

radix

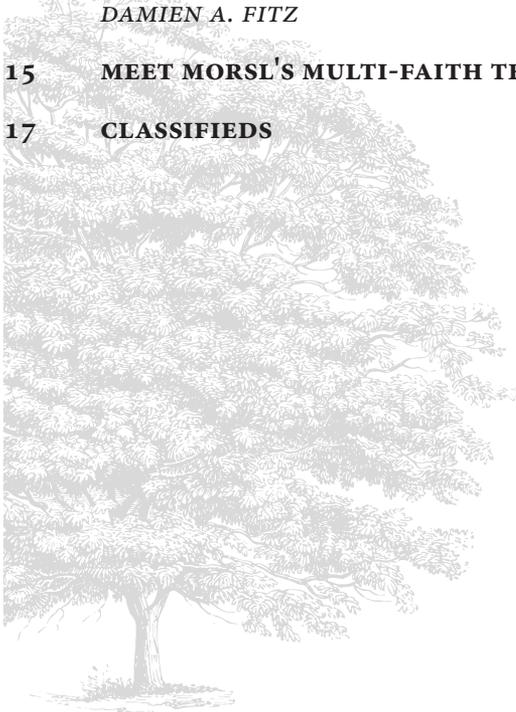
MCGIL'S STUDENT SPIRITUALITY MAGAZINE

APOCALYPSE AND REBIRTH WINTER-SPRING 2022



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Radix is a student-centred magazine providing literary and artistic space for expression on spiritual themes, produced by the McGill Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.

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EDITORS' MESSAGE

These are, to use university parlance, “unprecedented and unpredictable times.” Faced with a global pandemic, climate change, and a politically polarized landscape, we have become acutely aware of the precariousness of life on Earth. Some of us may feel hopeless and turn to eschatology, believing “end times” to be close at hand. Others may feel that this confluence of terrestrial disaster is precisely the shock to the system our world needs, and that we will emerge from these circumstances with a new compassion and appreciation for ourselves, each other, and the planet.

Whatever beliefs you may hold about the future, we are decidedly on the verge of something, be it positive social change or complete societal unraveling. That is why we chose the theme of “Apocalypse and Rebirth” for our Winter 2022 issue.

In this volume, you will find, among other submissions, an exploration of feminist eschatology, an examination of eschatological themes in Nathanael West’s “Day of the Locusts,” and a poem on the human condition. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

- Gabriel Yahya Haage and Melissa Hinckley

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**MCGILL OFFICE
OF RELIGIOUS AND
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About the cover: Artist Božena produced this piece called “Sun After Destruction” which depicts a woman who is the sun, (finally) in the sun, after armageddon. The embroidery is hand-stitched.

Untitled



Hugo-Victor is a photographer from Seattle and a McGill undergraduate student

Eschatology in Feminist Theology

In recent decades, feminism has exploded on the scene of theological and biblical thought. It has offered critiques of Christianity, offering a refreshing lens to a religion that has been intellectually defined by men for most of history. Rosemary Radford Ruether was one of the forerunners of this work and her legacy will remain with us long after she is gone. Yet her understanding of eschatological feminism has been criticized recently. Therefore, in this essay, I will define what eschatological feminism is according to Rosemary Radford Ruether. I will argue that her understanding of eschatological feminism puts the emphasis on an afterlife with God where the sexes will become an androgene and that this understanding mitigates social justice work in the current age. I will conclude that eschatological thought is an important part of modern feminism but is only helpful when it does not disregard injustices in the present.

In *Sexism and God Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, Ruether looks at different anthropologies. She starts with the assertion that anthropology in Christianity has been patriarchal. She argues that Augustine “concedes woman’s redeemability and hence her participation in the image of God” but “it is so overbalanced by her bodily representation of inferior, sin-prone self that he regards her as possessing the image of God only secondarily” (Ruether 1983, p. 95). Therefore, while Christianity walks a delicate balance of not denying that women are redeemable, they are placed under the subjection of men and not fully God. This is a direct affront to Genesis where “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (NRSV Gen 1:27). Ruether concedes that Augustine’s view is not shared by all – for example, Luther radically asserts that “in the original creation, Eve would have been equal with Adam,” and that “Eve cannot even be known by reference to the present nature of women” (Ruether 1983, p. 97). Yet in these examples, we can see that one of the most influential Church Fathers and the most influential Reformer viewed humanity under a patriarchal lens.

