

$$|p_n\rangle = i\sqrt{\frac{\hbar}{2m\omega}} \left[\sqrt{n+1} \delta_{n,n+1} - \sqrt{n} \delta_{n,n-1} \right]$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} 0 & \dots & \dots \\ \sqrt{2} & 0 & \dots \\ 0 & \sqrt{3} & \dots \\ \dots & \dots & \dots \\ 0 & 0 & \dots \sqrt{n} \end{bmatrix} \text{mythologie} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ \sqrt{1} & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & \sqrt{2} & 0 \\ \dots & \dots & \dots \\ 0 & 0 & \sqrt{n} \\ \dots & \dots & \dots \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\langle x \rangle = \langle \alpha | \hat{x} | \alpha \rangle = \left(\frac{m\omega}{\pi\hbar} \right)^{1/4} e^{-\frac{1}{2} \frac{m\omega}{\hbar} x^2}$$

$$\langle p \rangle = \left[\frac{1}{2^n n!} \left(\frac{\hbar}{m\omega} \right)^{n/2} \left(\frac{m\omega}{\pi\hbar} \right)^{1/4} \right] \left[\frac{m\omega}{\hbar} x - \frac{d}{dx} \right]$$



mythology

$$\langle P^2 \rangle = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} \psi_n^*(x) \frac{d^2}{dx^2} \psi_n(x)$$

$$i\hbar \frac{\partial}{\partial t} \psi(\vec{r}, t) = -\frac{\hbar^2}{2m} \Delta \psi$$

$$\Delta = \partial^2/\partial x^2 + \partial^2/\partial y^2 + \dots$$

mitologia

$$|\psi_1\rangle + \lambda_2 |\psi_2\rangle \Rightarrow \lambda_1^* \langle \psi_1 | + \lambda_2^*$$

$$|\psi(r)\rangle \quad E = \langle K$$

Part IV

OUR AMERICAN MYTHICAL EDUCATION

RECONCILING CATHOLICISM WITH THE CLASSICS: MYTHOLOGY IN FRENCH CANADIAN CATHOLIC EDUCATION*

I. Introductory Remarks

The winter of 1864 to 1865 brought storms of a different sort than the usual frigid winds and heavy snowfall that perennially battered the city of Quebec during the season. A debate originating in France had lately been raging among Quebec City's clergy tasked with the education of the archdiocese's young faithful, only to spill onto the front pages of the region's newspapers on 25 November 1864 with the anonymous publication of a blistering editorial that brought this particular clerical debate well and firmly into the public sphere. The situation, according to the article entitled "Christianisme et Paganisme", was one of the utmost gravity: schoolchildren throughout the Catholic world in their most tender years were being subjected to incessant veneration of the nefarious pagan ways of the Greeks and Romans through the enforced study of their history, poetry, and, above all, their pagan mythology and religion.¹ In place of exalting the eternal truths of Christ revealed through Holy Mother Church, the article lamented:

* Ce chapitre est dédié à la douce mémoire de mon grand-père, Ernest Lefebvre, un homme qui nous a tous montré que l'intelligence ne passe pas exclusivement par l'éducation, et que la perfection d'une âme est une œuvre graduelle qui continue tout au long d'une vie.

¹ Anonymous, "Christianisme et Paganisme", *Le Courrier du Canada*, 25 November 1864, front page of the newspaper, currently available through the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (henceforth BANQ). The article was jointly published (anonymously) by two priests, Abbé Alexis Pelletier and the French cleric Abbé Jacques-Michel Stremier, both of whom were teaching at the Séminaire de Québec. The article includes quotations from Abbé Firmin Verost's book *Le peuple de Dieu et le monde païen*, as well as Msgr Jean-Joseph Gaume's book *Révolution*. All translations from French and Latin to English are my own. The reader should note that I do not presume to provide a comprehensive or definitive bibliography on many of the subjects covered below, which, given their breadth, would be impractical. At any rate, I only cite those titles or articles that are germane or have direct bearing on the narrative and argumentation of this paper.

Des prêtres aux cheveux blancs, des religieux vénérables rivalisaient sur les éloges de la blonde (Vénus), de Junon aux bras blancs, de Jupiter aux noirs sourcils, d'Achille aux pieds légers, de Nestor aux lèvres de miel.

White-haired priests and venerable religious had been competing with one another in their exaltation of the blonde goddess (Venus), Juno of the pale arms, black-browed Jupiter, swift-footed Achilles, and honey-lipped Nestor.

“Notre éducation est toute païenne” (Our education is completely pagan), one priest, Abbé Grou, is quoted as opining, and this results in entire generations of young Catholics who are Christian only on the outside; deep down, they are true pagans in spirit, heart, and conduct.² The formation of tender young souls through pagan authors and their pagan sensibilities amounted to nothing less than a profound betrayal:

Pour la jeunesse, la séductrice est la littérature grecque qui montre le beau dans la gloire des armes, le bon dans la volupté, le vrai dans les fictions impies et insensées des poètes.

For the young, this seductress is Greek literature that argues for beauty in the glory of warfare, for good in pleasure-seeking, and for truth in the impious and nonsensical fictions of the poets.

This was nothing short of the work of the Devil: “Quand Satan a implanté son règne quelque part” (When Satan plants his influence in some place), the author warned,

il déprave tellement les institutions sociales qu’elles pervertissent jusqu’à l’enfant au berceau; il convertit tous les éléments de vie en instruments de mort, il fait du père et de la mère des corrupteurs, de l’éducation un empoisonnement.

² All direct quotations are taken from the 25 November 1864 article cited above. On the broader context of Gaume’s influence in Canada, see Manon Brunet, “Les réseaux gaumistes constitutifs du réseau littéraire québécois du XIXe siècle”, *Globe. Revue internationale d’études québécoises* 7 (2004), 147–180; Thomas Charland, O.P., “Un gaumiste canadien: l’abbé Alexis Pelletier”, *Revue d’histoire de l’Amérique française* 1.2 (1947), 195–236; and Jacques Cotnam, “La percée du gaumisme au Bas-Canada”, in Aurélien Boivin, Gilles Dorion, and Kenneth Landry, eds., *Questions d’histoire littéraire: Mélanges offerts à Maurice Lemire*, Québec: Nuit Blanche Éditeur, 1996, 107–119. On the intellectual context of French Canadian education and the Classics, see the excellent study of Irena Trujic, *L’intertextualité classique dans la production littéraire du Québec des années 1850–1870*, PhD dissertation, Université de Montréal, 2011, 20–41.

he depraves social institutions to the point that they pervert even the baby in the cradle. He makes the elements of life into the instruments of death, turns mothers and fathers into corruptors, and education into poison.

The admonition of Saint Paul (2 Tim 2:26) should have been heeded by educators more than anyone else: "Profana et vaniloquia devita: multum enim proficiunt ad impietatem" (Avoid profane and untrue chatter, because they have led many to impiety).³

In the longer history of education in French Canada, it is perhaps surprising that such a vociferous debate over the place of Greek and Roman authors in Catholic education took so long to arise.⁴ Greek and Roman authors had lain at the heart of education in Lower Canada since the establishment of its very first schools, and remained at the core of its curriculum until the publication of the findings of the *commission Parent* in 1964 at the height of the Quiet Revolution, which resulted in the laicization of public education in Quebec.⁵ In the field of education, as in so many other ways, French Canada presents something of an enigma, which renders it a particularly fascinating case study for the role of mythology in education. The colony of Nouvelle-France was since its very foundation a fundamentally Catholic enterprise, and the role of the Church extended far beyond religion into an essential monopoly on education, healthcare, and social services.⁶ With the Conquest of New France by the British in 1760, the region was severed

³ This quotation from 2 Timothy appears early in the article and is quoted by the anonymous authors.

