

# CROSSROADS

An interdisciplinary journal for the study  
of history, philosophy, religion and classics

VOLUME VI ISSUE I 2012

ISSN: 1833-878X

Pages 46-57

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*The Magical Power of Cannibalism*

## ABSTRACT

This article explores the perceived magical and religious uses of cannibalism across the boundaries of time, geography and culture. Cannibalism is often considered to be a primitive practice, however if we consider cannibalism to be the incorporation of human body components, then we could logically say that anyone who has had an organ donation or a blood transfusion, or has partaken of the Eucharist in either the Anglican Church or the Roman Catholic Church have indeed become cannibals.

## BIOGRAPHY

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# THE MAGICAL POWER OF CANNIBALISM

## INTRODUCTION

In this work I will discuss perceived magical properties of cannibalism, which for this article is defined as the consumption of human body components. These types of practices are often referred to as ritual cannibalism ‘...since they have magical and spiritual connotations to the participants.’<sup>1</sup> These supernatural aspects can be found across the boundaries of time, space (geography), and culture. Today cannibalism is viewed by cultures based on European values as an abhorrent and aberrant behaviour. However cannibalism has been widely accepted and practised by many societies as a way to interact with their gods and elements of the spirit world, as well as with the perceived nature of humanness in its positive and negative guises. In fact as we shall see, Europe was not immune to the magical properties of the ingested human. I will discuss magical aspects of cannibalism under five separate yet inter-linked categories. These encompass its abilities to transfer traits, to control, to heal, to transform or transmute, and as a method of communication.

These magical powers can be interpreted in a literal or symbolic sense.<sup>2</sup> Strathern in his discussion of tribal New Guinea lists death, reproduction, incest, male-female oppositions, greed and witchcraft as all symbolically and ritually linked to cannibalism.<sup>3</sup> Zubrinich believes reality and myth can be conflated and during this process human and cultural behaviour are formulated. This conflation or interchange ensures ‘the creation and maintenance of the social world.’<sup>4</sup> Eating human flesh was in this sense, both physically and spiritually nurturing. Cannibal symbolism is a powerful tool that has been used to great effect as definitional of ‘them’ and ‘us.’<sup>5</sup> This is especially evident in recent discourse on cannibalism and colonialism. In some cases the symbolic mitigated the reality. For example, Amerindians of Northeast Canada created the mythical man-eating Windigo to help them socially overcome the reality of winter cannibalism<sup>6</sup>—individuals who cannibalised believed they became a Windigo and as such were not responsible for the cannibal acts they committed. At the end of winter there were no repercussions for those who had eaten human flesh, that is, those who had become a Windigo. I will not be expanding on the symbolic use of cannibalism in this essay however it is important for the reader to be aware of its existence.

The magic of literal cannibalism involves the belief that by the ingestion of body parts, properties were passed from one human to another, or from human to god and vice versa. In this essay I will concentrate on literal cannibalism, holding to the narrow definition of cannibalism as the consumption of human body parts.<sup>7</sup> I will

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<sup>1</sup> Jean La Fontaine, “Ritual Murder” in *O. A. C. Press Working Papers Series Number 8* (London: Open Anthropology Cooperative Press, 2011), 1-17: 8. [www.openanthcoop.net/press](http://www.openanthcoop.net/press) Accessed 11.9.2011.

<sup>2</sup> However these two are rarely encountered separately.

<sup>3</sup> A. Strathern, “Witchcraft, Greed, Cannibalism and Death” in *Death and Regeneration of Life*, eds. M. Bloch and J. Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 111-133: 130.

<sup>4</sup> K. M. Zubrinich, “Asmat Cosmology and the Practice of Cannibalism” in *The Anthology of Cannibalism*, ed. L. R. Goldman (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 1999), 123-141: 124.

<sup>5</sup> I do not intend to enter the debate begun by William Arens in 1979 with the publication of *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press). In this work Arens proposed that cannibalism was an act committed only by the psychotic or those suffering from starvation. He believed that in all other circumstances cannibalism was only used as a metaphor. Jean La Fontaine notes a common trait of cannibalism—that cannibalism creates this separation by ‘justifying to each the inferiority of the other’ (La Fontaine, “Ritual Murder,” 7). According to Petrenko and Yartseva, the Russian historian B. F. Porshnev, ‘...once expressed a paradoxical idea that cannibalism had not existed in the history of mankind (though this contradicts anthropological investigations) because those who had eaten other human beings never considered their victims as human—i. e. as self.’ (V. F. Petrenko and A. I. Yartseva, in “Cross-Confessional Investigation of Religious Vision of the World in the Context of the Fight Against Terrorism” in *Psychological Responses to the New Terrorism: A NATO-Russia Dialogue*, eds. Simon Wessely and Valery N. Krasnov (Amsterdam: I. O. S. Press, 2005), 115-123: 115.)

<sup>6</sup> The long harsh winters and lack of winter food resources, we are told, led to cannibalism. This form of behaviour is often referred to as survival cannibalism.

<sup>7</sup> I will not discuss modern medical cannibalisation via blood transfusions, organ transplants or experimentation. However it is important to be aware of its existence. It has been admitted by staff of the Green Lane Hospital in Auckland, New Zealand that they have harvested the hearts of deceased babies for experimentation without consent for almost fifty years. A. Waldron, “Eat People –A Chinese reckoning,” *Commentary* 104: 1 (1997): 28-33. Nancy Scheper-Hughes details the eyewitness accounts by foreign

discuss literal cannibalism from across time, the globe and cultures, and thus show that belief in these magical powers has not been exclusive to any one particular society, and that in many cases the same beliefs were held by societies separated by these three referents. In other words diverse societies have used the medium of cannibalism to achieve the same goals without any connections between the groups. I begin with a discussion of the magical effects of cannibalism and the transference of traits.

## TRANSFERENCE

Cannibalism was believed by many groups to be able to transfer traits or power from the consumed to the consumer.<sup>8</sup> These abilities could be physical or metaphysical. An enemy who had fought bravely before being vanquished was partly consumed so that the eater would absorb those positive qualities. For example the legs of a swift runner were eaten to increase speed, his heart to increase bravery and courage, his arms to facilitate spear throwing or bow-man-ship etcetera. However the most common example of the transference of powers attributed to cannibalism is in relation to those believed to be witches. Witches consumed human flesh to increase their own powers by absorption.

