
REVIEW ESSAYS

INDOCTRINATION, CONVERSION, AND BELIEF IN THE COLONIAL IBERIAN WORLD

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Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830–1949. By Erick D. Langer. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009. Pp. xiii + 375. \$24.95 paper. \$89.95 cloth.

Bonfires of Culture: Franciscans, Indigenous Leaders, and Inquisition in Early Mexico, 1524–1540. By Patricia Lopes Don. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. Pp. xiii + 263. \$34.95 cloth.

Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns. Edited and translated by Sarah E. Owens. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies Publications, 2009. Pp. vii + 212. \$21.50 paper.

Death and Conversion in the Andes: Lima and Cuzco, 1532–1670. By Gabriela Ramos. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 355. \$39.00 paper.

All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World. By Stuart B. Schwartz. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. Pp. xiii + 335. \$25.00 paper.

Religión y poder en las misiones de Guaraníes. By Guillermo Wilde. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sb, 2009. Pp. ix + 509. \$85.00 paper.

The conversion of the indigenous peoples of the Americas to Roman Catholicism was among the key official objectives of the Spanish Crown, but the transfer of religion to the New World implied more than mere conversion. Demographically,

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it eventually affected African slaves. Spiritually, it posed challenges to the Spaniards who were in charge of executing it. This massive cultural transfer turned out to be an involved task, with tangible reverberations several centuries later. After the violence of the conquest period, missionaries largely carried out the effort to impose a uniform and single religion, although the Spanish Crown expected laypeople such as *encomenderos* to aid in the spread of faith. But while missionaries were carrying out their work, the Inquisition was active among professed Christians, searching out weaknesses in their beliefs. Faith turned out to be a delicate and intangible possession in need of constant care.

The uprooting of old beliefs to substitute new beliefs by force, persuasion, or both has been a recurrent event, both in lived experience and in the historiography of colonial Latin America. This transformation has been recorded largely by the victorious and rarely by the people who were indoctrinated, whose voices were customarily repressed and persecuted. Abandoning one's religion to adopt another entails more than a mere change of rituals. It affects one's personal and communal commitments to a specific understanding of the world and one's role in it. Those who tried to persuade others to change their religion initially assumed that it would be a relatively painless occurrence, given their own certitude that they had the only truth in the matter. Possessed by such convictions, the missionaries who arrived at the American continent hoped for an untroubled process that would unfold a prefigured pattern of history. Their hope gave way to a realization of the magnitude of the endeavor and, within a decade, to deep worries, as it became patently obvious that so-called neophytes were not easily persuaded and that conversion would demand a steady and stressful effort by all involved. The slow evolution of acceptance of a new faith and the internal fissures created by questioning established believers on the nature of some canonical pillars of Roman Catholicism are foundational themes in the history of indoctrination, conversion, and belief in the Americas. The six works under review help clarify some aspects of the process and extend the frontiers of its historiography.

Evangelization and conversion had their first dramatic stumbles in the New World in the very first decade of indoctrination. New Spain, where the Franciscan order carried out the first intensive evangelizing, experienced the first ecclesiastical trials of notable indigenous dissidents in the mid-1530s. This well-known historical chapter, which ended with the burning of Don Carlos, ruler of Texcoco, at the stake in November 1539, is reexamined by Patricia Lopes, whose ability to construct an agile narrative turns her work into a compelling read. Lopes argues that the actors of this drama—Bishop Juan de Zumárraga and the indigenous leaders Martín Ocelotl, Andrés Mixcoatl, Miguel Pochtecatl Tlaylotla, and Carlos Ometochtl—were involved in a complex process of learning about one another and that the trials reveal new evidence about the character and circumstances of all involved. Supported by the abundance of recent studies about indigenous culture and postconquest society, Lopes reviews the trials, the actors, and their behavior to understand how they fit into the general reaction of the indigenous elite to the newly imposed social and religious order. As a whole, Lopes sees the elite represented by these men as playing a skillful “arbitration of avoidance”

(13), that is, as avoiding frontal confrontation and walking a narrow line between resistance and collaboration as an expeditious means of coexistence.

