

# Martha Root's Interwar Lectures: Cosmic Education and the Rhetoric of Unity

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**Abstract:** *This article introduces Martha L. Root's cosmopolitan rhetoric, which exemplifies how women speaking from (religious) margins interpret traditions to create calls for social change. In lectures delivered between the world wars, Root argued for "cosmic education," a global peacemaking program promoting openness and civic service in learners, which she distilled from precepts of the Bahá'í Faith. Root implored every listener, from her US co-nationals to audiences worldwide, to evangelize peace. Her rhetoric of unity harnessed principle with practice to animate the cycle of cosmic education, a cycle she modeled by inventing transnational sisterhood with the 19th-century Persian poet Táhirih Qurratu'l-Ayn.*

**Keywords:** *cosmopolitanism, transnational rhetoric, religion, 20th century, Iran, Bahá'í Faith*

I would not travel the world uninterruptedly for so many years just as a journalist and certainly not as a tourist. I travel and write and speak because I know there can be an education to peace.

—Martha L. Root, "Some Experiences in Broadcasting" (1939)

To hasten the realization of world peace by advocating "an education to peace": this purpose drove Martha Louise Root around the globe until in 1939, on Oahu, she succumbed to the cancer she had outstripped for nearly thirty years. In her speeches' preambles, Root defines herself as a journalist, lecturer, Esperantist, and peace activist. Her mission was to compose "constructive articles [and speeches] that will help to bring understanding among nations and to promote the highest ideals for enduring peace" ("How I Interview" 4), calling her peacemaking program "cosmic education." Root theorized that intercultural communication could blossom in a universal (i.e., global) program of cosmic education that emphasized and encompassed humanity's oneness. Because any so-called universalistic rhetoric is rightly critiqued for its potential for harmful persuasion, advocates of cosmopolitanism must invent ways to channel this persuasion toward ethical ends. I present Root—a rhetorical theorist, though she never claimed this title—as an example of such invention:

her rhetoric of unity mobilizes the persuasive synergy of principle and practice to animate the cycle of cosmic education.

What pushed a nearly fifty-year-old woman to spend her last two decades of life—and her journalism earnings and inheritance—circling the globe, leaping among networks of Bahá'ís, Brahma Samajists, Esperantists, and Theosophists?<sup>1</sup> In 1909, Root (b. 1872 in Ohio) converted to the Bahá'í Faith, a religion that sparked her international rhetorical career and influenced her program of cosmic education. Root the rhetor cannot be separated from Root the believer, for her exigence and her theories arose from her faith in Bahá'u'lláh's promise that global society could be rebuilt by tapping into divine powers. Bahá'u'lláh's religion, the Bahá'í Faith, has been overlooked by our field thus far, though it is second only to Christianity in geographic spread (Stockman 29). Root serves as a window into the Bahá'í Faith, a paragon of rhetorical power whom later Bahá'ís have sought to emulate.<sup>2</sup> Despite this success, she failed to accomplish her ultimate objective of establishing world peace by the end of the twentieth century (“Poverty Amidst Plenty” 2). Her vision was unrealistic, but then reality, the status quo, was largely irrelevant to her approach. She imagined another reality, one unconceivable without tapping into divine energies, in which human motives would shift away from self-interest and toward the common good, so that a universal government, economic system, and basic curriculum could uplift all humans. Root's vision for a future global society arose from her interpretation of a new religion, and she conveyed her interpretation to intercultural audiences.

With typewriter and voice, Root spread her vision. Rhetoric was her career: she translated her understanding of Bahá'í tenets into articles and scripts, publishing in local newspapers and lecturing wherever she traveled in an effort to reach the widest audience possible. Beyond lectern and newsprint,

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1 Biographical information comes from Root's biography by M. R. Garis.

2 A few examples of her fame's persistence: a 600-page biography published in 1983 remains in print, and in 2016, “the immortal Martha Root” was the sole adherent recognized by name for “noble exploits” in a letter distributed worldwide by the international Bahá'í leadership (Universal House of Justice 1).

she appreciated radio, a brand-new technology.<sup>3</sup> Root also pursued a more enduring medium, book publication, because a “preacher preaches to a few hundreds or thousands or tens of thousands, but a book can be a preacher for centuries and to millions yet to be born” (qtd. in Garis 462–4). Her book is about Táhirih, a woman revered in the Bahá’í Faith. *Táhirih the Pure* and twenty-five speech scripts held in the US Bahá’í Archives form the corpus of primary texts from which I extract Root’s theory of cosmic education, a theory at the heart of this historiographical project.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, I contextualize Root in her personal background, her historical moment, and cosmopolitan discourse, arguing that her appeals for audiences worldwide to perceive their agency in fostering unity should be seen as exemplifying how women speaking from (religious) margins interpret traditions to create calls for social change. Through a close reading of two speeches focused on cosmic education, I elucidate two strategies Root loops together: *universal identification* and *action recruitment*. Universal identification

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3 Root praised radio as enabling “one to speak to millions just as though one were talking, heart to heart, with one individual” (“Some Experiences”). Radio could even facilitate cosmic education: “A true radio center is indeed a universal education in itself,” potentially “advancing a valuable educational program” (“Some Experiences”; “Broadcasting”).