⁴ On this early controversy in response to contemporary debates in France about the place of the Classics in Catholic education, see Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 33–41.

⁵ On French education in Canada, see, as we shall discuss below, Lionel Groulx, *L'enseignement français au Canada, Tome I: Dans le Québec*, Montréal: Éditions Albert Levesque, 1931; and more recently the report of Richard Leclerc, *Histoire de l'éducation au Québec*, Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur du Québec, 1989. On the system of *collèges classiques*, see the study of Claude Galarneau, *Les collèges classiques au Canada français (1620–1970)*, Montréal: Fides, 1978.

⁶ For an up-to-date history of Canadian Catholicism, see Terence Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics*, Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002. Specifically, see pp. 3–48 for the early missionary origins of the Church in Canada; 29–47 for the experience of the conquest; and 97–119 for Catholic education in the context of ultramontanism. Although he is a blatantly confessional historian with a patently nationalist agenda, Lionel Groulx, *Le Canada français missionnaire*, Montréal: Fides, 1962, crafts a fascinating narrative of the missionary origins of French Canada. For the tumultuous year surrounding the *commission Parent* and the Church's relationship with this review of education, see Michel Gauvreau, *Les origines catholiques de la révolution tranquille*, Montréal: Fides, 2008, 247–306.

from the influence of the French crown, but the Church was curiously unscathed – if anything it was strengthened – by the transition from the *fleur de lys* to the Union Jack. The Quebec Act of 1774 guaranteed the free practice of the Catholic faith, recognized the Church's right to impose and collect tithes, restored the French *code civile*, and removed any reference to the Protestant faith from the Oath of Allegiance to the Crown.⁷ These privileges were retained and extended to all of Lower Canada by another Act of Parliament in 1791. In the century and a half that preceded and followed this transition, thus for much of the history of French Canada, there was essentially no distinction between public education and Catholic education.

Given the centuries-long monopoly of the Church over education in French Canada, the consistent prominence of Greek and Roman authors, and of course their religious and mythological context, comes as something of a paradox. How did this educational system that implicitly prepared its students for religious life as laypeople or consecrated members of the clergy reconcile its deeply Catholic moral and theological emphasis with the fact that so much of the material studied was written by pagan Greek and Roman authors? Considering the place of mythology in the French Canadian educational system provides the ideal window through which to study this question of how such a Catholic education focused so intensely on pre-Christian authors and societies. In reaching back into the pre-Christian past, Catholic educators in French Canada as elsewhere were treading on uncomfortable ground: on the one hand, the Church celebrated its own antiquity – it was and is, after all, the Roman Catholic Church – but, on the other hand, embracing that very antiquity necessitated contact with a pre-Christian culture and its religious traditions that were incompatible with the Catholic faith. How then was Greek and Roman mythology taught in French Canadian Catholic schools? Was it communicated with a heavy dose of scepticism and disdain, or filtered through the lens of Catholic morality? Above all, why was it taught, and to what end? How can we explain the remarkable endurance of this classical tradition in this most unlikely of educational systems?

This chapter aims to answer these questions by tracing the place of Greek and Roman authors and mythology from the earliest schools in Nouvelle-France through to the established curricula of the nineteenth century and into the

⁷ For a general narrative overview of this period, see Robert Bothwell, *The Penguin History of Canada*, Toronto: Penguin Books, 2007, and see Fay, *A History*, 29–47, for the Church after the British Conquest.

twentieth. A variety of contemporary educational materials will provide us with an overview of what was being taught, while the arguments of contemporary and later commentators and critics will provide us with the social context necessary to understand why this material was taught. Beginning with the early days of French colonization, education was seen as a means of linking the colony more deeply to France itself. After the British Conquest, French Canadian education continued to develop apace even though many connections with France itself had been severed. Contemporary debates in France regarding the morality of teaching Greek and Roman religion manifested themselves in French Canadian clerical circles with no small measure of drama, though in the end the status quo was maintained and the Classics remained at the heart of Catholic education. Throughout, I argue that the prominence given to Greek and Roman mythology in French Canadian education extended beyond its simple recognition as an intrinsic pedagogical good, and rather was integral to the creation of an emergent national myth in which the people of French Canada were cast as the direct heirs of the classical tradition.

2. Tracing the Origins of Mythology in French Canadian Schools

Before turning to the eruption of the debate regarding “pagan” subjects being taught in Catholic schools in Quebec, a brief survey of the development of classical education in French Canada is needed to grasp the prominence with which pagan mythology figured in the curriculum that came under scrutiny in 1864. Pre-Christian Greek and Latin authors, of course, provide the vehicle through which Greek and Roman mythology were taught to students, and thus tracing the presence in school curricula of authors that contain mythological material is a straightforward means of simultaneously gauging the prominence of mythical material itself. It may seem a facile methodological point, but nevertheless one that needs to be made: a student who is translating and reading authors such as Ovid, Virgil, and Horace on the Latin side, and Homer, Herodotus, or the tragedians on the Greek side, would naturally have been exposed to the mythical traditions related by each author. Wherever we find the authors, in other words, we shall also find the myths.

The history of education in French Canada is as old as the colony of New France itself. Despite the small population of New France and the

vast distances separating its constituent settlements, schools appeared with remarkable speed in the decades following its foundation, and institutions teaching Latin authors came shortly afterwards. In 1635, although the permanent population of New France was barely 200, the inhabitants of Quebec built a school and the Jesuits began teaching in the new edifice.⁸ This was not the first time that Catholic teaching took place in French Canada, but it does represent the establishment of the first permanent school.⁹ Even before there were children of school age in Ville-Marie, the fledgling colony that would become Montreal, Sister Marguerite Bourgeoys began teaching whatever students she could find on 25 November 1657, in a stone stable given to her by Paul de Chomedey de Maisonneuve.¹⁰ Although many of the schools that would be formed over the rest of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries would be small parochial schools concerned with teaching students to read and write, Latin nevertheless appeared in this environment. According to the records of the Petit Séminaire de Québec, out of the 130 students enrolled between 1693 and 1703, 75 were below the age of ten, 23 had already begun studying Latin, and 68 knew to read and write in French alone.¹¹ Extensive study of Greek and Roman materials appeared in the curricula of some institutions since the mid-seventeenth century. The Collège de Québec mentioned above, established by the Jesuits in 1635, was teaching by 1655 a curriculum involving lessons in grammar, the humanities, literature, and rhetoric, as well as a two-year philosophy course.¹² Teaching staff were found among Jesuit missionaries who were resting, recovering from wounds and illness, or retired in Quebec. Literature courses at the Collège involved the teaching of Cicero, Virgil, Ovid, Quintus Curtius Rufus, Seneca, and others, and while Latin predominated, Greek was also taught to a smaller subset of students.¹³ Among the prizes given to the

⁸ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 13–14, citing the Canadian census of 1870–1871 and the *Relations Jésuites* of 1636.

⁹ Various Catholic missionaries had held schools in different corners of New France: in 1616 the Franciscan Recollect Friar Pacifique Duplessis taught in Trois-Rivières; in 1613 the Franciscan priest Joseph Le Caron held an open school in Tadoussac; and the Jesuit Abbé Paul Le Jeune taught in Quebec in 1632. All mentioned by Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 13, n. 11.