Lopes places each of the accused in his specific context, as not all indigenous peoples came from the same background or had similar purposes in their resistance to Christianity. She also calls attention to the background of Zumárraga, Andrés de Olmos, and Antonio de Ciudad Rodrigo, the main Spanish protagonists in the trials. Zumárraga, for example, had experience in witch-hunting in the Basque region and had taken part in the effort to Christianize the recently defeated and baptized Muslims of southern Spain. The methods used in the conversion of New Spain bore a significant resemblance to those used in the peninsula and should be studied in that light.

The Franciscans' hopes for conversion were shaken when they understood how the old faith resisted disappearance and how both Spanish settlers and indigenous rulers were at times willing to ignore widespread recidivism. With the reputation of his order at stake, Zumárraga saw inquisitorial proceedings as a means to contain dissidence and to repair an ineffective process of Christianization. Lopes characterizes members of the postconquest indigenous nobility as masterful politicians who walked a fine line to defend their vested interests. Tributes, land, defense of family lineage, and prerogatives such as the right of males to have several wives were as dear to them as their ties to their own religion. As the administrative structure of the Spanish government strengthened, many indigenous nobles were willing to renounce their old religion officially to maintain a grip on their old status. Yet there were a few who made mistakes in the avoidance of confrontation and rebelled either for personal gain or in the hope that their defiance could succeed in the face of ineffective ecclesiastical and civil authorities. Those were the men brought to trial by Zumárraga and accused of divination (Ocelotl), impersonation of the old gods (Mixcoatl), hiding bundles of the founding gods (Pochtecatl Tlayotla), or apostasy (Don Carlos). Coming from diverse backgrounds, the men had in common the personal decision to stand not only for their own gods but also for their own understanding of masculine values. Lopes perceptively introduces a gendered vision of these men, a nuance not always appreciated in previous analyses. She treats the actors and the period with respect and intensity, and she renders a vivid picture of the convulsed decade in which conversion plans were at their most tense and dangerous point.

The program of conversion and indoctrination that Lopes studies survived its initial challenge, but as the frontiers of European occupation and settlement expanded beyond central Mexico and throughout the continent, it replicated itself in different geographical settings with different actors. In the highlands of Central and South America, as well as on the frontiers of northern New Spain and the lowlands of Bolivia, different ethnic groups relived the confrontation with hegemonic religion. In regions lacking the solidity of unified states, indigenous communities were reorganized into mission pueblos; the best known of these in South America were under the guidance of the Jesuits. By the mid-eighteenth century, confrontation had given way to a set of religious practices and political issues that would last beyond the colonial period. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century missions

by Jesuits among the Guaranis, and by Franciscans among the Chiriguanos, reveal a mature system of indoctrination, conversion, and social readjustment.

Guillermo Wilde's erudite study treads on well-known territory: the Guarani missions of today's Paraguay. The Tupi-Guaranis have received an overwhelming amount of attention from ethnohistorians, anthropologists, and historians, who have struggled to unravel the skeins of the existence of a very complex people. In this revisionist work, Wilde covers the Guaranis from the early seventeenth century through the first decades of the republican period to pursue the central theme of social transformations, in which the Guaranis played a protagonistic role by defining their own sense of time and history within the religious and social structure that their Jesuit "guardians" provided.

One of Wilde's aims is to rebut prior interpretations of the Guaranis as a people conscious of having an ancestral sense of ethnic belonging that, at the end of the colonial period, allegedly moved them toward a basic ethnic unity under a messianic umbrella shared by their own political leaders. This interpretation came into vogue in the third quarter of the twentieth century but has since been contested by a variety of ethnohistorians. Wilde joins the ranks of those who, through meticulous research on the Guaranis, seek to discard the European filter of many sources, as well as the theories proposed by twentieth-century interpreters, which Wilde compares to the imaginary constructs previously created by Jesuits and colonial authorities.