4 Versions of a few of these speeches are published (see Yang; Zinky). In addition to the eighteen unpublished speeches under Root’s name in the Works Cited list, I also studied these seven: “Scientific Proofs of Life after Death” (1924); “Progress of the Bahá’í Movement in the Five Continents” (1934, Sweden); “The Bahá’í Faith as the Foundation for World Unity” (1937, India); “International Economics Essential to World Peace” (1939, Australia); “New Views on Immortality” (n.d.); “Bahá’í Scientific Proofs of Life after Death” (n.d.); and “Spiritual Education – the Four Ways of Acquiring Knowledge” (n.d.). My set from the archives does not encompass all Root’s speeches; a list of twenty-eight titles in her repertoire indicates that many are not represented in my collection, the scripts perhaps lost (“Some of Martha L. Root’s Subjects”). Root wrote dates on some scripts, but for those that were undated, I estimated the year by correlating textual clues with the itinerary furnished by Garis.

instructs audiences to deduce their personal investment in global welfare,<sup>5</sup> whereas action recruitment enlists listeners' participation in peacemaking to inductively attain identification with all humanity. These strategies function cyclically, universal identification leading to peacemaking action, and action to identification, in a process I label the cycle of cosmic education. To translate theory into practice, I discuss how Root exemplifies this cycle's functioning in her invention of transhistorical, transnational sisterhood with Táhirih. I evaluate passages from her speeches and book to reveal Root's identificatory work. The following pages, then, bring Root's rhetoric of unity to light, revealing how her theory of cosmic education links principle and practice to animate the cycle of cosmic education. Examining her work is timely because it anticipated theories of cosmopolitanism developing today.

## Teacher Turns Journalist Turns “Peace Fighter”: Root's Spiritual Exigence (1909–1939)

Root had accumulated a robust résumé of public writing and speaking before she encountered the Bahá'í Faith. After completing her studies in rhetoric, literature, languages, and elocution at Oberlin College and the University of Chicago in 1895, she returned to Pennsylvania, where she worked as a schoolteacher and principal, then freelanced as a Shakespearean lecturer, and in 1900 entered journalism as an editor and feature writer. While covering a convention in 1908, she met a follower of the Bahá'í Faith, which had recently spread westward from its administrative center in Palestine. She dismissed the religion as eccentric. But, by 1909, she had warmed to such tenets as global unification and interfaith harmony. The faith was “religion renewed” rather than a new religion, she wrote in an article published that year on the “New Persian Religious Movement” (qtd. in Garis 45).

When Root converted from her familial Baptist Christianity to the Bahá'í Faith, she embraced Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh alongside Moses and Jesus. She also embraced a religion that, despite its aim to reconcile all religions as unfolding divine revelations, had been stirring controversy in the Middle East since its inception some fifty years earlier. Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had just been released from a forty-year imprisonment in Palestine. Bahá'ís in Persia faced pogroms, as they

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5 When I use “identification,” I am of course indebted to Kenneth Burke, who famously defined identification as the confluence of interests: “insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes they are, or is persuaded to believe so” (20).

had for decades, beginning with a massacre in the 1850s that claimed Táhirih. Though physically protected by US civil liberties, Root faced detractors for leaving Christianity and preaching a foreign religion, like the clergyman in her Pennsylvania hometown who sabotaged her lecture series in 1922 (Garis 147). Perhaps the very marginality of Bahá'ís enhanced their sense of personal duty in spreading Bahá'u'lláh's instructions for humanity's unification.

After witnessing how her coreligionists were actualizing these ideals, Root felt moved to evangelize Bahá'í peace principles. She traveled through Eurasia in 1915 to observe Bahá'í communities; satisfied with her findings, in 1919 she took to the seas again, this time as a peripatetic lecturer bound to traverse five continents until her death. Root explained her spiritual mission while reflecting on a radio speech she delivered in Tokyo circa 1930: "On the way back to my hotel, I said to the University student who accompanied me 'What do you intend to do when you are graduated from your university in June?' Instantly he replied: 'I am going to be a peace fighter just like you'" ("Some Experiences" 3). She had not thought of herself as a peace fighter, she says, but the term suits her motives, which are neither touristic nor journalistic (see epigraph above): "I travel and write and speak because I know there can be an education to peace." Root's faith in the transformative potential of education stemmed from her reading of Bahá'í scripture. In a 1938 speech, she synopsized Bahá'í tenets:

oneness of mankind and the permanent establishment of universal peace through universal education, through a universal economic solution, a universal auxiliary language, a universal league of nations with every country a member, through a world court and an international police force; through equality of the sexes and the equal education of the girl and the boy; through the harmony of science and religion; and through the independent investigation of the truth and the absolute command to consort, [and] mingle with people of all religions. ("Poverty Will Be Removed" 392)

As Root's synopsis indicates, universalism constitutes the religion's bedrock. Her concept of cosmic education envelops the aims described above—unifying women and men, religion and science, and all religions, and universalizing education, economy, auxiliary language, and government. This package, Root believed, was the global solution to social ills. Her varied career equipped her with the oratorical tools to distribute it worldwide as a "peace fighter." In so doing, she aligned with a larger movement of women advocating peace in the interwar years.

## **Interwar Peacemaking Rhetoric**

It is hard to review peacemaking efforts after World War I without sorrowing at their futility. We know now that the Treaty of Versailles sowed resentment that would later explode. We know that from its inception in 1919, the League of Nations was bound to fail in its peacekeeping mission. While the 1920s looked hopeful, at least in the Jazz Age United States, by the 1930s, fascism had planted its flag in Europe. Peace activists in the interwar years could not budge the systems of injustice that made a second conflagration inevitable. But they tried.