¹⁰ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 33, and Amédée Gosselin, *L'instruction au Canada sous le Régime français 1635–1760*, Québec: Typ. Laflamme & Proulx, 1911, 212.

¹¹ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 20, citing Gosselin, *L'instruction au Canada*, 136.

¹² Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 23.

¹³ This overview of the early structure of education in French Canada is taken from Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 13–30; see also Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 250–303, for an annotated bibliography of resources for the study of Latin in French Canada.

most talented students at the Collège were commentaries on the *Aeneid*, the speeches of Cicero, the poetry of Horace, and volumes containing the works of Florus, Pliny, Livy, and Polybius. Such a volume of Latin and Greek study would involve a corresponding volume of mythological content, and although we cannot gauge it with the same precision, it is inevitable that the students would have been exposed to a substantial portion of the Greek and Roman mythical tradition. The preponderance of “pagan” Latin authors versus the Church Fathers in this curriculum is also noteworthy.

Quebec was not the only emergent centre of Latin and classical education in the colony. In addition to the Collège and Petit Séminaire de Québec, there were smaller Latin schools designed to supplement parochial primary schools and other colleges. Near Quebec, Latin schools were found in Pointe-de-Lévy, Saint-Joachim, and Château-Richer.¹⁴ By the beginning of the eighteenth century there were two Latin schools in Montreal, one founded by the Sulpician Order, the other by the Jesuits.¹⁵ Given the tendency of early schools in French Canada to model their curriculum on their counterparts in France, and their use of imported French textbooks, we can presume that a similar list of Greek and Roman authors would have been taught at these smaller Latin schools as well. At any rate, this seventeenth-century base of Latin education expanded throughout the region with the appearance of various religious orders in Nouvelle-France, among them the Ursulines, the Congrégation de Notre-Dame, and the Sœurs de la Charité de Montréal (Sœurs Grises). Alongside schools run by these religious orders was also an emerging network of parochial schools run by local priests in towns and villages.¹⁶ The diversity of institutions is remarkable, but there does appear to have been a common pedagogical thread running through them, as Abbé Lionel Groulx writes:

¹⁴ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 30–35.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 24.

¹⁶ See also Fay, *A History*, 3–47, for the early organization of the Church and its schools. In the context of Montreal, see Robert Gagnon, “Education in the Nineteenth Century”, in Dany Fougères and Roderick MacLeod, eds., *Montreal: The History of a North American City*, vol. 1, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2018, 604–630; Norman Perron, “The Spread and Influence of the Catholic Church in Montreal”, in Dany Fougères and Roderick MacLeod, eds., *Montreal: The History of a North American City*, vol. 1, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2018, 714–742.

[C]e système s'était organisé selon le vieux dessin franco-latin: à la base, l'instruction, les langues et les humanités intégrales; en haut, des antennes orientées vers les hautes régions de la morale et de la foi.¹⁷

This system had been organized according to the old Franco-Latin plan: at its base was the instruction of ancient languages and integral subjects of the humanities, and above there were branches reaching out towards the higher regions of morality and of the faith.

Although the primary evidence for education in these pre-Conquest French Canadian schools is not as robust as what we shall shortly encounter for the nineteenth century, we can nevertheless gain some indirect insight into how and where mythology would have figured in the Latin curriculum of these schools. A lengthy rallying cry for defending the humanities in French Canadian education, penned by Abbé Georges Courchesne in 1927 at the Séminaire de Nicolet, provides a historical review of how Latin was traditionally taught in contemporary France – and, by extension, in French Canada.¹⁸ In order to elevate Latin education above a mere dry grammatical lesson, seventeenth-century French Latin education was based on extensive reading of ancient authors. Ideally, after two hours of recitation or grammatical commentary, three hours should be given to translation of ancient authors and meditation on the content of the text.¹⁹ Even in the midst of pedagogical arguments over the course of this century and the next that variously emphasized composition or applied Latin language, translation and commentary of primary texts remained the core means by which Latin was taught in schools.²⁰ In light of the authors such as Ovid, Virgil, and Horace that we have encountered above in early French Canadian schools, it follows logically that students would have been extensively exposed to the Graeco-Roman mythological tradition through translation and comment upon their texts. Mythological themes would have prominently emerged from even this linguistic approach of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As we shall shortly see, the presence of mythology in this curriculum would only increase over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as it began to be taught as a subject in its own right, rather than just being carried by the surrogate of Latin or Greek language.

¹⁷ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 35.

¹⁸ Georges Courchesne, *Nos humanités*, Nicolet: École normale supérieure de Nicolet, 1927.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 480.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 480–490.

3. *La querelle des classiques*: Mortal Souls in Nineteenth-Century Mythological Peril

Perhaps the best gauge of the prominence with which Graeco-Roman religion and mythology figured in nineteenth-century French Catholic education is the intensity with which it was attacked by contemporary critics. The polemic of the 1864 article we have encountered above was neither the first nor the last time dissenting voices would decry the infiltration of “pagan” material in Catholic education in French Canada. “De toutes les controverses qui passionnèrent les intellectuels canadiens de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle” (Of all the controversies which impassioned Canadian intellectuals in the second half of the nineteenth century), Séraphin Marion wrote in 1949, “[i]l en est une qui paraît presque entièrement oubliée aujourd’hui [...]. Ce triste débat opposa aux partisans des classiques païens et les partisans des classiques chrétiens” (there is one which seems almost entirely forgotten today [...]. The sad debate which set the partisans of pagan Classics and the partisans of Christian Classics against one another).²¹ Although the debate raged with the hottest intensity in the 1860s, its first flames were fanned into existence several decades earlier by an incident in the Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe, a school on the banks of the Yamaska River in a town roughly fifty kilometres to the east of Montreal. Among the *contrariétés* (nuisances or frustrations) recounted by Msgr Charles-Philippe Choquette’s 1911 history of the school is a somewhat vaguely-recounted incident. “La curiosité inquisitive d’un élève” (The inquisitive curiosity of a student), he writes, “fit ouvrir les yeux, en 1829, sur les dangers de l’absurde et immorale mythologie païenne” (opened [our] eyes in 1829 to the dangers of the absurd and immoral mythology of the pagans).²² Although the precise dangers of this mythology and the indiscretion it blamed for having prompted are not specified, the school’s reaction was swift. The *Appendix de diis et heroibus poeticis*, a 1764 summary of Greek mythology, was promptly confiscated and proscribed from being taught in the future. Abbé Joseph-Sabin Raymond, one of the school’s most renowned faculty, penned a pamphlet in 1835

²¹ Séraphin Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d’autrefois. Tome VI: La querelle des humanistes canadiens*, Ottawa: Éditions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1949, 12. For an excellent narrative and overview of the Gaumist controversy in Quebec, see Trujic, *L’intertextualité classique*, 33–45, which is followed here.