This contrasts with egalitarian anthropologies where there is an “assertion of woman’s original equality in the image of God and its restoration in Christ” (Ruether 1983, p. 99). These lines of thinking conform more to what we see in the first creation account in Genesis. Yet what do different feminists do with the assertion that women are equal in God and that this has been affirmed by Christ? There are different responses to affirming that and how one actually lives that out in the present reality. Ruether speaks of eschatological feminism which she argues “is a perspective that developed parallel and even earlier than patriarchal Christianity, during the late first and second centuries” (Ruether 1983, p. 99). Even the most ardent patriarchal New Testament scholars cannot deny the presence of women in positions of power in Paul’s letters. The presence of these women in power led to non-canonical books such as the Acts of Paul and Thecla.

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SARAH WICKS

Taking these early examples of equality between the sexes, “eschatological feminism affirmed the restored equality of men and women in Christ by referring to an original transcendent anthropology that existed before the fall into the finite condition” (Ruether 1983, p. 100). Part of the consequences of this fall was the differentiation of the sexes – some proponents of eschatological feminism argue that “in one version original humanity was united in a spiritual androgene. Adam was both male and female, united and whole” (Ruether 1983, p. 100). Ruether’s understanding of eschatological feminism affirms that salvation cannot be found in the current patriarchal age where we are split into multiple sexes. Salvation can consist only “of transcending our sexual, bodily nature through ascetic practices and recovering our spiritual, androgynous nature” (Ruether 1983, p. 100). Clearly, our spiritual, androgynous nature can only be found in a limited capacity in our current existence so all our attention must be directed towards the coming eschaton where we will be able to reunite our female and male halves. While the Church, as a symbol of the New Heaven and New Earth which Jesus will bring about, should have equality, proponents seem very unconcerned with actually making this a historical reality. Ruether argues that in this understanding of the eschaton, proponents “implicitly agree that the subordination of women in society is unchangeable within history” especially “as long as women remain in sexual and procreational relationships” (Ruether 1983, p. 101). In other words, there is little hope for liberation.

It is a view of eschatology that separates itself from the Earth, from history, and from living in the present moment. Ruether’s explanation of eschatological feminism is well-crafted and in true scholarly fashion, she does not show her hand in explaining it. She puts it out there for the reader and theologian to judge and saves her opinions on it to other places. Her explanation is concise and thoughtful. Yet, the question remains: Does feminism need the future? Emily Pennington comes in to answer in her article “Does Feminism Need the Future? Rethinking Eschatology for Feminist Theology.” It is with her work and my own reflections which I will conclude.

Christianity has suffered at the hands of the patriarchy. A religion which was spear-headed by women (the first apostle to see the Risen Christ being Mary Magdalene) has become under the domination of a male hierarchical system. It is doubtful that the broken relationship between women and the Church will ever fully heal during our lifetime. And yet, Christianity is a religion built on hope and built on relationality. It is God’s relationship as Trinity within herself that our religion is based on. Pennington proposes that “we can hold together an under-

standing of humanity as partners with God, that is, working with God to create loving relationships now, with a trust in God for the final help” (Pennington 2013, p.223). We can hold together “a particularly eschatological future, in order that the God of relationality is able, and enables creation to experience this relationality in full” (Pennington 2013, p. 233). We can have trust in a Trinitarian God to bring together an eschatological future where broken relationships will be healed and that does not need to mitigate any of the important work we need to do in the present. Ruether writes about the large Matrix and “our acceptance of death is acceptance of the finitude of individuated centers of beings, but also our identification with the large Matrix as our total self which contains all” (Thompson 2010, p. 235). The Matrix is what Pennington calls our healed relationality where we can all fully be in relationship with each other and have our needs met. We should strive to work towards that in the here and now, and not let a theoretical afterlife distract us from humanity, but also when we see the failure of individuals to love each other competently, we should have hope in the eschatological Matrix where we will all be competent in the end.