International cooperation was a widespread concern in the wake of the Great War. Peace movements blossomed around the world, especially among women. Sarojini Naidu and Queen Marie of Romania joined other progressive writers and rulers in a constellation of activists Root befriended. Though her activities resemble peacemaking missions of other US women impelled to speak and write in the interwar period (Sharer; George, Weiser, and Zepernick), Root's mission is distinguished by its basis in the Bahá'í Faith. She interpreted the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in her speeches, promulgating his mandate: "He said . . . prejudices of all kinds must be forgotten. There must be universal education to train us to become world citizens, education to teach us to live together as a family of nations" ("My Experiences" 4). For Bahá'ís like Root, the war showed the stakes of failing to diffuse their blueprint for world peace. Their efforts parallel those of other peacemakers, but they believed their plan was unique because it had been tailored by God to an industrialized, globalizing world. From a cerebral view, this belief looks naively optimistic; indeed, on the ultimate question of faith—does this message come to us from God?—intellectual justifications wilt. Whether one views Root as chasing a mirage or implementing divine instructions, like many religious rhetors, she was compelled to speak by her belief: the world needed to hear Bahá'u'lláh's universal principles.

## **Anticipating Cosmopolitanism**

Yet, there is nothing universal about universalism. Ideologies that claim to speak for all, repeatedly stained by war and genocide, trigger unease. Unity is typically framed in terms of difference, with an in-group united against an out-group. The in-group's integrity depends on its homogeneity. Paradoxically, exclusion fosters unity. Advocates of cosmopolitanism seek alternative bases

for unity.<sup>6</sup> The philosophy of Root, an avowed “internationalist,” aligns closely with cosmopolitan ideals. Cosmopolitan ethics, as theorized by Kwame Anthony Appiah, promotes intercultural curiosity, forswears cultural purism, upholds universalism and tolerance, and recognizes borderless obligations to all humanity.

Rhetoric can effect Appiah’s objectives, for in practice, cosmopolitanism hinges on communication. We must seek “modes of communication that can ameliorate the conflicts arising out of religious, tribal, ethnic, gender, and economic class differences,” as Walter Fisher suggests (50). Rhetoric scholars have grappled with Fisher’s question, “How do people come to be members of a community, or, put another way, how are they induced to recognize that they are, in fact, members of a community?” (49).<sup>7</sup> We might advance this project by examining scenarios of cosmopolitan rhetoric and extracting theory from them. Our field’s ongoing inquiry into issues of globalization, multiculturalism,

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6 Cosmopolitanism has been widely discussed and debated over the past few decades, particularly in the wake of Martha Nussbaum’s 1994 argument for the revival of this ancient orientation toward world citizenship. Some reject “the cosmopolitan illusion” (Harris), though. Nussbaum’s respondents have critiqued cosmopolitanism for justifying imperialism, serving neoliberalism, universalizing Western values, and lacking basis in any world-state that ensures human rights (*For Love of Country?*).

7 For instance, Alessandra Beasley Von Burg has proposed a rhetorical cosmopolitanism that can tap into emotions to bring different people together, supplementing the rationalism of the Stoics and Kantians. Other rhetoricians have also engaged with the concept: for instance, Wendy Hesford critiques the privilege inhering in “academic cosmopolitanism from above” (792), preferring transnationalism as an ideology. Others view cosmopolitanism as fruitful for our field, and vice-versa; James Darsey, taking issue with stoical cosmopolitanism, has proposed sophisticated cosmopolitanism, and Xiaoye You has argued that compositionists should critically engage with cosmopolitanism in their pedagogy.

and transnationalism—our “global pivot,” in the words of Wendy Hesford (795)—demands evaluation of rhetorical theorists like Root.<sup>8</sup>

From her position in the previous century, Root anticipated our current concerns with globalization. Like women before and after, Root used her social, intellectual, and spiritual experiences to compose responses to an ethical quandary. She proposes “cosmic education”—a term she employs in a 1938 speech titled “Culture and World Peace”—to inculcate spiritual faculties enabling humanity to comprehend its spiritual unity. In her words, cosmic education “is a spiritual process as well as the training of the intellect” (4). In her lexicon, “cosmic” connotes eternal divinity as opposed to transitory worldly events; education with such a lofty focus would facilitate transcendence of material divisions impeding universal identification, paving the way for world peace. Root contributed to the cosmopolitan project by proposing the combination of global spiritual ends and local material needs into a reformed system of education that would elicit unification.

## Envisioning Cosmic Education: Root's Global Public Address

Root locates transformative power in education, holding that it “brings broadness of view, and sympathy with others—lack of education causes narrowness and prejudice” (“Children's Education” 1). Cosmic education will facilitate world peace: this thesis, undergirded by a belief that communication shapes society, drives most of her speeches. Her speeches orbit commonplaces she found globally pertinent: cosmic education, international peacemaking, Esperanto, journalism, and mass media.