²² Charles-Philippe Choquette, *L’histoire de Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe depuis sa fondation jusqu’à nos jours*, Montréal: Imprimerie de l’institution des sourds-muets, 1911, 422.

in which he “confia au grand public [...] les inquiétudes que suscitait dans son cœur de prêtre et d’éducateur l’importance que notre enseignement classique accordait au paganisme des Anciens” (confided to the public [...] the worries that were provoked in his heart, as a priest and as an educator, by the importance our classical education accords to the paganism of the Ancient authors).²³ A decade later, Raymond recommended at the end of the 1847 academic year that pagan authors be replaced by Christian Classics, especially the writings of the Church Fathers. The fear of Raymond, it seems, was that by being taught the language and style of authors like Virgil and Ovid, young students would thereby be exposed to the corrupting influence of their pagan mythological context.²⁴

The moral concerns of the teaching faculty of the Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe mirrored those of their contemporaries in France, who were increasingly ardent in their opposition to the inclusion of such pagan materials. Given that this debate in Canada was fanned into flames again in 1861 by the arrival in Quebec of a staunchly anticlassicist priest from France, it is necessary to track the development of these ideas on the continent before they were exported to French Canada and grafted into a different cultural and intellectual milieu. In 1851, then-abbé Jean-Joseph Gaume, an ultramontanist priest and at the time Vicar-General of the Diocese of Nevers in Bourgogne, published an extensive attack on the inclusion of pagan authors in Catholic education entitled *Le ver rongeur des sociétés modernes*. Unlike his earlier works on the topic, the book was enthusiastically backed by the Archbishop of Reims and the Bishop of Arras, and ignited what would come to be known as the Gaumist controversy in the nineteenth-century Catholic Church. As elsewhere in the Catholic world, Gaume’s ideology would provide the intellectual basis for opposition to the teaching of non-Christian authors in French Canada’s Catholic schools. There was far more at stake in this, of course, than simply the inclusion of a few pre-Christian authors in primary education. According to Gaume’s argumentation, essentially all of the evils that beset contemporary French society could be traced back

²³ Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d’autrefois*, 16, and Choquette, *L’histoire de Séminaire de Saint-Hyacinthe*, 423.

²⁴ Nevertheless, as Trujic notes in *L’intertextualité classique*, 33, it must be highlighted that the clergy of Quebec were by no means unanimous in sharing the opinion of Raymond. In 1853, Msgr Pierre-Flavien Turgeon, the Archbishop of Quebec, wrote extensively in support of the study of Greek and Latin in his letter establishing Université Laval. See Cotnam, “La percée du gaumisme”, *non vidi*.

to the Renaissance, which in his view represented nothing less than the resurrection and glorification of paganism.

“Pagan” ideas and ideals, which had up to this point been conquered by the triumph of Christianity, were thrust by Renaissance humanists back onto the centre stage. Centuries of this glorification of paganism resulted in nineteenth-century Europe’s exultation of what Gaume laments as nefarious pagan ideals – to the point that this society itself became pagan in many aspects. To quote Marion’s summary of Gaume’s convictions, the world of the nineteenth century was

[p]aïen dans son attachement aux droits de l’homme et dans son oubli des droits de Dieu, païen dans sa poursuite immodérée du plaisir, païen dans sa recherche d’une morale laïque qui équivaut à la négation de la morale de l’Évangile, païen surtout dans sa littérature et ses arts fréquemment au service de l’impudeur et de l’immoralité.²⁵

pagan in its attachment to the rights of man and disdain for the rights of God, pagan in its immodest pursuit of pleasure, pagan in its quest for a secular kind of morality, which amounted to a negation of the moral truth of the Gospel, and above all pagan in its veneration of literature and arts frequently in service of immorality and impropriety.

Such ideals had infiltrated society, he argues, through a system of education which teaches the history of the gods of Olympus, the fables of Phaedrus and Aesop, the stories of Ovid, Virgil, Horace, and Homer as models to young Christians, rather than the Christian Classics of sacred scripture and the acts of the martyrs. His definition of what constitutes “classical literature” is particularly interesting in the context of our current discussion: “[L]es livres classiques proprement dits sont: les histoires des dieux du paganisme, les fables du paganisme, les livres des grands hommes du paganisme” (These books are, strictly speaking, the stories of the gods of paganism, the fables of paganism, and the works of the great men of paganism).²⁶ Proof of this pagan infiltration, he later writes, could be found in how so-called learned men promote the cult of ancient paganism by discussing religion purely by pagan names, no longer afraid “de souiller la sainteté du christianisme par les fables ridicules de la mythologie” (to sully the sanctity of Christianity by

²⁵ To quote the concise summation of Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d’autrefois*, 16.

²⁶ Jean-Joseph Gaume, *Le ver rongeur des sociétés modernes, ou le paganisme dans l’éducation*, Paris: Gaume Frères, 1851, 101.

the ridiculous stories of mythology).²⁷ Education had popularized mythology to the point that the taint of paganism had spread everywhere:

[C]omme on avait traduit en langue vulgaire, dans l'intérêt du peuple, les ouvrages les plus obscènes de l'antiquité, les sculpteurs chrétiens reproduisirent à Tenvi les anciennes statues de tous les dieux et de toutes les déesses de l'Olympe [...]. Les graveurs les multiplièrent à l'infini, et souvent même ajoutèrent à l'obscénité du modèle. Par ce moyen, toutes les infamies mythologiques devinrent si communes que tout chrétien, si pauvre qu'il fût, se vit en état de se procurer au lieu des portraits de Notre-Seigneur et de la sainte Vierge, la gravure ou la statue de Jupiter, de Vénus, de Cupidon, de Diane et des autres.²⁸

Because the most obscene works of antiquity have been translated into the vulgar tongue, in the so-called interest of the people, now even Christian sculptors reproduce at Tenvi the ancient statues of all of the gods and goddesses of Olympus [...]. Engravers multiply them to infinity, and often even add yet more obscenity to the scene. By this means, all of these mythological villainies become so common that every Christian, no matter how poor he may be, can acquire an engraving or a statue of Jupiter, of Venus, of Cupid, of Diana, and of others, instead of portraits of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin.

The chain of mythological corruption was quite clear to Gaume: it began with the rediscovery of dangerous Latin and Greek texts by pagan authors during the Renaissance, which were then introduced into school curricula and taught to impressionable young Christians in the name of literary education.²⁹ The manner in which the beauty of a text's language was extolled by Catholic educators served only to mask the perversity of its content, and thus the dangerous ideals of pagan mythology masqueraded as educated refinement as they were taught to subsequent generations of young faithful, who came to know more and more of pagan religion, but less and less of Christian Truth. Small wonder, in Gaume's eyes, that the France in which he wrote his treatises was so profoundly corrupt and misguided. Paganism had triumphed again over Christianity, and was now bearing the social fruits of its victory. The cure to all of this, as far as Gaume was concerned, was

²⁷ Ibidem, 146.

²⁸ Ibidem, 187.

²⁹ Again, following the argumentation of Gaume, *Le ver rongeur*, and summary of Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*.

to excise the corrupting pagan influence at the core of education and replace it with Christian authors – in essence he advocated returning to what he viewed as the medieval model of education. In the same way as paganism had infected nearly all of society through the vector of childhood education, so too, he proposed, could the antidote be delivered.³⁰

Unsurprisingly, Gaume's passionate arguments provoked equally impassioned responses both within clerical circles and without. Pope Pius IX published a fairly equivocal encyclical on the "Classics Question" in March 1853, that was claimed as a victory by both sides in the debate which continued into the next decade.³¹ While Gaume's arguments were met with more disdain than support in France itself, the issue struck a particular chord in French Canada. Irena Trujic has identified a convincingly straightforward reason why: the Classics Question had much higher stakes on the other side of the Atlantic, where the Church had a *de facto* monopoly on public education, while in France public education had been in the hands of the state since the Revolution.³² The conflict at any rate quite literally came to Canadian shores in August of 1861 with the arrival of Abbé Jacques-Michel Stremler, a priest from Lorraine who had been invited by Université Laval's rector, the future cardinal, Msgr Elzéar-Alexandre Taschereau, to teach theology.³³ The French priest proved quite popular in the Archdiocese of Quebec, and gained the ear of Msgr Charles-François Baillargeon, administrator of the Archdiocese during the illness of Msgr Pierre-Flavien Turgeon.³⁴ Stremler, however, was an ardent disciple of Gaume and advocated removing the dangerous influence of pagan subjects from Catholic education. He quickly gained followers

³⁰ See Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*, 16–17, for summaries, and Gaume, *Le ver rongeur*, 331–389, for his plan of rectifying this and his proposal for a Christian library and course of studies. See also the summary of the Gaumist school of thought by Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 28–32. Interestingly, Gaume did not advocate the complete removal of pagan authors from the school curriculum, but suggested that they not be taught until the final three years of an eight-year programme.