Wilde supports the view that, facing new peoples, a new religion, and new sociopolitical institutions, Guarani authorities reinvented themselves within the mission. Guarani leaders were deprived of their traditional source of power, so they adopted and manipulated key institutions of Spanish governance to maintain their leadership. Although not lacking in internal conflicts, this process of adaptation and preservation of local power was already familiar, part of the history and intergroup relationships of Guaranis before Europeans arrived. Wilde argues that ethnic affiliations among Guaranis were less important than immediate bonds with close relatives. Historical information reveals a tense relationship between Guarani cultural heritage and the new elements imposed on their world, but they learned how to take advantage of the new system. Recent ethnographic studies of indigenous peoples elsewhere have arrived at similar conclusions.

Wilde delivers his promise of a full discussion of Jesuit government and of their methods of indoctrination, manipulation, and negotiation. The imposition of Christian civility through the ritualization of behavior and space, and by re-orienting the Guaranis' social axis from the family to Christian symbols, were conversion tactics that, we assume, were common to Jesuit activities in other geographical areas. Wilde aptly discusses them, and he emphasizes how native and Iberian social institutions melded, and how Guaranis maintained a supple personality under a semirigid system of control. Spanish institutions such as *cabildos* (town councils) created a bureaucratic class that sustained a working relationship between the religious and the Guaranis, with *caciques* (indigenous leaders) playing a key role in organization and stability. While fully acknowledging the eventual loss of the native priesthood (*hechiceros*), Wilde suggests that there was an intrinsic ambiguity in the exercise of missionary authority, as Jesuits ob-

served the expected reciprocity and rituals that cemented goodwill among their flock.

A key question in the history of these missions is how Guaranis reacted to the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. The governor of Buenos Aires reintroduced the figure of the king, gaining the loyalty of caciques, who saw new possibilities of direct access to Spanish venues of power. As Wilde argues, this development reflects eroding relations between Guaranis and Jesuits in the decades preceding independence. Nevertheless, in the post-Jesuit period, missions weakened as a result of conflicts between Guaranis, bureaucrats, and even priests; struggles among new settlers, ranchers, and bureaucrats; incursions by predatory revolutionary leaders; and shifting political and cultural frontiers.

Wilde's account of postindependence life gives insight into demographic changes that made social mobility and inclusion in the general population via *mestizaje* possible for Guaranis, who nevertheless retained the institution of *cacicazgo* and the liturgy that they had learned from the Jesuits. Traditional social and political savvy served Guaranis in navigating the rough waters of the first decades of independent statehood, but the most important relic of the past was the preservation of Catholic rites, which proved the glue that held their communities together. Wilde reopens many questions and offers new answers to the fascinating history of the Guaranis, ending his study where that of Erick Langer, centered on Franciscan missions, begins.

Studying Chiriguano missions in eastern Bolivia between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1930s, Langer aims to revitalize the study of missions in the republican period in two ways: by validating the term *frontier* beyond its mere geographical meaning and by anchoring the institution of the mission in the historiography of the frontier. This linkage, he proposes, affords a better understanding, ethnically and sociologically, of the Chiriguanos, of the policies that Bolivia formulated and enacted as an independent state, and finally of the response of the church and the Chiriguanos to the new postindependence *modus operandi*. Langer proposes that the concept of life cycle—foundation, readjustment, deterioration, and eventual demise—be applied to the history of missions. The foundation of postindependence Chiriguano missions was simply a reorganization of older missionary efforts. Italian missionaries supplanted Spaniards but still represented European colonialists to both ethnic Chiriguanos and new republican authorities. The initiation of a life cycle forces the historian to assess what was new and not so new in running missions, in confronting lay settlers, and in redefining the relationship of the republican state to the missions.

Langer tells us that postindependence missions retained many features of the colonial period that eventually clashed with new social and political realities and became untenable. Before their demise in the 1930s, however, the missions underwent a period of readjustment and growth. The Bolivian state saw them as useful tools to expand and strengthen its frontier and ensure its own survival. Politicians of different complexions initially allowed the Franciscans to operate with a considerable degree of autonomy. As in the colonial period, missionary activity helped “pacify” the indigenous population, a fact that would benefit non-Indian settlers, who in the end became a more desirable demographic for the state

than the Chiriguanos. Old issues such as litigation over land created resentments among new settlers and missions; but it was not until Liberal and secularizing politicians began to apply anticlerical ideas that the missions' life cycle began to be threatened and approached death.

