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More News

Welcome to the Spring 2024 edition of MORE News! Read the latest on the range of activities you can participate in at TMI, and delve into the stories of the people and projects who make our community vibrant. All with new behind-the-scenes stories and pictures.



A hybrid TMI course in full swing, welcoming local participants and one outside of Canada

In This Edition:

Upcoming Courses

With a broad range of topics offered this term, you're likely to find something that suits your taste. Browse our courses on pages 2 and 3, and don't forget to sign up before March 11th!

Anatomy of Two Course Designs

How does a course at the Thomas More Institute (TMI) come to be? With over 35 new courses designed each year, there's a story behind each one. TMI relies on an ever-growing corps of dedicated course designers who tap into their creativity, curiosity, and desire to learn to come up with compelling new courses. These courses may explore issues and ideas that are up and coming in the world, or that the designer has been thinking about for years and wants to explore with others in greater detail. *[Continued on p.4]*

TMI Volunteer Profile Series: A Conversation with Pierrot Lambert

Pierrot Lambert is a longstanding community member who has been designing and leading TMI courses from his home in Ottawa-Gatineau since 2002. A career translator, he also provides invaluable translation services for TMI communications. Find out more about his varied life including his close connection to Bernard Lonergan, a key figure in TMI's history, in his interview with Dominic Varvaro, writer and TMI student. *[Continue reading on p.5]*

Spring Edition
2024

Upcoming Events

Languages of Truth Mini-Series: Patronage in the Renaissance

April 15 2024
6:15-8:15 PM

Languages of Truth Mini-Series: Myths & Poetry in the Renaissance

April 22 2024
6:15-8:15 PM

Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

May 2 2024
12:30-2:30 PM

Convocation May 13th

Montreal Urban Nature through the Lens of Ezra Soiferman

May 23 2024
6:15-8:15 PM

For full details
see p. 7-8.

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Leap into Spring with a New Course

The Thomas More Institute has a lively roster of spring courses, with offerings in literature, art, poetry, classical history, and philosophy. There are still spots available in these courses:

[Awakening to the Wildness Where We Live](#)

Thursdays, 6:15 – 8:15 p.m., 12 weeks, March 14 – May 30, 2024, Atwater

See full article on this course on p.3.



[Descartes' Search for Certainty](#)

Wednesdays, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., 12 weeks, March 13 – May 29, 2024, Atwater

Descartes is famous for having grounded human knowledge on the certainty of our own cognition: "I think, therefore I am." What does that actually mean? Does this foundation of knowledge rely on an understanding of human subjectivity that is bound to a historical time, the beginning of modernity? This course will situate Descartes in his time and then trace his journey through his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, as he attempts to reconstruct knowledge of the world on his unshakeable foundation. Is it truly unshakeable? After almost four centuries, does he still offer helpful and relevant insights into the issues of human knowledge and acquisition?



[Julius Caesar and Augustus Transform Rome: The Rise of the Empire](#)

Tuesdays, 6:15 – 8:15 p.m., 12 weeks, March 12 – May 28, 2024, Atwater

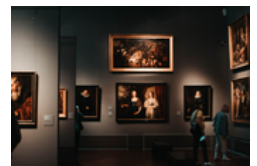
Following the Assassination of Julius Caesar by Roman Republicans, his grandnephew Augustus faced and defeated the assassins, continued Caesar's reforms, and set down the foundations of the great Roman Empire. This course will look at Augustus's struggles and those of his famous descendants as they enlarged and solidified the Roman Empire. How did Augustus bring empire to the Romans? What happened to the remaining defenders of the Republic? Did he maintain some Republican institutions or reform Rome entirely? Take a deep dive into the early history of the Roman Empire by reading the reflections of Rome's great historians, poets, and philosophers on the turbulent first centuries of the Roman Empire.



[Looking at Art](#)

Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m.–noon, 4 weeks, March 13–April 5, 2024, Online & MMFA

Do you love art and wish you knew more about why a particular work of art seizes your attention? Anita Grants, an art historian who lectures regularly at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA), will lead this four-session course designed to get participants to feel more comfortable talking about art by helping them to interpret what they are looking at and explaining how their gaze is being directed by the artist. Three classes will be held on Zoom and the final one at the museum.



