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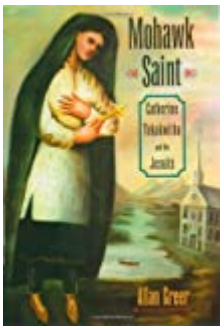

Allan Greer. *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. xiv + 241 pp. $ 30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-517487-8; $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-530934-8.

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Published on H-Atlantic (December, 2005)

The Mystery of Tekakwitha

Allan Greer's new book is about the seventeenth-century Iroquois convert, cult figure, and near-saint Kateri Tekakwitha. Although there are over three hundred books in twenty languages that recount her tale; most of these are devotional. Unlike these hagiographies, Greer seeks to paint a portrait of Tekakwitha that brings her down to earth. "My job," he writes, is to resituate her in the "historical context of colonial North America" (p. vii). Born to an Algonquin mother and Iroquois father, Tekakwitha grew up in the Mohawk village of GandaouaguÃÂ©, converted to Catholicism, took the name Catherine, and moved to the Christian-Iroquois town of Kahnawake near Montreal. There she encountered the Jesuit father Claude ChauchetiÃÂ¨re, who came to believe that Catherine was a saint following her sickness and death in 1680. Many Catholics continued to worship her as unofficial saint into the twentieth century, and in 1980 Pope John Paul II beautified Kateri Tekakwitha, thus clearing the way for her future canonization. Greer convincingly shows that Tekakwitha was above all a product of her Mohawk culture, and he also connects Tekakwitha across cultures and times. But his conclusions about her as an individual are more fleeting than his discussions of her world.

Greer chose Tekakwitha to "gain a better understanding of the larger processes of colonization by taking as my subject not 'Indians,' not even 'Iroquois' or 'Mohawks,' but a particular native person" (p. vii). Although Tekakwitha did not leave any written records, Greer tells her story by drawing on previously neglected French manuscript sources, as well as archaeological evidence. Borrowing freely from anthropological studies and literary theory, he concludes that Tekakwitha's world is Iroquoian and Canadian, Indian and European–a multifaceted contact zone where Mohawk subjectivity was hybrid, shifting, and unstable. Greer also places Tekakwitha in a "middle ground." While Kahnawake did not perfectly replicate Richard White's Great Lakes region, Greer argues that it had "many similarities, for here in the French-Canadian heartland, the 'natives' were also 'newcomers,' and they had to find ways of adjusting to the expectations of the ambient society without melting into it" (p. 99). If *Mohawk Saint* takes a "particular native person" as its starting point, Greer reveals much more about "the larger processes of colonization," especially the complex

nature of this contact zone.

The book, in fact, begins with Tekakwitha's "Beautiful Death," and the first sentence reads, "He came to visit her every day, as she lay waiting to die" (p. 3). The person who came to Tekakwitha was Father Claude ChauchetiÃÂ¨re, sometimes accompanied by a band of village children. The priest claimed Tekakwitha watched "with interest as he showed them pictures he had drawn to illustrate scenes from the life of Jesus or depictions of the terrors of hell" (p. 4). Greer describes what these encounters mattered to the Jesuit, who "never bothered to record her [Tekakwitha's] words, emphasizing instead the sighs and heartfelt looks that marked her silent prayers" (p. 4). Greer also reads between the lines to show that Tekakwitha's death–attended largely by a circle of women–was primarily an Indian affair. Tekakwitha's decease leads into a discussion of perceptions and practices concerning death. The Mohawks added modified Catholic rites to indigenous practices, and European ideas about dying also changed. Following historian Philippe AriÃÂ¨s, Greer suggests that early modern Europeans adopted a "new sensibility ... characterized by the pervasive presence of death in life" (p. 8). In America, the religious fathers took this infatuation to an extreme: they celebrated martyred Jesuits and focused on baptizing dying converts (who would not stray from the Christian path). Although there were overlaps in understanding, each culture's ideas about death remained distinct: "Whereas Claude ChauchetiÃÂ¨re came from a culture where death was construed as an individual drama ... Iroquois tended to draw wider boundaries around the human self" (p. 13). Other chapters similarly compare and contrast spiritual practices, the body, illness and healing, sexuality, and the boundaries of the self.

