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*History*

## **Ideals of Gender and Romance Portrayed in the Literature of Courtly Love**

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### **Abstract**

Courtly Literature arose in 12th-century France and moved across Europe. Male troubadours and female trobairitz, lyrical poets of courtly literature, express their sexual and romantic desires through songs and novels. Most scholarly literature on courtly love focuses on the words of male troubadours who were the main consumers and creators of courtly literature, although nearly one in twenty troubadours were women. The poems by female troubadours, or trobairitz, offer an important and unique view into how women at the time embraced the idea of courtly love and responded to the male-dominated literary genre. This paper examines how male and female troubadours began to explore platonic and sexual love through courtly literature, which sets the stage for modern-day romance and courtship, adding 'love' to the equation of marriage above socioeconomic considerations. Dichotomies between dominance and submission, as well as the poet's portrayals of each other, suggest the effects of religious and gender norms. The Catholic Church during the time denounced carnal pleasures as inordinate and imposed rigid rules on marriage. This paper explores how the writings of troubadours and trobairitz may reflect a larger conversation of idealized relationships, despite societal restrictions.

"I am like the unicorn which is stunned in looking,  
fascinated, at the virgin. Happy with its torment, it falls  
into her lap; prey offered to the traitor who kills it. So it

is with me: I am truly put to death by Love and my lady.  
They took my heart, and I cannot recover it.”<sup>1</sup>

In this way, French count Thibault de Champagne confesses his undying love for a maiden, a key aspect of courtly love. Courtly love originated from twelfth-century French love literature under troubadours or lyrical poets. Troubadours often focused on sexual desire and explored ways in which they could express their love, rejecting the Catholic Church’s condemnation of carnal pleasure.<sup>2</sup> It quickly gained popularity throughout Europe, meeting audiences from Italy to Germany.<sup>3</sup> Courtly love mainly influenced male poets like 12th Century Frenchman Chrétien de Troyes, who discussed masculinity and chivalry through fictional *romans*, or romance novels. And while this sentiment of an admirable knight affected by masculine desire prevails throughout courtly literature, most of which was written by and for men, women also composed their own pieces: twenty out of the four-hundred named troubadours were female.<sup>4</sup> Female troubadours (trobairitz) replaced the suitor’s position as the heartsick romantic and also used courtly literature to portray their idealization of love.<sup>5</sup> Genres within courtly literature, like jeu-parties and tensons, sang of courtly conversations between troubadours on the nature of relationships.<sup>6</sup> Courtly love allowed men and women to engage in discourse, reflecting societal debates on temperament, marriage, and platonic and sexual love against a backdrop of gender and religious constraints.

Depictions of gendered tropes in courtly literature revealed debates between male troubadours and female trobairitz about each other’s weaknesses. Chrétien De Troyes’ *Erec and Enide* portrays women as garrulous, where the knight Erec threatens his maiden Enide, “she should not again be so rash as to let a single word escape her lips.”<sup>7</sup> Annoyed that her voice attracted three robbers, Erec suggests that women were too talkative and attracted the wrong company, which is

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<sup>1</sup> Thibaut de Champagne, *Poèmes d’amour des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, ed. Emmanuèle Baumgartner (Paris: Union Générale d’Editions, 1983), quoted in R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 150.

<sup>2</sup> Laurie A Finke, “The Rhetoric of Desire in the Courtly Lyric,” *Feminist Theory, Women’s Writing*, 29-74, (London, Cornell University Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 74.

<sup>4</sup> Matilda Bruckner, Laurie Shepard and Sarah White, *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, (New York, Routledge, a member of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Finke, “The Rhetoric of Desire,” 30. Bruckner et al., *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 105.

<sup>6</sup> Doss-Quinby et al., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Chrétien de Troye, *Arthurian Romances*, (England: Penguin Books, 1991), 73.

why they needed to be silenced.<sup>8</sup> Enide then agrees with his words and laments about her negative qualities, saying: “How I regret my pride and effrontery ... May my tongue be completely disgraced.”<sup>9</sup> Chrétien de Troyes’ disliked verbose women, and even had Enide concede to her ego-centric insolence. As a result, courtly literature acted as a mouthpiece and suggested male discontent with the supposed loquacity of women. Moreover, he introduces the virtue of submissiveness through these critiques, describing a fantastical apologetic maiden who wavers under male authority. His work denotes how courtly literature conformed with religious and societal attitudes towards verbose women, who also viewed talkative women in a negative light.

The trobairitz characterized men as talkative and deceptive, reflecting courtly literature’s power as a medium for discourse between lovers. One troubadour complains about men’s behavior; “All these men, who were good troubadours, pretended to be loyal lovers ... he is love’s deceiver and behaves like a traitor, for he publicly speaks ill for that in which he has most hope.”<sup>10</sup> Gossiping men were condemned, and women used courtly literature to bemoan the hypocritical words of male troubadours, who professed their love to maidens but threatened consequences if the lady refused to respond in kind. In another poem, a maid urges her benefactor to love her suitor lest he dies of heartbreak, prompting the lady to call her lover “vain, mad, and inconstant.”<sup>11</sup> The lady condemns her lover’s selfishness and only desire to possess her body. Another lady warns that “men are consummate flatterers,”<sup>12</sup> scheming and lying to achieve sexual favors. Women used courtly literature to remind men of their deceitful natures too, responding to their accusations of treachery and verbosity. Female trobaritz’s wariness extended to greater anxiety over gossip, where Comtesse de Dia prays that “he [her lover] disbelieve whoever speaks false words to him,” aware of the damage slander can cause to her reputation.<sup>13</sup> Her words suggested the fleeting relationships of courtly love, entailing the need for clear communication between lovers. Meanwhile, a lady warns Raimon de las Salas that “troublesome and savage people ... make war against us” through their spiteful words.<sup>14</sup> Her observation reflects the importance of female courtly literature in responding to their vilification through courtly literature, defending their character while pointing out

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>10</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 99.

<sup>11</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Doss-Quinby et al., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 87.

flaws in their lovers. This tit-for-tat exchange also manifested in the question of fidelity.

Questions of deception, garrulousness, and infidelity, were central to the arguments of religious authorities. The Church charged that women were, according to John Chrysostom, the archbishop of Constantinople, liars and extravagant chatterboxes.<sup>15</sup> Aquinas, wary of a woman's uncontrollable body and emotional temper, noted men's superior intelligence and reason.<sup>16</sup> Women were also seen as temptresses, stemming from the biblical story of Adam and Eve, where Eve encourages Adam to eat the apple.<sup>17</sup> Augustine concurred, commending women who had control over their sexual impulses since he viewed them as intrinsically perverse and promiscuous.<sup>18</sup> The innate corruption within women described by the Church suggested the widespread perpetuation of those myths in society—cliches so overused that they were consciously or unconsciously advocated for in religious settings.

Male courtly literature draws on these religious views and describes women as sexually unfaithful and treacherous. In the story *Tristan and Isolde*, Isolde engages in sexual trickery when Brangaene replaces her and consummates with Mark, who does not notice the switch.<sup>19</sup> In *Cligès*, Fenice deceives her husband Alias with a potion. The concoction causes Alias to believe that he is having sex when it is only a dream, preserving Fenice's chastity.<sup>20</sup> While the focus on potions highlights how women were characterized as tricksters, the lengths to which she goes to remain chaste shows the author's interest in preserving her virginity. Male anxieties of infidelity were also exacerbated by negative religious views of women's promiscuity, implying courtly literature's greater implications in societal beliefs about women. In another anecdote, King Arthur's magical drinking horn spills over him, which indicated that his queen had cheated on him.<sup>21</sup> *De Dame Guile*, a short poem, warns of a woman's cunning and fakery, writing: "She wears a braid of foolish pride ... [and a] dress of false envy bordered with fakery."<sup>22</sup> Both poems imply men's fear of uncontrollable women, where men would never be able to glean their lover's true goals or possible affairs. This anxiety continues in another knight, who falsely accuses his

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<sup>15</sup> Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>18</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 151.

<sup>20</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 189.

<sup>21</sup> Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 96.

<sup>22</sup> Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 21.

maiden of adultery: “No, you liked it and were pleased by it!—You never tried to stop him ... [You] will follow me naked and on foot until I’ve cut off [the knight’s] head.” The implied violence highlights the knight’s hysteria, and while he acted as an antagonist in Chretien de Troyes’ story, the knight’s worries allude to greater societal anxieties over the promiscuity of women. Chretien’s anecdote suggested the influence of negative gender norms and church ideals and implied the power of courtly literature as a medium to voice these concerns. Relative distrust of women within courtly literature, exacerbated by religious ideology, caused female troubadours to push back against those narratives, highlighting the hypocrisy and problems of men.

Men’s fidelity was constantly called into question by women troubadours, or *trobairitz*, who lamented unfaithful knights and celebrated reciprocated fidelity. A lady demands Raimbaut d’Aurenga to “have you this loyal always,” implying her anxiety that Raimbaut would have separate affairs.<sup>23</sup> A female troubadour advised Italian Bertran de Pojet to value faith and truth; fidelity remained an important issue for women.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, *trobairitz* Alamanda berates Giraut de Bornello for courting another lover in front of his lady, calling his actions a breach of contract. Another lady complains that: “It isn’t fair that another love takes you away ... remember what our agreement was.”<sup>25</sup> *Trobairitz* used courtly literature to remind men of their vows of loyalty, alluding to discussions that happened between men and women on constancy. Their desire for loyalty also denotes a growing consensus in the requirements for a relationship; reciprocated fidelity emerges as a constant theme throughout women’s courtly literature. When both sides are fidelity, happiness abounds, as French *trobairitz* Comtesse de Dia writes; “because my lover is the very gayest, therefore I am charming and since I am true to him, it is proper that he be true to me too.”<sup>26</sup> In this way, women explored the requirements for a perfect union through courtly literature while admonishing men for their infidelity.

Female troubadours also criticized men as boastful and wicked, suggesting continued discussions regarding treachery. The Countess de Dia writes “With him ... I’ve been tricked and cheated,”<sup>27</sup> and her words reflect courtly literature’s power in revealing men’s deceit. Almucs de Castelnou mirrors the lady, commanding her lover “to repent the grave

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<sup>23</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 91.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>25</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Finke, “The Rhetoric of Desire,” 58.

<sup>27</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 53.

wrong [you have] done to me.”<sup>28</sup> Ysabella attacks her ex-love Elais Cairel as “a deceiver,” and urges him to “go back and live in the monastery.”<sup>29</sup> Ysabella’s attack is two-fold: She refers to Elais as treacherous but also implies that he is sexually incapable, hence her cheeky reference to the monastery where celibacy was a requisite. Since women used courtly literature to redirect accusations of deceit and trickery to their male peers, their work again reflected ongoing commentary about gender and moral character. Courtly literature, however, extended into the question of masculinity and expression of love.

Tournaments legitimized men’s chivalry and masculinity, but they could also reflect a discourse on platonic love. In Arthurian Romances, ladies hosted tournaments to find a suitable knight and partner. Lady Wurst and the Lady of Pomelegoi organize a game to find husbands, promising their love to the winners,<sup>30</sup> while Herzelayde, a German maiden, hosts the knights Gahmuret and Parzival who battle to become her husband.<sup>31</sup> Although women seem to gain power through organizing these tournaments, Georges Duby argues that Courtly Love was a man’s game, which through fighting characterized the masculine and gruff qualities of men, justifying their right to the maiden.<sup>32</sup> Erec engages in gruesome battles, hitting an offending knight’s head three times, breaking his helmet, and slicing through his opponent’s skull, cracking it open.”<sup>33</sup> This masculine aggression validated the power structure where men were physically stronger, which is why they held power in society. James Schultz agrees, adding that men allowed women to be on a pedestal since it was only a play,<sup>34</sup> and suggests that Courtly Love was a system that did not reflect reality. These stories on masculine prowess, however, marked a shift in courtly literature to the discussion of non-sexual love. Bravery and courage were now seen as requisites for a maiden’s love, and the knight Cligès “for love of [his maiden], fought back bravely ... so that she might hear tell only of his strengths and skills.” And while these tournaments highlighted the chivalry and courtliness of men, they also suggested how men were supposed to express their love; through battling and persevering despite hardships. So important is this trope that Chrétien includes a scene where Enide complains that Erec’s love for her is causing him to forget his knightly duties.<sup>35</sup> Courtly literature encouraged men and women to surmise the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>30</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 273.

<sup>31</sup> Schultz, *History of Sexuality*, 124.

<sup>32</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Schultz, *History of Sexuality*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 68.

qualities necessary to be loved, and they conclude that only through courageous and noble actions can men gain the favor of their lovers.

