

***The Heavens Are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity.* By Susan Neylan. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003. Pp.xvii + 401, ISBN 0-7735-2573-4)**

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others in the social sciences as quite a boon to many of her ideas. The support and examples she could have found in Foodways scholarship alone is both astounding and heartbreaking at times.

In the end, Walton shows that “they” have become “us” through various cannibalistic examples. Although there is no arguing that there is a dichotomy between “us” and “them” especially in the case of cannibalism, the reader may find it hard to swallow that “we” (i.e. Europeans) were ever innocent of cannibalistic charges from the start. Although the use of flesh eating has frequently been used as a way to define “otherness,” Walton never sufficiently makes one believe that we were not cannibals from the beginning, albeit a different type of cannibal. An argument that cannibalism has continued and is recognized for what it is would be stronger than an argument that we have become cannibals, therefore become the much feared “Other”.

Although film critics and literary scholars may find this work useful, most social scientists including anthropologists and folklorists, will find this work falls short. There are too many logical leaps and too few references to interdisciplinary scholarship to satisfy many academics. Perhaps it is the cannibal in all of us that hungers for the author’s logic and numerous examples to satisfy our appetites. Although Walton’s ideas waft above us like pleasant aromas, we need more to chew on so that we can digest some of these delicious ideas.

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In a broad sense, the purpose of Susan Neylan’s study of Protestant Christian missions “in their first generation on the North Pacific Coast of British Columbia (1857-1901)” and her specific focus on “Native roles in Christianization” (5) is to challenge the often superficial dichotomies that inform much scholarship in the field of Aboriginal studies. More specifically, Neylan attempts to detract from a Euro-Canadian focus on Aboriginal victimization: focusing on “the discourses

of conversion and of Native Christianity” (9) and on “the religious ‘middlemen’” (15), Neylan concludes that “broadening our understanding of Tsimshian Christianity is important to our knowledge of Canadian cultural and religious history” as “too little emphasis has been given to Aboriginal contributions to the Christian experience” (271). Recognizing nineteenth-century Tsimshian Christians as active proponents in a cultural/religious exchange, Neylan challenges the language of much post-colonial discourse and the ideologies upon which it is dependent, an awareness she underscores in her introduction: “Because much of the documentary record replicates the creation of ‘other’, objectification, and (mis-)representation, historians have, often inadvertently, perpetuated the process [of colonization] by building their historical interpretations based on Euro-Canadian records alone” (5).

The book has nine chapters. “The Spiritual Dimensions of Tsimshian Culture” deconstructs the notion that “Euro-Canadian missionaries converted First Nations to Christianity without Native participation in the process” (27). Though Neylan does not note, as do a number of Aboriginal scholars and spokespeople, that many Aboriginal nations were ecumenical before Christianity was introduced in North America (Métis author Harold Cardinal’s *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada’s Indians*, published in 1969, deserves worthy mention), she provocatively suggests that “the significance of transformation and of experiential forms of spirituality... predisposed Tsimshian towards certain aspects of Protestantism, not because they were ‘new’ but because they were familiar” (28). Moreover, she convincingly argues that “Christianity was not received for its religious messages alone” (44), positing that Christianity was, in fact, astutely used for Tsimshian financial and cultural advancement. “‘Driftwood’ on Their Shores and the Mission to Convert” is “a survey of the patterns of Christian missionization on the North Coast of British Columbia” (45), and the strength of this chapter is that it enters a new question into scholarship. Neylan suggests that the focus should not be whether or not the Tsimshian became Christians but whether conversion “represent[s] a replacement of Native religions at all” (64). “Proselytizing from within: The Native Christian and Catechist” problematizes the rhetoric of historical interpretation and traces the latter’s emphasis on the utterly transformed Tsimshian Christian to Euro-Canadian conceptualizations, thereby implicitly suggesting the worth of relying on Aboriginal records (as Neylan does) to interpret history. “‘Until the Gospel Came and Lifted Her’:

Perspectives on Christian Native Women and Families” “examines how this missionary imposition influenced Tsimshian women who converted to Christianity” (105) in a manner different than it influenced Tsimshian men; Neylan concludes that Christianity, in fact, “offered women new ways to maintain and expand pre-existing roles within their communities” (106) while, at the same time, conceptualizing women “according to Victorian models of femininity and domestic and maternal duty” (106). Native men “were primarily recognized for what they did as mission workers” (106). “Native Missionaries” and “The Self-reflections of Arthur Wellington Clah” are paired chapters “exploring missionization from the Native perspective through some of the textual sources they produced” (129). The first focuses significantly on “Tsimshian Christians [who] often inverted the images and metaphors of this hegemonic script, using it to critique the very missionaries who used it and the missionization process itself” (128-29); the second, an examination of the journals of Arthur Wellington Clah, attempts to assess literary tropes from a Tsimshian perspective — in particular, “metaphors of ‘containedness’” (167) — to suggest how Euro-Canadian values were undermined by (and perhaps even irrelevant with respect to) Tsimshian articulations. “Prophets, Revivals, and Evangelists” “examines Native forms of disseminating Christian power which remained outside the immediate control of missionaries” (175) while “The Politics of Everyday Life” turns the book’s focus again to commonalities between Euro-Canadian and Tsimshian cultures, though suggesting how symbols could be employed by different cultural positions for different ends. The last chapter, “Christian Houses and Colonial Spaces,” is a further and final challenge to received colonial interpretations of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in Canada, as Neylan suggests that an “‘indigenization’ of Christianity also occurred, especially at the community level” (235).

Neylan’s study is a welcome, important and rich addition to Aboriginal scholarship in Canada, and it has implications which extend beyond the sphere of historical studies. Neylan’s successful attempt to stand outside the academy’s ubiquitous belief in post-colonial theory, entrenched as it is in a consideration of binaries and dichotomies, adds a level of sophistication to the field of inquiry which presently dominates the study of Aboriginal issues in Canada. In particular, it is Chapter Four (“‘Until the Gospel Came and Lifted Her’...”) and Chapter 6 (“The Self-reflections of Arthur Wellington Clah”) which are the richest

finds. The former complicates the field of Aboriginal studies by separating women's considerations from those of men (though under the same critical colonial umbrella), reminding the scholar who must examine within the context of Canada's relatively new fascination with pan-Indianism (a focus and political reality borne out of the 1960s and 1970s in Canada) that no culture is homogenous and that cultures deserve sophisticated examinations of sensibilities imbricated in reality's complexities. The latter chapter and study of Clah should be mandatory reading for contemporary scholars of Aboriginal literatures as much as it should serve the purposes of historians. Implicit in Neylan's observations is the recognition that formalism (whose abandonment in the academy at large was commensurate with both the growth of post-colonial theory and the beginning of a new and fervent focus on Aboriginal culture, history and literature after the 1960s and 1970s in Canada) needs to be reintroduced into scholarship, albeit with a healthy deconstruction of its Euro-Canadian and colonial legacies.

My only query would concern the bibliography's omission of J.E. Chamberlin's *The Harrowing of Eden: White Attitudes Toward North American Natives* and Jarold Ramsey's *Reading the Fire: Essays in the Traditional Indian Literatures of the Far West*. The latter's examination of the influence of non-Native mythology on Salishan literature might have afforded Neylan the opportunity to further examine Tsimshian culture's dependence on "metaphors of 'containedness'" in terms of what Ramsey would call mythpoesis. No study, however, can account for every text, and *The Heavens Are Changing* is unequivocally responsible and rigorous.

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