We began this paper by defining eschatological feminism as Ruether defines it in *Sexism and God-talk*. While the eschatological feminism she describes is divorced from life on this earth, other theories and feminists have critiqued that this eschatological understanding is not enough – we need an eschatology that believes we can have an effect on life on this planet. But like most things, it is in the middle where we find the truth. We should not disregard our Christian hope in Jesus coming back and we should not disregard our Christian duty to work ethically for our siblings (human and nonhuman) on this earth. Both are not black and white and are not easy. Following a rigid doctrine has always been easier. But when has Christianity ever been a black or white or an especially easy religion? We follow someone who was tortured to death by the Roman state. If we can believe it is worth following him, why can't we also believe in an eschatological future devoid of the patriarchy and founded in relationality?

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Untitled



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Musings of a man at the end of the universe

There is a man at the end of the universe, floating in the depths of space. His home had deteriorated, as had all matter. Everything except him. He remained alive, as his body had molded itself to suit his circumstances. That was his curse.

As he floated there, he tried to go through his entire life, trying to imagine what his mentors, his friends, his loves said and did when he had interacted with them. He went over this so many times, he felt he knew his life by heart.

And then, something wonderful happened. The universe started again. It ran through billions of years, as it cooled, created stars which died, creating most elements, eventually leading to planets, even earth!

So the man headed, at the appropriate time, back to earth.

He saw that he was already there. This was not a new universe, but the same one in a loop! So he disguised himself as someone else and watched his life from afar. His love, his family, their failures and successes. But even all that ended and, billions of years later, he was the lonesome man at the end of the universe.

In the next loop, he became bolder and molded himself into his own mentor. While he was ready to bolt once the actual person showed up, he never did. And it dawned on him. He was his mentor! He always had been.

In the following loops he became this person or that. Whatever actions he took, were the actions the person actually took. His words, the exact words that were remembered in his mind. Sometimes he would forget who he was, fall into the character too much. He even seemed to die, from time to time, but he would always come back. False memories would sometimes sneak in, like the idea of pregnancy or birth. But he would eventually remember who he was, sometimes when he became the last man, out in space. And the fact he never met any other versions of him floating in space was clearly explained by the size of the cosmos.

When he did remember how the universe worked, he was elated. No one really dies, because they are all the man at the end of the universe. We will live on, we've just forgotten who we are. Or is this but a dream? Perhaps there is no resurrection, no return of our world. Perhaps there is only a man, at the end of the universe.

The author is a student at McGill.

Untitled



Hugo-Victor is a photographer from Seattle and a McGill undergraduate student

Untitled



Hugo-Victor is a photographer from Seattle and a McGill undergraduate student

Who We Are

Born as we are, to walk this earth. Shown the ways to live and rest. Every day and every night. Toiling, we spend most of the day. And remembering, in the nights. Yet within these times lie moments. Gazing towards the sun that shines upon us. The moon whose beauty never escapes our hearts. And the stars that are closer than the distance we measure. We lie in those moments, drinking the milk of truth. Hiding itself in plain sight. We are neither that which is born, nor that which walks. Nor the one who toils. Nor the one who remembers. Nor the one who gazes into this eternal wisdom. We are that which remains. Eternally existing. Outside the threads of creation.

Ag is a PhD student in computer science, from India.