Across history, the globe and cultures, witches have been accused of cannibalism; many acts performed illicitly. The Fore tribe from New Guinea still hold to the belief that witches are untrained and cannot control their power, whereas sorcerers can. Whitehead posits that because Europe was preoccupied with witches at the time of colonial expansion, these attitudes were transported with the colonialists and were superimposed upon the cultures they encountered.<sup>9</sup> Thus was born the exotic cannibal. As in Europe the majority of those accused of witchcraft (and thus also of cannibalism) were women. Jean de Lery writing in the sixteenth century is a case in point.<sup>10</sup> He supported the witch-hunts in Europe and the Americas, and brought his prejudices to the New World. His misogynistic reports from Brazil detailed those accused of cannibalism were predominantly women—they ate flesh and thus they had to be witches<sup>11</sup> and should be dealt with in the same manner as alleged witches in Europe.

In Europe witches were commonly accused of sacrificing and consuming children, preferably young and plump, and the eating of human flesh, cooked by the coven's servants, was believed to be a part of initiation into witchhood as well as part of the 'normal' witch rituals. The fat was believed to be an ingredient of a potion that could poison an enemy or 'make a broom to fly.'<sup>12</sup> In sixteenth century France it was believed that the fat of sacrificed infants was eaten and 'sucked dry'<sup>13</sup> or it was made into salves.

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investigators to China's cannibalization of executed prisoners, although this is denied by Chinese officials. The witnesses saw the non-consensual harvesting of organs, particularly kidneys from the recently executed by medical teams who had witnessed the punishment and were on standby. Organs were then sold or given to party officials, foreigners, or those with connections, most organs ending up in Middle Eastern and South East Asian hospitals. The number of executions is increasing and the crimes attracting the death penalty would seem to be innocuous, such as petty theft and tax evasion. ("The New Cannibalism" [http://www.soros.org/individual\\_fellows/internalpages/images\\_2/pubs\\_page/fellow\\_observer/fall\\_98/new\\_cannibalism.htm](http://www.soros.org/individual_fellows/internalpages/images_2/pubs_page/fellow_observer/fall_98/new_cannibalism.htm) Accessed 5.10.2001). China is currently the only nation continuing to use the organs of the executed for transplantation.

<sup>8</sup>. For example the Ijo of West Africa. (La Fontaine, "Ritual Murder," 8). Other examples include the Lessa from Central Africa eating female genitalia to enhance their marital performance, the Wabondei from East Africa believed eating human liver would give them energy and strength. (Howard Cheng, *Beyond Food or Drug: An Examination of Food and Drug Law Through a Study of Cannibalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Law School, 2002): 1-12: 7, <http://leda.law.harvard.edu/leda/data/471/Cheng.html> Accessed 10.9.2011). Diehl and Donnelly note that the British Celts gave the heads of the slain to the Druid priests who then ate the brains. (Daniel Diehl and Mark P. Donnelly, *Eat Thy Neighbour: A History of Cannibalism* (Stroud, Glos.: Sutton Publishing, 2009), 20.

<sup>9</sup>. Neil L. Whitehead, "Hans Staden and the Cultural Politics of Cannibalism," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 80: 4 (2000): 721-753; H. E. Martel, "Hans Staden's Captive Soul: Identity, Imperialism, and Rumors of Cannibalism in Sixteenth-Century Brazil," *Journal of World History* 17: 1 (2006): 51-69.

<sup>10</sup>. F. Lestrangant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne* R. Morris (trans.) (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup>. And also that if they were witches they must also be cannibals.

<sup>12</sup>. R. Tannahill, *Flesh and Blood: A History of the Cannibal Complex* (New York: Stein and Day, 1975).

<sup>13</sup>. Caroline Oates, "Metamorphosis and Lycanthropy in Franche-Comte, 1521-1642" in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michael Feher with Roman Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone Books, Part One, 1989), 304-363.

On the African continent witches were killed and eaten so that the cannibal could enhance his or her own supernatural abilities. In New Guinea witches were cannibals who killed their victim by consuming the internal organs and they were 'known' to disinter bodies. Conversely some tribal groups killed and ate a known witch in order to prevent the witch's power from being used by others. Cannibalism could transfer magical powers by both incorporation and dissipation.

Another example of the magical ability of transference can be seen in the rituals of the Ovimbunda tribe from Angola. A legendary king had a predilection for the flesh of small children. His kingship was so successful that this special behavioural pattern was emulated to transfer and preserve the essence of his kingship. To this end 'no king was ever allowed to rule or to be crowned unless he had eaten human flesh. For this purpose, it was the custom to kill a fattened slave and to eat his flesh mixed with that of other animals.'<sup>14</sup>

We can see that diverse societies have held the belief that cannibalism was capable of transferring traits and power; both to increase personal power and to prevent its future use. Closely linked to this is cannibalism's power to control.

### CANNIBALISM AND CONTROL

Cannibalism was used as a means of control, particularly in a social sense to achieve dominance and vengeance, and in these instances the victim was often representative of his or her group.<sup>15</sup> It was also used to control the fertility of the land and of the group itself. In China the heart was the seat of power, it was a metaphor for the head of state. This metaphor set the scene for the political cannibalism of the People's Revolution when cannibalism described oppression and oppressors. During the Cultural Revolution 'the conversion of the oppressor into food for the former victims must have seemed a fitting revenge.'<sup>16</sup>

We have seen above that cannibalism was used in the control a witch's power, both by the witch to increase power or used by others to absorb it and thus nullify it. This ability to divert control from the wrong hands can be seen in the Pacific Islands and parts of South America where it was common practice to consume the bodies of enemies to prevent the dead from exacting revenge. But cannibal magic was also used to help control the environment and especially human and environmental fertility, as well as the balance of the cosmos. Resurrection mythology dealt with fertility both of the land and the human species. In many groups from America to the Indian subcontinent, humans were sacrificed and their blood sprinkled on the sown fields, the seeds then consumed the body, and were in turn consumed by the populace; the dead were brought to life again once consumed by the living. Death was a necessary part of the ritual as it was from death that life had come.<sup>17</sup> The Pawnee Indians of North America sacrificed a young teen-aged girl and dripped her blood onto newly planted seed. The remaining flesh was made into a paste and spread onto root crops.<sup>18</sup> Frazer (quoted in Campbell) notes that 'cakes in human form have been sacramentally consumed at planting and harvest festivals wherever grain has been ground into flour and baked. [They are all] sacramental cannibalistic meals.'<sup>19</sup> The Aztecs are also among the societies who made edible images of their gods.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>. Herman Helmut, "Cannibalism in Palaeoanthropology and Ethnology" in *Man and Aggression*, A. Montagu (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 229-253: 237.