³¹ The encyclical was entitled *Inter multiplices*, published 21 March 1853. The tone struck by the Pope was more of an appeal to unity than a concrete ruling on either side, hence the perhaps deliberate ambiguity on the debate itself.

³² Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 32.

³³ Charland, "Un gaumiste canadien", 195. On the role of Taschereau and Msgr Charles-Félix Cazeau in this affair, see Nive Voisine, "Taschereau, Elzéar-Alexandre", in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto and Université Laval, 2003–, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/taschereau_elzear_alexandre_12E.html (accessed 12 September 2018).

³⁴ Lucien Lemieux, "Baillargeon, Charles-François", in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, University of Toronto and Université Laval, 2006, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/baillargeon_charles_francois_9E.html (accessed 12 September 2018).

among the teaching faculty of the Séminaire de Québec, notably Abbé Alexis Pelletier and Abbé Désiré Vézina, who quickly became fervent supporters of the cause of reforming Catholic education.³⁵

The debate over the place of pagan literature and mythology in Catholic schools began among the teaching clergy of the Séminaire de Québec, but rapidly spilled into the public sphere. We have already encountered the first public salvo in this debate at the outset of this chapter: Stremler, along with his ally Pelletier and others writing anonymously, together penned the scouring article "Christianisme et Paganisme" published on 25 November 1864 in *Le Courrier du Canada*. An article entitled "Les causes de la révolution française", featuring excerpts of Gaume's work on the topic, was published early in the next month, and a heated discussion emerged in letters to the editor and other anonymous contributions to the newspaper.³⁶ In the public sphere, the clergy were divided into the "chrétiens", advocating the removal of pagan (that is, pre-Christian) Greek and Roman material from the classroom, and the derisively-named "païens" supporting the continued prominence of classical works in Catholic education.³⁷ Msgr Charles-Félix Cazeau, the Vicar-General of the Archdiocese, was irate: he penned a communiqué to the editor of the newspaper, unobtrusively encouraging it to publish extracts from the encyclical of Pope Pius IX, which he claimed "a mis fin à la dispute qui s'était élevée quelque temps auparavant sur cette question brûlante dans certains journaux catholiques de la France" (had put an end to this dispute which had arisen a while ago on this pressing question that had appeared in certain Catholic newspapers in France).³⁸ A memoir of the winter of 1864–1865 at the Séminaire de Québec lamented that

³⁵ On Taschereau, see Voisine, "Taschereau, Elzéar-Alexandre". On Pelletier, see also Nive Voisine, "Pelletier, Alexis", in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, University of Toronto and Université Laval, 2003–, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/pelletier_alexis_13E.html (accessed 12 September 2018); Gérard Vézina, *Nos aïeux Vézina*, L'Ancienne Lorette: Gérard Vézina, 2006.

³⁶ For instance, an anonymous letter to the editor of the *Courrier* ("Lettre à la rédaction") in the edition of 23 December 1864 bemoaned the predominance of pagan authors in education by writing that "sortant des collèges ne savent rien de la Bible, des SS. PP. etc.; que l'on étudie les *classiques* pendant 8 à 10 ans et qu'on ne fait que lire superficiellement le catéchisme" (students graduating from these colleges know nothing about the Bible, about Sts Peter and Paul, etc.; one [i.e. they] study the *Classics* for between eight and ten years, but they are only made to read the Catechism superficially).

³⁷ Charland, "Un gaumiste canadien", 196, and David Gosselin, *Les étapes d'une classe au Petit Séminaire de Québec, 1859–1868*, Québec: Imprimerie H. Chasse, 1908, 139–140.

³⁸ Charland, "Un gaumiste canadien", 196.

[c]ette campagne fut attristante, parce que les belligérants de l'avant-garde étaient des frères, vivant sous le même toit, associés à la même oeuvre, poursuivant la même fin, également sincères, que l'on vit se fusiller mutuellement sous les yeux du public.³⁹

this campaign was saddening because the belligerents on the front lines were brothers, living under the same roof, working in the same profession, pursuing the same goal, equally sincere, but now whom we saw firing away at each other in the eyes of the public.

Students eagerly awaited the latest edition of the newspapers of each faction, *Le Courrier du Canada* for the Gaumists, and the *Journal de Québec* for the Classicists.

Despite the Vicar-General's protestations, the Gaumists continued the offensive in their war against the infiltration of Catholic education by pagan religion and mythology. Anonymity, in such a small intellectual milieu did not last long and the real authors of each salvo quickly became known to students and teachers alike. The Gaumists published another anonymous article, "La beauté de la vie des saints", in the *Courrier*, which included various hagiographic episodes meant to show that pious reading could be as interesting and entertaining as pagan mythology.⁴⁰ In response to this, Cazeau, the Vicar-General, published a letter to the newspaper under the name "A Subscriber" with the following request:

Si votre correspondant X tient à continuer d'encombrer votre feuille de ses articles, ayez donc la bonté de lui suggérer de mieux choisir les exemples dont il prétend nous édifier.⁴¹

If your correspondent X wishes to continue lading your pages with his articles, please at least have the kindness to suggest that he makes a better choice of examples with which he is pretending to enlighten us.

Another article, published on 20 February 1865, wrote specifically of myth that

dans le but de faire comprendre aux jeunes gens les auteurs païens, il est nécessaire de fouiller continuellement dans la mythologie et dans l'antiquité

³⁹ Gosselin, *Les étapes d'une classe*, 139.

⁴⁰ Charland, "Un gaumiste canadien", 196-197.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 197.

païennes, et de remplir leur tête de choses rarement utiles et trop souvent fausses ou scandaleuses.⁴²

in order to make young people understand pagan authors, it is necessary to delve continually into the mythology and the history of pagans, and in the process to fill their [the students'] heads with things that are rarely useful, and all too often false or scandalous.

Even in the public eye, then, the danger of pagan mythology was again that it provided a vehicle by which sin and licentiousness could be imparted on young students under the guise of edification.

As this public debate wore on into the spring of 1865, Cazeau resorted to more direct means. Encouraged by his success at publishing anonymous retorts against the Gaumists and wishing to keep the upper hand, he took to the streets of Quebec and paid impromptu visits to all the city's printers with a pointed request to cease publishing anything that was in favour of Christian reform to Catholic education, lest they incur his wrath and the disdain of the Séminaire and the Archbishop himself.⁴³ The Gaumists, publicly known as the *chrétiens*, were not finished: Pelletier, along with Stremmler, switched media and produced two anonymous pamphlets supporting Gaume and his quest to cleanse Catholic education of pagan influences, in the process reiterating that such pagan ideals were the root cause of the French Revolution, Voltairianism, and Protestantism. The cloak of anonymity quickly slipped away in the spring of 1865 as it had in the winter of 1864, and Cazeau and Baillargeon readily became aware of the author of the anonymous pamphlets.⁴⁴ More direct action was needed, and was taken by the Superior of the Séminaire de Québec, Taschereau, on his return from Rome. With the blessing of the Archdiocese, all of the Gaumists at the Séminaire were purged either by encouragement or coercion.⁴⁵ Vézina was dismissed and chose to leave the Séminaire shortly after Holy Saturday of 1865 (15–22 April) rather than teach out the rest of the academic year as his superiors had proposed. He went on to teach in a small primary school in the parish

⁴² Anonymous, "Discours prononcé à Rome par Mgr. l'évêque d'Aquila dans la séance de clôture de l'académie de la religion catholique", trans. Editors, *Le Courrier du Canada*, 20 February 1865.