Throughout *Mohawk Saint* Greer seeks to approach the missionaries "with the kind of sympathetic ethnographic imagination that ethnohistorians try to bring to their studies of Native American cultures" (p. x). Examining French families, the Jesuit order, and the town of Poitiers, Greer also delves into ChauchetiÃÂ¨re's psychological world. Although he arrived in Canada with typical notions about savage Indians, the Iroquois forced him to reexamine those preconceptions. His mental struggles moved towards resolution when he found that Tekakwitha–a supposed savage–exceeded his own spirituality. The melancholy Jesuit thus confronted the exotic "other" in unique ways. But to see her as exalted, ChauchetiÃÂ¨re (and his fellow Jesuits) had to transform Tekakwitha into a virginal figure and isolate her from her indigenous culture. Greer does just the opposite–he situates Tekakwitha in her culture and brings up the possibility that she had sexual encounters. Greer ultimately applies different approaches to his two protagonists in what he terms a "dual biography," raising some interesting questions. For example, Greer provides an extensive discussion of the material objects that Tekakwitha made (or might have made), but offers minimal analysis of ChauchetiÃÂ¨re's amazing pictures of Kahnawake. What might an even more ethnographically imaginative approach to these artifacts tell us about the person and culture that created them?

Greer also offers fewer psychoanalytic observations of his female subject. Instead, he situates Tekakwitha squarely in an Iroquois world: "she needs to be recognized as a Mohawk girl, her existence framed by the life of the Mohawk longhouse, her fate bound up in the vagaries of Mohawk history" (p. 57). Even Catholicism "came to her mainly as an Iroquois religion, a set of procedures for living that were apprehended within the familiar setting of female work routines" (p. 127). The chapter "Catherine and her Sisters" argues that she belonged to a circle of female converts in the tradition of an Iroquois medicine society. These women combined Mohawk and Christian practices, and competed with other Iroquois and French priests for religious authority. Following Iroquois and Catholic spiritual precedents, the women mortified themselves by exposure to the cold. When the priests found this out, a year later, they gave them whips and belts to moderate and regulate their ascetic practices. But the women became even more extreme. And when the Fathers stymied their attempts to form a convent, the women nonetheless continued to meet and remained celibate. Tekakwitha was one of the more moderate members of this group that sought to both work with and remain autonomous from the priests.

According to Greer, the Mohawks were able to sustain their separate identity and did not simply become tools of the Jesuits or assimilate into Canadian culture. Kahnawake "remained staunchly Iroquoian in its manners and customs" (p. 98). Far from becoming the peons of the French, the Mohawks maintained a separate economy and identity. Greer also points out that the people of Kahnawake reconfigured their clan structure rather than adopt European-style lineages, but Tekakwitha refused to marry altogether, which was unusual for a female Mohawk in her twenties. With Tekakwitha refusing to take a husband, her uncle lost control of her and her potential husband's labor. Several recent studies suggest that Native Americans had their own history of exploiting female labor, especially among captives. Was the town

of Kahnawake a response to, an exception to, or an example of such exploitation? Tekakwitha's mother was one of many Mohawk captives, and in the early 1700s the well-known captive Eunice Williams chose to remain at Kahnawake instead of returning to Deerfield, Massachusetts. Are there any connections between Williams, Tekakwitha, and Tekakwitha's mother?

In the end, Greer develops an incredibly complex portrait of a place and a time, but his attempts to fully understand Tekakwitha remain frustrated. Greer concludes: "What exactly was Tekakwitha looking for, and what exactly did she feel she had found at this stage of her life? These are questions that no historian can answer" (p. 146). Although Greer does not channel her spirit, he shows how other people have. French, Canadian, and American writers have competed to make Tekakwitha "our Katherine," and one even renamed her Kateri. Today many visit Tekakwitha's shrine at Kahnawake; some Mohawks pray for her canonization, though others dismiss her as "as a myth generated by centuries of religious and cultural imperialism" (p. 200). Her most devoted following is in the southwest, and Greer suggests that "Apaches, Pueblos, and Navajos seem able to connect to her life story at a deeper personal level than may be possible of nonnative.... The native saint has come home" (p. 205). Thus, Greer's approach allows him to shed light on Tekakwitha by connecting her present and past communities, but her real identity remains a mystery, and open to interpretation.

Greer does not promote his book as a contribution to "Atlantic world" history, though he might have done so. This book is an excellent example of what an analysis of life on both sides of the ocean can reap. It shows a masterful command of European and Native American cultures. Because it is so ambitious, *Mohawk Saint* might err in minor details. For example, Greer holds that Indians were never buried in churches and that only the nobility in Europe held this honor. But archaeological digs suggest that this was not always the case on the Northern Spanish frontier. I suspect that specialists in each of the fields Greer touches on will raise questions, and this book should inspire many fruitful cross-field dialogues. Therefore, I strongly recommend *Mohawk Saint* to the readers of the Atlantic history list. I also recommend it for anyone interested in colonial America, Native America, spiritual practices, or identity issues in Europe or America. Finally, it is deftly written and would make terrific reading for upper-level and graduate courses.

Citation: Carla Gerona. Review of Greer, Allan, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*. H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. December, 2005.

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