<sup>15</sup>. For example some Maori tribes only ate representatives of the enemy, usually the chief and his wife. The Kwakiutl had tribal members whose roles were to be the cannibals for the tribe as a whole. This type of cannibalism was highly regulated and commonly the cannibal was required to vomit the human flesh ingested and undergo rigorous cleansing procedures and rituals immediately afterwards. Cheng in *Beyond Food or Drug* (9) tells us that members of this tribe who chose the cannibal god as patron only received his benevolence after time in the forest and their first human meal. Marvin Harris, (*Cannibals and Kings: The Origins of Cultures*, (London: Collins, 1977)) on page 104 notes that 'if to be tortured is, as we say, to die a thousand deaths, then the torture of one poor captive is to kill a thousand enemies.' The Huron of North America chose a representative victim whose role was to defy the denigration of torture before his death and consumption.

<sup>16</sup>. D. S. Sutton, "Consuming Counterrevolution: The Ritual and Culture of Cannibalism in Wuxuan, Guangxi, China, May to July (1986)," *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 37: 1 (1995): 136-172: 151.

<sup>17</sup>. Tannahill, *Flesh and Blood*.

<sup>18</sup>. Kay Ray Chong, *Cannibalism in China* (Wakefield, New Hampshire: Longwood Academic, 1990).

<sup>19</sup>. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* (New York: Arkana, 1991 [1959]), 187.

<sup>20</sup>. Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth*.

The Aztecs also used human body consumption as part of their rituals to ensure that the rains came at the correct time. A productive field maintained its fertility by the sacrifice and cannibalization of a family member. Human blood deliberately shed was called 'most precious water.' As a non-renewable resource and thus more valuable, it was used to feed the gods and quench the thirst of the earth prior to planting. To celebrate a bountiful harvest the first fruits were often given to the gods as payment for their intercession. In Aztec society this would include children, often described as the 'young tasselled corn,' 'paper streamers,' and 'baby corn.' In each of these instances the populace consumed what the earth and the gods did not eat.

The efficacy of cannibalism to increase and preserve tribal fertility is another commonly held belief. Doueihy believes that in many cultures the heart is the centre of regeneration.<sup>21</sup> The purpose of eating the heart of one's enemy may not be to ingest his courage; it may be the ultimate revenge by preventing his regeneration. The Aztec sacrifice of the victim's heart could thus have a greater meaning.

In Sarawak, the Iban, one of the indigenous tribes, practised headhunting. Freeman details various rituals that involve heads they took in battle.<sup>22</sup> Apart from providing the warrior prestige the head was seen as a font of fertility for him and his community. Freeman notes that in psychoanalytic terms the head equates to the phallus and hence procreative abilities.

Mortuary cannibalism of the Bimin-Kuskusmin from New Guinea is believed to recycle a man's procreative and ritual strength within his family.<sup>23</sup> Part of his bone marrow is consumed. The men eat a portion of an initiated woman's bone marrow or a portion of her vulva, and the tribal women eat some of her belly fat for the same purpose. Many New Guinea tribes required a woman to eat part of her deceased husband's penis, and a man to eat part of his deceased wife's vagina to ensure that their fertility and procreativity stayed within the tribal group.<sup>24</sup> There is much purging afterwards. Porter-Poole claims to have seen this ritual on four occasions.<sup>25</sup> These beliefs were echoed in parts of South America where the chief's wife would eat part of an enemy's penis to increase her own fertility.

Cannibalism helped to control the cosmos for many groups. In Aztec society the human body reflected the cosmos and conversely the cosmos explained the human body, thus because the gods consumed humans, humans as a reflection of the gods did also. Eating the same food as the gods gave the eater temporary god-like status and the ability to interact with the gods as equals. Aztec mythology stated that the earth was created from a snake cut in half that refused to be fruitful until soaked in blood, which carried the vital force that conferred divine life,<sup>26</sup> and fed human hearts. Despite her sacred nature the earth depended on humans for sustenance and its provision. 'If the world and the seasons were to continue, the original drama had to be re-enacted every year by the gods, with the aid of man.'<sup>27</sup> The gods had a duty to maintain the working order of the universe; humans had a duty to feed the gods and enable them to perform this duty. The cosmos was kept 'healthy' by strict observance of all the rituals that kept chaos at bay. Cannibalism helped to heal and perpetuate the social body.<sup>28</sup> The Aztecs also believed that the sun was a new sun each day. To ensure the sun cycle was perpetuated the gods had to be fed: fresh beating human hearts were again preferred. The rest of the corpse was cooked and eaten by all members of the community. Roman Berrellezareveals that half the skeletons of sacrificed children uncovered at Tlatelolco in Mexico were found to have various skeletal pathologies that indicated their health conditions were precarious and they had little chance of survival.<sup>29</sup> Hopi cosmological law stated that the sun needed human grease to burn

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<sup>21</sup>. Milad Doueihy, *A Perverse History of the Human Heart* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup>. D. Freeman, "Severed Heads that Germinate" in *Fantasy and Symbol: Studies in Anthropological Interpretation*, ed. R. H. Hook (London: Academic Press, 1979), 233-246.

<sup>23</sup>. Fitz John Porter-Poole, "Cannibals, Tricksters and Witches: Anthropophagic Images Among Bimin-Kuskusmin" in *The Ethnography of Cannibalism*, eds. Paula Brown and Donald Tuzin (Washington, D. C.: Society for Psychological Anthropology, 1983).

<sup>24</sup>. I. M. Lewis, *Religions in Context: Cults and Charisma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>25</sup>. Porter-Poole, "Cannibals, Tricksters and Witches."

