

“In the Eyes of the Children this was a Miracle”: Sanctity in Nineteenth-Century Quebec

Timothy PEARSON

The vast majority of scholarly literature on saints and Saints' Lives¹ has been produced by medievalists, despite the fact that the cult of the saints more than endured beyond the Counter-Reformation. Indeed, the writing of hagiography experienced a tremendous revival in the seventeenth century resulting largely from the re-affirmation of the cult of the saints by the Council of Trent (1545-63), the reform of hagiographic writing by Pope Urban VIII (1623-45), and the new-found missionary zeal of the expanding church. In recent years there has been a renewal of scholarly interest in the hagiography of seventeenth-century France and Spanish Colonial America.² For the most part, however, Canadian hagiography has not garnered a great deal of attention amongst historians. Apart from Guy Laflèche's work on the Canadian Martyrs and recent work by Allan Greer on Kateri Tekakwitha, Canadian historians have mostly bypassed what is a large body of source literature on Canadian saints and holy persons.³ In this paper, I wish to begin to deal with this *lacuna* by

¹ Capitals are used for Saints' Lives here and throughout this paper to draw a distinction between such lives as a genre of literature and the actual lived lives of saints.

² See for example, Eric Suire, *La Sainteté Française de la Réforme catholique (XVIe-XVIIIe siècles)* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bourdeaux, 2001), and Ronald J. Morgan, *Spanish American Saints and the Rhetoric of Gender* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002).

³ Guy Laflèche, *Les Saints Martyrs Canadien* (Laval: Singulier, 1988). Allan Greer's published work on Kateri Tekakwitha (d. 1680), the Lilly of the Mohawks, includes “Colonial Saints: Gender, Race and Hagiography in New France,” *William and Mary Quarterly*. Vol. I.VII, No. 2, 2000, “Savage/Saint: the Lives of Kateri Tekakwitha,” in *Habitant et Marchand: Vingt ans après*. eds. Sylvie Dépatie, Catharine Desbarats et al. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), and “Iroquois Virgin: The Story of Catherine Tekakwitha in New France and New Spain,” *Colonial Saints: Discovering the Holy in the*

discussing, through three examples, the qualities of this genre of literature in nineteenth-century Canada, and some possible approaches historians might take in order to make it more accessible.

Perhaps the most pressing reason why Canadian hagiography has been neglected is the nature of the sources themselves. The fact that sacred biographies draw on preconditioned beliefs, make appeals to the supernatural, and are structured around literary conventions, tends to present problems for the practitioner of cultural and social history. The basic characteristics of these texts are tied to a specific genre of literature and a theological premise that is foreign to many modern secular historians. A manipulation of the reality of the past in favour of ideological principles seems to be at work in these texts. The site of text-reader interaction is one of conflict between competing expectations; those of the historian-reader, and those of the culture that recognized and validated the saintly performance.

The Belgian sociologist Pierre Delooz observed in a 1983 article that saints are made by and for others.⁴ Following on this, scholars of the Middle Ages have largely adopted the view that saints can provide insight into the society and culture in which they functioned, and the community which in turn regarded them as saints. Nancy Caciola, in a review article on recent approaches to sanctity and society, points out that “[s]anctity is historically determined, culturally constructed and socially enacted.”⁵ Focus, therefore, falls on the saint herself, but also embraces “her culture and community.”⁶

The historian as a reader of Saints’ Lives approaches these works from a point of view significantly different from that of the author of the life and the faith community that believed (and believes) in the saint. The reading of any work of literature involves a process of appropriation where the reader internalizes the text, makes it his/her own, and in doing so engages in an act of meaning creation.⁷ This is an act of interpretation and altera-

Americas. ed. Allan Greer and Jodi Bilinkoff (New York: London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ Pierre Delooz, “Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church,” *Saints and Their Cults*. ed. Stephen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 189-216.

⁵ Nancy Caciola, “Through a Glass, Darkly: Recent Work on Sanctity and Society. A Review Article,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 58 no. 2 (1996): 302.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁷ For a discussion of appropriation as a part of the act of reading see Paul Ricoeur, “Appropriation,” *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 191. Edward Said argues for an aggressive form of appropriation that involves the colonizer taking control of and manipulating the culture of the colonized. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979).

tion, especially when the socio-cultural context of the text's creation is not taken into consideration. For example, the removal of the supernatural elements from hagiography in the interest of empiricism neglects the significance of the miraculous to the faith of the community that recognized the saint. The work as a whole is emblematic of a coherent system of belief and socio-cultural expectations that the historian can investigate when the text is read on its own terms. The work itself, I wish to argue, is a vestige of the past – a surviving imprint that can mediate to the present an understanding of the faith community and the conceptions of reality that produced it.⁸

For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in the rich body of hagiographic literature that resulted from the phenomenal revival and reformation of Catholicism in nineteenth-century French Canada. Commonly known as Ultramontanism, this movement, which was manifest in Catholicism around the world, was characterized by a rejection of liberalism and democratic revolution, and sought to squarely align the local church with Roman ritual and theology. The *Syllabus of Errors*, proclaimed by Pope Pius IX in 1864, demanded that Catholics resist the secularization that liberalism and democracy implied, and ally themselves more closely with a conservative and traditional church.