Hollywood, the Graveyard of Nations

Civilizational Fatalism in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*

If one thing can be said of language, it is that it delights in ambiguity and imprecision. One example is a phrase which is chillingly becoming more and more relevant day by day: "it's the end of the world." Of course, we don't really mean it. There is little we can do to truly finish off the planet on which we live. We might raise global temperatures so as to upset diverse ecosystems. We could, in that stupor which results from rushing out the door without a morning coffee, allow some long-festering pathogen to escape some lab and kill 50% of the world population. 75%? 90? 99? Do I hear 100? Maybe. But then again, there would likely still be the trees, the birds, the alligators and crocodiles, the jungle cats and flying fish, just to name a few of those fellow living things with which we share this earth and sea. If we really made the effort, really went for the A+ in thoroughness, we could maybe, just maybe, accomplish that elusive feat of utter and complete annihilation. Maybe; I can think of a few species of deep sea fish that might give us a run for our money, as well as microscopic bacteria, and not to mention those pesky cockroaches. Even if we did manage to become death, the destroyer of worlds, though, we would still likely fail to erase the rocky sphere we live on. What we mean then, when we say "it's the end of the world" is that "it's the end of the world *as we know it.*" Not *the* world, really, but *a* world, *our* world.

Is this scary? Well, yes. It's downright terrifying. One might say that it is even more fear-inspiring than those religious conceptions of apocalypse which are an actual end, which represent the light of existence flickering out, because those (if one believes in that sort of thing) only come once (or once per cycle, for proponents of eternal return); the type of cataclysm here being discussed are not so unique. Taking a grand view of history, one might even say that they are common. We might be living through one: even if Putin does not follow in Stalin's footsteps and make Russia's war in Ukraine a genocide, could the obliteration of the Ukrainian state not be considered an apocalyptic moment for that people? Would one not call the destruction of the Second Temple and the eviction of the Jews from their native land a kind of Armageddon for the ancient Hebrews? It seems silly to argue otherwise.

For those of us who are not students of history, the above claim that such events are not rare might seem hyperbolic. One need not look far to dispel this thought, though. There is no better collection of spent nations and phases of civilization than Hollywood, especially as portrayed in Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*. West reveals the ubiquity of societal failure through diverse and plentiful historical allusions. One of his main characters is Homer Simpson (potentially the namesake of the cartoon character), whose first name recalls the Greek Heroic Age, a thing of the past even for

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the likes of Socrates, Herodotus, and Alexander, who lived much later. The name of another key character, “Abe,” summons to the mind ancient Judaism. As does the novel’s title, which references the Egyptian captivity, yet another apocalyptic moment in the history of the Jews. In that conflict, the motives of the two peoples are set in direct opposition. For one nation to rise, they must strike against the other with a plague of locusts, or, from the other perspective, to sustain itself, a populace must enslave another. Geopolitics, in this model, becomes a zero-sum game. In so being, conflict is inescapable, and, given the sheer number of examples West provides, the conclusion of it seems forgone. The novel proves this point with its final chapter of mass violence. The episode fittingly erupts at “Kahn’s Persian Palace” (West 152), which references the splendor of two late empires in its name (the title “Kahn” evoking Genghis Kahn of the Mongol Empire). Not only is civilization doomed, but it is also doomed to repetition, as represented by the “potentially infinite number of Waterloos” if the set at which Tod Hackett, the central character, works were to collapse each day only to be rebuilt the next (Jacobs 309). Hollywood, as Tod understands it, is like the paintings of “Guardi and Desiderio[, with] palaces that seemed of marble until a whole stone portico began to flap in the light breeze” (West 95). Even if all seems stable and orderly, a spark might, at any moment, from any source, start “The Burning of Los Angeles” (West 2). The city is therefore “a historical microcosm [...] in which to observe the decline of the West” (Locklin 292). In this way, West shows that the end is always nigh.