⁴³ Charland, "Un gaumiste canadien", 197.

⁴⁴ For the narrative of this period, see Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*, 15–25, which is followed here.

⁴⁵ Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 34–35.

of Saint-Nicolas.⁴⁶ Stremier, the original Gaumist, departed the Séminaire on 24 June 1865; so too did the fellow reformers Abbés Félix Buteau, Ferdinand Laliberté, and Damase Gonthier take their leave over the course of the summer to unspecified destinations.⁴⁷ Pelletier was likewise dismissed, and found a sympathetic superior at the Collège de Sainte-Anne de la Pocatière, where he carried on the good fight until he was compelled to publicly recant his ideas on 19 January 1877 in the Catholic periodical *Le Franc-Parleur*.⁴⁸

The victory of the *païens* was complete by the end of 1866, and life in the Séminaire and the Archdiocese returned to normal. But the character of the *querelle des classiques* and the rival ideologies it brought so fervently to the fore are telling.⁴⁹ To the Gaumist *chrétiens*, the threat posed by classical authors to Catholic society was nothing short of existential: venerating these authors and the texts they had written in turn venerated their dangerous pagan subject material, replete as it was with the scandalously heretical stories of their religion and its myths. This form of education, in which paganism was the wolf disguised in the sheep's clothing of pious Catholicism, had inspired to most horrific excesses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Revolution, Protestantism, atheism, rationalism, and the exaltation of man above God that was identified as the Enlightenment. In France, the Gaumists concluded, this infection manifested itself in the manic disease of the French Revolution, which toppled the ideal order of society in the ultimate victory of paganism. By the vagaries of fate, French Canada, however, had been severed from its infected host by the British Conquest, and as such was spared the experience of the Revolution and remained untouched – at least for the moment. The anxiety, it seems, on the part of the Gaumists was that French Canada would perhaps fall prey to the same continental pagan folly as its motherland had in recent years, hence the ardour with which the *querelle des classiques* was waged on Canadian shores. With the backing of the hierarchy and of Rome, the *païens* had emerged victorious, and the place of classical literature and the mythology it contained in French Canadian education was secured for decades to come.

⁴⁶ Vézina, *Nos aïeux Vézina*, 15–54; Gosselin, *Les étapes d'une classe*, 66.

⁴⁷ The departure of each is recorded in Gosselin, *Les étapes d'une classe*, 139–142.

⁴⁸ Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 34–35, citing the article of Pelletier published in *Le Franc-Parleur* on 19 January 1877. See also Charland, "Un gaumiste canadien", 196–199.

⁴⁹ The identification of each group as the *païens* and *chrétiens* by all accounts seems to have been contemporary to the original struggle, and the monikers adopted by each faction themselves. Gosselin, *Les étapes d'une classe*, 139–140, mentions that the faculty of the Séminaire divided themselves into these camps.

4. *Les belles histoires des faux dieux: Mythology* in French Canadian Education, 1865–1963

In spite of the victory of the *païens*, the *querelle des classiques* left an indelible mark on how pre-Christian classical material was taught in Catholic schools, and this is especially true of mythology. Although it remained part of the curriculum throughout French Canada, the religious traditions of the Greeks and Romans were now taught with a healthy dose of condescension and no small measure of disdain. In this sense, the Gaumists had at least partially won the battle of the preceding decades, and the perceived “threat” of pagan morality to Catholic youth was taken somewhat more seriously. The solution seems to have been simple: keep “pagan” classical material, but make it abundantly clear to students that such pre-Christian religious materials were little more than the fanciful literary creations of a pre-Christian society that had not yet been exposed to Catholic Truth. A textbook of mythology written by Abbé Claude-Joseph Drioux in 1887 and subsequently used in Catholic schools neatly captures this revised attitude. In his preface to the textbook, Drioux writes that he finds it regrettable that mythology, in some schools, is no longer put into the hands of students, and that this leaves a large lacuna in the broader course of study. He justifies teaching mythology by arguing that

il est très important que les jeunes gens sachent la religion de ces peuples, pour comprendre leurs poètes et saisir une foule d’allusions qu’ils rencontrent dans leurs orateurs et leurs historiens.⁵⁰

it is critical that young people understand the religion of these peoples [the Greeks and Romans] in order to understand their poets, and to grasp the myriad allusions that they encounter in their orators and historians.

Mythology thus becomes necessary to understand the context of classical works, and to better comprehend their meaning.

Although it is necessary to understand classical authors, Drioux makes it abundantly clear throughout his textbook that students should not admire these pagan religious traditions. Under the guise of anthropological objectivity, he explains the errors of pagan religions as a misunderstanding of the

⁵⁰ Abbé Drioux, *Précis élémentaire de mythologie*, Tournai: Typographie de J. Casterman et fils, 1887, v.

natural world due to primitive ignorance. The children of Noah, scattered from Babel, forgot the true God and instead became fascinated with the things that most vividly struck their senses: the sun, the moon, the stars, fire, wind, air – “voilà les dieux que les hommes ont cru les arbitres du monde” (these were the deities that men believed were the arbiters of the world).⁵¹ From there, primitive men deified animals and natural objects without reason, they worshipped those things which were useful to them in order to gain more of their favours, and worshipped those which were harmful to divert their maleficence.⁵² A sense of Catholic self-superiority mixed with almost pity for the misguided beliefs of early mankind pervades much of the rest of the textbook. The Greek and Roman understanding of destiny as a deity, he writes,

est un travestissement de la croyance primitive en un Dieu qui gouverne tout et qui tient tout sous ses lois. Seulement, au lieu d'admettre une Providence éclairée et sage, libre dans ses actions, respectant la liberté de toutes les créatures intelligentes et raisonnables, les païens croyaient en un Dieu aveugle dont la force irrésistible en chaîne et subjugué le monde entire.⁵³

is a travesty of a primitive belief in a God which governs all and holds all under His laws. Rather than believe in an enlightened, wise Divine Providence, which is free in its actions and respects the freedom of all intelligent and reasonable creatures, instead the pagans believed in a blind God whose power was an irresistible chain reaction which subjugated the entire world.

Pagans, he later writes, did not have the consoling belief in a benevolent god, and instead staked their trust in deities that were blind and deaf to their prayers and needs.⁵⁴ In the end, however, he describes them as nothing more than mere fictions.⁵⁵ Fear and passion in equal measure lay behind the misguided priorities of ancient religion, but to Drioux this was precisely what made the study of mythology important:

⁵¹ Ibidem, 8.

⁵² Ibidem, 8–9.

⁵³ Ibidem, 11.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 99.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 9.