Even female troubairitz described the need for noble knights. A lady notes that “he who risks heart and body ... deserves help from a lady of worth,”<sup>36</sup> admiring the knight’s courageous actions in his quest for love. “Break lances, make banners fly. He who acts thusly fulfills his obligation,”<sup>37</sup> another lady asserts. One maiden goes as far as to concede that “however many unfavorable attributes a good knight may amass, he remains valiant forever.”<sup>38</sup> Troubaritz expected men to act with bravery and valor as proof of their nobility, and their discussions reflect the dissemination and idealization of platonic love. Masculinity was used by female and male poets to determine the worthiness of a knight for a maiden, and they explored ways in which men could communicate such love.

One way was to protect maidens from mythical beasts and antagonistic knights, reflecting men’s masculinity and the development of platonic love. Yvain defends maidens against two demons terrorizing their town while also safeguarding a woman in a land dispute with her sister.<sup>39</sup> In addition, he fights against a villainous knight for Lady Lunette while she is wrongly imprisoned for an affair.<sup>40</sup> Women relied on knights as a refuge, with a female troubadour writing to a knight: “Please lend me your protecting presence.”<sup>41</sup> By highlighting men’s chivalry, male courtly literature encouraged men to safeguard maidens too, signifying that as a new requirement for platonic love. Men now needed to use their strength to protect women, rather than demonstrating it in a game. This idealization of men’s roles in love stories was also reflected in ladies.

Male courtly literature often romanticized the physical beauty of female lovers. Schultz notes how German writers Johnasdorf, Gottfried, and Morungun focused on the red lips of ladies, as well as their eyes and the radiance of their bodies.<sup>42</sup> The light was a sign of nobility, emphasized by Jacques Goff, and in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Cligès*, the male protagonist Alexander praises his maiden Soredamor’s brow and notes her eyes, saying that they were as bright as candles and gave her whole

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<sup>36</sup> Doss-Quinby, *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 88.

<sup>37</sup> Doss-Quinby, *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> Doss-Quinby, *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 97.

<sup>39</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 361; *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>42</sup> Schultz, *History of Sexuality*, 23-24.

face a warm glow.<sup>43</sup> Other German writers including Wolfram, Parzival, and Condwiramus agreed, calling them the ideal perfection of the body.<sup>44</sup> Clothes and other accessories accentuated their beauty, and Isold's gold ring complemented her blond hair.<sup>45</sup> Erec describes Enide's dress with equal fascination, writing how her white dress was simple and pleated, indicating the purity that illuminated her face.<sup>46</sup> The relative consistency between the categorization of "beautiful" women reflects a fantastical figure that arose out of courtly literature and suggests the evolution of platonic love to include physical beauty. Writers debated what constituted perfection and peak attractiveness, setting their standards and ideal qualities.

In addition, male courtly literature discussed and fantasized about the idea of "perfect love." Friedrich Von Hausen enjoyed the power such fantasies gave, saying: "It still brings me great pleasure that no one can prevent me from thinking of her close to me."<sup>47</sup> His fantasies allow his beloved to remain perfect and untainted by other people, and Fenis agrees to a more negative degree, noting: "I am striving after a foolish delusion."<sup>48</sup> Their phrases reflect a growing understanding that love could be determined through reverie and imagination too, instilling a more open attitude towards the various facets of platonic love. French troubadour Jafure Rudel relates to Fenis, saying that there is: "no other joy than the pleasure of distant love," citing the euphoria an envisioned perfect person provides.<sup>49</sup> Italian troubadour Bertran de Born literalizes these fantasies, declaring: "I shall go everywhere purchasing of each lady one beautiful image, to make one beautiful lady."<sup>50</sup> Bertran's creation of an ideal woman is a central theme throughout courtly love and is similar to French count Thibaut de Champagne's fascination with virgins, where the maiden transcends reality and becomes the ultimate object of achievable infatuation. Discussions of platonic love were heightened to philosophical and whimsical musings, alluding to the increasing discourse on the different ways poets could express their love. Women also weighed in on the topic of romanticization, differing in their opinions.

Some female troubadours emphasized their shyness, preferring a more indirect approach to an ideal relationship. We see this in women

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<sup>43</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Schultz, *The History of Sexuality*, 22.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Schultz, *The History of Sexuality*, 112.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 155.

<sup>50</sup> Finke, "The Rhetoric of Desire," 51.

depicted by male writers like Chretien de Troyes. He writes in *The Knight of the Cart* of a bashful lady who expresses her love for Lancelot: “Do not consider me ill-bred for telling you what I believe.”<sup>51</sup> Their words allude to societal and religious pressures which condemned women as talkative and verbose. An anonymous female troubadour assents, saying that she was extremely smitten with a knight, although “everybody says it isn’t proper for a lady to plead her case with a knight.”<sup>52</sup> Female troubadours found themselves in the confusing position of not being able to express their affections since male courtly love set a rigid hierarchy where it was the man’s duty to grovel for love at his maiden’s feet.

Other women pushed back against this narrative in various poems, asserting their right to choose. Castelloza claims that “when it happens that a lady loves, she ought to court the knight if she sees prowess and knightly worth.”<sup>53</sup> However, she also admits that she’ll “set a very poor example to other loving ladies: usually a man sends messages.”<sup>54</sup> Castelloza realizes that by declaring her feelings and wishes, she forfeits her power as the indifferent lady and takes the place of the begging suitor. She relishes, however, the opportunity to express her feelings, deciding that “he’s a great fool who blames me for loving you because it suits me well.”<sup>55</sup> The opposing narratives from Castelloza and other female troubadours suggest the wide spectrum of opinions within courtly literature on the best way to acknowledge love, as well as a backlash to restrictive gender norms. The questions of assertiveness were especially important in courtly literature discussions about sexual love, which were influenced by the Church’s restrictions on carnal desire.

According to the Church, people conducted sex solely for the propagation of humankind; pleasurable intercourse was sinful, demonstrated when Tobias apologizes to God before consummating his marriage with Sara; “We will be in our wedlock ... And now, Lord, you know, that it is not because of lust ... but only for the love of posterity.”<sup>56</sup> Gregory of Tours, a bishop, mirrors Tobias’ views and writes that children born on Sunday will be crippled,<sup>57</sup> whereas Bonaventure, an Italian theologian, discusses the corruption related to semen.<sup>58</sup> The Church drew parallels between sexual desire and moral

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<sup>51</sup> Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, 223.

<sup>52</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>56</sup> Jacqueline Murray, *Love, Marriage, and Family in the Middle Ages*, (Toronto, The University of Toronto Press, 2010), 60.

<sup>57</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 10-11.

<sup>58</sup> Schultz, *the History of Sexuality*, 69.

decay, which may have exacerbated their anxieties over sexual tolerance. The sexual restrictions imposed by the Church were also worse for women, due to religious authorities' strict guidelines for women's roles in marriage. Abott Adame advised the Countess du Perche that she should give her body, or *dilecto* (love), to her husband, who is allowed to use and exploit it in any way. Her soul, or *reverencia* (reverence) however, is reserved for God.<sup>59</sup> St. Ida of Herfield, a female saint, agreed with Adame, suggesting a consensus among papal authorities on marriage norms.<sup>60</sup> As a result, women usually also had no say in choosing partners and were expected to serve their husband's sexual desires. The Christian author Tertullian goes further, arguing for the need to sequester unmarried women from the public views because "every public exposure of an honorable virgin is (to her) a suffering of rape."<sup>61</sup> His words note the extent of these restrictions to the mobility and freedom of women, which were met with ire by noblemen and even other theologians; historian Guibert of Nogent is quoted by Duby exclaiming: "The priests have planted a cross in this woman's loins?"<sup>62</sup> His humor acts as a rejection of these religious restrictions, and courtly love perhaps became popularized because it allowed people to freely voice their desires and fantasies. Religious curtailments on sexual love led to lively discussions within courtly literature on the nature of sex.

Sexual dominance in Courtly literature manifests as romanticized rape, reflecting a greater discussion on sexual love. Perceval, an aspiring knight, forcibly kisses a maiden, and thought; "she resisted mightily ... her resistance was in vain, for the boy kissed her repeatedly, twenty times as the story says."<sup>63</sup> The maiden's inability to resist his advances shows the sexual power of men over women in courtly literature, and Schultz highlights this in the *Eneas Romance* during Eneas's consummation with his wife Dido, where: "[he] took possession of the lady ... Nevertheless, she opposed his suggestion and he laid her down ... she was unable to defend herself. He did as he wished so that he gained her favor in a manly fashion."<sup>64</sup> Rape advances a man's masculinity and courtliness, but is also idealized and promoted. Sexual dominance was expected from men, illustrated when people mocked Baldwin VI for not forcing his wife to bed - his peers assumed he would do so to satisfy his love, and ostracized him when he decided not to.<sup>65</sup> Male courtly literature revealed new discussions between troubadours on the topic of sexual love and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>60</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 101.

<sup>62</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage*, pg. 29.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 389.

<sup>64</sup> Schultz, *History of Sexuality*, 152.

<sup>65</sup> Duby, *Love and Marriage*, 31.

domination, something that had been restricted and condemned by religious authorities.

In response to male aggression, women became wary of sexual relationships. At times, this was on the advice of men; Wolfram Von Eschenbach warns women to be careful about choosing whom to give their virginity to, as sexually promiscuous women were looked down upon. Women lost their chastity and their subsequent power while men improved their reputation and masculinity through these marriages.<sup>66</sup> Women also shared this view, and Christine de Pizan advises women to be shrewd in their relationships, and that “the greater esteem in which she holds herself regarding men ... the more she will be revered[.] ... [No] good can come of ... receiving too many man friends.”<sup>67</sup> By elevating themselves through honor, Pizan suggested that women could shield themselves from gossip and protect their reputations, albeit voluntarily restricting their power to choose, which decreased their freedom and independence. Their words alluded to female anxieties about the impact of male fantasies and romanticized rape, as well as circulating ideas on what sexual relationships should look like.

Still, women wished for sexual control and dominance within courtly literature, similar to their male counterparts. A trobairitz attacks men for their gossip and sexual restrictions, telling a: “foul-tongued, jealous man [that] don’t think that I’ll be slow to please myself with joy just because it may upset you.”<sup>68</sup> Although it is unclear if she is finding joy by herself or with multiple men, she is clearly incensed towards the men around her who may be talking about her sex life and wishes to freely find joy whenever. Likewise, one anonymous woman complains about her chastity, wanting “to hold my knight in my arms one evening, naked . . . when I will have you in my power . . . be sure I’d feel a strong desire to have you in my husband’s place.” Another writes “I pray that I may press you in my arms.” Courtly literature allowed trobairitz to explore sexual dominance in ways analogous to male troubadours.<sup>69</sup> The creation of a loyal liege, similar to men’s ideals of submissive women, manifested as a fantasy where the female troubadour had resolute power over their relationships. Maria de Ventadom exclaimed that a lover needed to follow a lady’s every command, even when the lady proclaimed that a mountain was plain.<sup>70</sup> Maria also countered Gui D’Ussel’s argument that men should become equals with their lovers,

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<sup>66</sup> Schultz, *History of Sexuality*, 168.

<sup>67</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, (England: Penguin Books, 2003), 96.

<sup>68</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 13.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>70</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, xxxv.

noting that “I rightly consider him a traitor if, having given himself as a servant, he makes himself an equal.”<sup>71</sup> Trobairitz understood their supposed elevated position in courtly love and strove to strengthen it, marking male troubadours with a lower social status that ensured women’s dominance. Female courtly literature reflected larger discussions between men and women on the topic of sexual love, where similar wishes for dominance were expressed.

Their work also clashed with the restrictive marriage norms. One female troubadour wrote; “And I want to love him, no matter who blames me. No father or mother can make me change my mind.”<sup>72</sup> Female troubadours complained about marital problems too, oftentimes shunning their husbands for lovers, with one poet promising that “if he won’t let me be or lead a good life ... I’ll get my revenge: I’ll lie with my lover all naked.”<sup>73</sup> Trobairitz celebrated sexual freedom and utilized extramarital affairs to avenge themselves against abusive or toxic husbands, and another cheeky poet declares that “never on account of my husband will I stop saying that my lover lay with me last night.”<sup>74</sup> Their words rejected gender and religious norms that both looked down upon sexual desire and dictated marriage; one trobairitz writes that “he has not ravished me to make me a nun.”<sup>75</sup> In many ways, courtly literature expounded upon trobairitz’s contempt for their limited marriage options and required chastity, acting as a societal critique on gender norms. Their descriptions of sexual fantasies and control also denoted a need for sexual fulfillment within these relationships. One female troubadour laments that “I am poorly rewarded in my husband; I will compensate for it with a lover.”<sup>76</sup> Trobairitz frame additional lovers as necessary to ameliorate a dull sex life, freely expressing their wishes and emphasizing their right to a more satisfying relationship.

Another way that women showed power was by rejecting certain double standards in their society, suggesting the increased discourse courtly literature created. Oftentimes, bachelor knights hoped to elevate their position by marrying a woman of higher status. A lady who wished to court a man of a higher status, however, was seen as greedy and uncourtly. Azalais de Porcairagues notes that “a dompna’s [lady’s] love is badly placed who pleads with a rich man ... For the men say that love

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>72</sup> Doss-Quinby et al., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, (London: Yale University Press, 2001), 137.