One of the most pronounced aspects of Ultramontanism in Quebec was the rise of new religious orders dedicated to teaching and providing social services.⁹ By Roberto Perin's reckoning, fifty-seven new female orders alone were either imported from France or begun from scratch in Quebec between 1837 and 1914.¹⁰ In the short term, these institutions revolutionized the furnishing of social services. In the long term, and in terms of my interests here, many of the foundresses and founders of these orders came to be viewed as saints. Within this group, I will focus in this paper on Mother Mary Ann, Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Ann, and Rosalie Jetté, Foundress of the Sisters of Miséricorde.¹¹ In addition, I will examine the Life of Louis-Zéphyrin Moreau, Bishop of Saint Hyacinthe,

⁸ For a discussion of the text as vestige of the past see chapter 8, "The Interweaving of History and Fiction," in Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁹ For a good discussion of the various religious orders introduced in Quebec at this time see Nive Voisine (dir.) *Histoire du Catholicisme Québécois: Réveil et consolidation 1840-1898*. Vol. II. (Québec: Boréal, 1991).

¹⁰ Roberto Perin, "French Speaking Canada from 1840," *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada*. ed. Terrence Murphy and Roberto Perin (Toronto & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 212.

¹¹ Blessed Mother Mary Ann (1809-1890), beatified in 2001; Venerable Mère de la Nativité, Rosalie Cadron-Jetté (1794-1864). There are many others who could be included in this group such as Blessed Mother Léoni Paradis (1840-1912), beatified in 1984.

as an example of the male typology of sainthood. The profusion of *vitas* associated with these and other individuals has left behind for historians a fascinating, but confusing and often vexing body of literature.¹²

Supporters of Ultramontanism in Quebec, such as Bishop Ignace Bourget (1799-1885) of Montreal and Bishop Louis-François Laflèche (1818-1898) of Trois-Rivières, sought to construct a Roman Catholic world view based on Roman theology and ritual. Bourget was a staunch defender of the rights of the church and the doctrine of papal infallibility proclaimed by the First Vatican Council (1869-70). He regarded the church as a hierarchy, divorced completely from democratic ideals and under the total authority of the pope. This Catholic world view informed the way these new religious orders thought about themselves and their role in Catholic society. Moreover, it informed the way they conceptualized their founders as saints and holy people in the context of post-tridentine, counter-reformation notions of the holy.

As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued, religion, through ritual and symbol, formulates conceptions of a general order of existence clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality.¹³ I would argue that hagiography functions in much the same way. Text and language function symbolically to enunciate collectively created concepts of sanctity and, by making the truth-claim that the subject is a saint, give a sense of factuality, not only to the metaphysical conceptualization of sainthood, but also to the temporal actions of the subject as laid out in the text. The author functions both as a representative of community standards and understandings of the holy and as a teacher and interpreter of the saintly performance.¹⁴

Hagiography mediates between the supernatural and temporal, creating a coherent system of belief.¹⁵ This dual nature of hagiography, however, has often led historians to categorize their content into divisions of the believable and not,¹⁶ with the result that one approach taken by historians

¹² Blessed Louis-Zéphyrin Moreau (1824-1901), beatified in 1987. It should be noted that my primary interest in this paper is with the Lives themselves as textual artefacts from the past. Consequently, the fact that the majority of individuals about whom Lives were composed were never officially canonized, is of little importance in examining community conceptualizations of holiness and the conventions of hagiographic writing.

¹³ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Culture System," *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. by Michael Banton (London: Tavistoke, 1968), 4.

¹⁴ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19.

¹⁵ Caciola, "Through a Glass Darkly," 304.

¹⁶ This was the general approach of the Bollandists, editors of the Lives of the Saints, from the mid-seventeenth century to the present. See Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. Donald Attwater (New York: Fordham University

has been to mine these sources for information considered to be historical or rational. Rudolph Bell, for example, used the Life of Catherine of Siena to argue that heroic fasts were really eating disorders,¹⁷ while he, along with Donald Weinstein, used a sampling of Lives to compile a quantitative picture of the ideal late medieval saint, and what features such a model could be expected to demonstrate.¹⁸