[E]lle nous fait connaître toutes les erreurs dans lesquelles les hommes sont tombés en suivant leurs passions, et nous montre par-là les bienfaits du christianisme qui a dissipé toutes ces ténèbres.⁵⁶

It makes us understand all of the errors into which mankind has fallen by giving in to its passions, and from such a low point reveals to us the benefits of Christianity which had dissipated all of these shadows.

In an ironic twist, the study of pagan mythology by Catholic students serves to help them better appreciate the beauty of the Catholic faith. The subtle hint of a smile, perhaps, would have cracked the expressions of even the most ardent Gaumists at this new pedagogical approach.

An examination of various programmes of study and teaching materials from the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth reveal the continued prominence of Greek and Roman religion in Catholic education, albeit with this new pedagogical tone. A curriculum overview prepared by the École normale Laval for the Chicago Columbian Exhibition of 1893 indicates that second-year students were taught one and a half hours of mythology by M. C.-J. Magnan, and third-year students had two hours of Greek and Roman history per week taught by M. Joseph.⁵⁷ This was not limited to the education of boys: a course outline for the École d'enseignement supérieure pour les jeunes filles in Montreal required the study of both pagan and Christian Greek and Latin literature alongside mythology and biblical history for all of the young women on its usual course of study.⁵⁸ A grammar textbook containing spelling exercises and principles of composition from 1902 tasked young students with distilling a moral lesson from Aesop's fables.⁵⁹ Knowledge of and familiarity with ancient material, especially mythological traditions, was requisite for various professional examinations in the province of Quebec – even in fields unrelated to the humanities, like dentistry and pharmacology. A manual preparing students for their baccalaureate examinations stresses that they must understand the context and content of classical authors rather than simply translate from

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 9.

⁵⁷ Thomas-Gregoire Rouleau, *Notice sur l'École normale Laval de Québec pour l'exposition de Chicago*, Québec: Imprimerie L. Brousseau, 1893, 9.

⁵⁸ Anonymous, *École d'enseignement supérieur pour les jeunes filles*, Montréal: La Congrégation de Notre-Dame, 1908.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Exercices d'orthographe*, Lévis: Mercier & Cie pour les Frères du Sacré-Coeur, 1902.

Latin to French.⁶⁰ The entrance exams to Université Laval required a strong knowledge of the Greek and Latin literary tradition, and students were tested on their knowledge of prose and poetry in each ancient language.⁶¹ With such a strong presence in the studies of students of all ages, an energetic dialogue emerged among primary school teachers regarding the finer points of mythology they encountered in their classrooms. The trade newspaper *L'enseignement primaire*, for instance, featured articles explaining the association between Jupiter and the eagle (16 February 1885), the powers of Pluto, "the prince of hell" (15 November 1883), the derivation of the word "hero" from the goddess Hera (2 October 1882), the agricultural traditions of the goddess Ceres (2 November 1882), and the various domains of action of the god Bacchus (15 January 1883).⁶² Textbooks for the study of mythology, ancient languages, and ancient literature were advertised in the *Journal de l'instruction publique* from the 1860s until the 1930s. Even textbooks that did not deal specifically with mythical material, such as the *Méthode pratique et raisonné de style de composition*, published in 1881, took care to emphasize the superiority of Christianity over earlier traditions. One exercise in this manual prompts young children to write a story about a visit to Rome in which they reflect on the victory of Christianity over paganism represented by the Pantheon's dedication to Catholic saints rather than pagan deities.⁶³ Pagan religion was strictly consigned to the realm of poetic imagination in discussions of literary history.

But such condescension in teaching mythology did not completely neutralize the danger it posed to young students. A case vividly documented by the Dominican priest André Bissonnette in the *Revue Dominicaine* of April 1922 reveals that even sixty years after the Gaumist controversy, mythology could still pose a dangerous menace to young, impressionable souls.⁶⁴ Bissonnette tells the story of a boy named only as "Alcippe", whose identity he wishes to keep secret. Alcippe was at first an exemplary student, but then came across Greek mythology, Latin Classics, and the ancient stories

⁶⁰ Adrien Leblond de Brumath, *Programmes et résumés des principales matières exigées pour les différents examens de la province de Québec*, Montréal: Cadieux et Derome, 1899, 6.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 16.

⁶² All available through the digital archives of the BANQ.

⁶³ A textbook written by Abbé E. Robert, of the Clercs de St-Viateur, *Méthode pratique et raisonné de style de composition*, Montréal: Clercs de St-Viateur, 1881, 28.

⁶⁴ The following is a summary of Bissonnette's article: "Alcippe – la chute d'une âme", *La Revue Dominicaine* (April 1922), 153–164. The original publication is available through the digital archives of the BANQ.

of ancient divinities contained therein. His interest in these stories quickly turned into an obsession: he never had any other reading material to hand, his face transformed with perverse enthusiasm when he described the beauty of these fables and the influence of these divinities on ancient people. His obsession followed him home as well. His father's house became the island of Ogygia, home of Calypso, and he delved into Latin and Greek poetry day and night to the expense of his other studies. His character, Bissonnette concludes, lacked the strength and formation necessary to avoid falling prey to such dangerous pagan Classics. Without restraint, they inflamed his passion without limit. His veneration of mythology led him to advance scandalous ideas on religion, morality, and the authority of the Church to his pious classmates. He became arrogant, hostile to all direction and advice, and no longer sought the guidance of his betters. He went through the motions of Catholic devotions, but his mind was clearly absent. His faith and his piety were not strong enough to weather the storm of the pagan readings that so fascinated him. Distant to his friends and educators, he became remote from his family when he graduated the college and went on to study law. He became a curious amusement to those he held to be his friends, the sort of oddity at a party that provoked consternation and conversation but little else. Distancing himself from the True Faith he plunged ever more into his books, questioning the very basis of existence, law, and morality. Alcippe, having given up on work and indulging his poetic interests, died of a flu, unremarkably. Yet he should be the object of our pity, not hatred, as, according to Bissonnette:

La foudre qui frappe le sommet d'un arbre, et le dépouille de son verdoyant feuillage, fait moins de ravage que ces insectes qui se logent sous son écorce et en détruisent la sève [...]. Cette parole d'un moraliste s'applique admirablement à l'influence pernicieuse du livre. Il insinue peu à peu la pensée de son auteur dans celle du lecteur.⁶⁵

The lightning which strikes the top of a tree and strips it of its verdant foliage does less harm than the insects who live under its bark and destroy its sap [...]. This example of a moralist applies admirably well to the pernicious influence of a book: it injects bit by bit the thinking of its author into the mind of the reader.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 163–164.

Alcippe was nothing more than an unwitting victim to an ancient, ancestral evil.

The list of specific teaching materials and case studies of mythology in education could go on and on, but the point remains clear: the years following the *querelle des classiques* saw the entrenchment of pre-Christian literary Classics, and thus mythology as well as Graeco-Roman religion, in the curricula of French Canadian Catholic schools. From primary through to secondary and post-secondary education, students throughout French Canada were required to be *au fait* with the literary and religious traditions of the Greeks and Romans, though the inferiority of the latter to Catholic doctrine was emphasized with newfound vigour following the disputes of the 1860s. This would continue to be the case until the upheavals of the 1950s and the Lesage government's creation of the Royal Commission of Investigation on Education in the Province of Quebec on 21 April 1961, chaired by Msgr Alphonse-Marie Parent. The sweeping findings of what came to be known colloquially as the *commission Parent* were published in five volumes in 1963–1964, and the recommendations for reform contained therein forever changed the face of public education in Quebec. Education was to be brought under the auspices of the state rather than the Church with the creation of the Quebec Ministry for Education, which would be accountable to the citizens and government of the province. Specialized teachers, lay-people rather than consecrated religious, were to be given more extensive training, and curricula were re-organized with an eye towards teaching practical skills that would be useful in the workplace. A new generation of polytechnic and vocational schools were created, universities were brought under government management, and in general education was taken out of the hands of the Church and given to the newly nationalist state. Education became public and secular. Suddenly the fraught debates of the 1860s on the morality of teaching classical materials became irrelevant as such curricula became artefacts of what was now a bygone age. With no small measure of irony, the end of Catholic education in Quebec would also spell the end of mythological education.