Within this framework, she would incorporate details pertinent to her particular audience. Usually, she would praise her audience's nationality and exhort them toward universalism. For example, in Athens, she remarked, “we

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8 As Hesford continues, “reconsideration of earlier transnational thinkers and international rhetorical figures” merits work. Certainly, one might wonder, in line with feminists including Hesford and Chandra Mohanty, whether examining a US white woman with the resources to travel internationally as a transnational thinker could propagate “assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality” (Mohanty 63). I would posit that, though voluntary travel indicates privilege, women who migrate between the Middle or Far East and the West can use that privilege to access rich transnational perspectives. For example, according to Crosson, early Western Bahá'í women contravened the imperialistic model of missioning; following non-Western leadership, these rhetors challenged imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism (126).



in all other countries look to you Greeks and we expect great things of you" ("Esperanto as a Way to Peace" 1); in Reykjavik, she congratulated her radio listeners for having "the first state in the whole world to announce neutrality in any war" ("Iceland" 1). When she lectured for interest groups, she addressed their objectives: speaking to women, she commented on their role in creating peace; to Esperantists, their movement's progress (partially in Esperanto); to religious congregations like Spiritualists and Theosophists, metaphysical concepts. For general audiences like those she reached over radio, she lectured on social justice. Through all these situations, cosmic education and world peace formed Root's constants.

Root's reliance on a few "universal" concepts regardless of audience, whether Sri Lankan or Icelandic, seems to have been successful, if not subtle. One acquaintance smilingly observed, "She gave you 20 subjects to choose from (for her speeches) but they were all the same" (Rosemary Sala qtd. in Crosson 171). Root typically found hosts for her lectures, so her fidelity to themes she found transcendent and global, adorned with a few specific encomia, worked. Her argument did not persuade everyone, of course; she met unwilling audiences who saw her as just another dogmatic missionary. In a 1931 speech, she recounts how an ambassador resisted introducing her to the King of Albania, surmising that the diplomat "looked upon me as a representative of a specific religious movement. I could not at first make him see that I was bringing a non-creedal, a universal, spiritual message of world peace" ("Interviews" 5). Since she viewed the Bahá'í Faith as integrating diverse belief systems and thus not a segregated doctrine, she saw her mission as "non-creedal." She sought to convey its universalism and thus appeal to what she perceived as a worldwide desire to end discord. As she declares in the same speech, "the ears of the world [are] waiting to hear of plans for peace which are workable, which are actually sending men out to BE brothers to their fellow-men; men who think in the terms of all humanity" (6). Two speeches epitomize her "plans for peace": "International Education for World Peace" and "Culture and World Peace."

### **"International Education for World Peace" (1931)**

After spending more than a decade traveling, Root had returned to her homeland to execute a yearlong lecture tour, starting on the West Coast. In Portland, Oregon, on 3 March 1931, she aired a lecture titled "International Education for World Peace." KOIN, a major station that aired some programs nationally ("Portland's Radio Days"), transmitted her speech, which expounds the concept of cosmic education and its significance. This section primarily summarizes the speech; to let Root explain her ideas in her way, with its inventiveness and flaws alike, I postpone my own interpretation.

Root offers three elements of cosmic education: children's education, secondary and postsecondary education, and a universal auxiliary language to be learned alongside native tongues. These elements roughly correspond to childhood, adolescence, and perpetuity (an auxiliary language was a lesson for all learners regardless of age). She does not, however, arrange these elements chronologically, instead starting with higher education, then moving to primary schooling, and finally describing language learning. Though this arrangement appears inverted, it implies a sequence of adult actions: after young adults finish schooling, they will likely become parents, responsible for initiating offspring into a worldview. To complement their children's education, these adults must continue to spiritualize their worldviews by learning a global communication medium and thereby establishing a diverse network. Thus, Root's order tracks three ideal achievements of adulthood. I follow her arrangement, occasionally pausing to draw comparisons to this speech's counterpart, "Culture and World Peace" (1938–1939), to flesh out her theory.

After greeting the "Friends of the United States," Root explains her exi-  
gence: "With the broadcasting, the talking film, the aeroplane and all the other modern inventions the nations are coming very close together, and it is necessary to have international education to learn to live together as a family of nations" (1). The sentence highlights the communication and travel technologies that support increasing socioeconomic ties beyond national borders. Globalization's material closeness does not guarantee international collaboration; cosmic education can transform the former into the latter. This sentence reappears, with minor alterations, in several of Root's speeches. It is noteworthy that she employed it with a US audience despite "rising discourses of isolationism that had emerged in response to World War I" (Johnson 443), which were compounded by the Great Depression. She pushes the audience to expand their perspective, observing the entire globe rather than their locality.

Following her introduction, Root discusses "the kind of universal education that our high schools, colleges and universities should teach" (1). After quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the essential aims of higher education, she suggests all universities should offer "similar courses of study and the basis of ethics should be the same," and they should develop exchange programs because "this great interchange of students will do a great deal to abolish prejudice, promote the oneness of humanity, and establish good will among the nations" (1). She leaves the particulars of ethics and courses to future deliberation. "Young men and women who come out of colleges and universities with all these old, worn-out prejudices and superstitions are not truly cultured and truly educated, no matter how many degrees they may have acquired," she comments in "Culture and World Peace" (5), in which she argues that higher education must eliminate prejudices against nation, race, politics, and religion. In the age

of globalization, old social paradigms must be updated—this proposal might appeal to her US audience’s aspiration to innovate. Root aims to convey the fundamental purpose of higher education—promoting a universalistic disposition—with a few hints at potential methods. Her proposals are vague, but this generality leaves space for local needs to influence cosmic education.