<sup>73</sup> Doss-Quinby et al., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 154.

<sup>74</sup> Bruckner et.al, *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 183.

<sup>75</sup> Doss-Quinby et al., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 190.

<sup>76</sup> Doss-Quinby et al., *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, 221.

and money do not mix.”<sup>77</sup> Female troubadours also discussed other double standards. Azalais d’Atier warns Clara d’Anduze that not forgiving her lovers would be seen as harsh and unkind, forcing Clara to offer unreciprocated kindness to avoid malignant gossip. Men were not similarly required to be forgiving, and courtly literature allowed Trobairitz to highlight and discuss these paradoxes.

Courtly literature encouraged the discussions between troubadours on the definition of platonic and sexual love, which were affected by religious and societal views. Male stereotypes stemmed from the Catholic Church’s portrayal of women, which denoted how society viewed women as well. Male writers portrayed their masculinity and power through courtly literature while debating the nature of love, switching between fantasies and rape. Courtly love also allowed female writers to express their desire for sexual dominance and fantasies too, reflecting an ongoing discourse and evolution on the meaning of romantic love. The trobairitz redirected accusations of infidelity and talkativeness back to their male peers, rejecting rigid social and religious structures that demanded silence and constrained their freedom.

In the end, courtly literature served as a medium to describe men’s and women’s fantasies, and desires, and suggested the intellectual idealization and discourse on romance. Troubadours enjoyed giving each other the illusion of complete dominance and used courtly literature to express their anxiety but also their hopes for perfect love. Azalais de Porcairagues puts herself at her lover’s mercy provided that he asks “nothing wrong of” her.”<sup>78</sup> She gives minimal power to her lover, cleverly ensuring that each action he takes will first have to go through her approval. Meanwhile, a male troubadour cockily tells his lover: “Lady, I have power and boldness ... for I could beat you lying down . . . [but] I prefer to let you be my conqueror.”<sup>79</sup> Courtly Love was just a play, a game, and this man knew that although he was acting submissive, he could easily overtake his maiden. He allowed her, however, to be “his conqueror” because such foreplay made him seem courtlier and more faithful. Their work suggested a renewed interest among troubadours in the discussions of sexual and platonic love, either by defining it in terms of themselves through masculinity or writing of others when discussing loyalty and submissiveness. They searched collectively for a perfect union, which differed from marriages at the time that were made solely for economic gain. Courtly love revealed the underlying social tensions

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<sup>77</sup> Finke, “The Rhetoric of Desire,” 64.

<sup>78</sup> Bruckner et al., *Songs of Women Troubadours*, 37.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

between men and women and their varying views, a rich discourse that explored one of mankind's most treasured phenomena—love.

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## **Painting the Counter-Reformation: Revisiting the Sistine Chapel as a Theological Document**

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### **Abstract**

The Sistine Chapel ceiling, painted between 1508 and 1512, remains one of the most iconic pieces of Catholic art in the world. Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) painted his fresco series during the Italian Renaissance, a time of dramatic philosophical, artistic, and religious developments, all of which are illustrated in his masterpiece. Michelangelo's Catholic faith was heavily influenced by these Renaissance movements, such as Humanism, and he translated these new ideas into his fresco series on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The ceiling, in turn, served a critical iconographical role in representing Humanist themes in Catholicism before the Catholic Church technically adopted them at the Council of Trent in 1545. Ultimately, there is an undeniable connection between the Sistine Chapel ceiling and Counter-Reformation Catholicism. The ceiling may not have directly determined the decisions made at the Council of Trent, but it did illustrate the Renaissance ideologies that influenced those decisions. Through his artistic process and formal choices, while working on the ceiling, Michelangelo acted not only as an artist but also as a theologian. He depicted the complexities of the emerging Counter-Reformation Catholic Church through the incorporation of Humanist Renaissance ideas into classic biblical imagery and proved art's power to represent religious doctrine.

## Introduction

It was not made for the sake of form or intellect, which were only servants to the central act, but as an act of worship and proclamation. It can be understood only by participating in the act, which is an act of worship.<sup>1</sup>

This astute description by Professor John W. Dixon Jr. calls to mind an array of religious events, perhaps a Buddhist prayer service, a melodic reading of the Qur'an, or maybe even a Jewish Seder dinner. However, the "act of worship" Dixon speaks of is not an event at all. It is a 508-year-old fresco painted upon the ceiling of an even older chapel located in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City.<sup>2</sup> It is a work of art globally renowned as one of the greatest creative accomplishments in human history and the most famous work of the Florentine artist, Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). The simple amalgamation of pigments has become a paradigm of both Renaissance art and theological expression. Michelangelo's fresco series on the Sistine Chapel ceiling reflected the evolving doctrine of the Catholic Church on the Italian Peninsula during the Renaissance as it emphasized a new focus on humanity in Christianity and the importance of mortal life. The early 1500s was a time rife with religious turmoil.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of the Protestant Reformation would eventually cause a readjustment of Catholic values and practices, determined largely at the Council of Trent, and with movements like Humanism and individualism driving creative pursuits in Renaissance Italy, the Sistine Chapel ceiling served as a precursor of coming theological developments.

## Religious Turmoil in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe

Before delving into the intricacies of Michelangelo's theology, it is paramount to survey the larger religious changes occurring in Europe, specifically the Protestant and Catholic Reformations. The culmination of these changes occurred in 1536 when the Pope convened what would eventually be known as the Council of Trent, a collection of the highest-ranking and most influential members of the clergy.<sup>4</sup> Although the group did not meet until 1545, their summons served as a notice to all members of the Church, and Europe as a whole, that change was coming in what was arguably the continent's most powerful and

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<sup>1</sup> Dixon, John W., Jr. "The Christology of Michelangelo: The Sistine Chapel." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 503.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Sistine Chapel."

<sup>3</sup> Francesco C. Cesareo, "The complex nature of Catholicism in the Renaissance (Review Essay)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Bull, George, *Michelangelo: A Biography*. (New York City, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 329.

traditional institution.<sup>5</sup> This unprecedented change was a response to an even larger religious movement, which essentially redefined the organizational structure and balance of power in Europe, the Protestant Reformation.<sup>6</sup> The Protestant Reformation was led by Martin Luther, born in November of 1483, whose career in theology began in 1505 after a near-death experience in a thunderstorm drove him to join the clergy. By 1507, he had been ordained into the priesthood. Shortly after, he held a teaching position at a university and eventually earned a doctorate in Scripture.<sup>7</sup> However, as he was furthering his studies of Catholic theology, Luther began to question some aspects of the Roman church's religious doctrine, specifically the necessity of demonstrative action to determine one's status as a faithful member of the Catholic church. Additionally, he opposed the practice of collecting indulgences, a lucrative business for many members of the clergy that involved accepting material or monetary payments to ensure salvation. He verbalized this opposition in his *Ninety-Five Theses*, which were published in October of 1517.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout his lifetime, Luther used the printing press to spread his ideas and further his Protestant cause, a strategy that was eventually adopted by the Catholic Church as well when they were promoting their reformed doctrine decades later.<sup>9</sup> After four more years of Luther relentlessly offering his criticisms of the corruption and practices of the Catholic Church, he was officially excommunicated in 1521.<sup>10</sup> This was a monumental occurrence as it officially separated his followers from the rest of Europe's millions of practicing Catholics. It further encouraged Luther to continue his work by organizing a team of like-minded thinkers and printers to build off of his translation of the New Testament into German to create a full German Bible translation.<sup>11</sup> Luther firmly believed that it was crucial to base one's Christian faith around the word of the Bible, and so this translation was necessary for him to help connect with and expand his followers, most of whom lived in German cities.

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<sup>5</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 329.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Mullett, *Historical Dictionary of the Reformation and Counter Reformation*, *Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements* 100 (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2010), xxiii.

<sup>7</sup> Mullett, *Historical Dictionary*, 305-306.

<sup>8</sup> Mullett, *Historical Dictionary*, 306.

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment," *The Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (July 1989): 391.

<sup>10</sup> Mullett, *Historical Dictionary*, 307.

<sup>11</sup> Mullett, *Historical Dictionary*, 308.

Luther continued publishing works that clarified and compounded his position on the justification of faith, arguably the area in which he differed most from the Roman Catholic Church. As discussed in his works “Freedom of a Christian,” and “Disputation Concerning Justification”, published in 1520 and 1536 respectively, Luther believed that faith alone was all that was necessary to justify one’s life for salvation, which opposed the Catholic ideology that faithful actions and deeds along with belief in God were what determined salvation.<sup>12</sup> This belief system was enthusiastically adopted by many European Christians, for a multitude of reasons including frustration with widespread financial corruption in the Catholic Church, allowing Luther to gain a widespread and devoted group of followers. This exodus of parishioners served as a startling notice to the leaders of the Catholic Church that the sentiment of ordinary Christians was changing, and that the organization needed to reform itself to maintain its awesome influence on the European stage.<sup>13</sup>

The reform took place on all levels of the Church, from regular clergy to the Papacy, but ultimately it ended up reestablishing key Catholic beliefs in a manner that better reflected the new Humanist values sweeping through Europe. These values are evident in Michelangelo’s artwork, which aligned with his faith. Although the Sistine Chapel is often analyzed in terms of specific artistic methods and overall aesthetic value, it must also be considered through the lens of what it truly was meant to illustrate, Catholic theology and history and more specifically, Catholic theology during the Renaissance. Ultimately, that is where the true meaning of the fresco series lies. Although a stunning piece of artistry and a triumph for fresco painting, it is fundamentally an illustration of a new Catholic ideology, deeply influenced by movements that flourished on the Italian peninsula during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, such as Humanism and Classicism. These movements surrounded all aspects of Michelangelo’s life as a major figure of the Italian Renaissance, and therefore obviously presented themselves in his Catholic faith.

### **Michelangelo’s Catholicism**

Throughout his life, Michelangelo was deeply religious and his Catholic beliefs manifest in his creative work, especially his tendency to depict biblical figures and scenes. Like many other children of the Italian Peninsula during the Renaissance, Michelangelo’s faith emanated from his family’s Catholicism. As he grew up, he continued to allow the

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<sup>12</sup> Mullet, *Historical Dictionary*, 308.

<sup>13</sup> Mullet, *Historical Dictionary*, 76.

Catholic values of performing good works and studying the Bible to define his practice. These characteristics show that Michelangelo was a good representative of most Catholics in the Italian Peninsula, as they were the common expectation of Italian Catholic parishioners. His religious doubts also aligned with those common during the Renaissance, as George Bull, an acclaimed expert on Renaissance Italy described in his biography of the artist, “Michelangelo’s spiritual torment was over whether his sinfulness stood in the way of his salvation; over how far Christ’s sacrifice would, as it must, outweigh transgressions.”<sup>14</sup> This internal conflict mirrors one sweeping across Europe at the time regarding what determined salvation.

The emerging Protestant belief, which had been dictated by Martin Luther, was that man was, in his own words, “justified by faith without the works of the law.”<sup>15</sup> Essentially what this meant was that no actions of charity or work for God were necessary to achieve salvation, that holy faith and recognition of God and his truths would suffice, which was directly opposed to the traditional Catholic ideology that service to the church and others was of paramount importance. Michelangelo, being Catholic, thought that good deeds were necessary, so he practiced acts of charity such as donating money to monasteries and orphans.<sup>16</sup> The necessity of good deeds for salvation is something that the Catholic Church would eventually put at the core of its reformation and would feature prominently in their reevaluation at the Council of Trent, decades after the Sistine Chapel ceiling was finished.<sup>17</sup>

Further, Michelangelo’s career as an artist influenced his faith, as he believed both beauty and creativity were holy pursuits, and that God’s divine creation of humanity and the human world was the most perfect form of art.<sup>18</sup> This fascination with humanity can be related to the Humanist movement, which was structured around the study of human history and behavior, and from which many Counter-Reformation Catholic groups like the Jesuits gained inspiration.<sup>19</sup> But what may be most fascinating about Michelangelo’s personal Catholicism is how he often expressed it through a lens of uncertainty and powerlessness in his artwork. He never failed to infuse even the most glorious of images with hints of humility and humanity, an example being his placement of the

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<sup>14</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 330.

<sup>15</sup> Mullet, *Historical Dictionary*, 281.

<sup>16</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 375.

<sup>17</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 329.

<sup>18</sup> Dixon, *Christology*, 509.