<sup>26</sup>. Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>27</sup>. Tannahill, *Flesh and Blood*, 20.

<sup>28</sup>. Aztec society was waiting for the return of the Toltec god, Queztalcoatl, who it was believed, would abolish the practice of cannibalism. Part of Hernando Cortes' success hinged on this myth as Cortes forbade human sacrifice and thus cannibalism.

<sup>29</sup>. Juan Alberto and Roman Berrellez, "A Study of Skeletal Materials from Tlatelolco" in *To Change Place: Aztec Ceremonial Landscapes*, ed. David Carrasco (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1991), 9-19.

and keep rotating at its proper speed in perpetuity.<sup>30</sup> The Melpa of New Guinea, and other tribes, believed the creating Sky-Beings were cannibals. Cannibalism maintained the health of the world and in the next section I will discuss its magical attributes to heal the individual.

## HEALING POWERS

Cannibalism also had the magical power to heal. As Howard Cheng states, '[c]laims (and superstition) that the consumption of human parts cleanse the body of disorder, act as wards against sickness and cure illness, are old, common and well known.'<sup>31</sup> This is a common belief across history and geography. It is hard to ascertain the dividing line between 'legitimate' medical uses of the body, and satanic or witch ceremonies that were alleged to use body parts to effect cures and curses.<sup>32</sup> For most Westerners the idea of starvation cannibalism is barely palatable, cannibalism practised by those not as 'civilized' as ourselves is deemed abhorrent yet understandable, but the idea that the 'consumed' body has healing powers is truly unthinkable. And yet '[it] seems certain that the practice of medicinal cannibalism has always been a part of any concept of healing, from the dawn of medicine to the present day.'<sup>33</sup> It is not only exotic and tribal groups that have engaged in therapeutic cannibalism. It was a commonly accepted practice in Western societies. Pliny recommended pulverized bones, especially the skull, for many illnesses.

Christianity has claimed responsibility for the abolition of cannibalism, yet Christian Europe was using the human body medicinally during at least the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. In the sixteenth century Ulisse Aldrovandi, a well-known scientist of his era stated 'I believe that there is no part of the human body, no residue which comes forth from it, out of which the doctor cannot derive enormous advantage on behalf of the sick.'<sup>34 35</sup>

Medical cannibalism utilizes the body's power to heal. Piero Camporesi notes that in Medieval Europe, medical science dictated that a healthy body part, placed against the corresponding body part of an ill person, would affect a cure.<sup>36</sup> Saints by definition live with god, even in the material world. This bestowed upon them the healing powers of God himself. They were known to spit or breathe into the mouths of the ill. Many 'ingested' disease as they ingested pus, lice, scabs and other bodily components. They cannibalized the sick and the sick cannibalized them. The ill ingested parts of saintly bodies or their exudations, the 'prodigious manna,'<sup>37</sup> as the bodies of the saints were deemed able to perform post-mortem miracles, including miracles of healing.<sup>38</sup> The bodily exudations after death usually described as a sweet smelling oil, were collected and used to effect miraculous cures.<sup>39</sup> Some saints suffered miraculous lactation, the breast milk having extraordinary curative powers.

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<sup>30</sup> Christy G. Turner, II. and Jacqueline A. Turner, *Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence in the Prehistoric American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 468.

<sup>31</sup> Cheng, *Beyond Food or Drug*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Paracelsus himself was accused of conversing with Satan.

<sup>33</sup> P. K. Himmelman, "The Medicinal Body: An Analysis of Medicinal Cannibalism in Europe 1300-1700," *Dialectical Anthropology* 22: 183-203: 198.

<sup>34</sup> Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh: Bodily Mutilation and Mortification in Religion and Folklore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Today Christian based societies are the biggest consumers of body parts in the form of blood transfusions and organ transplants. There is an increasing belief that given a broad definition, these constitute cannibalism.

<sup>36</sup> Piero Camporesi, "The Consecrated Host: A Wondrous Excess" in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michael Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone Books, Part One, 1989), 221-234. See also Karen Gordon-Gruber, "Anthropogagy in Post-Renaissance Europe: The Tradition of Medical Cannibalism," *American Anthropologist* 90: 2 (1988): 405-409: 93; P. K. Himmelman, "The Medicinal Body."

<sup>37</sup> Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh*.

<sup>38</sup> Bishop Hugh of Lincoln outraged the citizens of Fecamp, followers of Mary Magdalene, by chewing on the relic of her arm bone, and saying that if he could touch the body of Christ in Mass, then he could certainly chew the bones of a saint (Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages" in *Fragments of a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michael Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone Books, Part One, 1989), 161-219; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Bynum, "The Female Body"; Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*; Piero Camporesi, *The Incorruptible Flesh*.

The medicinal use of human body parts was at its peak in the seventeenth century when it was used for such diseases as epilepsy, arthritis, sciatica, warts, reproductive difficulties, skin blemishes, and impotence to name a few.<sup>40</sup> Cannibal healing magic was particularly favoured in England.<sup>41</sup> Montaigne in his discourse *Of Cannibals* states of his native France that ‘... physicians do not fear to use human flesh in all sorts of ways for our health, applying it either inwardly or outwardly.’<sup>42</sup>

As Western ‘orthodox’ medicine was developing, an intellectual battle raged between the theories of Paracelsus,<sup>43</sup> and Galen.<sup>44</sup> Paracelsian and Aztec cosmologies shared a commonality in the reflection of the macro-world in the micro-world of humans. Followers of Paracelsus used human body parts, especially from Egyptian mummies, to affect cures, because they, like living man, contain all the elements of the macrocosm. The use of mummies or mummia, and moss of mummy was popular in England. The moss, or usnea, grows on a skull that has been exposed to the air and usually takes at least six years to appear. Usnea remained an official drug in England as late as the nineteenth century. Mummia was still listed as available in 1908. In Medieval Europe and China, it was common for the blood and the body of executed criminals to be used medicinally. Bread soaked with a little of the criminal’s blood was said to cure impotence in men and infertility in women.