Turning to the earlier years of the student’s development, Root describes the ideal childhood education. It must be universal so “there will not remain one single individual without education” and should prepare each student to contribute to society (“International Education” 2). Acclaiming the “new liberalized schools of Europe” for replacing old authoritarian pedagogies’ “spirit of competition” with “a spirit of cooperation and real comradeship” (2), she advocates expanding such reforms:

When education on right lines becomes general, humanity will be transformed and the world will become a paradise. At present really well educated people are rare, for nearly every one has false prejudices, erroneous conceptions and bad habits drilled into him from babyhood. How few are taught from their earliest childhood to love the spiritual and to dedicate their lives to the Infinite; to regard service to humanity as the highest aim of life; to develop their powers to the best advantage for the general good of all! Yet surely these are the elements of good education. (2)

With her visceral image of *drilling* prejudices into children, Root evokes shock at the failure to prepare children to serve the public good. She continues, “Mere cramming of the memory with facts about arithmetic, grammar, geography and languages has comparatively little effect in producing noble and useful lives” (2). Once again, she employs a violent term, *cram*, to underscore that the transmissive pedagogical model, shoving facts into minds, is futile if children are not oriented toward spirituality and service. Root pursues this vein, stating that girls must have parity to boys in education, and outlining a redistributive economic system that would ensure education for every child.

Adopting a universal auxiliary language to facilitate global communication is Root’s final element of cosmic education in this speech. She proposes that the auxiliary language, when selected, be taught in schools alongside the local language; it would not supplant any native tongue but supplement it. Root calls upon her audience—as she often did—to actively petition their government to support the international project of selecting an auxiliary language: “Your task and mine is to urge the rulers of the world to appoint an international committee of their best linguists, then this committee should either choose one of the existing languages or make a language which could be approved and then introduced into every school” (4). They should also investigate Esperanto—an

invented language that enjoyed popularity before waning due to Nazism and WWII (Crosson 134)—which she found advantageous in neutrality, beauty, and ease of learning. To emphasize the practicability of this call to action, she provides the Esperanto Association of California's address for study guide orders. As the finale of this argument, Root recites a passage, which Bahá'u'lláh originally spoke in Persian, first in English (“. . . the Most Great Peace shall come”), then in Esperanto (“. . . la plej Granda Paco venos”) (5). By pronouncing these words, she attempts to convince listeners of Esperanto's beauty and intuitiveness. In many of her speeches, she makes the same argument for a universal auxiliary language, implying that a shared language enables rhetorical identification. Every listener knew a language (not necessarily English, since she delivered some speeches in Esperanto and had others translated). Therefore, they could all comprehend the power of language as a mediator of—or barrier to—communication. In language reform, she assigns her audiences a concrete goal: joining the global project of selecting and implementing a universal auxiliary language.

Despite the attention she lavishes on language as an element of international education, Root cautions her listeners that “no one single remedy will bring the universal peace” (5). Combining social solutions, including global governance and redistributive economics, with the abolition of prejudice will “create such a spiritual world brotherhood that war will be impossible”; hence, “there must be universal education for world peace” (5). Cosmic education would motivate global cooperation, an objective she exhorts her US listeners to support:

I know that you, as citizens of our great Republic, are eager to stand in your places and do your part to help humanity to learn to think internationally. We do not boast that we love our own country alone, we are much better nationalists when we are earnest internationalists, when we are working for the good of all humanity. (6)

In this conclusion, she suggests that there is nothing wrong with loving America, unless that love is exclusive. Cosmopolitanism supersedes patriotism—and even enhances it. The best possible American, she implies, would care for everyone, whether compatriots or foreigners. Thus, she appeals to her audience's sense of civic pride, but globalizes patriotism.

In sum, Root establishes that in fact there is a problem in our world: new technology has increased interdependence but our capacity for intercultural understanding has not kept pace. The Great War furnishes incontrovertible evidence. She defines the problem as fundamentally one of communication: we convey timeworn prejudices to rising generations. To solve this miseducation crisis, she proposes globally restructuring learning from infancy to maturity

through cosmic education. At its base, cosmic education is rhetorical education because it mandates learning to listen to dissimilar others and to deliberate with them on issues better solved through communication than violence.

## **Facing Armageddon: Exhorting Reform in “Culture and World Peace” (1938–1939)**

Seven years later, Root delivered “Culture and World Peace” in locations throughout India and Australia (“What Is Culture?” is its alternative title). According to notes on her scripts, Root presented this speech in Bombay and other Indian locales in 1938, and in several states of Australia to organizations including the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Country Women’s Association in 1939. Analyzing this speech alongside “International Education for World Peace” reveals the consistency of her ideas despite contextual changes: in 1931, maintaining peace seemed feasible, but by 1938, the Second World War had grown inevitable. Root admitted the imminence of war but held that her strategies would be necessary to prevent continuing conflict—assuming humanity survived World War II. Because the two speeches overlap, this section avoids repeating points made above and is therefore briefer.