Is it? Opinions are divided, both as to whether such a permanent, and therefore necessarily unchanging, society is possible as well as whether it would be the sort of place of which one would like to be a denizen. For the purposes of not providing a laundry list of great thinkers and their thoughts on apocalypse and societal change (there are a lot of them, it’s a fun topic), I will consign myself to two personages of similar worldviews. Karl Marx says it’s all so much phooey. In his philosophical system of dialectical materialism, forces will always arise from within any given social order to destabilize it. To borrow a term from maritime law, every civilization has an inherent vice, a tragic flaw which is at once integral to the society and eventually spells its doom. For the Roman Empire, this was the competition among citizens to achieve glory by rendering services to their state. The greatest of possible ministrations was conquest. Not only did this high-stakes game transform the Republic into the Empire through the power struggle between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great (and Crassus, if we are being generous), but it also led to the complete collapse of the Western Empire, the leaders of which, lacking profitable targets for foreign wars, decided more glory was to be gained through civil conflict. Marx painted capitalism in the same light; once automation reached such proportions that the working class was intolerably squeezed, they would rise up and seize the means of production from the capitalist class. Another socialist, George Orwell, in 1984, seemingly posits that such a steady state is possible,

but it is a dystopia. (The novel admittedly contains what would, at the time of its publication, have been considered science fiction elements, but of course, in our day, less than a century later, such technologies as Orwell imagined are considered positively archaic, and so the story cannot be called wholly unrealistic.) The three superpowers of that world, all of them basically fascist but with different veneers, take turns pairing up to fight the odd one out, but never push to any final victory which would upset the world order. Everything in the societies is geared towards this permanent state of war, which the upper brass never hopes to win anyway, and so does not bother with innovation or whatever else might give them the upper hand and, as a side effect, change the material reality of the civilization. One thing that should be pointed out, however, is that Orwell's Big Brother subsumes our society (or the early 20th century ancestor of it); I would wager that there are very few people who would argue that the current state of the world is destined for eternity. It is rather more likely that we are in for at least one more "apocalypse." The writing is perhaps on the wall.

It is for the reader to decide which of these two thinkers was closer to the truth, but their disagreement shows that, as one must expect, the future is uncertain. The past, however, is unequivocal; the ends of the world are a dime a dozen. One need only go to the box office and see which national specters are at the moment being projected onto the silver screen. From my own perusal, I identified a film about the Vikings; we don't see them around anymore, do we? And then there are those speculative films, like the recent *Dune*, which imply that the days of our current day are numbered. Of course, this is all little comfort for those of us living in apocalyptic days. The material reality and brutality of such events will prevent most people from taking full consolation in philosophy, in that knowledge that this has all happened before and, if Nathanael West and others are right, will likely happen again. It requires a very cerebral being to sing along in agreement to R.E.M.: "It's the end of the world as we know it, and I feel fine."

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MEET MORSL'S MULTI-FAITH TEAM

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Shmuly, our Chabad Rabbi, leads the Chabad Student Center on Peel, where they offer spiritual growth and personal guidance.

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Salam, our non-denominational Muslim volunteer, serves both McGill and Concordia, and also presides the Muslim Council of Montreal.



Rev. Dr. Anthony Atansi
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Fr. Anthony is our Catholic volunteer and he is also currently chaplain of the Newman Centre, McGill's Catholic community.

David Summerhays
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David is our Quaker volunteer. He is available for a chat about faith, and helps to organize meditations in the Quaker tradition.



Dr. Juss Kaur
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Juss is our Sikh volunteer. She holds regular motivational workshops that engage students with questions of faith, spirituality, mindfulness, and positive thinking.

Rabbi Ellen Greenspan
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Rabbi Greenspan has been serving as the Rabbi-Educator at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Westmount since 2014.



**MCGILL CHAVURAH
(GHETTO SHUL)**

The McGill Chavurah continues on the legacy of Ghetto Shul as a community intent on creating inclusive spaces for Jewish students. We are currently running online events, which aim to integrate the peace and comfort of shared Jewish experience into the hectic feeling of student life. We are progressive, sustainable, inclusive, traditional, non-hierarchical, and egalitarian in both structure and practice. Because we are student-run, we evolve to fit the needs of our changing community every year.

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hillelmcgill@ssmu.ca

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mcgillcatholics.ca
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The SSA aims to serve as a home and safe community for youths of secular, atheist, agnostic, non-religious identities and their allies in the Greater Montreal Area, as well as advocate for socio-political causes that align with our humanist values, including human rights, racial justice, LGBTQ2+ rights, feminism, and more.