<sup>19</sup> Mullet, *Historical Dictionary*, 247.

tragic illustration *The Drunkenness of Noah* next to the powerful *The Separation of Light and Darkness*.<sup>20</sup>

The juxtaposition of God's glory and the absolute corruption of sin can be attributed to questions about Catholicism that Michelangelo pondered and that the Counter-Reformation would later try to answer. These ideas can be found in virtually all of the Sistine Chapel images, as the questions that haunted the Counter-Reformation ideologists were ones also asked in the Biblical times of the Old Testament. They were asked when God demanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and again in the Book of Job, a man who suffered countless horrible maladies. How can such a glorious God be so cruel? Is God even cruel, or do humans inflict this pain upon themselves?<sup>21</sup> Although there is perhaps no real answer to these queries, Counter-Reformation theologians grappled with them, along with other issues like justification. But even before the leaders of the Church took it upon themselves to incorporate these changing ideals into the Church's doctrine, many ordinary parishioners, like Michelangelo, had recognized that they needed to be addressed. Michelangelo's religious sentiments echoed those of much of the Catholic Italian Peninsula. In his artistic pursuits, he integrated this increasingly complex ideology of Catholicism to spread its message to a larger audience.

### **Planning the Sistine Chapel Ceiling**

Although a devout Catholic, Michelangelo had a strained relationship with Pope Julius II because of financial disputes. Nevertheless, Michelangelo accepted the commission for the Sistine Chapel ceiling, offered to him in 1508, and began planning a fresco that would illustrate the Bible's Old Testament through the lens of changing Catholic theological beliefs.<sup>22</sup> The original plan given to Michelangelo was simply to do twelve separate images, one of each apostle. Michelangelo was not interested in such a basic design and successfully convinced the Pope to allow him to do something much more complex. In a way, the Sistine Chapel ceiling was an expression of Michelangelo's personal Catholic beliefs, as he felt his experience as both a faithful member of the church and his proximity to prominent religious figures gave him the ability to dictate how the nuances of Catholicism were to be portrayed in the ceiling. As art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon explains, "The balance of probabilities suggests that he did indeed take

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel* (New York City: Skyhorse Publishing, 2009), 114-115.

<sup>21</sup> Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 115.

<sup>22</sup> Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 59.

the license to reinvent and reconceive the meaning of the stories from the Old Testament that were his subject, filtering and refracting them through the lens of his own intellect, his own reading, his own sensibility.”<sup>23</sup> The result of this was that the ceiling represented a version of Catholicism that hinted towards the coming changes in the church, and was a reflection of Michelangelo’s own ideology, not just traditional beliefs.<sup>24</sup> Michelangelo planned to encapsulate the first section of Christian history, specifically the Old Testament era before God gave Moses the Twelve Commandments also known as the time “ante legem” or “before the law.”<sup>25</sup> Michelangelo sought to depict this period in a series of intricate scenes from different Biblical stories and illustrations of various significant religious figures. Artistic chronicles of Jesus’s life were common in Michelangelo’s time, an example being Gaudenzio Ferrari’s work in the chapel Santa Maria delle Grazie in Varallo, aptly titled “Life of Christ.” Ferrari’s bibliographical piece, which he completed in 1513, depicted key scenes and people in Jesus’s life in a series of twenty-one frescos on the inside of an Italian chapel.<sup>26</sup>

Although Michelangelo also created a chronologically-ordered fresco series, his goal was to do so with a unique subject matter, hence his focus on the Old Testament. This departure from convention can be related to some Counter-Reformation themes, for example, the growing emphasis on the relationship between humanity and divinity, which is the focus of the Old Testament, and the relationship between God and the ordinary people of the Catholic Church. Instead of simply making a divine character the center of his work, Michelangelo chose to depict what George Bull aptly described as an “embodiment of the divine in the human; the history of man's dealings with God.”<sup>27</sup> With this plan in mind, Michelangelo began to paint his masterpiece and, as he worked, his artistic techniques added a whole new layer of depth and meaning to his original vision.

### **Michelangelo’s Artistic Methods**

The artistic methods that Michelangelo used to create the Sistine Chapel Ceiling helped convey its complicated religious meaning. Michelangelo sectioned the ceiling into three parts, each depicting three smaller events. The first was God creating the universe, the second was

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<sup>23</sup> Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 184.

<sup>25</sup> Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Gillet, “Gaudenzio Ferrari,” New Advent, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06047a.htm>.

<sup>27</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 347.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the third was the start of human history with Noah and the floods.<sup>28</sup> He surrounded this primary scene with depictions of other characters or situations, some from the Bible and others from real life. These included a shockingly powerful David standing over Goliath, arm raised in almighty fury, ready to strike and Eve reaching out in gratitude to a benevolent, almost fatherly God, while Adam lies beneath them in the gorgeous *Creation of Eve*.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout his fresco scenes, Michelangelo takes care to convey interpersonal humanity and emotion between these holy beings, which can be attributed to the increasing emphasis on human relations and mortal livelihood during the early Renaissance. In terms of his more realistic inclusions, chronological illustrations of thirty popes and the ancestors of Jesus Christ adorn the ceiling as well.<sup>30</sup> These important historical figures serve as powerful reminders of the vastly influential history of the Catholic Church. The ceiling was meant to take its viewer on a journey, illustrating the story of early Biblical history and encouraging people to actively observe to follow the narrative.

The idea of viewer participation in art was popular during the Renaissance.<sup>31</sup> In terms of the materials used on the ceiling, they were not extraordinarily luxurious. After Michelangelo completed the ceiling, Pope Julius II wanted to add gold trim to it, but Michelangelo firmly rejected this proposal, and the ceiling was not embellished. When the Pope said that without gold it “will look poor,” Michelangelo responded, “Those who are painted here, were poor themselves.”<sup>32</sup> This conversation evidenced broader European conflicts at the time, as the Catholic Church was under harsh criticism for its opulence and monetization of faith. Michelangelo’s resistance to the proposition demonstrated how he represented the members of the Catholic population who were concerned about these issues, and eventually would portend the changes coming in the Catholic Church.

Michelangelo preferred to draw attention to his paintings through dynamism and movement, reflecting popular themes in Renaissance art like the expression of an energetic human form.<sup>33</sup> In his most important scenes, the significant character is often in motion either forwards or backward, this motion becomes even more apparent when he is

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<sup>28</sup> Graham-Dixon, *Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm Bull, “The Iconography of the Sistine Chapel Ceiling,” *The Burlington Magazine* 130, no. 1025 (1988): 597, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/883597>.

<sup>30</sup> Bull, *Iconography*, 597.

<sup>31</sup> Dixon, *Christology*, 514.

<sup>32</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 99.

<sup>33</sup> Dixon, *Christology*, 518.

depicting God as he shows his strong and commanding figure hurtling through space.<sup>34</sup> Michelangelo's artistic choices provide insight into how the Renaissance movement of Humanism influenced the chapel ceiling.

### Counter-Reformation Themes in the Sistine Chapel Ceiling

Michelangelo demonstrated his belief in burgeoning reformist Catholicism by emphasizing humanity in the overarching themes of the ceiling. By painting characters in the nude and through his powerful depictions of Christ's mortal figure, he demonstrated his humanistic interpretation of Christian ideology.<sup>35</sup> Michelangelo was, and by some still is, considered to be the master of the human figure. Before him, God's visage had often been included in Christian art, but rarely along with an entire mortal body. Michelangelo illustrated God as a powerful and physically imposing man, with defined arm muscles and broad shoulders, yet His face conveys paternal kindness as He reaches out towards Adam, His greatest creation of all.<sup>36</sup> Michelangelo's stunning portrayal of God in the *Creation of Adam* is now culturally one of the most iconic images of the Catholic faith.<sup>37</sup>

The concept of fully presenting God as a human was a product of growing Renaissance movements like Humanism. As Francesco Cesareo said in his essay on Renaissance Catholicism, "The process of renewal advocated by Catholicism in the Renaissance entailed a restoration of the image of God in the human person."<sup>38</sup> Additionally, it was a product of the Humanist emphasis on mortal anatomy, which can be demonstrated in artistic works such as Leonardo da Vinci's *The Vitruvian Man*. Leonardo completed his phenomenally detailed anatomical sketch in 1490, about thirty years before Michelangelo finished the ceiling.<sup>39</sup> Although Leonardo's drawing was not a religious piece, it was intended to be a representation of the "ideal man," as geometrically determined by a celebrated ancient Roman architect, Vitruvius. Leonardo explains this

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<sup>34</sup> Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Sistine Chapel, Ceiling*, fresco, 1508-1512, Sistine Chapel, Vatican City.

<sup>35</sup> Dixon, *Christology*, 522.

<sup>36</sup> Buonarroti, *Sistine Chapel*.

<sup>37</sup> "The Italian Renaissance-Faith, Imagined," *Columbia Blogs*, accessed April 4, 2021, <https://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/maf2219/the-italian-renaissance-2/>.

<sup>38</sup> Cesareo, "The complex nature of Catholicism."

<sup>39</sup> Bolles School, "Humanism and its Influence on the Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, and Music of the Italian Renaissance," Bolles.org, accessed April 2, 2021, [https://www.bolles.org/uploaded/PDFs/academics/AP\\_AP/APEuro3.\\_Humanism\\_and\\_influence\\_on\\_Art\\_and\\_Music.pdf](https://www.bolles.org/uploaded/PDFs/academics/AP_AP/APEuro3._Humanism_and_influence_on_Art_and_Music.pdf).

in a paragraph above the drawing and it serves as yet another example of classicism and rediscovery of ancient Roman thought.<sup>40</sup>

Exploration of man's perfect form was a popular idea during the Renaissance, and one frequently utilized by Michelangelo, both in the Sistine Chapel ceiling and in other pieces of his work. Michelangelo's *David*, for example, was a gorgeous and hyper-realistic sculpture that is now widely regarded as one of the most iconic pieces of Renaissance art. *David* is a beautiful example of both Classicism, the rediscovery of Classical Greek architecture, art, and philosophy, and realistic human depiction.<sup>41</sup> The latter can be seen throughout the Sistine Chapel ceiling, and to incorporate it, Michelangelo drew inspiration from the world around him. While painting the ceiling, he used average Italian people as inspiration for his divine figures and background characters. As he was finishing his masterpiece, Michelangelo would go out into the streets of Vatican City to find inspiration for imagery from the passersby, then create chalk sketches of these average people to use their likenesses as faces for his biblical characters.<sup>42</sup> This emphasis on realistic imagery of characters was inspired by Humanism and the growing focus on mortal life in the Catholic religion. The confluence of Humanism and Catholicism was demonstrated on a religious level in the philosophy of the extremely popular Jesuit organization, and their practices such as missionary service.<sup>43</sup>

Also, Michelangelo included domestic imagery and portraits of famous historical families in his fresco, as it was meant to show the power of the human family, which was designed perfectly by God.<sup>44</sup> Michelangelo's cherub-like *ignudi* figures, who dramatically clutch decorative items and swathes of ribbons and have faces of children but much stronger bodies, were one example of his complex depiction of the human form.<sup>45</sup> John W. Dixon Jr. faultlessly described their significance in his essay when he wrote, "They are the consummate beauty of the human, in their youth and their magnificent strength and energy."<sup>46</sup> Around the time of Michelangelo's work on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, many of his peers in the top echelon of Renaissance art were also working on pieces that reflected some Humanist themes. One example is Raphael, who focused on two different aspects of Humanist ideology, secularism, and classicism, in his "The School of Athens," a fresco

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<sup>40</sup> Bolles School, "Humanism and its Influence," Bolles.org.

<sup>41</sup> Bolles School, "Humanism and its Influence," Bolles.org.

<sup>42</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 99.

<sup>43</sup> Cesareo, "The complex nature of Catholicism."

<sup>44</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 101.

<sup>45</sup> Dixon, *Christology*, 508-509.

<sup>46</sup> Dixon, *Christology*, 508.

illustrating a collection of the greatest intellectual figures in human history such as Socrates and Aristotle.<sup>47</sup> This piece was also commissioned by Pope Julius II, to be hung in his residence in the Vatican. Both Michelangelo and Raphael and other renowned artists of the time created physically attractive and anatomically accurate depictions of the human form in their artwork, which aligned with the Humanist movement's burgeoning fascination with man's physical beauty and potential. This can even be attributed to the developing study of anatomy and medicine in the sciences.<sup>48</sup> When considered along with his motifs of human action and his exploration of the humanity of the divine and the divinity of humanity, it is evident that Michelangelo's fresco is a work of art that foreshadowed the religious themes that would define Counter-Reformation Catholicism later in the sixteenth century.

### **The Church Responds**

Decades after Michelangelo finished the Sistine Chapel ceiling, the Catholic Church redefined its purpose at the Council of Trent in 1545, embracing ideas like Humanism that Michelangelo had included in his fresco years prior.<sup>49</sup> The Catholic Reformation was a response to a larger change in European ideas about faith, some of which Michelangelo's Ceiling addressed, and was prompted by Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Luther and other Protestant reformers disapproved of the Catholic Church's corrupt organizational structure and its system of profiting off of faith through practices like indulgences, where church officials would take money from their congregation to recompense for sins the people had committed or to a place in heaven for their souls.