When Saints' Lives are mined in such ways the integrity of the text as a whole is broken down, turned into numbers or otherwise picked apart in an attempt to remove the authentic from the legendary. The process whereby the historian appropriates a cultural vestige of the past becomes destructive, an exercise of seizure and control, where little effort is made to understand the *vita* on its own terms and in its own context. The results of such studies, have in many cases been enlightening in terms of the typologies of saints, but have generally resulted in the destruction of the cultural artefact itself and errors of specific cultural understanding. Bell, for example, has been accused of committing an anachronism by mapping a modern disease, anorexia, onto a past cultural context that would never have recognized it as such.¹⁹ Consider the following example from *The Life of Mother Mary Ann*, foundress of the teaching order, the Sisters of Saint Ann, who died in 1890. The *Vita* was published in 1950.²⁰

At St. Jacques (mother house of the Sisters at the time) a pupil, while playing, had the misfortune of running her tongue down the spout of a small teapot. The suction was such that she could not withdraw it. Alarmed by her screams and not knowing what to do, the sisters were going to call the doctor. Mother Mary Ann came upon the scene, guided thereto, she said, by her guardian angel. Very ingeniously she slipped a straw down the spout between the tongue and the side of the teapot. She breathed through it, and the little one's tongue was released. "In the eyes of the children this was a miracle," commented the narrator, "and she who performed it a saint. This was the general opinion held by the pupils of St. Jacques of our Foundress."²¹

Press, 1962). See also H. Delehaye, *L'oeuvre des Bollandistes: A travers trois siècles, 1615-1915* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1959).

¹⁷ Rudolph M. Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

¹⁸ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints & Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). See also Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1982).

¹⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 277n.

²⁰ Nadeau, Eugène, O.M.I. *The Life of Mother Mary Ann (1809-1890), Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Ann*. trans. Sister Mary Camilla, S.S.A. (Lachine: Saint Ann Edition, 1965).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 246.

This short, and somewhat frivolous, passage can tell us a great deal about how the belief community regarded Mother Mary Ann's sanctity and also about how hagiography was written in the early twentieth century, when it is placed within the larger context of the *Vita* as a whole, and the cultural circumstances of its production. By cultural circumstances, I mean the entire process that led to the conceptualization of Mother Mary Ann as a person worthy of veneration. This involved fitting Mother Mary Ann into the larger conventions of sanctity, the process of gathering local evidence and witnesses to her life, the writing of the life itself within the conventions of the genre and, of course, Mother Mary Ann's own performance within a proscribed system of cultural belief.

In this passage, we have an example of an incident that may well have happened, the memory of which has been conceptualized as a miracle by at least one of the witnesses. The fact that the author included this story in the *Life*, perhaps also indicates that he believed that Mother Mary Ann was capable of miracles, even if he did not necessarily regard this particular event as such. Here, a miracle has been constructed out of a real event, based on the cultural perception of that event by the community and its re-inscription by the author of the *Life*.²² This story is found in the second to last chapter of the book amongst a collection of testimonials made by witnesses as to the qualities embodied by Mother Mary Ann, and as such reads as a testimony to her sanctity.

Eugène Nadeau, the author of the *Vita*, wished to impart the idea that Mother Mary Ann was a saint without explicitly saying so, as Canon Law reserved to the pope alone the right to officially make saints.²³ Unofficially however, a saint was created by a belief community, and Nadeau wished to stress in his narrative that there was such a community centred on Mother Mary Ann. The existence of a spontaneous community was considered a necessity by the church, especially when it was emphasized by the belief that the candidate had performed miracles. Efforts of the Council of Trent to rationalize the cult of the saints meant that miracles performed by Counter-Reformation saints were presented as after-death intercessions.²⁴ The fact that Mother Mary Ann is very much alive in this instance requires that she deny that she had performed a miracle, and that Nadeau himself not make any grandiose claims. Nevertheless, the presence of the supernatural in this passage defines and expresses the community's

²² Delooz, "Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood," 211.

²³ For a detailed description of the Vatican's saint-making process see Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1990).

²⁴ The Council of Trent defended the Catholic tradition of the veneration of saints, but moved to regulate popular piety. The faithful were not to erect new images, accept new accounts of miracles or recognize the legitimacy of new relics without episcopal approval. See Morgan, *Spanish American Saints*, 29.

conceptualization of Mother Mary Ann as someone who worked simultaneously on two planes.

Mother Mary Ann, however, posed a problem for those advocating her cause because, although she had founded a religious order, she had been deposed from her position as superior general. A personality conflict and power struggle with the order's chaplain resulted in the chaplain requesting that Bishop Bourget depose her in the interests of maintaining harmony within the fledgling community. Such a demotion at the hands of the bishop was not auspicious for her cause, and so her community sought to construct her sanctity, not only as the foundress of a successful religious order, but also in terms of her great humility and obedience in the face of adversity. Indeed, her deposition from power stands as the central crisis point in her *Vita* where, in the conventions of the genre, the subject turns to the saintly life and embarks on a career of heroic virtue.²⁵ The biography was framed to fit the expectations of the genre which were familiar to the belief community who regarded Mother Mary Ann as embodying the qualities of sainthood.