[Continued on next page]

Leap into Spring with a New Course (continued)

[Sandworms, Spice, and Crysknives: Dune Revisited in Print and Film](#)

Thursdays, 6:15 – 8:15 p.m., 6 weeks, March 14 – April 18, 2024, Online

Frank Herbert's epic Science fiction novel *Dune*—whose screen adaptation is making waves in the world of cinema—tells the story of a young boy who is destined to become a hero in a world torn apart by the rise and fall of empires. In this six-session course, we will explore both the novel and the two recent film versions by Denis Villeneuve, *Dune I* (2021) and *Dune II*. The novel and films look at the relationship of humankind to nature, at questions of fate and free will, tradition versus technology and the treachery of politics. Bring your popcorn for a fun deep dive into this science fiction classic and its newest reincarnations.



[Shakespeare in the Spring](#)

Tuesdays, 1:30 – 3:30 p.m., 6 weeks, April 16 – May 21, 2024, Atwater or Online

The 2024 Season of the Stratford Festival will feature, among other plays, tragic and comic takes on love: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*. This six-session course will explore these plays through close readings of the texts, film clips from previous productions, and interpretations by Northrop Frye and other critics. Join us for our annual excursion into the world of Shakespeare.



[The Spirit of the Sixties](#)

Thursdays, 1:30–3:30 p.m., 12 weeks, March 14–May 30, Online

Join us as we explore the turbulent decade of the '60s, a period of great social change, revolution in consciousness, and anti-everything-establishment. What positive things came out of that decade in terms of social changes, values, and culture—particularly music? Were the changes that came about abiding or limited by virtue of having been born of youthful idealism? Is our current society better for what the youth movements of the '60s sought to accomplish? Or is a reflection on the spirit of the '60s little more than nostalgia for the past?



[“We call upon the author to explain”: A Poetry Workshop Series](#)

Tuesdays, 6:15–8:15 p.m., 6 weeks, March 12–April 16, Atwater

Acclaimed poet, performer, and workshop facilitator Rachel McCrum will lead this workshop that asks whether writing poetry can help us to make sense of the chaos of the world. “How can we address, explore, explain the questions of the age? Can we shape our writing to find coherence? Can we find communion with each other through expression?” This workshop is certain to be a powerful experience. Aspiring poets and writers of all genres, you won't want to miss it.



Behind the Scenes of TMI Courses

Introducing “Curious Conversations”: A Brand-New TMI Podcast Series

Coming soon: TMI will soon present the first instalment in our new podcast series, “Curious Conversations”. In this first episode, we will hear course leaders Imogen Brian and Jim Queen, as they discuss the thought process that went into Queen's design of his upcoming philosophy course: [Descartes' Search for Certainty](#). Subscribe to [our Youtube channel](#) to hear the podcast upon release.



Behind the Scenes of TMI Courses (continued)

Anatomy of Two Course Designs: Rethinking Our Place in Nature (2022) and Awakening to the Wildness Where We Live (2024)

[Continued from p.1] In this issue of The More News, we're inaugurating a new feature that looks at the anatomy of a course design from the spark of the initial idea to the production of the course. The first designer we'll feature is Mariela Tovar, who has designed two courses: Rethinking Our Place in Nature (Fall 2022) and [Awakening to the Wildness Where We Live](#) (Spring 2024).



Mariela Tovar, Ph.D

When Mariela designed her first TMI course in 2022, she didn't need to be converted to the idea that learning begins with questioning and that "teaching" is more a matter of facilitating learning than delivering lectures. Mariela worked from 2005 to 2021 as an Academic Associate at McGill's Teaching and Learning Services, where she helped professors move from a teaching approach based on the transmission of expertise to one focused on student learning. The transmission of expertise model, she explains, focuses on what the teacher does. The student's role is receiving the information. Teaching that focuses on student learning is marked by strategies designed to engage students and facilitate their learning. In TMI terms, participants—and leaders as well—learn through conversation, listening to what others have to say, expressing their own thoughts, hearing the reactions of others, and reformulating their ideas. No wonder that when Mariela took her first course at TMI in 2016 she felt right at home!