5. Conclusion: Creating a National Mythology

In spite of the reforms of the 1960s, the curious fact remains: in this conservative, deeply Catholic northern corner of the world in which the Church

enjoyed a near-total monopoly on education for over three centuries, the study of pre-Christian authors and their religion consistently lay at the heart of Catholic education. Even now this is not ancient history: my own grandfather, Ernest Lefebvre, born to a poor family in French Ontario, was taught the Latin Classics in primary school and for his achievements was chosen to attend the local Collège Jesuite in which he learnt Ancient Greek. He did not become a priest, nor did he go to university, but went on to work for Canada Post for much of his life. His humanist education, and the natural intellect which it sharpened, can in no way be thought to have been wasted on him or the generations of French Canadians that came before him. We have established the primacy of pagan material in Catholic education, but the question nevertheless remains: why here, at an end of the world so geographically removed from the Graeco-Roman past, did pagan mythology cast such a long and enduring shadow?

The answer, I argue, lies in the perceived relationship of French Canada with the pre-revolutionary French past and the proto-national myth cultivated by French Canadian clergy. The infamous Msgr Gaume, in his *Ver rongeur* that we have encountered above, argued that the perversion and corruption of French society caused by the penetration of pagan religion in Catholic education manifested itself most clearly in the radical social upheaval of the French Revolution of 1789. The social rot that had produced this reversal of the natural order of things, he writes, had only worsened by the mid-nineteenth century, and these social ills had become entrenched to the point of being idealized. But by the vagaries of history French Canada had taken a vastly different path than its ancestral motherland: the British Conquest of 1760 had severed many of its external links with France, and the new British administration had further entrenched the power of the Church in French Canadian society. Cut off, at least politically, from France, French Canada never knew the violence and turmoil of the French Revolution. The *ancien régime*, in a sense, was never overthrown in this colony of France as it had been in France itself, and many of the old sensibilities reigned much longer in Canada than they had in France. French Canada, on a societal level, remained as a living spectre of France's pre-revolutionary past, a characterization which many French Canadian clergy eagerly embraced. The overthrow of the Church in France and the monarchy that it had supported were viewed by French Canadian and French clergy alike as an unholy act, a desecration of a holy society and the perversion of the divinely ordained social order. French Canada became the last bastion of the way that things

once were, and ever should remain. Because it had never rejected the power of the Church, French Canada had remained faithful where its continental ancestors had erred; in a sense, it remained truly French.

The lineage, however, did not end there. According to French Canadian clerical commentators, the thread reached from French Canada to pre-revolutionary France, and then further back to Christian and pre-Christian Rome, and ultimately Greece. Pre-revolutionary France was the direct successor to the cultural genius of antiquity, and the contemporary possessor of its legacy as well as its responsibility. France had erred in its ways, and the Revolution had severed its link with the glories of antiquity, but leaving French Canada as the sole living heir. Groulx, in his history of the French in Canada, notes this explicitly:

Quand nous parlons, en effet, de culture française, nous ne l'entendons pas au sens restreint de culture littéraire, mais au sens large et élevé où l'esprit français, fils de la Grèce et de Rome, nous apparaît comme un maître incomparable de clarté, d'ordre et de finesse, le créateur de la civilisation la plus saine et la plus humaine.⁶⁶

In fact when we speak of French culture, we do not mean this simply in the limited sense of literary culture, but in the broader and higher sense by which the French spirit, which is the son of Greece and Rome, appears to us as an incomparable master of clarity, order, and finesse, and as the creator of the most sane and human civilization.

Elsewhere, he writes that the guardians of this sacred tradition of culture and humanity were the clergy themselves and the Church they served: "[Les] Prêtres de l'Eglise romaine, gardienne antique des humanités traditionnelles [...] inclinera toujours vers les disciplines qui font l'homme éternel" ([The] priests of the Roman Church, which is the ancient guardian of the traditional humanities [...] will always incline itself towards the disciplines which make humanity eternal)."⁶⁷ Courchesne communicated the same point a few years earlier in his long monograph *Nos humanités*:

Notre humanisme ne peut pas ignorer que le présent de nos élèves a son origine dans le passé, et ce passé, chez nous, c'est – sans mépris pour

⁶⁶ Lionel Groulx, *Le français au Canada*, Montréal: Éditions Albert Levesque, 1932, 124.

⁶⁷ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 194.

l'héritage d'autres nationalités – une civilisation très ancienne dont nous sommes les héritiers.⁶⁸

Our sense of humanism cannot deny that the historical presence of our current students has its origins in the past, and that past, for us, is, without contempt for the heritage of other nationalities, a very ancient civilization to which we are the heirs.

The prominence of classical mythology in French Canadian education can thus be explained by two observations. The first is that French Canada perceived itself as the direct inheritor of the classical past which France had relinquished during the turbulence of the Revolution. French Canada thus had a duty in the present to maintain and perpetuate an ancient sense of truth and beauty, which had originated with Greece and Rome, was passed to the early Church, and then to the culture of France. The second is that the break with France that came with the British Conquest of 1760, as Laurent Mailhot put it of French Canadian literature, "obligea les Canadiens à chercher chez eux, fidèlement et difficilement, une voie originale" (obliged French Canadians to search among themselves, faithfully and with difficulty, for their own path).⁶⁹ This view of French Canada as the successor of the classical past in turn became part of the emerging national myth of French Canadians. Teaching the ancient past became a way of reinforcing and living this myth in the present, and in turn passing it on to the next generation. Encountering ancient mythology in education became a means of living a new mythology in the present, and in the process the bonds of a new society, of a new nation, were woven and strengthened. The closing thoughts of Groulx provide the most fitting summation:

Dieu, qui a fait les races diverses, ne les a point également faites pour les mêmes activités, ni pour les mêmes triomphes. Chaque civilisation ou chaque culture a ses points de faiblesse et ses points d'excellence. C'est par l'ensemble qu'entre toutes, la compensation, l'équilibre se rétablit. Et c'est en excellant dans le sens de son génie particulier qu'une nation atteint,

⁶⁸ Courchesne, *Nos humanités*, 287.

⁶⁹ Laurent Mailhot, *La littérature québécoise*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975, 7, quoted in Trujic, *L'intertextualité classique*, 27. See also the preceding discussion of Trujic on the impact that this rupture of ties with France had on developing French Canadian literary ideals, especially *L'intertextualité classique*, 23–27.

comme un individu, son plus haut point d'originalité, qui est aussi son plus haut degré de puissance.⁷⁰

God, who made diverse people, did not make them equally for the same activities and neither did He destine them for the same triumphs. Each civilization or each culture has its points of weakness and its points of excellence. It is by looking at the whole picture among all of them that compensation and equilibrium are established. And it is by excelling in the sense of its own particular genius that a nation, just as it is for individuals, attains its own height of originality, which is also the height of its potential.

⁷⁰ Groulx, *L'enseignement français*, 315.