In Edward Taylor’s “Dispensatory”<sup>45</sup> as discussed by Karen Gordon-Grube the entry for man comes after lynx and before magpie.<sup>46</sup> He lists over fourteen body parts and exudations that are powerful curatives from hair, nails and earwax, to excrement, blood, milk, placenta,<sup>47</sup> fat and gallstones. As Gordon-Grube states ‘Taylor advocates cannibalism, pure and simple, and that the purpose is medicinal does not change the fact.’<sup>48</sup> Richard Sugg notes that as historical circumstances changed, mainstream medical treatment was undermined and discarded in Europe, including medicinal cannibalism.<sup>49</sup>

Children’s hair was believed to cure gout, their teeth to cure all uterine diseases, and human ashes imbibed with wine or broth to cure any ailment no matter its cause. Medical practitioners of the time also found great benefits in the umbilical cord, used as a talisman.<sup>50</sup> Modern medical science is embarking on a similar voyage of discovery. Urine was and still is recommended for its curative properties. Human grease, especially as it exuded from criminals’ hanging on the gallows was exceedingly beneficial, and fat in a solid form also found favour, particularly if it was from young children. Thirty-five body parts have been listed as having medicinal use in China, for innumerable diseases including impotence and tuberculosis. Some highly placed eunuchs in Medieval China killed virgin boys and ate their brains in an attempt to recreate their own genitalia. In China as in Europe, many of the body parts used medicinally, (particularly hearts, livers and fresh blood), were sold by the official executioners.

However for the European the most efficacious human remedy was the mummy. Not the sort that administers tender loving care but the sort that came from exploited Ancient Egyptian tombs, and failing that, from bodies that had been dried in the desert sands. This latter source was not as strange as it may seem as it was not uncommon for whole caravans to be overcome in the desert, not to be found until years later as the desert sands

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<sup>40</sup>. David F. Salisbury, *Brief History of Cannibal Controversies*. (2001)

[http://exploration.vanderbilt.edu/news/news\\_cannibalism-pt2.htm](http://exploration.vanderbilt.edu/news/news_cannibalism-pt2.htm) Accessed 5.10.01.

<sup>41</sup>. P. Villa, “Cannibalism in Prehistoric Europe,” *Evolutionary Anthropology* 1: 3 (1992): 93-103: 93.

<sup>42</sup>. Michel de Montaigne, *Montaigne’s Essays and Selected Writings* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1963), 103.

<sup>43</sup>. Paracelsus was a Swiss-German physician and alchemist (1493(?)–1541). Paracelsus can be seen as the forerunner of homeopathy as he believed it was the spirit or essence of the medication that was efficacious and contact was not necessary.

<sup>44</sup>. Galen was a Greek physician and writer on medicine (130–200 C. E. (?)) who demanded physical answers and physical contact, he was the forerunner of our current medical system.

<sup>45</sup>. Edward Taylor was a poet and a town physician in Puritan New England, and his “Dispensatory” details the remedies he used in his practice.

<sup>46</sup>. Karen Gordon-Grube, “Evidence of Medicinal Cannibalism in Puritan New England: “Mummy” and Related Remedies in Edward Taylor’s “Dispensatory,”” *Early American Literature* 28: 3 (1993): 185–221: 192.

<sup>47</sup>. Placentophagy is currently experiencing a resurgence.

<sup>48</sup>. As early as 1582 the medical use of humans was denounced as cannibalism; Gordon-Grube, “Evidence of Medicinal Cannibalism in Puritan New England”: 199.

<sup>49</sup>. Richard Sugg, “‘Good Physic but Bad Food’: Early Modern Attitudes to Medicinal Cannibalism and its Suppliers,” *Social History of Medicine* 19: 2, 225–240.

<sup>50</sup>. Umbilical cord blood is currently being researched for its possible use in the treatment of numerous disease states.

shifted. As the supply of genuine Egyptian mummies dwindled ‘fresh’ mummy substitutes could be manufactured from any corpse. The following is the recipe for the ideal substitute:

Take the fresh, unspotted cadaver of a redheaded man (because in them the blood is thinner and the flesh hence more excellent) aged about twenty-four, who has been executed and died a violent death. Let the corpse lie one day and night in the sun and moon—but the weather must be good. Cut the flesh in pieces and sprinkle it with myrrh and just a little aloe. Then soak it in spirits of wine for several days, hang it up for 6 or 10 hours, soak it again in spirits of wine, then let the pieces dry in dry air in a shady spot. Thus they will be similar to smoked meat, and will not stink.<sup>51</sup>

The requirement that the victim must have died a violent death is not restricted to European specifications, as per the recipe above. It was generally believed across divergent societies that the human spirit was not able to escape from the body if death was sudden, as the very suddenness trapped it within. The Iroquois and Aztecs believed that torturing the victim first increased the level of bravery and hence the efficacy of the trapped spirit, as it was ingested in the physical body.

Human blood was second only to mummia and was drunk fresh and warm, especially in England,<sup>52</sup> and Germany and Hungary.<sup>53</sup> It could cure epilepsy (especially in ancient Rome), coma, and nervous disorders. Leprosy was believed to respond to cures involving blood—in ancient Egypt Pharaohs and princes would bathe in it, in China the afflicted drank it, and in France both Louis XI, in 1483, and Louis XV, in 1750, were said to have drunk the blood of children to effect a cure.<sup>54</sup> In 1618, together with mummia, it was listed by the English College of Physicians and was still recommended in the eighteenth century. Sadistic eccentrics such as Madam Bathory, bathed in human blood because of its perceived regenerative qualities. Even as late as 1684 pharmacists were making an oil from human blood that was reputed to cure most illnesses. Other scientists extracted the salts from blood, and used them to alleviate physical pain.

Filial cannibalism was a socially accepted expression of love and respect in China, which began in the ninth century. Usually daughters and daughters-in-law fed their ailing parents and parents-in-law with food made using parts of their own bodies. The government and society encouraged this practice and virtuous women were expected to behave in this manner which was at its peak in the sixteenth to nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Various body parts were used including the liver, thigh, upper arm, breast, fat from the waist, eyeball, ear, rib, knee, finger and, of course, blood.<sup>55</sup> There are recorded cases of the donor either bleeding to death or dying from the wounds. None of the records tell us how large a portion was required, however to remove a piece of one’s own liver would entail a high level of risk. In 1261 an edict banned the use of portions of the liver and the plucking of eyeballs. In 1270 thigh portions were banned. But Chong tells us that there was little or no effort to enforce the edicts.<sup>56</sup> Filial cannibalism peaked in 1912 and is now officially banned in modern China. However according to Chong it is still practised in rural areas.<sup>57</sup>

Sutton believes that many of the reported occurrences of filial cannibalism were faked or symbolic, but we do not know if this belief is based in fact or is a result of his own prejudices. He proposes that married women were not true members of their own or their husbands’ family. As such he states ‘the desperate and widely admired act of flesh cutting may have been intended to strengthen these weak bonds in one household or the other.’<sup>58</sup> That is the act of offering parts of one’s own body was done to garner acceptance into the established familial clan.