Once retired, Mariela was thrilled to have the time to explore areas of curiosity that she had long been thinking about. One of these was the climate crisis: How do we understand it and find our place within it, without feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenges before us? She found a unique approach to the subject when looking again at a favourite book, David Orr's *Earth in Mind*. What if, in addition to understanding the science we also need to rethink our relation to nature? What about a transformation of our values and world views? The essence of the course Mariela had in mind was encapsulated in the epigraph for the course description that she presented to the Curriculum Committee. It came from Stephen Jay Gould, who wrote: "We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well—for we will not fight to save what we don't love," Stephen Jay Gould, *Eight Little Piggies: Reflections in Natural History*.

Another fundamental influence on the design of the course came from Indigenous knowledge. With such central ideas as kinship with nature, reciprocity, and gratitude, Indigenous thinking offered a different way of relating to nature to consider and discuss. Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* became the anchor for the course, featured in three of the twelve weeks. With these key elements in mind and several additional readings featuring ecological, ethical, and legal approaches to understanding our relationship with nature, Mariela discussed her ideas with the Curriculum Committee, which offered suggestions and encouraged her to continue her research and to stay in close contact throughout the process.

Reflecting on the design process, Mariela comments on the importance of opportunities to speak with the Committee and with colleagues, mentors, or friends about the challenges and the joyful discoveries of what can often be a lonely, if exciting, period of research. The pay-off, of course, comes when the designer sees their course come to life on the first day of class.
[Continued on next page]



Upcoming Course to be led by Mariela Tovar in Spring of 2024.

Behind the Scenes of TMI Courses (continued)

In “Rethinking Our Place in Nature,” the enthusiasm of the group for the carefully curated course materials (from videos to poems to classic works to more recent authors challenging all our preconceptions) and the pleasure they took in exploring them together, quickly created a bond in the classroom. As weeks went on, the course really came to life—as all TMI courses do—in rich discussion, where at times ideas not even envisioned by the designer came forth.

The spark for Mariela’s next course, this Spring term’s “Awakening to the Wildness Where We Live,” came from a reading in week five of the first course. William Cronon’s article “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” challenged conventional thinking about wilderness or nature as some pristine place, preserved far away from human touch. Cronon provocatively argued that “[f]ar from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history.” When nature is identified as the pristine “other,” we see it as something apart from us, to which we don’t belong, to which we owe nothing. In so doing, we fail to look for the “other” that always surrounds us. Mariela started with this thought and wondered what it would mean “to reconnect to landscapes where we are very present, such as the urban landscape” “What happens,” she asks, “when we think about familiar places as complex, interconnected ecological systems and awaken to their wildness? How are we entangled with the non-human species in the place where we live? How do we practise wonder and connection to the nature around us? Is there a wildness in ourselves waiting to be discovered?” Oh, to be a participant in the classroom when this design comes to life!

Carol Fiedler, who took “Rethinking Our Place in Nature,” interviewed Mariela Tovar for this article. Mariela’s new course, “[Awakening to the Wildness Where We Live](#),” will be starting this spring.

TMI Volunteer Profile: A Conversation with Pierrot Lambert

A Knowledge Born of Love

By Dominic Varvaro, January 2024

[Continued from p. 1] He argues that he is not a writer but in the same breath confesses that he has translated at least 17 publications and authored several books. Pierrot Lambert, a career translator with the federal government until his retirement in 2002, is a native of Sherbrooke, Quebec, who now lives in Gatineau. He studied philosophy at Séminaire de Philosophie in Montreal and then at Dominican University College in Ottawa.

We discuss the challenges in the marriage that is the art of translation: how to establish the most appropriate mid-point between the simple act of transcription and the retelling of someone else’s story. We conclude that this act of collaboration often leads to the serendipitous birth of new thought.