Although Root rehashes many of the arguments from her 1931 Oregon address, she now underscores the pairing of education and culture: “The world needs new cosmic education in this universal epoch just opening, it needs and will achieve a universal system of culture in which the distinctive educational expression of each nation will be united with a new cosmic ideal” (1). A “universal system of culture” *seems* to imply global uniformity. In her definition, however, each nation would retain its “distinctive” features but reorient toward internationalism. That is, cosmic education should not be homogenizing, but should promote “the patriotism of all mankind” (1)—agape without borders. She explains,

this new universal age requires universal education, cosmic education, and this is a spiritual process as well as the training of the intellect. Universal education is the complete unfolding and perfect functioning of the human soul. In addition to our A.B.C.’s, we must think about the universe and our world and our relation to them both, and think about the oneness of all humanity. . . . Our universal education should train us to look upon all the peoples of the world as our brothers and sisters. We should catch the vision of the unity, the interdependence of all human beings. Thus we become world citizens, with

capacity to share in and help direct a world civilization, a divine world culture. (4)

As she suggests repeatedly, cosmic education would teach students to consider their connectivity with all other humans and their role in global civilization. Such education must begin when children are young, since "to the end of their lives they are affected by the training of their earliest years" (4). The language of "complete unfolding" suggests that children have an inborn capacity for universal love that must be coaxed into expression. Girls, especially, would transmit this training to the next generation in their probable motherhood, and women's equality with men "will be a great impulse forward to culture and world peace" (3). Students of cosmic education, attuned to unity and interdependence, would channel divine power into building "a world civilization" (4). These claims sound familiar; Root's basic themes remain intact.

There is a change, however: Root's tone is more importunate as she advocates world peace, reflecting her anticipation of World War II. Take her statement of exigence: "We have come so close together through the aeroplane, the radio and all the other space-annihilating inventions; yes, and through the last world war, that we must learn to live together, or we perish" (1). Comparing this sentence with the 1931 version, here she more clearly relates the new "space-annihilating" technologies to the urgency of cooperation. Societies are intermeshed, so the task of learning to coexist is dire; delay would induce universal destruction. Urgency permeates the entire speech. Root pleads, "Why are we sleeping upon our beds, heedless when the Armageddon is at the door of our world?" (2). She warns that humanity would be "put to the test" of global coexistence; failure would mean "we are lost" (1). Underscoring the universal obligation of peacemaking, she reminds her audience that as residents of the planet, they must participate: "the world is you and I. We are the ones responsible for world peace and culture" (2). Instead of lamenting the failed League of Nations, "our task is to study and learn thoroughly what a Universal League of Nations can be and establish it" (2). Only such world unification along with "mind disarmament and a strong spiritual foundation can ever save our world from complete cataclysm, and our culture from hopeless disintegration" (2). Social unification undergirded by mind disarmament—that is, identification with all humans—alone promises to resolve the impending violence. She warns, "let us not deceive ourselves—an unspiritual humanity cannot save itself from Armageddon" (6). The solution cannot be solely material. While the overall affect of this 1938–1939 speech is gloomier than the 1931 address, a thread of optimism unites both: the actions of individuals will accumulate into global change.

## Two Ways to Enroll in Cosmic Education: Identification and Action

Root’s overarching rhetorical strategies, consistent across many of her lectures, can be distilled from “International Education for World Peace” and “Culture and World Peace.” She deploys two persuasive strategies to appeal to her audiences to get involved: making the general principle of cosmic education personal and inciting active participation in the project of peacemaking. Root once claimed, “This is the way the world is moved: first the vision, then the plan, then the fulfillment!” (“Woman’s Place” 6). Yet, her speeches permit latitude in that first step. Even if her effort to inspire a vision—the universal identification strategy—failed, she offered action as an alternative. If a listener followed either suggestion, they would enter the cycle of cosmic education (Figure 1).

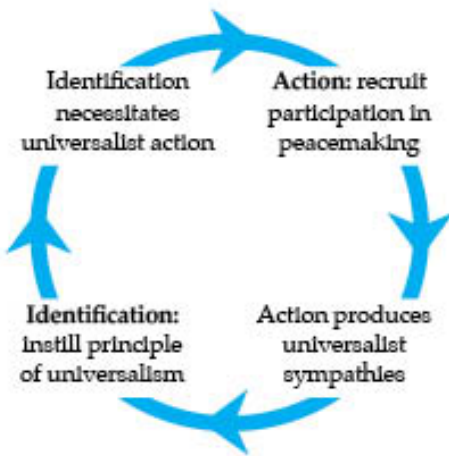


Figure 1: Cycle of cosmic education

With *universal identification*, Root invites the audience to recognize their personal investment in global human welfare. She stresses that the concern for world peace is—or should be—universal. She alludes to Bahá’í principles but does not spotlight them as her primary exigence, since peace should resonate with anyone, religious or not. Anyone could witness the problem. On display were the phenomena of a globalizing world, its permeable borders reified by air travel and mass media including radio and movies. The struggle to coexist was likewise obvious: the Great War’s

aftermath kept roiling, forming an exigence anyone could see. Another conflagration flamed on the horizon; Root saw its smoke—in fact, she survived the fiery Battle of Shanghai in 1937—yet she persisted in hoping such a cataclysm would impel a search for “ways of peace that the human race may not be extinguished” (“My Experiences” 4). Root appeals to a concern for self-preservation, for in a globalized world, if the collective fails, the individual faces the repercussions; Armageddon would not be inflicted by God but by humans upon each other. Her frequent reminders of the situation’s urgency reflect her

situation's constraints: she had just an hour or so to inspire a new vision in her audience. Itinerant orators, lacking embedment in a community, must compose a catalyst to propel future action. Therefore, the technique of universal identification requires the speaker to cling to *kairos* in crafting a persuasive argument for a cosmic perspective, anticipating both an audience's current status and their future capabilities. If a listener accepted this cosmic perspective, they would be poised to act.