Mother Mary Ann participated in the expectations held of her as a holy person and a woman by her community by accepting her deposition to live as a humble sister within the community that she had founded. She never regained her position as superior, and indeed was sent from the mother house to live out her days as Sister Mary Ann at a remote sister house at St. Genevieve de Pierrefonds. To show that Mother Mary Ann, as a candidate for sainthood, fit the conventions of the genre and the community's expectations of sanctity, Nadeau explicitly and repeatedly related her career to the larger cult of the saints and conventions of the genre which, in theological terms, extend to the life of Christ in the form of an *imitatio christi*.²⁶ For example, Nadeau writes, "The lives of saints are full of these challenges which baffle limited human wisdom. The founders of religious orders seem inevitably destined for great trials."²⁷ Mother Mary Ann's life is constructed according to the universal plot of the triumphant victim that stretches back to the martyrs of old.

Within the simple story related above, the community's conceptualization of Mother Mary Ann as an exceptional person favoured by God, and of sanctity itself as a force in the world, are laid out. By denying that she had anything to do with rescuing the poor student, Mother Mary Ann par-

²⁵ The biographical pattern of the western saint was set out by Sulpicius Severus in his *Life of saint Martin of Tours* (d. 397). The central crisis point in Martin's life is not martyrdom, but rather his conversion to the heroic Christian life which characterized his later deeds and achievements. C. Staccliffe, *St. Martin and His Biographer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 92.

²⁶ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 29.

²⁷ Nadeau, *The Life of Mother Mary Ann*, 115.

ticipates in this conceptualization by behaving as a Counter-Reformation saint ought. It was her guardian angel that guided her in her action. This claim gives credit for the “miracle” to God working through her, while it deflects credit for a creative solution to a sticky situation away from herself in the interest of humility. Such behaviour was evidently recognized as saintly by those who shared a similar world view. For the faith community, even the deposed and humiliated is a saint precisely because she accepts her fate with heroic obedience and fortitude, and so behaves in a way that would be recognized as saintly by others.²⁸

The conventional qualities of the hagiographic genre, which have the purpose of presenting each saint as being a member of a heavenly community, can pose problems for historians as the saint must be subsumed in some degree to the typology. She is not her own woman, but rather a vehicle for the power of God in the world, and the subject of community veneration. The intended result is not to diminish the personality of the saint, indeed each individual is extraordinary within a particular context, but rather to situate the saint within the eternal as well as the temporal. Hagiography has the dual aspect of being both historical and metaphysical, which informs the dual nature of the saint as someone who lives both in the world and beyond it.²⁹

The pattern, of course, is not static since, although the saint must appear to fit the mould of sanctity, he or she must also appeal to the public meant to be served. Social change is constant and so the saint must also adapt, as culture itself adapts, while maintaining a recognizable connection to the larger cult of the saints. Moreover, societies, cultures, and communities differ and so the saint must be relevant to his or her own cultural circumstances and audience in order to be successful. Each life requires a balancing of the particular with the transcendent within the discourse of the Saint’s Life. It is for this reason that Eugène Nadeau must be so explicit in showing that Mother Mary Ann fits the metaphysical model as a member of the *communio sanctorum*, while also demonstrating her temporal efficacy as a possessor of heroic virtue in her own time and locality.

Each Life that was constructed as a hagiography presented its own peculiarities and difficulties, and had to be relevant to the faith community represented. Mother Mary Ann’s obedience and humility in trying circumstances established a clear causal connection between virtue and act – the heroic faith necessary for a performance recognized as holy, and the foundation of a religious order. This connection firmly rooted the physical act within transcendent faith. In the case of Louis-Zéphyrin Moreau, the fourth Bishop of St. Hyacinthe (1824-1901), however, the very temporality of his life and the success he enjoyed in the world threatened his claim to

²⁸ Delooz, “Towards a Sociological Approach to Canonized Sanctity,” 208.

²⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 38-39.

sainthood, despite the fact they he was acclaimed for his great charity.³⁰ Community expectations of sanctity, represented through the biography, dictate that Moreau must be more than a successful cleric to make a claim to sanctity.

Displaying a keen intelligence at an early age, Moreau enjoyed a great deal of worldly success during his life. He became a teacher of dogmatic and moral theology at Collège Nicolet at the age of twenty, a priest and secretary to the bishops of St. Hyacinthe, and eventually became bishop himself – a position he held from 1876 until his death in 1901. The Jesuit priest Frédéric Langevin, writing Moreau's hagiography in 1937, followed the typology of the bishop and confessor exemplified by figures such as Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours (d. 397), and Saint Charles Borromeo, the Counter-Reformation bishop of Milan (d. 1584).³¹ The crisis point – an illness that Moreau suffered in 1845 which forced him to take a break from his teaching and his career – stands at the point where heroic virtue replaces worldly success as the central theme of the biography. "...[T]he academic year 1845-1846 passed with no improvement in health, with victories in humility and patience and with little advancement in theological science."³²

Moreau's illness is a triumph in patience and fortitude – a setback, humbly endured, to his secular career. Following his illness, Moreau wished to resume his studies for the priesthood, but was rejected by the Quebec seminary because of his low academic performance during his time of illness. "This refusal bit cruelly at the soul of Zéphyrin Moreau, but his stubborn will would not crumble under an avalanche that leaves it still living."³³ He turned instead to Bishop Bourget of Montreal, and was accepted into the Séminaire de Montréal. His secular career in the priesthood is thereafter presented in terms of his great charity and commitment to upholding the truths of the church, rather than as a successful rise through the church hierarchy.