The Hua of New Guinea gave boys with stunted growth the blood of the men they called father to drink so they would grow tall and strong.<sup>59</sup> The Tanna tribe from the New Hebrides would kill (and consume) women to aid in the recovery of important men.<sup>60</sup> In some Australian Aboriginal societies young siblings were killed and cooked to provide sustenance for an ailing older child. They ate the flesh until it was all gone, and their body was rubbed

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<sup>51</sup>. Gordon-Grube, “Evidence of Medicinal Cannibalism in Puritan New England,” 195.

<sup>52</sup>. Villa, “Cannibalism in Prehistoric Europe.”

<sup>53</sup>. Cheng, *Beyond Food or Drug*, 7.

<sup>54</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>. Chong, *Cannibalism in China*; Sutton, “Consuming counterrevolution.”

<sup>56</sup>. Chong, *Cannibalism in China*.

<sup>57</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>. Sutton, “Consuming counterrevolution,” 151-152.

<sup>59</sup>. Sanday, *Divine Hunger*.

<sup>60</sup>. John G. Paton, *Missionary to the New Hebrides: an Autobiography* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902 [1889]).

all over with the fat.<sup>61</sup> In twentieth century Peru, the Amahuaca grind the teeth and bones of dead relations into a medicinal potion.

Modern medicine likes to envisage a substantial gap between its own practices and those of the witchdoctors of the indigenous populations or of the superstitious predecessors of allopathic medicine, both of whom have used human body parts in their healing practices. Himmelman believes medical use of the human body has been relegated to the realm of folklore so that it can be dismissed as unscientific, that 'a very complicated tension has always existed between the body as object of, and source for, medical use.'<sup>62</sup>

In this brief look at the human body as a curative we have seen that there is no part of the human body that has not been used at some point in time for most known diseases. Cultures from all parts of the world and across all eras have used the consumption of body parts to heal the living body. The use of transplants and blood transfusions in the modern era ensures that these healing potentials are still harnessed.

## TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSMUTATION

My fourth category concerns cannibalism having the power to transform or transmute the individual from one kind of being to another. These changes can involve an individual's transformation within the social group such as in naming ceremonies and initiations, as well as the transformation of the individual within his or her being, or to an entirely different being. For example those who consumed the deceased were transformed from a grieving person, cannibalism could create a were-animal and the Aztec believed that when they consumed the human who had become a god by the act of sacrifice, they also became temporarily divine, at one with the gods. This is reflected in the Christian ritual of the Eucharist. I shall look at each of these types of transformation in turn beginning with the magic of cannibalism and naming rituals.

Forsyth details Jose de Anchieta's report written in 1584, wherein he confirms that Brazilian warriors had 'as many names as the number of enemies they have killed' and all these names were recited at ceremonial occasions.<sup>63</sup> It was a way for personal construction and thus transformation or transmutation as the warrior accumulated the 'beautiful names' of those he had killed and eaten,<sup>64</sup> and become a more powerful person in the process. It was necessary to kill and consume to achieve identity. Lestringant details a Tupinamba naming ceremony of the children: 'On the appointed day he [the sacrifice] was killed with considerable formality. As soon as he was dead, they all came up to touch the corpse with their hands, or hit it with sticks, and gave a name to all the children who hitherto had had none.'<sup>65</sup> The ceremony ended with the consumption of the victim's flesh. Each family took some home and made a broth that even the youngest babies consumed.

Cannibalism has been used by many different societies as part of the all important transformation of initiation of the individual from child or adolescent to a full adult member of the society with all the privileges and responsibilities this entailed. For a young boy to be transformed into a fully functioning adult in Aztec society he had to capture a live victim for the sacrificial altar. On their second military venture boys were expected to join in with five others to capture a victim.<sup>66</sup> The initiation rites of boys from the Marind-anim tribe from New Guinea required all the participants to have intercourse with a chosen girl. In the last sexual act, the couple were killed and 'a hideous howl goes up and the dead girl and boy are ... cut up, roasted and eaten.'<sup>67</sup> Zubrinich reports that for the Asmat of Indonesia, headhunting was a major part of initiation rituals. Heads needed to be taken to ensure the initiate's male fertility, for him to gain a soul, courage and prestige, which allowed political involvement in tribal matters. Other tribes knew of this 'prestige.' A man without a soul was merely a piece of meat, 'the man became more than meat by killing and eating others.'<sup>68</sup> The Turrbal tribe in Australia engaged in ceremonial battles at initiation. If anyone was killed, they would be eaten, and where the remains were buried

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<sup>61</sup>. Daisy Bates, *The Passing of the Aborigines: A Lifetime Spent Among the Natives of Australia* (Melbourne, Australia: Heinemann, 1966 [1938]).

<sup>62</sup>. Himmelman, "The Medicinal Body," 185.

<sup>63</sup>. Donald W. Forsyth, "The Beginnings of Brazilian Anthropology: Jesuits and Tupinamba Cannibalism," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39 (1983): 147-178: 161.

<sup>64</sup>. Whitehead, "Hans Staden and the Cultural Politics of Cannibalism."

<sup>65</sup>. Lestringant, *Cannibals*, 65.

<sup>66</sup>. I. Clendinnen, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society," *Past and Present* 107 (1985): 44-89: 58.

<sup>67</sup>. Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 171.

<sup>68</sup>. K. M. Zubrinich, "Asmat Cosmology and the Practice of Cannibalism," 126.

became a sacred site.<sup>69</sup> In Fiji young boys were encouraged to practice on captives in preparation for their initiation which required them to kill an enemy with a war club.