The charismatic Protestant leaders encouraged a migration away from the Catholic Church to join new sects of Christianity, causing the officials in the Catholic Church to conclude changes needed to be made. The Council of Trent, which officially gathered in 1545, sought to address these issues. Notable clergymen convened with an agenda to answer the Protestant idea of "justification through faith alone," specifically to redefine the role of the pope, clergy, cardinals, and bishops, and provide clarity to how the Bible should be taught.<sup>50</sup> Seven months later, the Catholic Church emerged with a doctrine for the new

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<sup>47</sup> Bolles School, "Humanism and its Influence," Bolles.org.

<sup>48</sup> Rebecca Seiferle, "Renaissance Humanism Definition Overview and Analysis," ed. Kimberly Nichols, TheArtStory.org, last modified October 19, 2019, accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.theartstory.org/definition/renaissance-humanism/>.

<sup>49</sup> Bull, Michelangelo, 329.

<sup>50</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 329.

era, one centered around the idea that one's life on earth, specifically the good deeds and faith practiced as a human, determined one's salvation. This philosophy echoed the Humanistic ideas that Michelangelo had also drawn inspiration from through its emphasis on the power and beauty of mortal life and the importance of actions one makes on earth. As Robert Birely, a Jesuit historian of Counter-Reformation Catholicism, explains, "Rather the result of 'the discovery of the world and of man' was the desire and the demand for a style of religion or a spirituality that took more account of individuality and of life in the world around us."<sup>51</sup> This shift in religious doctrine was foreshadowed by the way artists such as Michelangelo portrayed God creatively, as a mighty yet anatomically human figure.

Furthermore, Michelangelo's inclusion of contemporary, non-Biblical figures and families in the ceiling was also indicative of the coming theological changes that ensured the Church served all its practitioners, not just its leaders.<sup>52</sup> The mortal emotion and interpersonal relationships that Michelangelo weaved into his Old Testament stories illustrated the changing ideology of the Catholic Church, as it refocused itself on defining the relationship between God and His children, and how Catholic people practiced their faith. Michelangelo's incredibly beautiful and detailed human figures represented the Renaissance's fascination with anatomy and science and celebrated God's most glorious creation, man. The humanist themes incorporated in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco ultimately alluded to larger theological changes that would eventually be made by the Catholic Church at the Council of Trent.

Art can both convey and elicit emotions and ideas of great magnitude and power. Michelangelo harnessed this ability whilst painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling and ended up creating a masterpiece indicative of the intricate complexities of Counter-Reformation Catholicism. Michelangelo's ability to incorporate Humanist ideology into his fresco not only signified that he was an artistic precursor to Catholic reformers but allowed the Sistine Chapel ceiling to become a worldwide emblem of the beauty of Catholic art and the evolution of Catholic theology during the Renaissance.

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Birely, quoted in Francesco C. Cesareo "The complex nature of Catholicism in the Renaissance (Review Essay)." *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Winter 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Bull, *Michelangelo*, 101.

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## **The White Paper of 1969: A Failed Attempt at Equity**

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### **Abstract**

During the late 1960s, the indigenous peoples of Canada suffered rates of poverty vastly disproportionate to their population and their complaints became harder to ignore. To remedy this injustice, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau proposed what would be known as the White Paper. Yet rather than ameliorate the rampant problems among indigenous communities, the paper's proposals were geared to benefit the federal government by relieving it of the responsibility to honor centuries-old treaties. Using newspaper publications and firsthand accounts from indigenous leaders, this paper will analyze the context during which the White Paper was formed, proposed, and ultimately rejected by the public. It will highlight the inconsistencies in the government's message of equality and deceptive policies contained in the White Paper and reveal the federal government's true goals. This paper ultimately argues that the White Paper was presented with disingenuous motives, breaking treaties under the guise of instilling equality, and was intended by the government as an assimilatory method whose ultimate aim was to gain control over indigenous lands and conclusively divide and conquer First Nation communities. This paper's criticisms of the federal government will be further buttressed by an examination of its actions in response to the White Paper's backlash.

## Introduction

On June 25, 1969, the Canadian government, led by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, released the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*. This publication, known as the White Paper, was supposed to offer a solution to indigenous economic, cultural, and social issues. In reality, it was a strategic move to neutralize and assimilate the Indigenous once and for all. It proposed to strip the Indigenous of their separate status and lands and transfer the federal government's responsibility for them to provincial governments, thereby circumventing its duty to honor Indigenous treaties. The White Paper would also absolve all governmental responsibilities from two centuries of treaties. Moreover, had the White Paper been adopted, the federal government would dissolve the existing financial costs of this marginalized population and non-indigenous businesses would legally have access to indigenous lands for mining and development. Ultimately, it is clear that the White Paper of 1969 was a tool to assimilate the Indigenous, while accessing their lands and dissolving once and for all the burden of honoring established treaties the federal government had been avoiding for decades.

## Leading Up to the White Paper

When Pierre Trudeau was elected the Prime Minister of Canada on April 6, 1968, he claimed that he wanted to turn Canada into a 'just society'. The White Paper, however, contradicted his stated objectives. Rather than consult the indigenous as partners in creating cultural and economic solutions, the government directed its resources to assimilate them through unilateral policies. Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society* served as a response to Trudeau's initiative in stating, "Indians sometimes think that if government authorities became convinced, they could solve the Indian problem by purchasing gallons of white paint and painting all of us white, they would not hesitate to try."<sup>1</sup>

Indigenous resentment against the government can be explained by studying the government's repeated failure to uphold indigenous treaties. These unfulfilled promises include approximately seventy treaties endorsed by both parties throughout history. Two particular examples are Treaty 8 and Treaty 6. In Treaty 8, signed June 21, 1899, the government promised quality education for indigenous youth, as evident in the Report of Commissioners for Treaty 8.<sup>2</sup> Government authorities asserted that indigenous were "assured that there was no need

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2013), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 36.

of any special stipulation, as it was the policy of the government to provide ... education of Indian children, and that the law... provided for non-interference with the religion of the Indians in schools maintained or assisted by the Government.”<sup>3</sup> Nearly seventy years later, it was apparent that neither the treaty nor the law had been upheld. An article from *The Province*, “Indian schooling full of problems” by Professor H. B. Hawthorn of April 10, 1969, cited a national survey conducted to examine the indigenous situation in Canada and explained, “schooling of Indian children today raises many questions. School for some ... is unpleasant, frightening, and painful. For these and some others, it is not so much adaptive as maladaptive.”<sup>4</sup> This article and the survey on which it was based demonstrated that the government’s promises were merely words and are but one of the many examples of the government’s empty promises.

On August 23, 1876, Treaty 6, also endorsed by the indigenous and federal government, promised free health care for the indigenous. It stated, “A medicine chest shall be kept at the house of each Indian agent for the use and benefit of the Indians at the direction of such agent.”<sup>5</sup> *Citizens Plus*, the formal response to the White Paper, clarified “the intent was that Indians should receive from the Federal Government whatever medical care could be made available.”<sup>6</sup> Despite this clause, “the Department of National Health and Welfare [held] the policy that medical health services are provided to Indians based on need and indigency—not based on treaty rights.”<sup>7</sup> This contradiction from the government, and its lack of action regarding Treaty 8, exhibits the indifference with which legally binding treaties were viewed and substantiates the government’s failure to uphold the privileges legally entitled to the indigenous.

Indigenous animosity towards the government was further fueled as the treaties’ signing occurred under dishonest circumstances. Owing to language differences and purposeful miscommunication by government officials, indigenous leaders were misled. There are

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<sup>3</sup> Canada. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *Treaty Texts: Treaty No. 8*. (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1899). <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028813/1581293624572#chp2>.

<sup>4</sup> Harry B. Hawthorn, “Indian schooling full of problems,” *Province*, April 10, 1969. <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2379893265%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>5</sup> Indian Chiefs of Alberta, “Foundational Document Citizens Plus,” *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2011): 218.

<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/aps/article/view/11690>.

<sup>6</sup> Indian Chiefs, “Foundational Document”, 219.

<sup>7</sup> Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 40.

countless cases of discrepancies between verbal agreements and final treaties. Cardinal identifies such discrepancies in the Report of the Commissioner for Treaty 8,<sup>8</sup> which states the indigenous were promised: “they [were] free to hunt and fish after the treaty as they would be if they never entered into it.”<sup>9</sup> The written treaty contradicts this statement, declaring they “shall have the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing ... subject to such regulations ... made by the Government.”<sup>10</sup> Blatantly negating the Commissioner’s verbalization, Treaty 8 shows government’s promises regarding hunting and fishing rights were merely a manipulative tactic for the indigenous to sign the treaty. Similarly, Treaty 6 and 7 were also created under pretenses about hunting and fishing rights.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in the Report of Commissioners for Treaty 8, indigenous were “promised that supplies of medicines would be ... distributed free to those of the Indians who might require them,”<sup>12</sup> but this promise was never reflected in official treaty articles either.

Another flaw with the treaties was the ambiguity of having “Indian status”, a significant aspect of indigenous identity. The legal implications of this status arose during the 20<sup>th</sup> century when only those with this status could live on reserves.<sup>13</sup> However, this special status was accompanied by layers of complicated qualifications due to the treaties.<sup>14</sup> According to the *Indian Act of 1876*, “Indian means a person who under this Act is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian.”<sup>15</sup> But this status was not inalienable—it was by white rules concerning gender. If an indigenous woman married a non-indigenous man, she lost her status, but the same did not apply to an indigenous man.<sup>16</sup> There were also divisions of indigenous into “treaty Indians” and “registered Indians” with each category having different rights and previously enfranchised indigenous bringing another layer of complexity.<sup>17</sup> *A Declaration of Indian Rights* by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, also argued, “the legal status of Indians as defined by the Indian Act is too restrictive and creates self-destruction of [their] ethnic

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<sup>8</sup> Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 34-35.

<sup>9</sup> Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Treaty Texts: Treaty No. 8*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Indian Chiefs, “Foundational Document”, 220 – 221.

<sup>12</sup> Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Treaty Texts: Treaty No. 8*.

<sup>13</sup> Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17-21.

<sup>15</sup> Indian Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5 (Can.), <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>.

<sup>16</sup> Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

identity.”<sup>18</sup> In summary, the treaties between the indigenous and federal governments were strife with issues regarding their formation, implementation, and content.

The late 1950s and early 1960s saw increasingly inhumane living conditions and poverty for the indigenous. In “The Plight Of British Columbia Indians” from *The Province* by Doug Wilkinson on July 31, 1953, Wilkinson explains, “the ghetto conditions of many reserves do not make for a well-balanced young Indian population [and] the Indian situation ... is unsatisfactory and inadequate ... Health, welfare, hospital care, and schooling, were it not for various religious agencies, would be reduced drastically.”<sup>19</sup> Because the government was failing to fulfill its legal responsibility to provide services, religious charities were unfairly burdened with this responsibility.

In the *Toronto Daily Star* on May 24, 1969, Joseph Dufour, previously a director of the Indian Development branch in Ontario, explained that he resigned to “help the government to look again at the shocking conditions of the Indian in Ontario.”<sup>20</sup> Dufour described the reality of various indigenous communities he visited during his time as director: “We saw the poverty, we saw the apathy, the ill-health, the sores on the children’s faces.”<sup>21</sup> Similar articles were released from other notable Canadian news articles, including the *Globe and Mail* and *The Ottawa Citizen*. These reports of the indigenous’ poor conditions and the lack of government action, however, still did not instigate proper governmental responses.

The White Paper was ultimately created due to the report, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*, commissioned by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson in 1964. The first volume of this survey, known as the *Hawthorn Report*, was published by Professor Harry B. Hawthorn in October 1966. Professor Hawthorn “made 91 specific recommendations on economic and

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<sup>18</sup> The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, *A Declaration of Indian Rights The B.C. Indian Position Paper*, (Vancouver, B.C.: n.p., 1970), 10, [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ubcic/pages/1440/attachments/original/1484861419/3\\_1970\\_11\\_17\\_DeclarationOfIndianRightsTheBCIndianPositionPaper\\_web\\_sm.pdf?1484861419](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ubcic/pages/1440/attachments/original/1484861419/3_1970_11_17_DeclarationOfIndianRightsTheBCIndianPositionPaper_web_sm.pdf?1484861419).