*Direct action* is enabled by, but does not depend on, universal identification; anyone can and must participate in peacemaking. In Root's view, it was not only civic leaders who had a role to play—though they had special responsibility, which is why she fostered relationships with them. Moreover, it was not solely teachers who could transform education. People could self-educate, learning Esperanto and joining international networks via this language. In addition, they could influence curricula, cooperating “with the teachers in the schools to see that universal peace is stressed; that great humanitarians and scientists are glorified rather than wars” (“Woman's Place” 3). Everyone could emanate spiritual qualities to serve as a role model for others, for a shining life ensures that “every one who ever meets you will be ennobled, cheered and refined just because she has come into your presence” (3). Peacemaking was not the exclusive concern of diplomats, but the duty of every member of every audience. Like inducing universal identification, recruiting action is rhetorical, as deeds constitute wordless arguments to onlookers. To explain how an audience could be convinced to act on behalf of a global community's interests without *first* identifying with that community, we must turn to Root's favorite recommendation: learning Esperanto.

To recruit action, Root highlighted Esperanto in most of her lectures, including the 1931 and 1938 speeches. Learning Esperanto was, in Root's view, an accessible peacemaking action for her audiences (at least compared with her other formidable objectives, such as redistributing wealth or creating a comprehensive forum for international arbitration). As noted above, Root performed the language's beauty, seeking to convey its aesthetic pleasure. Audiences could be convinced to learn Esperanto by their aesthetic curiosity or by a desire for exotic pen pals—motives less abstract than joining the global community. That is, they did not need to achieve universal identification *before* acting. Individuals could acquire the language and then join the international network of Esperantists: “All of you can learn to speak and write Esperanto fluently in six months' time, and then you can correspond with people in more than two thousand cities in the five continents,” she claims in “International Education for World Peace” (4). Apparently, some listeners acted on her proposal; reflecting on her 1931 US lecture tour six years later, she notes that “500 letters were received from listeners asking about this new language”



("Esperanto as a Way to World Peace" 2). Her approach parallels Appiah's practical cosmopolitanism, coexistence "without agreeing on what the values are that make it good to live together" (71). If her listeners were indifferent to her religious tenets, they could still converse in Esperanto, thus working on the project of living together. The ensuing intercultural exchanges through correspondence or travel, celebrating commonalities and differences, would ideally result in a reformation of values. Such spiritualization through action occurred for prominent Esperantist Lidia Zamenhof, who scandalized her family by forsaking atheism for the Bahá'í Faith during her collaborations with Root. In the process of interacting with fellow Esperantists, learners like Zamenhof could reach conviction about the project of spiritual unification, achieving universal identification.

Accomplishing transnational identification could unleash potent changes, Root hoped, and to that end, she praised exemplars. She frequently referenced her meetings with national leaders in her speeches. In "International Education for World Peace," she recounts a compliment Czech president Tomáš Masaryk paid to the principles of Bahá'u'lláh and declares, the "sovereigns, the ministers of foreign affairs, the ministers of education, the world economists and millions of other people are today studying deeply these principles of international education for world peace" (5–6), implying that her audience would be wise to follow suit. Study would lead to action; action would lead to study: this is the cycle of cosmic education. By citing luminaries like Masaryk, Root built ethos, displaying the breadth of her global network—but she also modeled her recommended curricular reform of glorifying humanitarians and scientists. Root assembled a new pantheon of heroes in her enclavia to the pacifism and justice of leaders she met.

## **Acting on Cosmic Identification: Táhirih as Global Role Model (1930–1939)**

At the center of the pantheon, Root enthroned Táhirih—a move of rhetorical cosmopolitanism that represents the maturation of Root's approach to cosmic education. While Root's method in the speeches discussed above could be critiqued for failing to ensure results, she made a more concrete contribution to cosmic education by gaining intercultural literacy and diffusing it through her lectures. The culture and society of Iran, the birthplace of her religion, attracted her. She celebrated Iran's spiritual advancement in "The New Spirit of Persia" (1931), telling her Hawai'ian audience, "I could not wish anything happier for you all than to have the bounty of a trip all through Persia" (4). Of particular interest to her was the progress of women's rights there. Her four-month visit in 1930 afforded opportunities to bond with her female

coreligionists; she fondly recalls the meeting of “sisters of the East and the West” (6). Spreading knowledge of different regions to her audiences was a linchpin of Root’s cosmic education curriculum. In an imaginative act of transnational, transhistorical sisterhood, Táhirih became the centerpiece of Root’s program.

The conference of Badasht—site of Táhirih’s most famous act—and the first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, coincided in the summer of 1848, symbolically foreshadowing the Bahá’í brand of feminism in which Root would participate. Only one woman was present when converts to the newly founded religion of Bábísm gathered in Badasht, Iran: Qurratu’l-Ayn, born as Fátimih Barágháni, best known to Bahá’ís as Táhirih. At the conference, she showed her face publicly—a shocking act in her conservative milieu—to jolt her coreligionists out of traditionalism (Milani 114). She proclaimed, “This day is the day of festivity and universal rejoicing . . . on which the fetters of the past are burst asunder” (qtd. in A’zam 296). Within a few years, Iranian theocrats, distressed by Bábísm’s influence, executed Táhirih and many others and banished a Bábí who later assumed the title Bahá’u’lláh. When he declared his divine mission, many Bábís accepted, converting to his Bahá’í Faith.