Naming and initiation ceremonies involved social transformation of the individual. Mortuary cannibalism, reported across the globe, involved an emotional transformation. It was practised by various tribes such as the Hewa from Papua New Guinea, and some Central Australian Aboriginal tribes, as a form of respect and as a way to overcome their grief and loss. Howitt details the rituals involved in the mortuary practices of some Victorian Aboriginal tribes, where fat was removed and eaten as a way to ease feelings of sadness.<sup>70</sup> If the deceased was from another tribe then the fat was preserved and given as a means of pacification to his relations who came to avenge his death. The cannibalism transformed the grief participants felt, as the loved one became part of the consumer and so lived on. The dismemberment of the body symbolized the cutting of emotional ties. As Doueihi states the funerary meal helps to remember the dead as dead, and its incorporation allows the deceased to be present and to 'speak.'<sup>71</sup> To the Wari' of Amazonia 'cannibalism altered memories and the emotions of grief in ways that helped them deal with the loss of a loved one... [mortuary cannibalism was] aimed at reshaping emotional and spiritual relations between the living and the dead.'<sup>72</sup> Mortuary cannibalism also gave continuity to the tribal fertility and ensured that the body of the deceased was not cannibalized by enemies. In some societies it was felt to be a necessary ritual to release the spirit from the corpse. Transformation could also take on metaphysical form. This metaphysical change can be seen in the stories of were-animals.

If humans have a soul that can leave the body, then it is possible for the soul to return to the wrong body. And if a society accepts that animals also have souls, then human souls could enter animal bodies, and more importantly animal souls could inhabit human bodies, hence the were-animals that are reported throughout the world. The werewolf retains his or her own cunning and intelligence while gaining the strength, endurance and ferocity of the wolf.<sup>73</sup> Caroline Oates reports on the werewolf trials in the Franche-Comte area of France.<sup>74</sup> Cases were prosecuted in 1521, 1574, 1598 and 1643, with one other case in 1603 near Bordeaux. All were accused of witchcraft, killing and eating children. Pierre Burgot admitted to liking the taste. All the accused were burned after confessions under torture. They claimed to never consume the head, the site of baptism, or the right hand as it made the sign of the cross. It was believed that real wolves attacked animals and only werewolves attacked humans. We will never know why these people not only confessed, but also continued in their protestations of guilt, knowing the consequences. Askenasy believes were-animals were religious and political scapegoats as their existence proved the existence of evil. Tales of vampires are found in Arabia, India, China and Europe. Askenasy links stories of vampirism to the disease porphyria which is exacerbated by garlic and leads to gum degeneration, consequent teeth prominence, and the sufferer develops hirsutism.<sup>75</sup> Here we may be seeing an unexplained natural phenomenon, in this case a disease, explained by use of the supernatural.

Although this essay is concerned primarily with reported actual cannibalism, some cultures maintain non-physical cannibals are part of their world. Graham Huggan reports on Caribbean, particularly Guyanese, use of a cannibal ghost figure who acts as a catalyst for transformation between the material and spiritual worlds.<sup>76</sup> The *gaki* of Japan are metaphysical cannibal beings that were used by Buddhist scientists to explain the seeming disappearance of things in the actual world such as lightning, corpses, pus, diseases, human waste etcetera. These creatures by their cannibal acts transformed the rotten and rotting, the disgusting and putrid so that they were no longer a part of the actual world.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>. A. W. Howitt, *The Native Tribes of South East Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1996 [1904]).

<sup>70</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>. Doueihi, *A Perverse History of the Human Heart*.

<sup>72</sup>. B. A. Conklin, "Thus Are Our Bodies, Thus Was Our Custom: Mortuary Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society," *American Ethnologist* 22: 1 (1995): 75-101: 76; B. A. Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

<sup>73</sup>. H. Askenasy, *Cannibalism: From Sacrifice to Survival* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus, 1994).

<sup>74</sup>. Oates, "Metamorphosis and Lycanthropy in Franche Comte."

<sup>75</sup>. H. Askenasy, *Cannibalism: From Sacrifice to Survival*.

<sup>76</sup>. Graham Huggan, "Ghost Stories, Bone Flutes, Cannibal Counter-memory" in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 126-141. Cannibalism and generic ghost stories are currently being used, he believes, to restructure their history.

<sup>77</sup>. William R. LaFleur, "Hungry Ghosts and Hungry People: Somaticity and Rationality in Medieval Japan" in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, eds. Michael Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone Books, Part One, 1989), 270-303.

Yet another example of the magical transformation capabilities of cannibalism can be seen within Christianity. Sagan states ‘the ritual mystery of [Christianity] is expressed through an act of symbolic cannibalism; the flesh of the god is eaten and the blood is drunk, not actually but symbolically. And these symbolic cannibal acts are performed out of the need to express and enjoy feelings of affection and communion.’<sup>78</sup> However if a Christian believes in the doctrine of transubstantiation, then the Eucharist is not symbolic cannibalism, but actual cannibalism. John Calvin states:

the body of the Lord was once offered as a sacrifice for us, so that we may now feed upon it, and, feeding on it, may experience within us the efficacy of that one sacrifice; and that his blood was once shed for us, so that it is our perpetual drink.... The body, therefore, which was once offered for our salvation, we are commanded to take and eat.<sup>79</sup>

The Eucharist was god and as the focus of the mass it made god visible in the form of the wafer and wine. Christianity had adopted an act of actual cannibalism where worshippers ate their god. In the tenth century the Eucharist wafer began to appear with the image of Christ stamped upon it, further reinforcing transubstantiation. Cardinal Humbert in 1059 asserted the body and blood of Christ were ‘not only in sacramental figure but in reality, in a bodily manner... handled and broken by the hands of the priest and ground by the teeth of the faithful.’<sup>80</sup> In 1215 C. E., Pope Innocent III declared ‘the body and blood of Jesus Christ are truly contained under the appearance of bread and wine in the sacrament of the altar, the bread being transubstantiated into the body and the wine into the blood.’<sup>81</sup> What was once symbol was firmly reinforced as actual and to disagree was heresy. This gave the communal wafers an awesome power.<sup>82</sup> There has been reported throughout the history of the Christian church, tales of miraculous transformations of the Eucharist from its form of bread and wine to flesh and blood, many lurid in their descriptions.