<sup>19</sup> Doug Wilkinson, “The Plight of British Columbia Indians,” *Province*, July 31, 1953. <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2368992147%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Dufour, “The condition of the Ontario Indian is shocking,” *Toronto Daily Star*, May 24, 1969.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1433882046%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>21</sup> Dufour, “The condition”.

political development, local government, the role of the Indian affairs department and federal-provincial relations.”<sup>22</sup> Among these recommendations was proposed that “Indians should be regarded as ‘citizens plus’; in addition to the normal rights and duties of citizenship, Indians possess certain additional rights as charter members of the Canadian community.”<sup>23</sup> There were also suggestions regarding indigenous economic development, treaty rights, federal-provincial relations, and more.<sup>24</sup>

## The White Paper

This White Paper was born shortly before December 5, 1968, when the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that “major proposals on Indian affairs will be submitted to Prime Minister Trudeau Friday by the National Indian Brotherhood.”<sup>25</sup> The Brotherhood was established in 1968 to represent the Treaty Indians in Canada. Soon after, the *Global and Mail*, on December 4, 1968, reported that the “National Indian Brotherhood asked the federal Government yesterday to let it take part in federal-provincial conferences to amend the Canadian constitution.”<sup>26</sup> According to the article, “the Brotherhood... will also be meeting with Indian Affairs and Northern Development Minister Jean Chretien.”<sup>27</sup>

Initially, the situation looked promising. On December 7, 1968, the *Ottawa Citizen* published “Indian delegates happy with Trudeau meeting”, detailing that after a meeting with Trudeau, members of the Brotherhood were seen smiling, which was interpreted as good news for the indigenous.<sup>28</sup> Finally, an article from the *Windsor Star* on December

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<sup>22</sup> Dennis Bell, “Indian unrest ahead?” *Windsor Star*, August 15, 1969.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2243587606%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>23</sup> Bell, “Indian unrest”.

<sup>24</sup> Harry B. Hawthorn, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies* (1966), 6, <http://caid.ca/HawRep1a1966.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Bob Hill, “New Indian brotherhood will present brief to PM,” *Ottawa Citizen*, December 5, 1968.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2338799154%3Faccountid%3>.

<sup>26</sup> Loren Lind, “Indian group wants federal Government to give it part in constitution meetings,” *Globe and Mail*, December 6, 1968.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1242387418%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>27</sup> Hill, “New Indian brotherhood”.

<sup>28</sup> Canadian Press, “Indian delegates happy with Trudeau meeting,” *Ottawa Citizen*, December 7, 1968.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2338865143%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

24, 1968, reported that the Brotherhood had presented six demands and threatened to terminate the consultations regarding changes to the Indian Act if their requests were not met.<sup>29</sup> This was the beginning of the White Paper's formation.

After years of mistreatment, many indigenous were excited about the new policy paper as they believed it would finally address their problems. When the White Paper was released on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1969, they were disappointed. The government had ignored the advice of indigenous leaders and instead proposed ineffective and counterproductive policies.

Perhaps the most drastic measure of the White Paper was the government's proposal to abolish the *Indian Act* to "end the legal distinction between Indians and other Canadians."<sup>30</sup> This would remove any legal references to their unique status, effectively erasing them from the system. In Cardinal's recollections of the consultations between indigenous leaders and the government, "the Indian people had stated that they did not want to discuss any changes in the *Indian Act* until the government had settled the outstanding issues of treaties, aboriginal rights, and claims."<sup>31</sup> Yet, the government's inclusion of this clause in the White Paper proved that they had ignored indigenous wishes – the first sign of the government's true motives.

Even if the indigenous had been willing to discuss amendments to the Indian Act, abolishing the entire act was not viable. As Cardinal explained, "[they] would rather continue to live in the bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender [their] sacred rights."<sup>32</sup> In *A Declaration of Indian Rights: The B.C. Indian Position Paper*, the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs explained, "[r]ecognition of Indian status is essential for justice. [They] intend to enjoy the same rights, privileges, and immunities as [their] non-Indian fellow citizens but also to enjoy certain additional rights due [them] because ... [their] special status ... with [their] aboriginal rights [are] mandatory."<sup>33</sup> In other words, their status was non-negotiable. Yet, by abolishing the *Indian Act*, the government was

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<sup>29</sup> Boyce Richardson, "Indians: Are they ready to go alone?," *Windsor Star*, December 24, 1968.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2243438525%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Chretien, *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* (Ottawa, ON: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1969), 11, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010189/1100100010191>.

<sup>31</sup> Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*, 115.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, *A Declaration of Indian Rights*, 10.

not just removing discriminatory legislation, but committing a worse evil by fully assimilating the indigenous.

This proposal also directly conflicted with the Hawthorn Report, which stated, “It is not incumbent on Indians to give up their special community status for the sake of equal treatment in areas which that status is irrelevant.”<sup>34</sup> It is important to note that the government’s decision to abolish the Indian Act was founded on the basis that both the Act and Indian status were the source of discrimination against indigenous, a view the *Hawthorn Report* rejected. Though the government commissioned this report to assist in the creation of the White Paper, it was prepared to dismiss the report’s advice once it became inconvenient. If the government had genuinely wanted to fix prejudiced legislation, it would have offered to amend the *Indian Act*. The purpose of this deceptive clause was not, as Trudeau originally claimed, to eliminate indigenous discrimination, but to eliminate a charter of protection with cultural significance and exacerbate indigenous assimilation.

The White Paper also discussed the transfer of indigenous oversight from the federal to provincial governments which would “take over the same responsibility for Indians that they have for other citizens.”<sup>35</sup> This proposal was met with apprehension from both the indigenous and provincial governments, which was understandable as the latter had no experience dealing with the indigenous and their issues. Like much of the White Paper, this clause was written with only the federal government’s best interest by allowing them to relinquish the burden of indigenous issues and reduce expenses.

The White Paper also addressed ownership of land reserves on which registered indigenous lived. The federal government proposed to allow the indigenous to “control Indian lands and to acquire title to them.”<sup>36</sup> According to the paper, allowing the indigenous to have control of their lands would give them the freedom to use the land in whatever way they liked: “The Government believes that the Indian people should have the opportunity to develop the resources of their reserves so they may contribute to their well-being and the economy of the nation.”<sup>37</sup> Upon closer examination, it is evident this clause benefited only the government as the indigenous would pay taxes for services for the lands. More importantly, by having the indigenous sell their lands individually, non-natives could buy and exploit the lands for uses such as oil and gas

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<sup>34</sup> Hawthorn, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada*, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Chretien, *Statement of the Government*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Chretien, *Statement of the Government*, 16.

production, boosting the economy. Because the indigenous lands were previously protected by treaties, this was the only way for the Canadian government to gain access to these lands and finally divide and conquer the indigenous.

Additionally, similar to many other conflicts between the indigenous and the government, this clause highlighted the government's inability to consider the indigenous perspective. As cited in *Citizens Plus*, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta stated "The Indians are the beneficial (actual) owners of the lands. The legal title has been held for us by the Crown to prevent the sale or breaking up of our land. We are opposed to any system of allotment that would give individuals ownership rights to sell."<sup>38</sup> The opposition to the White Paper's land ownership clause further proves that the Indigenous had no input on the paper, exposing the government's selfish motivations.

Furthermore, the Indian Affairs Department was to be shut down within five years of the paper's release, transferring its responsibilities to other government branches. This, too, was inconsistent with the advice of the *Hawthorn Report*, which recommended more investment into the economic development for the Indigenous, "entailing a much larger budget and staff for the Indian Affairs Branch."<sup>39</sup> Instead, the federal government proposed to "wind up that part of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development which deals with Indian Affairs."<sup>40</sup>

This proposal lacked practicality and a coherent plan. The indigenous' position was that their status quo was being unfairly ignored. If this new clause were adopted, the Indigenous would have to go through multiple different departments for each of their grievances, complicating matters and resulting in less productive change while the government reallocated funding and decreased its costs.

Not only was the government bent on assimilating the Indigenous by removing their special status and altering their land tenure, but they also deliberately downplayed the Indigenous rights pledged in longstanding treaties. Despite the outcry from many indigenous groups to finally give them what they deserved, the government's response was underwhelming. They stated "The terms and effects of the treaties between the Indian people and the Government are widely misunderstood. A plain reading of the words used in the

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<sup>38</sup> Indian Chiefs, "Foundational Document", 198.

<sup>39</sup> Hawthorn, *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Chretien, *Statement of the Government*, 7.

treaties reveals the limited promises which were included in them,”<sup>41</sup> implying that they owed the indigenous nothing further. This infuriated the indigenous whose primary hope for the White Paper was recognition of their treaty rights. Ultimately, the government’s denial of rights confirmed suspicions that its true intentions for the White Paper were self-serving.

### **The Direct Aftermath and the Red Paper**

The White Paper caused backlash from an increasingly united indigenous community. Harold Cardinal, a Cree citizen and “one of the most articulate and influential spokesmen for Canada’s Indian people”<sup>42</sup>, was the President of the Indian Association of Alberta and a member of the National Indian Brotherhood. He was also the author of *The Unjust Society* which he wrote in response to the White Paper. In it, Cardinal addresses each clause in the White Paper, while outlining its flaws. Additionally, Cardinal was part of the consultation process with the government for the White Paper, and his experience with government officials was included.

In 1970, the Indian Chiefs of Alberta, led by Cardinal, formally rejected the White Paper with the foundational document *Citizens Plus* also known as the Red Paper, stating, “[they] have studied carefully the contents of the Government White Paper on Indians and [they] have concluded that it offers despair instead of hope.”<sup>43</sup> The Red Paper proposed alternative plans in place of the White Paper. Specifically, it explained “the only notable way to maintain [their] culture is for [them] to remain as Indians. To preserve [their] culture it is necessary to preserve [their] status, rights, lands, and traditions.”<sup>44</sup> It also discussed treaties, land control, and economic development and received a positive public response. An article from the *Globe and Mail* stated, “The Indian community is as diverse as any other and this is why the red paper’s gradual approach, as opposed to Mr. Chretien’s immediacy, deserves special study.”<sup>45</sup> This confirmed that a policy paper addressing indigenous issues was able to be successful. It was the government’s

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<sup>41</sup> Chretien, *Statement of the Government*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> Patrick O’Callaghan, “Canada’s Indians rise in anger,” *Ottawa Citizen*, December 9, 1969.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2338683801%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>43</sup> Indian Chiefs, “Foundational Document”, 189.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>45</sup> “The Indians’ Answer,” *Globe and Mail*, June 9, 1970.

<http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F1242162095%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

approach to the White Paper that resulted in its downfall, not the concept.

On November 17, 1970, The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs released *A Declaration of Indian Rights: The B.C. Indian Position Paper*, another response formally rejecting the White Paper. The first part discussed self-determination and their requests regarding topics including the Indian Act, education, and taxes. They argued that “new legislation must reflect the real intent of past government obligations. It must guarantee Government commitments to its treaties, to its legislative commitments, and verbal promises,”<sup>46</sup> condemning the government’s unfulfilled treaty promises. The rest of the response addressed indigenous rights and other legislations and proposed programs that would “provide the resources to encourage Indians to speak up for their rights.”<sup>47</sup>

In addition to legislative responses, the White Paper also sparked a new wave of indigenous activism among the younger generation. The *Edmonton Journal* reported on July 9, 1970, that “in the past year, Indian leaders from coast to coast have condemned the white paper, some in the quiet sober fashion of an older generation, some in a militant provocative fashion of a newer generation”<sup>48</sup>, demonstrating the nationwide impact of the White Paper.

### **Long-Term Aftermath**

In the end, the backlash against the White Paper and the federal government proved to be effective—the paper was formally retracted in 1970. In an interview with Jean Chretien in the *Edmonton Journal*, on July 9, 1970, Chretien stated, “Prime Minister Trudeau concedes that the government’s White Paper had been perhaps, a bit naïve, too theoretical, with too much tidy idealism.”<sup>49</sup> The White Paper’s failure was not theoretically based, but because it was a poorly disguised move for the federal government to overrule land treaties and assimilate the Indigenous. As such, Chretien’s comment highlighted that, even after the fallout of the White Paper, the government still refused to acknowledge its mistakes and would rather continue disguising its true intentions.

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<sup>46</sup> Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, *A Declaration of Indian Rights*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Ben Tierney, “Indians head into the mainstream,” *Edmonton Journal*, July 9, 1970. <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F2397532938%3Faccountid%3D14771>.

<sup>49</sup> Tierney, “Indians”.

When asked about plans, Chretien stated, “It was the Indians who said we had gone too far, too fast with the White Paper ... We’ll go at a slower pace. We’ll take five, ten fifteen, twenty years. It’s up to them. We’re flexible,”<sup>50</sup> again, failing to address the true problems with the White Paper and, instead, blaming the indigenous. The government’s repeated inadequate apologies and responses further damaged its reputation and had significant consequences on government-indigenous relations.

Finally, on April 17, 1982, the *Constitution Act of 1982* was passed by Pierre Trudeau cementing the indigenous people’s special status in Canada by stating, “The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.”<sup>51</sup> Though this was established after numerous poor government decisions, it was an important step that ensured the permanent status of the indigenous people of Canada.

## Conclusion

The federal government’s self-serving proposal of the White Paper of 1969 had an unexpectedly significant impact; instead of establishing federal control over indigenous lands and generating financial gains, it generated constitutional changes and a new wave of indigenous activism. This document, initially justified as a policy paper to end discrimination, was revealed to be a method of dividing and conquering the indigenous nations. Although there have been successful steps taken to rectify the government’s previous unjust actions since 1969, there is much still to be accomplished. The government must continue to take steps towards establishing equity and repair the historic mistrust that remains between Canada and its First Nation partners.

