer creer*.

Where Evans' analysis differs from that of many other critics is in that she neither defends the orthodoxy of Unamuno's faith, nor assumes that the Spaniard's doubts are tantamount to atheism. By using Kierkegaard's stages of existence as a framework for studying Unamuno's writings about religious belief, she is able to propose a more nuanced understanding of the problem. In chapter 7, she argues that the Kierkegaardian category of "Religiousness A"—"a natural religion of immanence," distinct from orthodox Christianity, or "Religiousness B" (98)—comes quite close to characterizing the wrestling with belief found in Unamuno's work and in his life. While Evans gives a detailed description of "Religiousness A" and indicates clearly the extent to which Unamuno's beliefs correspond to it, it would serve the reader also to have a summary of Kierkegaard's concept of "Religiousness B," which she does not provide. When she concludes that "Unamuno's faith functions outside the paradigm of orthodox Christianity" (106), she relies on a commonly held critical view, but does not explain how that view receives support from the Kierkegaardian framework.

Nevertheless, the connection that Evans makes between Unamuno's beliefs and "Religiousness A" is a productive one, and her general approach in the book comes with several advantages. Firstly, it offers a cogent, clear, and tidy account of Unamuno's faith: what it is, and what it is not (at least as far as we can tell from his major writings and from an overview of his effort to live out his beliefs). Secondly, it makes a useful and appropriate comparison with Kierkegaard, a thinker that Unamuno admired and cited often, yet without assuming complete identity in their ideas. Like Evans' earlier book, *Miguel de Unamuno's Quest for Faith* illuminates the relationship by pointing

out those aspects of the Dane's thought that may have proved most appealing to Unamuno, as well as those that he overlooked or could not accept. Finally, this comparative approach makes the study a useful introduction to Unamuno for those English speakers less familiar with him, particularly those interested in situating the philosophical aspects of his work within a broader Western context.

The disadvantages of Evans' study are simply the flip sides of its advantages. This is the risk one takes in analyzing the work of a lover of paradox like Unamuno: each observation comes with its dialectical opposite. While the Kierkegaardian framework is convenient and in many ways elucidatory, at some point the reader is bound to wonder why Evans gives Kierkegaard the authority to define Unamuno's thought—especially since the chronology of the relationship between the two must posit Unamuno as responding to Kierkegaard. To be sure, the knowledge of Kierkegaard's writings and philosophy that Evans brings to her analysis is a valuable corrective to earlier studies that have approached the question from the standpoint of Unamuno's work and taken his statements about Kierkegaard at face value. Yet the effort to define the later writer's faith in terms of a system developed by the former must inevitably limit it. As Evans herself notes in the introduction to her study, none of the "labels" other critics have given Unamuno—seeing him variously as "a Catholic, a modern Erasmus, a Lutheran, a Protestant Liberal, a Krausist and a panentheist"—fits him well (2). She asserts, "I believe that he would have rejected all of them" (3). But is not the term "Religiousness A" simply another label that Unamuno would have likely rejected, not because of its inapplicability, but out of his dislike of "rótulos" and "etiquetas," the resistance to categorization that is perhaps the most characteristic aspect of this thought?

One difference between Kierkegaard and Unamuno may be that while Kierkegaard's thought is systematic enough to delineate stages of existence and kinds of religiosity, Unamuno's is not. From early in his career, he rejected the academic rigor of philosophy and professed a greater attraction to poetry; this led one of his greatest admirers, Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, to insist, "Unamuno no es

un filósofo.”¹ But if Unamuno was not a philosopher, at least not a systematic one, he most certainly was a man of integrity. Indeed, to return to the observation with which I opened this review, as Evans demonstrates, Unamuno shared with Kierkegaard a deeply held belief that faith must impact how one lives—this is, in my view, the most important insight offered in *Miguel de Unamuno’s Quest for Faith*. Evans’ last chapter, which discusses how Unamuno lived out his faith, together with her careful analysis of his thought and writing on the topic, establishes an excellent starting point for further investigation into the continuity between belief, writing, and action in the work of this Spaniard, a man of both doubt and conviction.

NOTES

1. María Zambrano, *Unamuno*, ed. Mercedes Gómez Blesa (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2003), 81.

Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang. *Welcoming the Stranger. Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate*. Foreword by Leith Anderson. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009. 240pp. ISBN 978-0830833597, \$15.00.

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As a result of their personal life experiences and extensive work with immigrants and refugees through World Relief, Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang Yang penned this Christian response to the often contentious immigration debate in the United States. The title of this volume makes transparent its agenda: to challenge Christians to rethink immigration and bring about comprehensive reform built upon biblical principles. The authors skillfully incorporate compelling stories of immigrants they know personally with a succinct overview of history,

political processes, biblical passages and practical paths to engagement. This much-needed volume quickly established itself as a seminal text on the topic within Christian activist circles and thrust Soerens and Hwang into the spotlight as sought-after speakers at conferences, in churches and on Christian college campuses across the nation.

Appropriate for book clubs and the undergraduate classroom alike, *Welcoming the Stranger* provides an accessible introduction to the complexities of the immigration debate in ten clearly written chapters followed by thoughtful discussion questions that encourage personal reflection and action rooted in Christian faith. For those seeking further engagement, various appendices provide lists of specific ministries and organizations serving immigrants, as well as tools for political advocacy that include instructions on how to contact your elected officials.