³⁰ Moreau was beatified in 1987. His feast day is May 24.

³¹ St. Martin was the first monk in the west to become an ordained bishop and was represented by his biographer, Sulpicius Severus, as an exemplary individual able to live simultaneously both in the world and in the metaphorical desert. Charles Borromeo was instrumental in implementing the program of the Council of Trent and therefore the counter reformation itself. Saint Martin therefore, provides the example of the model bishop-saint, while Charles Borromeo is the model counter-reformation saint.

³² [...]L'année scolaire 1845-1846 passait sans amélioration de la santé, avec des victoires d'humilité et de patience, avec des gains assez maigres en science théologique.] F. Langevin, S.J. *Monseigneur Louis-Zéphyrin Moreau, Quatrième évêque de Sainte-Hyacinthe, 1824-1901* (Québec: L'Action Catholique, 1937), 27.

³³ [Ce refus mordit cruellement l'âme de Zéphyrin Moreau, mais son vouloir tête ne croulera pas sous une avalanche qui le laisse encore vivant.] Ibid., 28.

Moreau is presented as a staunch upholder of a strict orthodoxy characterized by an adherence to ultramontane values. More importantly for his claim to sanctity, however, is his charity work for which he is said to have garnered the moniker, Bishop of the Sacred Heart (*l'Évêque de la Sacré Coeur*). He is presented as the defender of doctrine (*Le Gardien de la Doctrine*), and the good shepherd (*Le bon pasteur*), both spiritually pious and temporally hard working. “Monseigneur Moreau did not place a watertight partition between work and piety.”³⁴

Despite, or indeed because of his temporal accomplishments, however, sceptics remained within his faith community. His audience went so far as to demand miracles of him whom they suspected capable of performing them. “And the life of Mgr. Moreau? It was a life of prayer, a life of faithfulness to daily duty; a life without splendour perhaps, but also a life without stain; a life beautiful in the eyes of his contemporaries, priests and laity, who called their good pastor *Bishop of the Sacred Heart*, and asked of him miracles as would be asked of saints.”³⁵

A “life without stain” was not enough to guarantee Moreau a place in the *communio sanctorum*, in the eyes of the *communio fidelium*. Miracles were demanded by the sceptics and Mgr. Moreau did not disappoint. To solidify the claim to sanctity it had to be shown that Moreau worked not only in the world, despite his virtue, but also beyond it, in the supernatural. To be a saint, and to be called a saint, the community expected “true” miracles.

The people who, without conflating them, had linked holiness with miraculous power, asked *saint Mgr. Moreau* for true miracles – the mildly sceptical to see if the bishop was indeed the saint he was said to be, and the more convinced to confirm their devotion while awaiting a sign from heaven.³⁶

³⁴ [MGR Moreau ne plaçait pas de cloison étanche entre le travail et la piété.] *Ibid.*, 125.

³⁵ [Et la vie de Mgr Moreau? Vie de prière, vie de fidélité au devoir quotidien; vie sans éclat, peut-être, mais vie sans tache, vie belle aux yeux des contemporains, prêtres et laïcs, qui appellent leur bon pasteur: *l'évêque du Sacré Coeur*, et lui demandent des miracles, comme l'on en demande aux saints.] *Ibid.*, 149. Langevin's italics.

³⁶ [Le peuple qui, sans confondre, avait cependant uni sainteté et puissance miraculeuse, demandait au *saint Mgr Moreau* de vrais miracles, - les quelque peu sceptique, pour voir enfin si l'évêque était aussi saint qu'on se plaisait à la répéter; les plus lancés pour confirmer leur dévotion, en attendant un signe dans le ciel.] *Ibid.*, 247. Langevin's italics. Note that Langevin is careful here not to call Moreau a saint directly but to put that appellation into the mouths of others unnamed. As with Mother Mary Ann, the claim to sanctity is effectively made without jeopardizing the *nihil obstat* of the bishop (pp. 11-14). Just in case there was a chance for confusion, the author included a disclaimer at the beginning.

In the final chapter of the *Vita*, one in which testaments to Moreau's sanctity are outlined, evidence of the miraculous is finally offered. The author attests that these are not necessary to prove Moreau's sanctity, but nevertheless obliges his critics by revealing that the bishop had in fact been performing (or at least had been the conduit for) miracles for some time.