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<sup>50</sup> Tierney, “Indians”.

<sup>51</sup> *The Constitution Act, 1982*, Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11, [https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/schedule-b-to-the-canada-act-1982-uk-1982-c-11/latest/schedule-b-to-the-canada-act-1982-uk-1982-c-11.html#PART\\_II\\_RIGHTS\\_OF\\_THE\\_ABORIGINAL\\_PEOPLES\\_OF\\_CANADA\\_\\_38994](https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/stat/schedule-b-to-the-canada-act-1982-uk-1982-c-11/latest/schedule-b-to-the-canada-act-1982-uk-1982-c-11.html#PART_II_RIGHTS_OF_THE_ABORIGINAL_PEOPLES_OF_CANADA__38994).

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## **The Nazi Book Burnings: Implications and Reflection on German Literature**

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### **Abstract**

On May 10, 1933, “all afternoon, Nazi raiding parties had gone into public and private libraries, throwing onto the streets such books, as Dr. Goebbels in his supreme wisdom had decided were unfit for Nazi Germany.”<sup>1</sup> From May to June, the National Socialist German Students’ League and the German Student Body joined the SA and SS in their efforts “to cleanse libraries of un-German literature.”<sup>2</sup> Due to the radical censorship of the Nazi regime, more than 2,500 writers left Germany in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup>

This paper aims to illustrate both the short-term and long-term implications of the Nazi book burnings on German literature. Outlining the different periods of literature both globally and within Germany will reveal how literature is shaped by its historical context. By examining the global reactions to the Nazi book burnings and their consequences on German authors, we can understand how the Nazi book burnings transformed the focus of German literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis P. Lochner, “The Book Burning: Report by Louis P. Lochner, Head of the Berlin Bureau of the Associated Press (May 10, 1933)” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.gbi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1575](http://germanhistorydocs.gbi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1575).

<sup>2</sup> Lochner, “The Book Burning: Report by Louis P. Lochner.”

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Periods of Literature

### *Medieval Period (c. 450-1500 CE)*

Most literature at the beginning of this period was oral, and common prose and translations were typically religious in nature.<sup>4</sup> Early Old English poems include “Beowulf”, “The Wanderer”, and “The Seafarer”. In 1066 CE, many French authors grew in popularity, including Chretien de Troyes, Jeun de Meun, and Marie de France. Towards the end of the period, we see the emergence of notable poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer, the “Gawain” Poet, Boccaccio, Petrarch, Dante, and Christine de Pisan.<sup>5</sup>

### *Renaissance Period (c. 1500-1660 CE)*

The Renaissance Period spread over many regions of Europe and is often subdivided into 5 parts: the Early Tudor Period, the Elizabethan Age, the Jacobean Age, the Caroline Age, and the Commonwealth Period.<sup>6</sup> While these subdivisions categorize the Renaissance shifts in England, we see prominent writers from different regions of Europe such as Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, John Donne, John Milton, Machiavelli, Thomas Browne, and Ludovico Ariosto.<sup>7</sup>

### *Neoclassicism (1600-1785)*

“Neoclassical” refers to the increased influence of Classical literature during this period.<sup>8</sup> Many writers closely imitated older poets, such as Virgil and Horace. At the same time, this literary period is also marked by the Enlightenment where literature is guided by logic and reasoning. Admired poets and authors of this period include John Locke, Voltaire, Alexander Pope, Jean Racine, Dr. Samuel Johnson, and Moliere.<sup>9</sup>

### *Romanticism (1785-1832)*

The Romantic Period revolves around nature, imagination, and individuality, and yet it crafts the growth of smaller subdivisions such as Transcendentalism and Gothic writings. Romantics comprise Mary Shelley, William Blake, Jane Austen, and Johann von Goethe in

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Burgess, “A Brief Overview of British Literary Periods.” ThoughtCo. Feb. 3, 2020. <https://www.thoughtco.com/british-literary-periods-739034>.

<sup>5</sup> “Literary Periods.” Leland Speed Library. Mississippi College Sept. 30, 2019. <https://mc.libguides.com/eng/literaryperiods>.

<sup>6</sup> “Literary Periods.”

<sup>7</sup> Burgess, “A Brief Overview of British Literary Periods.”

<sup>8</sup> “Literary Periods.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Germany.<sup>10</sup> This period ended with the passage of the Reform Bill in England, initiating the Victorian Era.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Realism (1832-1914)*

The Realist period grew from the rejection of Romanticism, increased interest in the Scientific Method, and significant influence of rational philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Many authors in this period wrote fictional stories that accurately represented life within different contexts. From Realism rose Naturalism in the late nineteenth century, where writers used heredity and history to define character. Notable writers include Mark Twain, Henry James, Honore de Balzac, William Dean Howells, Gustave Flaubert, and George Eliot.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Modernism (1914-1945)*

The Modernist Period is marked by the two World Wars and is characterized by bold experimentation with style, form, and subject matter, weaving narrative, verse, and drama together to create a complete piece.<sup>14</sup> The most notable authors of this period are Seamus Heaney, Virginia Woolf, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Post-Modernism (1945-Present)*

The Post-Modernist period begins with the end of World War II and is shaped by a direct response to modernism.<sup>16</sup> Many modern writers, such as T.S. Eliot, Morrison, and Beckett, experimented with metafiction and fragmented poetry. Authors including Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Luis Borges, and Salman Rushdie flourished for their surrealistic writings within the conventions of realism: Magic Realism.<sup>17</sup>

As shown, each period of literature is characterized by its historical context. This reflection of political, economic, and social atmospheres on literature proves the changing nature of literature and foreshadows the literary effects of the Nazi book burnings. Outlining the global periods in literature gives us a comprehensive understanding of

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<sup>10</sup> "Literary Periods."

<sup>11</sup> Burgess, "A Brief Overview of British Literary Periods."

<sup>12</sup> Donna M. Campbell, "Realism in American Literature, 1860-1890." Literary Movements. Washington State University. Sept. 7, 2015, <https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/realism.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, "Realism in American Literature."

<sup>14</sup> Burgess, "A Brief Overview of British Literary Periods."

<sup>15</sup> "Literary Periods."

<sup>16</sup> Burgess, "A Brief Overview of British Literary Periods."

<sup>17</sup> "Literary Periods."

shifting literary themes within German literature as a supplement to changing political environments.

### Literature in Pre-War Germany

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Germany experienced a smaller literary period that rose from Naturalism: Aestheticism. This movement is defined by “the belief that the work of art needs no moral or political use beyond its existence as a beautiful object.” Magazines such as *Pan* and *Die Weissen Blätter* helped spread Aestheticist works, promoting short texts that experimented with this then-modern technique. Central works included Stefan George’s early lyric poetry and Arthur Schnitzler’s dramas and short stories.<sup>18</sup>

Aestheticism gave way to the emergence of German Modernism, which clustered together Expressionism, Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), and Dada.<sup>19</sup> Most recognized, Expressionism began in 1910 and heightened during World War I as a response to chaos and suffering.<sup>20</sup> Because the decades before the war were characterized by relative security and confidence, the literary backlash was immediate as the war became a crisis of civilization and progress.<sup>21</sup> Writers used this literary Expressionist stage to bring about a transformation of consciousness in the audience. From Ernst Toller’s plays *Die Wandlung* and *Masse-Mensch* to Georg Kaiser’s dramas, *Gas I* and *Gas II*, the protagonists worked to lead their community away from violence toward peace, exemplifying the correlation between literary themes and historical context.<sup>22</sup>

After the war, literary representation brought on heated debates, as subjective experience and authenticity limited literature’s ability to mediate reality. “The established psychological categories of narration ceased to be effective in expressing the traumatic experiences of the technologically advanced modern warfare and its cruelty.”<sup>23</sup> And yet, a multitude of novels were written about the war, claiming to give an authentic account of the front. These prevalent works include Arnold Zweig’s *Der Streit um den Sergeanten* (1927), Ernst Glaeser’s *Jahrgang 1902*

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<sup>18</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, “German Literature.” Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/art/German-literature>.

<sup>19</sup> Jaeger, “German Literature.”

<sup>20</sup> Bernd Huppauf, “Literature (Germany).” International Encyclopedia of the First World War. Oct. 8, 2014. [https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/literature\\_germany](https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/literature_germany).

<sup>21</sup> Huppauf, “Literature (Germany).”

<sup>22</sup> Jaeger, “German Literature.”

<sup>23</sup> Huppauf, “Literature (Germany).”

(1928), Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928), and Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929).

The Weimar Republic, formed in 1919, brought a new, liberal atmosphere to the chaotic environment set by World War I. As such, Weimar Republic's literature is noteworthy for its "representation of competing political perspectives, its innovative aesthetic practices, and its insight into a society struggling to redefine itself," expanding German Modernism.<sup>24</sup> In *Der Steppenwolf*, author, Herman Hesse illustrates the divisions between the conventional and artistic worlds, the feminine and masculine, reason and hallucination. The unfinished novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, written by Robert Musil, employs stream-of-consciousness narration, montage, essayistic reflection, and experimental visionary passage to explore individual consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

Each shift in German literature is characterized by the changes in the political, economic, and/or social agendas of the time. From World War II expressionism to Weimar modernism, these changes set the stage for the long-lasting effects of the Nazi book burnings.

### **The Nazi Book Burning**

As the Nazis rose to power in the 1930s, their implementation of Gleichschaltung forced German arts and culture to align with Nazi ideology. This resulted in the unparalleled execution of book burnings throughout Germany. The unhindered National-Socialist power over public discourse quickly disconnected German literature from Europe and the rest of the world.<sup>26</sup> The Nazi book burnings demonstrated that "the Nazi war on un-German individual expression had begun."<sup>27</sup>

The act of "book burning" refers to the ritual destruction by fire of books and other written materials. Carried out in public, they represent censorship and opposition.<sup>28</sup> The burning of books under the Nazi regime in 1933 is arguably the most famous book burning in history. Ironically, this 1933 book burning mirrored the 1817 demonstration for a unified Germany, where German student

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<sup>24</sup> James M. Skidmore. "Literature of the Weimar Republic." The Literary Encyclopedia. Feb 9, 2005.

<https://www.litencyc.com/php/stopics.php?rec=true&UID=1524>.

<sup>25</sup> Jaeger, "German Literature."

<sup>26</sup> Huppauf, "Literature (Germany)."

<sup>27</sup> "Book Burnings in Germany, 1933." PBS.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goebbels-burnings/>.

<sup>28</sup> "Book Burning." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/book-burning>.

associations burned anti-national and reactionary works deemed “un-German” on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther’s 95 Theses.<sup>29</sup>

In 1933, to carry out Gleichschaltung, the Nazi government eradicated cultural organizations for Jews, degenerates, and suspected political enemies. To further this effort, the Nazi regime, under orders of Joseph Goebbels, used the support among the youth to “synchronize the literary community.” The book-burning event began with the nationwide proclamation for “Action against the un-German Spirit” on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1933, by the Nazi German Student Association.<sup>30</sup> Local chapters collaborated to create blacklists of “un-German” authors, supply the press with commissioned articles, sponsor Nazi public speakers, and schedule radio broadcast times. To mimic the 1817 book burning and Martin Luther’s 95 Theses, students, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, wrote their 12 “theses,” declaring the necessities for a “pure national culture and language.” These students constructed placards, attacking Jewish intellect, demanding German purification, and claiming that “universities be centers of German nationalism.”<sup>31</sup>

On May 10, 1933, university students across Germany burned more than 25,000 books considered un-German, solidifying the state censorship and cultural control by the Nazis. Pillaging from public and university libraries, students threw books and written collections into bonfires ceremoniously. These right-wing students paraded around the bonfires, “against the un-German spirit,” making “so-called fire oaths.” In Berlin, more than 40,000 people gathered to hear Goebbels’s speech, where he explicitly states, “I consign to the flames the writings of Heinrich Mann, Ernst Glaser, Erich Kastner.”<sup>32</sup>

These students burned the works of communists and Karl Marx, well-known socialists including Bertolt Brecht and August Bebel, bourgeois writers like Arthur Schnitzler, and corrupting foreign influences such as Ernest Hemingway. They burned Thomas Mann’s works supporting the Weimar Republic, burned Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, burned Helen Keller’s beliefs in social justice for the disabled, workers, and women, burned contemporary works by Jewish authors including Franz Werfel, Max Brod, and Stefan Zweig. They burned the poems of the German Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine, who wrote the famous admonition: “Dort, wo man Bücher

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen”: “Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people.”<sup>33</sup>

In 34 university towns across Germany, the May 10<sup>th</sup> book burning was a victory that received widespread news coverage. Radio broadcasts allowed numerous Germans to hear radical speeches and ceremonial chants.<sup>34</sup> The fire oaths, recited by the students, twisted words written by the authors whose books were burning.<sup>35</sup> “Against decadence and moral decay / For discipline and decency in family and state,” is an example targeting Heinrich Mann, Ernst Glaser, and Erich Kastner. They spoke against Erich Maria Remarque: “Against literary betrayal of the soldiers of the World War / For the education of the nation in the spirit of standing to battle.” In contempt of Marx and communism, students chanted, “Against class struggle and materialism / For national community and an idealistic lifestyle.”<sup>36</sup> These fire oaths were constructed and circulated by the German Student Association, not the Nazi regime, demonstrating the far-reaching support the Youth had for the Nazi ideology.