The most significant pursuit in his life, and arguably his most recognized literary contribution, is the memorialization of the thoughts and conclusions of noted Jesuit priest, philosopher, and theologian Bernard Lonergan. From the late 1970s until 2010, Lambert, along with several colleagues, published Lonergan’s theological and philosophical studies in French. Lonergan had begun teaching philosophy himself at TMI in 1945. This seed then blossomed in 1980 when the theologian returned to TMI upon Lambert’s invitation and felt comfortable enough to sit for six days of interviews for the TMI publication [Caring About Meaning](#).

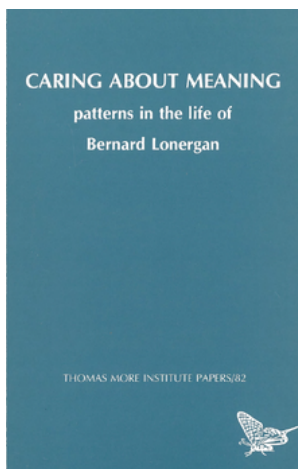


TMI Volunteer Profile: A Conversation with Pierrot Lambert (Continued)

"I don't feel I'm an accomplished writer," he insists. But following his retirement from the civil service, his propensity to translate morphed into the "intellectual challenge" of writing and publishing books. "TMI involvement was an encouragement for my intellectual life," he contends. He would, with his late wife, Simone Saumur-Lambert, write six books. Their collaboration *Vivre avec des sans-abri* won the 2007 Communications et Société Prize for documenting Père Jean-Louis Morin's efforts to care for and house the unhoused population of Outaouais.

I hesitate before broaching the subject of his deeply religious roots, about the evolving nature of Quebec religion and of the cultural revolution that he witnessed in 1960s Quebec. "People are so afraid of religion...they don't know what they've lost," he answers simply and without hesitation, as if he's giving me the time of day. "But we are not lost—Quebec society is trying to find itself." He cites the popularity of local musicians Les Cowboys Fringants and "their heartfelt poetry on human love and solidarity" as an indicator of "basic spiritual values".

In addition to the 1980s interviews, Lambert's affiliation with TMI is long and varied. As well as serving as TMI's volunteer translator, he is also a course designer. "I started designing and leading courses for TMI in 2002, ...and in Ottawa-Gatineau," he explains. I ask him about the secret sauce that the Institute uses to attract such a deep thinker as Lonergan. "I enjoy very much leading conversations on topics suggested by regular participants," he explains referring to the latitude that the Institute provides its course leaders. One of his 2022 courses asks, "What is the relationship between faith and love?" and the course description includes the promise of Lonergan's answer to Kant's question: "que pouvons-nous connaître?" The probing questions in the course material that only a philosopher would dare ask (such as "How can we define a human being?" and "Is the universe intelligible?") build on the Institute's tenet of questioning everything.



Lambert's moral orientation builds on a foundation of theology and is enriched with a vein of philosophy that pervades our conversation as well as the publications that boast his brand. "Judgements of values and decisions become a basis for ethics," he tells me. Then he refers to his theological perspective as "...knowledge born of love, not dogma."

"This year with the [Syrian refugee] crisis," he says in a 2015 CBC interview, "we thought we had to do something for refugees, to get involved." Lambert is an active member of the Collectif Islamo-Chrétien, a Gatineau-based community that sponsored two refugee families, one Islamic and the other Christian. He tells me how he had initially assumed that it would be an opportunity to expose each community to the other's theologies but admits that in the end simply meeting and communicating "...was a major factor in building close relationships within our Collectif."

True to form, Lambert is about to publish another book. *Au seuil du silence* will be launched this March in Montreal. In it he describes the final months of his wife's life in her long-term care centre while adding his personal reflections and stories of several other residents.

Lambert's theology runs through everything. The knowledge born of his culture-spanning love emboldened him to reach out to the Syrian community. Lonergan's essence permeates Lambert's psyche with its philosophy and understanding of the needs of such community. Lambert teaches us that when new reality encroaches on our own, we can venture onto an unknown path, one of defining a relationship of listening and trust—and perhaps even a measure of love.