Secularization gained momentum in the early twentieth century and, by the 1930s, Liberal ascendancy and the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay combined to destroy the missions. This received the approval of a new highland—not Chiriguano—indigenous leadership, a reversal that closed the missions' life cycle. Secularization had a devastating effect on the indigenous peoples of the lower eastern areas. Distrusted by highlanders and considered enemies by the Paraguayans, the scattered inhabitants of the missions would never again gather under the old, and now weakened missionary premises. One thing did not change, however: the demeaning treatment of indigenous peoples, who continued to be considered legal minors by the new 1937 *reglamento*. The fate of the church was tied to the vagaries of politics and ideologies in the national period, yet the spirit of *reducción* (gathering Indians into fixed settlements) and paternal control, characteristic of the colonial period, would persist for centuries.

Both Langer and Wilde enrich their works with information on the social organization of missions, which allows for a comparative view of two different styles within the framework of the same evangelical enterprise. These two works prove that missionary history is still alive and open to debate and reinterpretation and that it should be extended beyond the colonial period.

The degree to which indigenous peoples accepted conversion remains a slippery issue full of disquieting signs that never yield complete intellectual satisfaction or comforting evidence. Nonetheless, there has been no lack of attempts to grasp the essence of religious transformations and of dissidence from within. In her study of death in two Andean cities, Gabriela Ramos proposes that the degree and pace of conversion may be assessed by studying the last wills and testaments of Christianized Indians. Using this Spanish legal venue, Indians stated their beliefs as they disposed of their material possessions and navigated the complex set of sacred rituals surrounding death.

Assuming the compulsive nature of conversion, Ramos does not dispute that it may not have been as complete as Spanish ecclesiastical authorities imagined or desired. In contrast, she argues that, after a century of enforcement, her subjects had new social and community attitudes shaped by Catholicism. Ramos's cultural approach joggles history with sociology and anthropology and offers a different dimension to explore conversion. What people believe about the afterlife is a trustworthy clue to their faith.

Before discussing colonial religiosity, Ramos explores the diversity of pre-conquest ideas on the meaning of death and the many rituals observed by Andean cultures in the territory that would become present-day Peru, including rituals predating the Incas. The violence experienced first in the Incas' defeat, and then in civil war among Spaniards, allows Ramos to establish a transitional period of accommodation that would develop in the following hundred years. She argues that a key component of conversion was precisely the reshaping of the sacred in relation to death. Preconquest Andean religions believed in an afterworld, yet

Christianity injected concepts such as purgatory and the teleological finality of reward or punishment in resurrection. The dispositions made in the wills of men and women by the early seventeenth century indicate that these beliefs were adopted not only by the urban elite but also by lesser members of the community. The foundation of parishes, the construction of churches, and the organization of hospitals and confraternities brought a religious structure that nourished pillars of faith such as the sacraments of extreme unction and final confession, as well as masses to aid the dead. These practices speak to a specifically Christian vision of the cosmos and were the results of decades of indoctrination and practice.

Ramos follows the progress of religious changes through a close examination of wills in the cities of Lima and Cuzco. The distinct characteristics of Lima, where Indians were marginal, and of Cuzco, where they were central to any social process, establish a dialogue made necessary by regional variations in Andean culture and explain differences in the manner of burial and the practice of patronage. Wills offer a wealth of detail about choices—in burial, grave location, apparel, and care of the body after death—that help one follow the exchange between the old and the new orders. They also convey the means used to honor ancestors and recognize offspring and family in accord with the new laws, how hierarchy was established or reinforced, and how ties to the community were strengthened. Over time, adaptation and adoption of Christianity, though not necessarily complete conversion, speak in Ramos's view to a need to "resolve the practical problems involved in the . . . imminence of death" (213). The Christianization of death, she concludes, was crucial in the conversion of Andean peoples. Ramos posits that any process must be meaningful to participants if it is to be effective. The interaction of the Catholic Church, the beliefs of conquerors, and the beliefs of the conquered that expressed itself in wills reveals, to Ramos, that indigenous communities were finding Catholic practices satisfactory in the quest to understand the meaning of life and death. *Death and Conversion in the Andes* is a rewarding read. It follows well-established lines of historical ethnography and exemplifies the potential that the sensitive analysis of testimonies of daily life has when placed against the larger background of royal and ecclesiastical policies.