Immediately, literature was stigmatized, and a multitude of authors, both German and foreign, were disgraced. As one of many short-term consequences of the Nazi book burnings, this radicalization of literature mirrored the radical atmosphere of Germany at the time.

### **Immediate Reactions**

However, because this event was broadcasted globally, it sparked an immediate response in the United States as German literary blacklists circulated. On the same day as the German book burning, May 10<sup>th</sup>, organized by the American Jewish Congress, a vast number of demonstrators took to the streets, protesting Nazi attacks on Jews and literature.<sup>37</sup> Demonstrations occurred in over a dozen American cities including Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Chicago, but the largest gathering took place in New York City, where more than 100,000 people protested the book burnings in Germany for more than six hours.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Fire Oaths.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/fire-oaths>.

<sup>36</sup> “Fire Oaths.”

<sup>37</sup> “Immediate American Responses to the Nazi Book Burnings.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/immediate-american-responses-to-the-nazi-book-burnings?parent=en%2F7631>.

<sup>38</sup> “Immediate American Responses to the Nazi Book Burnings.”

American newspapers unanimously condemned the Nazi bonfires: some newspapers called the actions of the German students “silly, ineffective, and infantile.” Ludwig Lewisohn of *The Nation* foreshadowed “the dawning of a dark age, and [the] insane assault against the life of the mind, intellectual values, and the rights of the human spirit.” *The Nation* claimed the German book burnings “as a pagan ritual for Nazi henchmen, Prussian militarists, monocled industrialists, SA thugs, and corrupted Hitler Youth.” A newspaper that advocated social justice and Jewish rights *Forward* published an editorial cartoon illustrating Hitler “wielding a torch for a cartload of books.” Thomas Mann described the Nazi book burnings as “an act of national drunkenness enveloped in a stupid ceremony.” Helen Keller wrote an open letter to German students, asserting the “enduring power of ideas against tyranny.”<sup>39</sup> These reactions exemplify the short-term consequences of the Nazi book burnings: polarization and politicization of literature.

### Consequences on German Writers

At this point, many writers left Germany in fear and exile. However, because of the “exclusionary immigration policy” and “narrow quotas,” many of these emigres had difficulty escaping Germany. With the help of private organizations such as the League of American Writers, emigres received money, shelter, visas, contracts, and much more, to the point where more than 200,000 immigrants from Nazi Germany reached America.<sup>40</sup> Alvin Johnson, director of the New School for Social Research, coordinated “a faculty of 15 émigré social scientists” to form a “University in Exile.” Stephen Duggan led the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars to help find employment for many emigres, “supporting over 355 displaced scholars and professionals”. While many of the blacklisted authors successfully fled Germany, numerous authors including Erich Muhsam and Carl von Ossietzky “remained trapped in Germany and died after imprisonment and torture in concentration camps.”<sup>41</sup>

Walter Benjamin was a German-Jewish critic and philosopher who died in 1940, after 7 years in exile. During the height of Weimar Culture, he advocated for radical modernity and wrote a collection of works interlacing fiction, cultural analysis, and memoir to produce *One Way Street* and *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, now considered “modern

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<sup>39</sup> “Immediate American Responses to the Nazi Book Burnings.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

masterpieces.”<sup>42</sup> Because he grew up in an “assimilated, well-to-do Jewish family,” and openly opposed German involvement in WWI, he was forced to flee to Paris in 1933, “like almost every important German intellectual of the day.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Bertolt Brecht is another example: a German poet, playwright, and theatrical reformer, Brecht strayed away from the “conventions of theatrical illusions” and “developed drama as a social and ideological forum for leftist causes.”<sup>44</sup> Brecht openly shared his disappointment with how civilization collapsed with World War I and became a Marxist. He similarly went into exile in 1933, when his books were burned and his citizenship withdrawn. During his exile was when many of his plays gained popularity including *Der Aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*, a parable of Hitler’s rise to power set in prewar Chicago. Fortunately for Brecht, he was able to return permanently to Berlin and even established his own company, the Berliner Ensemble.<sup>45</sup>

Another renowned author whose life and work provide key insight into the life of German writers is Rudolf Ditzen, more commonly known under his pen name, Hans Fallada. Despite being one of the leading exponents of Realism, specifically Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), Fallada suffered greatly, spending most of his life in asylums, prison, and rehab. Although he had the opportunity to leave Nazi Germany, Fallada stayed in Berlin until he died in 1947. He once described how writing “only what he saw” consumed him:

From the minute I sit down and write the first line, I am lost, a compelling force is in command. That force dictates just how and how much I must write, whether I want to or not, even if it makes me ill... A hundred times, I have wondered what it is that drives me so. [... My need to write is like] a poison that I could not shake out of my mind or my body, I was thirsty for it, I wanted to drink more of it, to drink it always, every day for the rest of my life.<sup>46</sup>

This intense passion allowed him to truthfully depict life in Nazi Germany. Published in 1932, *Little Man—What Now?* illustrates a working-class couple struggling to find employment in Berlin during the

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<sup>42</sup> Eiland, Howard, et al. “Walter Benjamin: A Contradictory and Mobile Whole.” Adapted from

*Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life*. Harvard University Press. <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/features/walter-benjamin.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Eiland, Howard, et al. “Walter Benjamin: A Contradictory and Mobile Whole.”

<sup>44</sup> “Bertolt Brecht.” Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertolt-Brecht>

<sup>45</sup> “Bertolt Brecht.”

<sup>46</sup> Liesl Schillinger, “Postcards from the Edge.” *New York Times*. Feb. 27, 2009. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/01/books/review/Schillinger-t.html>

global depression. An international hit, this book was translated into more than 20 languages and was made as a German and American film in the 1930s. In 1944, Fallada published *The Drinker* where the main character recklessly drinks and is institutionalized. In the asylum, a doctor points out that “in his marriage, his wife is the guiding hand, the superior partner.”<sup>47</sup> This novel portrays the intimate implementation of Nazi ideology, where men needed to be superior and dominating in a marriage.

Perhaps, his most famous novel is *Every Man Dies Alone*, published in 1947. It is a “story of a working-class Berlin couple who took on the Third Reich with a postcard campaign intended to foment rebellion against Hitler’s Germany.” This couple made inflammatory postcards as a form of protest at the fact that their son died on the front. A quote from the book reveals the efforts of dissenting Germans: “No one could risk more than his life. Each according to his strength and abilities, but the main thing was, you fought back.” Set in wartime Berlin, this story mirrors the life of real Berliners, Otto and Elise Hampel, who led a postcard campaign at the height of Hitler’s power. In fact, after their execution in 1942, a poet and postwar culture official delivered the Gestapo files of this couple to Fallada, trusting his literary talent to objectively retell their story.<sup>48</sup> And he did, in 24 days. Unfortunately, he died just a few weeks before the publication of *Every Man Dies Alone*. Not only does Fallada’s life represent the long-term consequences of the Nazi book burnings on authors, but his works clearly demonstrate the reflection of political themes onto literature.

Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and Hans Fallada are just a few of many renowned writers gravely impacted by the book burnings and Nazi control of Germany. And yet the implications of the Nazi book burnings do not end here.

### **German Literature after the Defeat of the Nazis**

Immediately after the end of World War II, it was “Stunde Null” (zero hours) in Germany, where writers had the opportunity to start over and reconnect with global literature.<sup>49</sup> Bertolt Brecht, who returned to East Berlin in 1949, developed a unique plot style that “loosely linked a series of episodes.” He even employed a popular technique of the time: *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect), meant to “discourage empathy and stimulate critical responses” with the audience. Short stories were written

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<sup>47</sup> Schillinger, “Postcards from the Edge.”

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jaeger, “German Literature.”

abundantly, but employed a “straightforward, realistic style [...] to reinforce the change of values that had taken place in Germany since the end of the war.” In East Germany, there was a fierce communist resistance to Nazism, in which literary Socialist Realism grew. This resulted in rare formal experimentation and, more frequently, a straightforward social reality, modeling ideal choices to be made by readers in similar situations.<sup>50</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s saw this contrast in literature between East and West Germany. In West Germany, Heinrich Boll’s *Billard um halb zehn* gained popularity as the novel depicted many voices representing different generations who reflect on Nazism. Gunter Grass, a 1999 Nobel Prize winner for Literature, published his Danzig trilogy that illustrated a “grotesquely imaginative retrospective on the Nazi period. With its virtuosic command of the language, its innovative, reworking of the picaresque tradition, and its sophisticated approach to German social history, [the trilogy] was a landmark in postwar German literature.” Like Boll and Grass, many authors in this period sought to distinguish between “the Nazi past and political realities of the present.”<sup>51</sup>

By the 1970s, a new focus on subjectivity complemented the political lens of West German literature. When the feminist movement in Germany took place, numerous female writers emerged. However, many debated “feminine sensibility” as women “were encouraged to feel and write through their bodies rather than through conventional rationality.”<sup>52</sup>

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, international post-modernist literary trends gained influence in German literature. This literature is marked by parody, pastiche, and allusions to appeal to both popular and sophisticated audiences. An example is Gunter Grass’s *Der Butt* which combined “inset narratives, lyric interludes, recipes for favorite German dishes, revisions of fairy tales, and ironic representations of contemporary feminism.” Following the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, writers ventured into the economic, political, and social tensions of the time, but we do not see these novels emerge until the mid-1990s. The Nazi book burnings left a clear mark on the way future literature took shape as authors continue to include thematic topics from the Nazi period. Even today, the Nazi past plagues German literature as writers focus on explicitly defining the memory of the Nazi period.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Jaeger, “German Literature.”

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

## Legacy of the Nazi Book Burnings

The Nazi book burnings transformed into a symbol, a warning, for future generations. In the United States in the 1950s, the *New York Times* labeled the widespread ban of books in schools and public libraries a “species of book burning.”<sup>54</sup> During the Cold War, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy directed a search for “subversive books” in US Information Service Libraries in Europe and Asia. As a result, the state department circulated pro-Communist blacklists and the “few suspect books” were burned in libraries in Sydney, Tokyo, and Singapore. Debates and disagreements within the State Department brought on the statement: “We cannot screen without looking like a fool or a Nazi.” Similarly expressed in the *Washington Post*, “the memory of fascism is keen in Europe and Europeans know that book burning marked the beginning of fascism in Italy and Germany.”<sup>55</sup>

This symbol can also be seen in popular culture. In the 1970s television drama *The Walton's*, John Boy exclaims: “Burning books is like burning people! Why would people do such craziness?” Author of *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury expressed how “when Hitler burned a book, [Ray] felt it as keenly as his killing a human, for in the long sum of history, they are one and the same flesh. Mind or Body put to the oven, it is a sinful practice.” Director of the movie *Field of Dreams*, Phil Alden Robinson compared American book burnings with Nazi book burnings because they both demonstrated “the suppression of opposing points of view to increase political control.” Even the popular *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling suffered “public acts of destruction” in that the books “promote witchcraft, sorcery, and Satanism.” Since 1999, *Harry Potter* has remained the most common request to remove from library shelves. “In Alamogordo, New Mexico, a local church stage[d] a ceremonial “Holy Bonfire” to destroy the Harry Potter books and symbols of witchcraft.”<sup>56</sup>

While the book burnings in Germany occurred in 1933, its memory has withstood. As a recurring symbol, the book burnings warn of the implications of censorship upon society. In Germany, this event greatly transformed the focus of German literature as the Expressionist literary period fabricated a new wave of grim, brutal, truthful stories that revealed the reality of war and Nazi Germany. The Nazi book burnings

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<sup>54</sup> “Nazi Book Burning: Recurring Symbol.” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Holocaust Encyclopedia. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/nazi-book-burnings-recurring-symbol?parent=en%2F7631>.

<sup>55</sup> “Nazi Book Burning: Recurring Symbol.”

<sup>56</sup> “Nazi Book Burning: Recurring Symbol.”

brought on heavy burdens to a generation of writers. Whether forced to exile or forced to endure the harsh Nazi atmosphere, these writers faced a life, unlike others. These short-term and long-term consequences of the Nazi book burnings remind us to honor literature and to honor the words of writers. The legacy of the Nazi book burnings is found in the piles of books burned but is carried on in the minds of protestors and in the words of books to come. While the burning of books is not an end, let us hope that its legacy will continue to challenge its initial purpose, as it inspires us to use our freedom and our voice.

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