Bynum thinks that instead of transporting the human to a celestial union with God, partaking of the Eucharist as the broken and mutilated body of Jesus at the time of his death merely reinforces our very humanness.<sup>83</sup> This made the Eucharist intensely feared and desired. Medieval religious women saw ingestion of the Eucharist as a way to absorb God to the point of losing the distinction between the two, leading to mystical union or ecstasy. God’s humanness became the major theme of the late Middle Ages. ‘The Eucharist was, to medieval women, a moment at which they were released into ecstatic union, it was also a moment at which the God with whom they joined was supremely human because supremely vulnerable and fleshly.’<sup>84</sup> By eating the Eucharist these women not only joined with God, but they felt his pain and his suffering in a very physical manner. Bynum equates eating metaphors with the religiosity of the fasting saints. ‘... medieval women went to God through ‘eating’ or ‘hungering,’ because to eat is to join with food—and God is food, which is flesh, which is suffering, which is salvation... To eat was to consume, to take in, to become God. And to eat was also to rend and tear God.’<sup>85</sup>

Protestants did not accept the doctrine of transubstantiation. John Milton (quoted in Kilgour) said:

The Mass brings down Christ’s body from its supreme exaltation at the right hand of God. It drags it back to the earth... to a state of humiliation even more wretched and degrading than before: to be broken once more and crushed and ground, even by the fangs of brutes. Then, when it has been driven through all the stomach’s filthy channels it shoots it out—one shudders even to mention it—into the latrine.<sup>86</sup>

Gordon-Grube muses ‘perhaps for Protestants of this period [post-Renaissance], healing with mummy and blood on some level fulfilled a substitute function to that of the transubstantiated flesh and blood.’<sup>87</sup> She likens the

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<sup>78</sup>. Eli Sagan, *Cannibalism: Human Aggression and Cultural Form* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: FishDrum Magazine Press, 1993), 50.

<sup>79</sup>. John Calvin, *A Compend of the Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 195.

<sup>80</sup>. Francis Clark, *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 432.

<sup>81</sup>. Tannahill, *Flesh and Blood*, 56.

<sup>82</sup>. We can see this reflected in the beliefs and behaviours of the Fasting Saints from the Middle Ages.

<sup>83</sup>. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*.

<sup>84</sup>. *Ibid.*, 134-135.

<sup>85</sup>. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1987), 250-251.

<sup>86</sup>. M. Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), 84.

<sup>87</sup>. Gordon-Grube, “Anthropophagy in Post- Renaissance Europe.”

healing properties of mummia to those of the body of Christ. 'Paracelsus compared the efficacy of medicine to the mediatory function of Holy Communion.'<sup>88</sup>

John Fenton tells us the Church of England in the 1970's altered the post-communion prayer, removing the symbolism to be replaced with the idea that the worshippers 'had been fed 'with the body and blood' of Jesus.'<sup>89</sup> In other words transubstantiation was re-instated. Burr believes that the Eucharist must be the actual body and blood of Christ for if it is not then what is worshipped is the bread and that constitutes heresy.<sup>90</sup> God being the Eucharist is not the same as God being present at the Eucharist.

Clendinnen draws a correlation between the Christian transmutation of bread and wine to flesh and blood, while Aztec symbolism transmuted flesh and blood into maize (representing vegetative sustenance) and water.<sup>91</sup> Humans are at the centre of cosmology for Christians, and for the Aztec, humans are part of a repetitive cycle whose continuation was precarious enough that it needed man's decisiveness to be maintained.

We have seen that the ingestion of human body components can transform the individual socially or emotionally, can help them change from human form to animal form. The doctrine of transubstantiation transforms the symbolic body of Jesus as the Eucharistic bread and wine into the actual body of Jesus which when ingested affirms faith and for some creates and transforms them in a mystical union with their god. This was particularly so for the aptly named fasting saints of the European Middle Ages.

## COMMUNICATION

The fifth area of cannibal magic involves its use as a means of communication with the gods and the spirits. In most cases of cannibalism discussed to date there is a strong element of communication between humans and the spirit world and/or the gods, including the Christian god.

When cannibalism is seen as symbolic of chaos and evil, then everything is to be dominated, controlled and repressed; most of this is projected onto enemies. When cannibalism is seen as symbolic of regeneration and order then vital essences are transmitted from the dead to the living, from humans to the divine, and it affirms or creates social standing.<sup>92</sup> For Evans-Pritchard 'sociologically speaking, the god was the clan itself, idealized and divinized, the god and his worshippers unite by partaking together of the flesh and blood of a sacred victim.'<sup>93</sup> Most of the societies discussed used cannibalism as a pathway to divine interaction.

## CONCLUSION

I hope in this short essay I have shown that cannibalism has held great significance for many peoples across the globe and throughout history because of the magical aspects it was believed to have held, only some of which I have been able to touch upon here. We have seen how cannibalism has transferred both positive and negative aspects of the consumed, and how in some cases the possible negativity has been overcome by cannibalism. It has been used to help societies control their environments by means of fertility rites, and ensuring the continuation of life cycles. I discussed the healing magic of cannibalism noting that human body consumption was a popular source of remedies for virtually all known diseases in medieval Europe. With a broader interpretation of 'cannibalism' than has been used in this essay, we are still using medical cannibalism in the form of organ transplants, blood transfusions, skin grafts and the like. We also saw how cannibalism transformed the individual within his social group by the rites of naming and initiation, and how it helped the grieving to adapt to their loss. I also noted how cannibalism could transform the individual physically by either becoming one with the worshipped god or by conversion to a were-animal. And finally I discussed how cannibalism helped the individual and the society to converse with the spirit world and the gods they worshipped, and this includes Christians who consume the Eucharist holding to a belief in the doctrine of transubstantiation. All of these illustrate the magical powers with which cannibalism has been imbued.

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<sup>88</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>. John Fenton, "Eating People," *Theology* 94: 762 (1991): 414-425: 418.

<sup>90</sup>. David Burr, *Eucharistic Presence and Conversion in Late Thirteenth Century Franciscan Thought: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge* 74: 3 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1984).

<sup>91</sup>. I. Clendinnen, "The Cost of Courage in Aztec Society," 79.

<sup>92</sup>. Sanday, *Divine Hunger*.

<sup>93</sup>. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 51.