

AKEDAH

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Growing up in Quebec
I didn't understand
why the tortured man

hung writhing in every public building
or why, if he was supposed to be God's son
God would let people kill him

or how he could be God himself
because everyone knows that gods
can't die.

My later devotion to Western culture
compelled me to lock such questions away
where only occasionally my eye fell on them

as on the butchered carcass
from which the aromatic roast
ensued.

It was impossible to savour English Lit
without accepting its myths

though I was told they were "truths"
which the sacred texts of my own people
had merely "adumbrated."

Such grand Latin to hide the insult –
one of many to which I turned the other cheek
as professor after professor made excuses

for centuries of anti-Semitism
as an outmoded perspective
we had to accept

and even excuse
because of its historical context
and the acute understanding of human character

and elegant compositions of those who espoused it
in our *Norton Anthology* of the discipline's
greatest hits.

Nor were we to question their contention
that the "Old" Testament deity was a god of Judgment
while the "New" Testament version was a god of Love.

A conundrum when you think about it
– as you were not meant to –

because the Torah
rejects human sacrifice, freeing Isaac
but the Christian bible requires it.

Even if we browsed *The Golden Bough*
and discovered that Osiris, Tammuz, Adonis,
Attis and Dionysus

all died and were resurrected,
we were not supposed to notice how this trope
functions in our own culture

or, more accurately, the culture
we were allowed to pretend was ours
as long as we didn't ask impertinent questions.

I swallowed my tongue so often
it's amazing I still can speak.

What's most striking about the *akedah*
is not that Isaac escaped being sacrificed
but that father Abraham

slunk off covertly
with his knife and his bundle of wood
without informing Sarah.

He knew she would not allow it.
What mother would?

Sarah is only mentioned a few pages later
when she dies and is buried at Kiryat Arbah
betrayed and perhaps bitter

but not weeping over the marble corpse
of her son.

She was spared that, at least,

though like Mary she knew
he was the child of God.
Because every child is.