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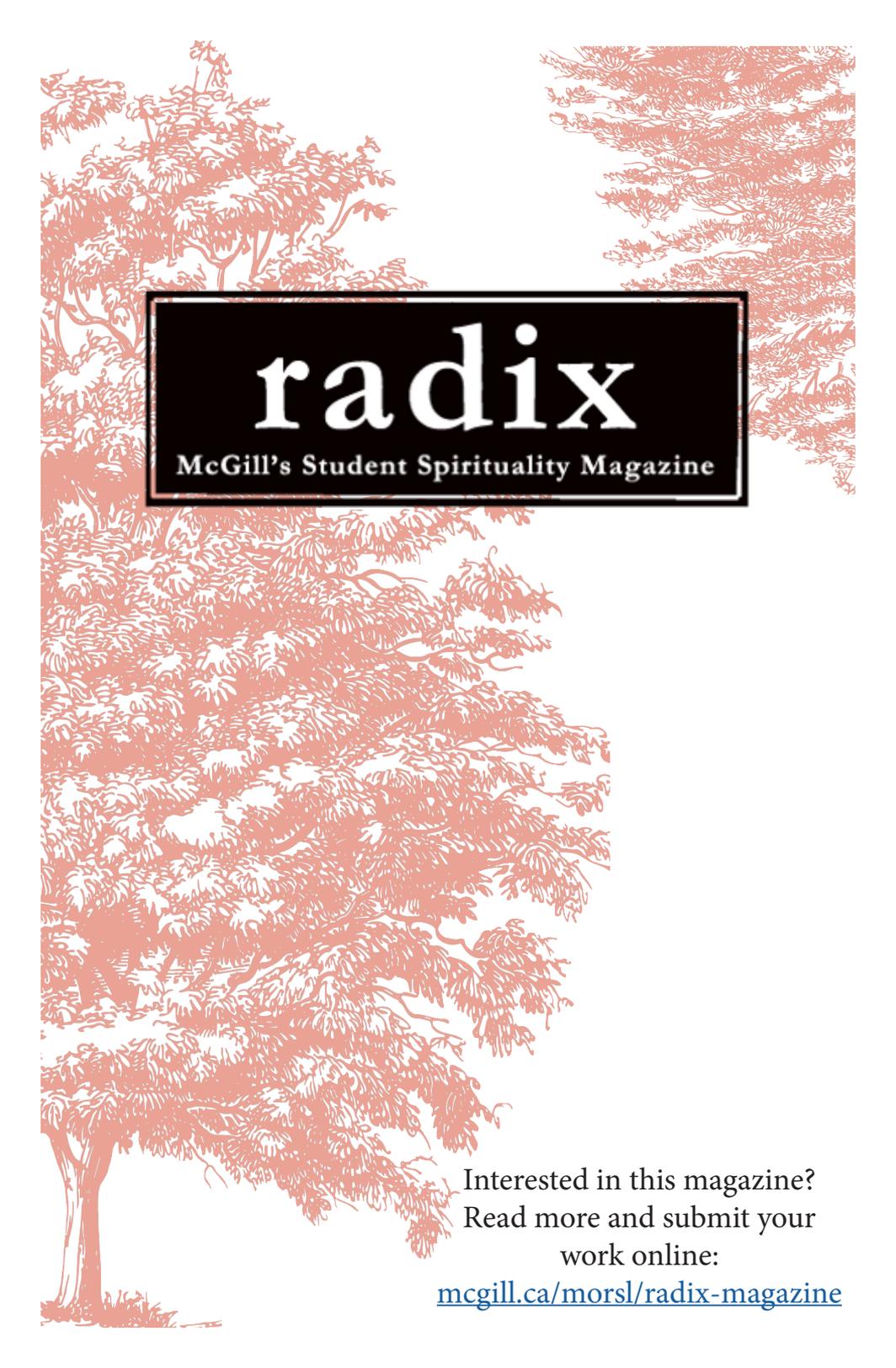
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