Should the study of evangelization in early Latin America focus exclusively on Indians? Answering this question in the negative, we open historical inquiry to the activities of those who dedicated themselves to ensuring Catholic orthodoxy not only among converts but also among others born into the faith. Doing so also leads to the study of dissidence and doubt, as well as the type of religious observance imported to the New World by men and women of the cloth. Stuart Schwartz and Sarah Owens address some of these issues in their books.

Although scholars now frequently use inquisitorial records to learn about popular beliefs, a new set of sources has allowed them to address the presence of women as members of the church and the meaning of female spirituality in colonial culture. Laywomen of all social classes and ethnicities were the stronghold of the church. Educated in piety rather than in letters, they sustained and invigorated it through the daily observance of devotions and rituals. Nevertheless, nuns were the most emblematic embodiment of Catholicism's successful transfer to Spanish and Portuguese America. The foundation of nunneries began by the

mid-sixteenth century and lasted through the final decades of the colony; they were patronized by rich and poor and held in high esteem by the pious faithful. In a sea of illiterate women, nuns stood out as one of the few groups to receive regular instruction and to wield the pen. With the exception of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, most nuns wrote about religious subjects such as their own spiritual life, or religious plays and poems, biographies of their sisters, chronicles of their convents, and devotional books. Although such texts afford a gender-based vision of religion, the work Owens studies is of a different genre.

Nuns founding convents traveled all over Europe and to the New World; but, even in that context, the story of five Capuchin nuns on their way to establish a new community in Lima is definitely a *rara avis*, now made available in a polished English translation. The exceptionality of Sister María Rosa's diary, which Owens edited and translated, is matched—to this day—only by the account of the Brigittine nuns who traveled from Spain to New Spain, arriving in 1743.¹

The Capuchins' travelogue is a remarkable narrative of what it was to journey as women in Spain, across the sea, and overland in distant colonies in the early 1700s. These nuns fully belonged to the transatlantic cultural exchange. As Owens points out, they were aware of their mission and, although they did not personally convert or indoctrinate others, they represented the triumph of faith for a colonial elite avid to reiterate its loyalty to the church. Their community was yet another link in the chain of conventual establishments that created bridges to European Christianity, one that specifically inserted a female presence into the space of the sacred. They brought a pattern of social distinction and spirituality that was expected to be replicated and multiplied, even though its bearers had sworn a vow to virginity and celibacy. As we know, social and geographical differences between Europe and the New World eventually gave female religious communities in the colonies their own special identity. However, in terms of following the canon and observing the spirit of post-Tridentine religion, female convents adhered to orthodoxy, and in doing so, they helped strengthen Catholicism and piety in the urban population. The willingness of patrons—not all of whom were necessarily affluent—to found and sustain female convents speaks of the value that convents had as symbols of local pride, as well as their role as places of refuge for women.

For women who spent their lives mostly behind walls, this journey was a unique experience, and Sister María Rosa renders it with a considerable degree of sophistication. Apart from a plethora of details about the incidents and accidents of the journey, the narrative confirms the selectivity of the participants' viewpoint as Spaniards and members of the social elite. The landscape was challenging and terrifying; they judged the few isolated pampa Indians they encountered to be ugly and in need of Christianization; but, for the most part, the Capuchins enjoyed the civility and piety of their distinguished hosts and hostesses until their arrival in Lima. Among the latter, they found the social comfort and religiosity that, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, was a sign of the assimilation

1. Anne Sofie Sifvert, *Crónica de las monjas Brígidas de la Ciudad de México* (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1992).

of an Iberian-inspired lifestyle. Where Lopes and Ramos raise the issue of belief as the core of the history of evangelization, Owens's protagonists are a less recognized model of the faith that evangelization sought to instill in professing Christians.

In contrast to the emblematic, perfect Christians these nuns represent, we find, in Schwartz's subjects, disquieting signs of doubt among the Roman Catholics who populated the cities and countryside of the Iberian nations and their colonies in the New World. Here, we learn that dissent can be a mark of tolerance in the closed and apparently intransigent ground of Roman Catholicism.