These miracles violated the unspoken rules of post-tridentine hagiography that placed the miraculous as after-death intercessions, but nevertheless met the expectations of the community indicating a particular expectation of sanctity at the local level. Unlike the case of Mother Mary Ann where an event with a perfectly plausible and rational explanation is construed as a miracle by some children, we are now confronted with wonderful cures attested to by reliable witnesses, including a doctor. Moreau cures a crippled child, Léonie Adam, who suffered from a bone deformation, attributing the miracle to the intervention of Saint Anne.³⁷ “...He knelt down on his knee and said to the young patient: Walk. The child walked.” [...] Il se mit à genoux et dit à la petite malade: Marche. L'enfant marcha.]³⁸ This is only the first of several cures attributed to his intercession, both while he lived and after his death.

The cultural expectations of early twentieth-century Catholic Quebec demanded that miracles be performed to solidify the claim to sainthood made by Moreau and to overcome the potential dangers of a too familiar association with the secular world. It is not enough for Moreau to be *l'Evêque du Sacré Coeur*, *Le Gardien de la Doctrine* and *Le Bon Pasteur*, he must also perform miracles to legitimate his claim to sanctity in the estimation of his faith community. The presence of the miraculous in the hagiography is contingent upon community demands and the expectations of the genre, and suffice to show that Moreau worked both in the temporal and the transcendent. In so doing the audience becomes more than mere passive observers, but rather they take an active role in shaping the life of the holy man to reflect a received tradition – “a tradition whose locus is in the community.”³⁹

“Conformément, aux règles édictées par le pape Urbain VIII, l'auteur déclare que, s'il a employé quelquefois le mot ‘saint’ en parlant du serviteur de Dieu, ou de quelque autre, il ne prétend en rien devancer le jugement de la Sainte Église.” This is a fairly standard device at the beginning of post-tridentine lives.

³⁷ Ibid., 248.

³⁸ Ibid., 249.

³⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 19-21. Heffernan argues that, because hagiography is meant primarily to teach, virtuosic writing and literary aesthetics are of secondary concern. Therefore, authorship is representative of a larger community voice that is collective. Sanctity is what made the saint an historical figure and consequently the fictional saint can not be separated from the historical personage.

This is not to say, however, that the author functions only as a mere conduit for community knowledge and normative conceptualizations of the holy. Rather, the nature of hagiography as a work meant to edify, means that the author is also an interpreter and a teacher. Langevin's job is to draw out and interpret what the community does not entirely understand – what is mysteriously hidden in the public record of Moreau's life.⁴⁰ The author's role is not just to confirm what is already known, but to increase the understanding of the community. Virtues and the miraculous, the particular and the transcendent, must be shown to come together in the person of Mgr. Moreau.

The life of Rosalie Cadron-Jetté (1794-1864), *la Mère de la Nativité*, foundress of the Sister of Miséricorde, written by Pierre-Auguste Fournet in 1898, on the other hand, is almost completely devoid of the miraculous.⁴¹ With her we turn from the typology of the male, worldly actor, back to the female foundress, passive in her obedience and humility, and characterized by a bending of the will to the will of God. Rosalie Jetté is constructed as the heroic almsgiver, dedicating her life to the assistance of others with little or no thought for herself.

Rosalie was born in Lavaltrie, Quebec and married Joseph Jetté with whom she had eleven children, seven of whom survived. The family eventually moved to Montreal where Rosalie became the metaphorical mother superior of her own household, that included not only her husband and children, but also an increasing number of indigent persons who called on her for aid as her reputation for charity spread throughout the city. After the death of her husband in 1832, Rosalie Jetté continued her charitable work but increasingly focused on aiding unwed mothers, the fallen women of Victorian Montreal. She was approached by Bishop Bourget in 1845 to set up a shelter and hospice for these women which eventually became the Congregation of the Sisters of Miséricorde.

The Life of Rosalie Jetté, like that of Mother Mary Ann, posed problems for her biographer and especially for her community. Unlike with Mother Mary Ann, however, these challenges were not easily reducible to the standard heroic qualities of the saintly life found in the hagiographic tradition, but rather threatened the very reputation of Rosalie Jetté as a pious widow in the community. Rosalie Jetté's chosen profession – her charity work itself – threatened community standards and mores and challenged the very boundaries of acceptable social behaviour. As Marta Danylewycz has shown, the work of the Sisters of Miséricorde with "fallen women" long remained an obstacle to community acceptance due to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 21.

⁴¹ Rosalie Cadron-Jetté has not yet been beatified, and is generally categorized as a Servant of God. Her life was composed by Pierre-August Fournier in 1898.

popular prejudices against unwed, pregnant women that branded the sisters as “accomplices in sin.”⁴² Nevertheless, in the *Vita*, the socially repugnant nature of the work of the Sisters of Miséricorde, and Rosalie Jetté’s chosen profession, serves only to enhance her heroic virtue and sacrifice.