About the Author: Dominic Varvaro is a writer, photographer and TMI student. His foodie creations can be found on Instagram: @thesauceison

Looking Back at TMI's Recent Events

TMI Welcomes the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts guides

On February 1st, TMI hosted some twenty guides from the MMFA for a special talk on TMI's recently installed Art Gallery Wall. The talk, entitled "Art Exhibitions in Unusual Spaces", was presented by Sandra Paikowsky, Professor Emerita of Art History at Concordia University, and curator of the gallery wall.



The visit to TMI was part of the guides' "In-Town Tours" series, featuring visits to other museums, art galleries or any other public or private institution of artistic/cultural interest for the guides.

An Afternoon of Course Brainstorming

On February 8th, TMI welcomed course leaders and designers to the annual Curiosity Forum. Participants gathered for a convivial afternoon lunch to brainstorm and exchange ideas regarding topics for future courses. If you are a leader or course designer, be sure to keep an eye out for next year's invitation! And if you have a course idea of your own, feel welcome to get in touch with us—we are always open to hearing about new course ideas.



TMI at the Côte Saint-Luc Library

On February 28th, TMI's Literature Circle took place at the Côte St-Luc Library: a second installment of the series that kicked off last year at the Westmount Library. TMI course leaders Patricia Sikender and Jennifer MacGregor facilitated an animated discussion about the short story *The Painted Door* by Sinclair Ross. Participants were invited to read the story in advance and to share their perspectives on various aspects of the text. We thank the Côte Saint-Luc Library for collaborating with us towards making this event a success! We also thank the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund which helps support these collaborations.



Upcoming Events

Languages of Truth Series: Patronage in the Renaissance

April 15, 6:15-8:15 PM

TMI will welcome Dario Brancato, Ph.D., who currently teaches at Concordia University. Brancato's discussion will explore the way in which the elite in Renaissance Florence produced histories of their cities by becoming patrons of chroniclers. We may ask questions such as: how free were these chroniclers to write true histories? Did rulers attempt to alter facts to fit their political needs? Further details coming soon.

Upcoming Events (continued)

[Continued from p.7]

Languages of Truth Series: Myths & Poetry in the Renaissance

April 22 2024, 6:15-8:15 PM

TMI will welcome Maude Vanhaelen, Ph.D., also currently teaching at Concordia University. Her discussion will explore the way in which myth and poetry were used in the Renaissance to illustrate complex philosophical concepts which are often harder to grasp or come to terms with. We may ask questions such as: what can the forms of myth and poetry offer to make certain concepts more accessible? How can myths be altered or transformed to convey the moral of a story? Further details coming soon.

Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

May 2 2024, 12:30-2:30 PM

Volunteers are the driving force of TMI, touching every area of the organization from leading and designing courses, to running committees and events, to supporting staff with editing, translation and office administration. We look forward to celebrating them at this event! More details to come.

Convocation

May 13th

Save the date! TMI is hosting a Convocation to recognize students who have completed our Certificate program. More Info to follow.

Photography Talk with Ezra Soiferman

May 23 2024, 6:15-8:15 PM

What happens when we awaken to the wilderness in the place where we live? Montreal based filmmaker and photographer Ezra Soiferman will take us on a journey into the hidden wildness of our urban landscape. Come and enjoy an evening of inspiring photographs, short films, 'music photos' and stimulating conversation. This event is presented in conjunction with the Spring course ["Awakening to the Wilderness Where We Live"](#), but is open to all. Information to come regarding registration for the event.



TMI's 2023/2024 Annual Appeal Closes May 31st! Please Give Generously

Donations from TMI's community provide vital support in sustaining the ongoing operations of the Institute, particularly during these inflationary times. Government grants cover only a portion of our costs, and we rely on your support to provide much needed funding in key areas. Please give generously to help sustain our community of lifelong learners.



How to Donate: by phone at 514-935-9585 • thomasmore.qc.ca • by cheque

We look forward to welcoming you this Spring!