A fundamental pillar of Christianity is the belief in eternal life and the salvation of the soul through Christ's sacrifice, as Ramos points out in her study of wills. Questioning this means of salvation can lead to a questioning of faith, and for early modern Catholicism, this was not a negotiable practice. So-called *novísimas*—writings and preachings about the final meaning of life and death—were a thriving occupation in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Catholic Iberian world. The nature of salvation mattered to all people, not just theologians, insofar as its understanding nourished their faith and presumably guided their actions. But was the doctrine of salvation conceived by common men and women in accord with the teachings of canonists and theologians? Schwartz argues that, despite narrow perimeters traced by canonical Catholicism, a good number of people interpreted salvation as a more flexible notion.

Schwartz's study of tolerance in a venue characterized for its intolerance of heterodoxy and dissent is challenging, not only conceptually but also in terms of historical research. Using the concept of salvation as a means to enter the realm of personal belief, Schwartz surveys the entire Iberian world, in Europe and America, in a fine example of transatlantic studies, and shows how this ample frame can accommodate more than traditional themes such as migration or trade. Schwartz posits that dissidence and the expression of nonconformity had a place in many sectors of the population and revealed flexibility within the frame of religious rigidity. This position echoes Lopes's discussion of the subtleties of dissent among the first neophytes. The protagonists in this case, however, were non-heroic men and women, whose exceptionality encourages history written against the grain and appreciation of the individual nature of faith. To sustain his thesis, Schwartz retrieves testimony by Iberian Christian doubters in the Old and New Worlds, as well as by Jews and Muslims who converted for practical reasons. The result is a picture of tolerance set within a narrow circle, defined and contained by vigilant inquisitional and ecclesiastical authorities.

The vastness of the New World, as well as the complexities of the transfer of faith, made the religious threat of Protestants a political and commercial issue. However, the real challenge to Catholicism in sixteenth-century America was the residue of indigenous beliefs and the underground flow of Judaism. Throughout the colonial period, indigenous beliefs adapted to Christianity while Judaizers went further underground. Schwartz calls the final product of the confrontation of indigenous beliefs and Christianity a "multidirectional process of absorption, adaptation, and incorporation" (171). Enslaved Africans presented problems of belief not far removed from those found in the first generation of indigenous con-

verts, with additional moral quandaries about their human status. These problems added to the expression of dissidence and doubt.

Schwartz's work is, indeed, about the growth of doubt within a hegemonic religion that was imposed in an imperious manner on a vast area of the world and to people of different races. However, the fact that it includes examples from imperial epicenters, exposing fissures of doubt in their midst, adds weight to Schwartz's thesis. He would like historians to look deeper into the minds of local people rather than to rely on the discourse of the learned in discussing matters of faith. Incredulity and dissent had some purchase, not only in the Iberian world but across Europe and among Protestants as well. The rigidity of canonical mandates was intended precisely to address the potential of dissent. *Tolerance* was never a good word in the early modern world, but it existed and became more defensible by the advent of the Enlightenment. However, religious tolerance would not become an acceptable possibility in the Iberian and Ibero-American worlds until the late nineteenth century, and with many important exceptions, it was finally allowed breathing space in the twentieth century. Arguing for the worthiness of the study of a fragile cultural concept, Schwartz ends by reaffirming the validity of the common folk's thinking about deep religious concepts. A revised and refreshed history from the bottom up, this comprehensive work is not confined to social or economic issues but attempts to engage the obscure and less well-remembered members of society, developing pathos for an arguable thesis in a field in need of adventurous minds.

The works gathered in this review essay represent a newer trend in the historiography of conversion, indoctrination, and belief. They tie the meanings of dissent, consent, and conformity to personal and communal beliefs in the tenets of religion. They suggest fruitful ways to decipher sometimes obscure expressions of personal faith and to examine the equally difficult theme of the relationship between the faithful and the institutions in charge of kindling and maintaining that very personal corner of the human soul. Spaniards, Africans, Amerindians, men, women, the wealthy, and the poor are all represented in these works because they were compelled by the one quest that can accommodate all members of society: that of a belief in some principles that might allow them to grasp the meaning of their lives.