Chapter 1, "The Immigration Dilemma," presents two common views on the immigration "problem": 1) frustration toward "an unprecedented invasion of illegal aliens" (11) and 2) frustration with broken immigration laws that force people "into a shadowy existence" (12). The authors call for a more nuanced, Christ-centered perspective that seeks justice, love and compassion through comprehensive immigration reform. Hwang's story of her family's migration from Korea to the United States paired with Soerens' account of coming to consciousness regarding the plight of immigrants in the United States beginning in his college years, alert the reader to the fact that the authors are personally invested in this issue. For them, the personal is political, and their personal faith in Jesus Christ is what propels them to urge Christians to rise up and unite in a call for immigration reform.

Chapter 2, "Aliens Among You: Who Are Undocumented Immigrants" educates the reader on issues of legal status and what it means to be a documented or undocumented immigrant in our nation. Personal stories recounting the struggles, hopes and dreams of a variety of undocumented immigrants from diverse countries of origin serve to humanize these misunderstood and often villainized members of local communities throughout the United States.

Chapters 3 and 4 are dedicated respectively to providing a historical perspective on immigration and an overview of our system today. In

so doing, they take the reader on a journey that exposes a troubling national narrative that exalts our immigrant past while simultaneously embracing xenophobic legislation. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Quota System (1924–1965) are just two examples of the barriers put in place to control the racial makeup of this nation by favoring whites and deliberately excluding certain racial and ethnic groups depending upon economic and labor needs of the time. The authors make clear that “immigrating the legal way” is fraught with obstacles and “waiting your turn in line” may mean waiting decades to reunite family members torn apart by broken immigration laws.

Chapter 5, “Thinking Biblically about Immigration,” provides a brief overview of Old and New Testament passages that should inform Christian perspectives on the issues. Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David and even Jesus, the authors remind us, were themselves immigrants and refugees. The authors ask the reader to recognize a palpable connection between the biblical text and immigration today, “God used migration throughout Scripture to accomplish his purposes and bring his people to a greater understanding of his will for creation. God, who used migration so vividly throughout the Bible, works today to move his people from one place to another” (86). It is with this in mind that Soerens and Hwang challenge us to thoughtfully examine the question: Who is my neighbor? The parable of the Good Samaritan, they suggest, reminds us that “our neighbor might be a person of an entirely different (and maybe even disliked) culture, far away from his homeland, with serious needs” (91).

Chapter 6, “Concerns about Immigration,” is of particular importance for it addresses some of the main arguments Christians (and others) use against establishing a more generous immigration policy. Caring for the poor already in this country, protecting national security, protecting American culture, fears of chain migration, and concerns about immigrants who have broken the law to get here are indeed important concerns. Nevertheless, Soerens and Hwang urge readers to overcome fears of a more generous policy and implement restorative measures that would provide a way for undocumented immigrants to attain legal status by just means.

Chapter 7, “The Value of Immigration to the United States,” focuses on the economic impacts of immigration. The authors dispel common myths such as, “immigrants do not pay taxes” or “immigrants steal jobs from native workers.” Although their pro-immigrant agenda remains clear throughout, they do introduce opposing viewpoints from such figures as leading immigration economist George Borjas, and, in an earlier chapter, Carol Swain, political scientist. Borjas and Swain argue that a more generous immigration policy is detrimental to the U.S. economy. While Soerens and Hwang acknowledge that immigration can be a financial drain on local communities, they conclude that “immigration is a net good for the U.S. economy” (136) and that we must be careful not to value immigrants only for the economic benefit to us but also for their humanity for “the human person should not serve the economy, but the economy should serve the human person” (137).

Chapter 8, “The Politics and Policies of Immigration Reform” provides a useful overview of political maneuverings in Washington on both sides of the aisle from 2005-2009. Immigration reform should address such issues as border security, reuniting families in a timely fashion, and a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants, but deeply entrenched partisan politics have resulted in the failure to implement any type of reform. Nearly five years have passed since *Welcoming the Stranger* was first published, but to date, no significant legislation has managed to pass through both the House and the Senate.

Chapters 9 and 10 address the role of the church and practical Christian responses to the immigration dilemma. The authors remind us just how important immigrants are to the growth of the church in the U.S. today. The Southern Baptist Convention serves as a poignant example, for while in the 1990s approximately 4 percent of constituents were immigrants and people of color, that number stands at about 20 percent today. Even so, a startling “63 percent white evangelicals see immigrants as a threat to U.S. customs and values, and 64 percent consider immigrants a burden on society—higher percentages than any other group surveyed, whether religious or secular” (173). More startling, perhaps, are the results of a poll conducted by the Family

Research Council, the political arm of Focus on the Family, which “found that 90 percent of those polled said our country should forcibly deport the 11 to 12 million illegal aliens in the country today” (173).

These statistics and polls demonstrate the great need for dialogue and education on immigration issues amongst Christians in the U.S. There is indeed, as Soerens and Hwang state, “a disconnect between the pulpit and the pews” (173). While many Christian leaders, educators, politicians and pastors alike are committed to working with and for immigrants to bring about comprehensive reform, much work remains to be done. We are called to be reconcilers. It is the hope of Soerens and Hwang that their readers will respond prayerfully and actively to bring about a just and compassionate reform.

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