There is a certain class of person for whom society has no word of pity: we mean those young girls who, through ignorance, seduction, or a moment’s blindness, have fallen into the abyss where honour and virtue perish ... What is to become of them? Where will they go? What asylum, what retreat will throw an impenetrable veil over their sin? ... Blessed forever be the friendly hand stretched out to the young girl during these moments of agony, to save her from utter shame and rehabilitate her soul before God and his Angels.⁴³

Initially the community of Montreal rejected the work of the Sisters of Miséricorde, the order struggled financially and socially to legitimate itself, and experienced great difficulty recruiting new members who preferred to join the more respectable teaching orders such as the Congregation of Notre-Dame.⁴⁴ Passers-by were known to ridicule the sisters when they recognized their habit.

The public seemed to have a settled antipathy in regard to the new work. At the sight of one of the sisters, passers-by turned their heads aside, others insolently laughed, while some more daring than the rest laid hands upon the burden, which those pious women tried to conceal (new-born children being taken to baptism) and overwhelmed them with abusive language.⁴⁵

To remove the stain of a life time spent working with the most rejected of social outcasts – those deemed worthy of neither pity nor charity – her biographer attempted to rhetorically separate Rosalie Jetté from her work in the world. The character of Rosalie Cadron-Jetté all but disappears from the story at the point where, in response to the prodding of Bishop Bourget, the hospice for fallen women is established.⁴⁶ “From the day that she gave

⁴²Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 77.

⁴³ Pierre August Fournier, *Mère de la Nativité et les origines des soeurs de Miséricorde* (Montréal: Institut des Sourds-Muet, 1898), 32-3. There is a direct English translation of this work, *Mother de la Nativité and the Origins of the Community of the Sisters of Miséricorde, 1848-1898* (Montreal: Institution for Deaf Mutes, 1898). The quotations I have used here are drawn mostly from this translation.

⁴⁴ Danylewicz, *Taking the Veil*, 82

⁴⁵ Fournier, *Mother de la Nativité*, 74.

⁴⁶ The first house belonging to the order was named after St. Pelagia, a legendary actress from Antioch with a reputation for licentious living, who became a Christian and, dressed as a man, a monk in the desert. The symbolism of this name is significant given the work of the new hospice and the necessity to separate the virgin nuns from the sins of their fallen charges. “Plein d’espérance pour l’avenir, le pieux évêque décora cette mesure du titre d’Hospice Sainte-Pelagie, en

up the direction of her work in order to sanctify herself, far from human eyes, she almost disappears from this history.”⁴⁷ Marta Danylewycz suggests that Rosalie Jetté never wished to found an order and so declined the offer to be the first mother superior, thus taking a back seat in day-to-day operations of the Sisters of Miséricorde.⁴⁸ Fournier attributes this refusal to her humility which allows him to disassociate his subject from an institution and vocation that remained impoverished both in financial terms and in the social estimation of the community, while remaining within the expected rhetorical constructions of the hagiographic genre. The worthiness and unfortunate necessity of such an institution could only reflect favourably on its founder and argue for her sanctity, but the associated social stigma requires that the two – worldly and saintly – be kept at arms length from one another.

At the point of the foundation of the hospice for fallen women the hagiography changes genres and becomes a history of the Sisters of Miséricorde, which outlines the process whereby the institutional church slowly took over control of the order. Rosalie Jetté’s position as the sanctified nun and pious widow is not compatible with the work of the order and so her biographer must separate her from it as far as possible. Her days as an actor are largely over and she lives in “blessed obscurity” as decisions fall increasingly to male institutional figures such as Bishop Bourget and the community’s chaplain, Venant Pilon.⁴⁹

Community expectations demanded the separation of the holy from the profane and, at the same time, insisted on male institutional control over the dangerous field of fallen women and pious nuns.⁵⁰ There was a necessity to impose male institutional order so that the congregation could take its proper place in society without casting contempt upon the nuns and upon the church. This was a necessary response on the part of the church to a dangerous social situation, and only once the nuns had been given a

l’honneur de la sainte pénitente de ce nom.” Fournier, *Mère de la Nativité*, 43.

⁴⁷ Fournier, *Mother de la Nativité*, 141.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁰ See Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and the Church in the Seventeenth Century* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990). Rapley argues that the institution of a rule upon female religious collectives was a central means of exerting institutional control over female religious groups that were often viewed as suspicious by male authorities. These orders, left uncloistered, threatened to cross gender boundaries into male sphere’s of teaching and proselytizing and, therefore, threatened the traditionalism that the Council of Trent and Counter-Reformation wished to reinforce. Although Rapley’s book deals mostly with the seventeenth century, the cloistering of female congregations as a central reform of the Council of Trent was inherited by the Ultramontane church of the nineteenth century.

formalized and controlled position in society does the new order begin to stabilize and flourish.

Many priests still entertained doubts about the hospital. In the first place, they said, it was a new community, – a capital grievance in the eyes of some, – and then, to say nothing of its object, which seemed to be of uncertain utility, – how could it possibly get out of the poverty in which it had been struggling...⁵¹

Coadjutor Bishop Prince decided to give the nuns a habit and Bishop Bourget determined that they should take simple vows and be given a rule. Through such measures the male, hierarchical, and institutional church took control of, and attempted to legitimize, a vocation that was looked down upon by the community, after which, the public “to some extent, conquered its aversion and began to see the great utility of such an institution.”⁵² At the moment of their taking of vows, the chaplain Pilon recites the anthem *prudentes virgines*, which serves to define the sexual limits of the nuns amongst their fallen charges.⁵³

The institutionalization of the sisters granted legitimacy both to Rosalie Jetté’s work and to her performance as a saint. Her biographer is able to present her as the patient and passive follower of the will of God and the demands of her bishop.⁵⁴ “No one was better convinced than herself that she was unable to found or direct a community. She realized fully her own weakness and incapacity. But was she not doing the will of God? And who can fight against the Most High?”⁵⁵ She does not question God’s plan for her, but follows obediently despite the social ramifications and boundary transgressions. Community standards demanded first that Rosalie Jetté be subsumed to patriarchal authority, and second that her association with the unwed mothers for whom she cared, and which made her sacrifice so much the greater, be reduced as much as possible.

The result is a *Vita* that emphasizes the great humility, charity, and obedience of this would-be saint, but limits her association with the order she founded so that she might be distanced from an unpopular institution and the threat of moral stain. Her claim to sanctity is constructed, like Mother Mary Ann’s, almost entirely in terms of heroic virtue in the face of great adversity. As the Church takes control over the Sisters of Miséricorde, she re-occupies a recognizably female role in society – one that is bounded by the dictates of patriarchy and so conforms to community expectations, allowing her life to be constructed as saintly within the genre-

⁵¹ Fournier, *Mother de la Nativité*, 87-88.

⁵² Ibid., 111.

⁵³ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 32. “Nothing less than that charity which knows no bounds was needed to undertake the work which was henceforth to consume her whole life.”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 48.

expectations of female hagiographic literature.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that of the three candidates for sanctity discussed here, Rosalie Jetté advanced the least on the road to institutional and formal canonization.

When viewed in the contexts of authorial intention, historical circumstance, and the conventions of the genre as a whole, Rosalie Jette's biography illustrates for the historian the central importance of local community standards in assessing a candidate's virtues within the confines of social expectations and the genre-conventions of the Lives of the Saints. In much the same way, Mother Mary Ann's alleged miracle becomes a story that can illuminate a particular conceptualization of sanctity held by a religious culture that regarded the temporal and supernatural as part and parcel of the same belief system. To her belief community, Mother Mary Ann lived in the temporal realm, but kept one foot firmly planted in the transcendent. The narrative reinforces this belief and makes the truth-claim that Mother Mary Ann is, indeed, a saint. Moreau's biography shows how community expectations demanded that a saint have power beyond the temporal realm and how these demands became a part of the authorship of the life. The historian reading such sources can come to an understanding of the world view of the communities that produced these works when they are read with a sensitivity to both the temporal and supernatural aspects of religious understanding, and with a healthy respect for cultural difference.

Consequently, as I indicated near the beginning, I would like to argue that sacred biography should be viewed not as a source document *per se*, which implies something to be used to achieve or support an end outside itself, but rather as a vestige of the past that helps historians come to terms with the dynamics of sanctity in context. According to literary theorist Paul Ricoeur, who was concerned with how the past is read in the present, the vestige is the re-inscription of lived time into the present.⁵⁷ In this sense, the vestige is not so much documentary or archival evidence as it is material culture, and as such it has a synthetic quality as something *from* the past but *in* the present. It is something present standing for something past to which the historian brings knowledge and training in order to learn about the culture that created it.

History, argues Ricoeur, is the knowledge of vestiges, because the past can never be replayed exactly as it was.⁵⁸ Rather, history is the knowledge

⁵⁶ Danylewicz, *Taking the Veil*, 53. Throughout the nineteenth century, existing male and female divisions and inequalities were reinforced. Men and women occupied separate spaces in the religious and political arenas and were thought to internalize different value systems.

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 184.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

and appropriation in the present of what has been left behind by the past. As a vestige, a sacred biography provides the present with an impression of a past community and the culturally informed understanding of the world that it held. Canadian hagiography offers a tremendous opportunity to learn about the cultures that created these works, about the reactions of the audience to the saintly performance, and also about the saint herself and how she and her biographer strove to meet cultural expectations.