As the Bahá’í Faith enlisted Western converts, Táhirih emerged as a transnational paradigm of womanhood (Crosson 14). For instance, Root’s contemporary Lua Getsinger expressed her yearning “to go to Persia and proclaim the Faith as Táhirih had done,” and announced that “being *women* we must not fall below the standard of her example” (Metelmann 55, 277, italics original). Táhirih, with her unconventional travels, set a precedent for the visibility that Bahá’í orators assumed and became a theme in their speeches (Crosson 99, 116). Root thus shared a vision of global sisterhood with coreligionists like Getsinger. The reverence they expressed for their Iranian forebear contrasts with the dehumanization of much orientalist literature, which Edward Said characterizes as “neither interested in nor capable of discussing individuals” (155). Literature inspired by Western women’s esteem for Táhirih, including poems and plays,<sup>9</sup> emerged long before Root started her project. Root collected such interpretations of Táhirih’s life as a method of assaying her global influence, cataloging her admirers in a chapter titled “Táhirih’s Fame and Its Effects in the World” at the end of *Táhirih the Pure*.

Besides gathering evidence of Táhirih’s international influence, Root took an approach to historiographical research that resembles strategic contemplation, a feminist research process enabling “focus on ‘spiritual’ dimensions

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9 I analyze one such play, *God’s Heroes* (1909), in my article “Laura Barney’s Discipleship to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Tracing a Theological Flow from the Middle East to the United States, 1900–1916” (*Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 28.1–2).

of scholarship" (Royster and Kirsch 85). As Root explains in the book, in 1930, she traveled to Táhírih's birthplace—a reverential pilgrimage for her. There in Qazvin, Root conversed with a relative of Táhírih, using his accounts in combination with secondary sources to construct Táhírih's biography. Striking a conversational tone, using the first and second person, Root establishes rapport between herself and the reader, in the process evoking her personal bond with her subject, as this apostrophe indicates: "O Táhírih, you have not passed out, you have only passed on. Your spiritual, courageous individuality will forever inspire, ennoble and refine humanity, your songs of the spirit will be treasured in innumerable hearts" (87). Root's strategic contemplation suggests her praxis of rhetorical theory and feminist authorship: her display of humble devotion to Táhírih models a stance of intercultural love to her readers, implicitly inviting them to assume the same posture.

In the book's first paragraph, Root articulates her purpose in recuperating Táhírih. She states that women "after centuries of somnolence are wide awake to their new position, and are stirring to new ideas" (i). Therefore, they should heed the story of Táhírih, "the first woman suffrage martyr . . . not a Westerner at all." She applies to Táhírih the phrase "ex oriente lux," glorifying the East in relation to the West. Furthermore, Root takes all of womankind as her audience by claiming that women—"one-half of the whole human race"—should take a "thrilling interest" in Táhírih. The introduction reveals Root's project of conflating Táhírih's work with suffragism, (re)writing an internationalized feminist history. The biography thus represents a practical application of cosmic education theory.

Root envisaged her book interpolating Táhírih into public memory worldwide, imagining it as a permanent and borderless counterpart to her orations. She wished her book to speak in many languages, favoring Esperanto for translation "because thus, it could easily be translated into more than fifty languages of the East and the West" ("Woman's Place" 4), and was delighted at its translation into seven languages the year after publication ("Táhírih's Message" 6). Always eager to seize every chance to disseminate her message, Root also promoted Táhírih in her orations, reiterating her book's argument for Táhírih's status in suffragism. As she told Australians in a 1939 radio speech titled "Táhírih's Message to the Modern World," "The woman suffrage movement did not begin with Mrs. Pankhurst in the West, but with Táhírih" (1). An early reformist, Táhírih modeled the individual's role in global peacemaking; in the same speech, Root states, "We are born into this world to work for universal education, a universal auxiliary language, for unity in religion and for the oneness of mankind. Our lives, our world, need strong spiritual foundations, and one of the finest traits in Táhírih, and one that helps the world most, was her fidelity in searching for truth!" (6). Táhírih, according to Root, exemplifies

the essential ethics required worldwide for constructing the spiritual foundations of purposeful lives and unified societies.

Root's integration of Táhirih into her program of cosmic education reframed this Bábí martyr in the context of Western feminism. Critiques could certainly be lodged against her strategy of identification for erasing distinct identities, eliding significant differences between Iranian and Western women. Revising Táhirih into a suffragist, for instance, projects Western feminist goals of voting rights onto monarchical Iranian society and onto a woman who prioritized theological revolution. Yet, in Root's revisionism, she expands the concept of suffrage beyond local or national concerns to encompass women's advancement globally. The local context diminishes in importance, but this is less a sin of rhetorical imperialism than a rejection of intolerance. The authorities in Táhirih's homeland had tried to excise her from public memory, destroying her writings and vilifying her as a lascivious heretic. In Táhirih's original context, she was framed as a despicable fanatic. Yet, reframed in global feminism, she becomes a heroine. Rhetorical recuperation, emanating from an American's identification with an Iranian, was no mere expression of feminist orientalism, the narcissistic discovery of the self in otherness (Kaplan 234). Rather, Root's reframing of Táhirih indicates her recognition that storytelling comprises the base of intercultural communication. As Appiah explains, "Conversations across boundaries of identity . . . begin with the sort of imaginative engagement you get when you read a novel or watch a movie or attend to a work of art that speaks from some place other than your own" (85). Root wanted her imaginative biography to inspire women to emulate her foremother. *Táhirih the Pure* stands out in her corpus. She completed it at the peak of her career, and in it, she acts upon the exhortations she made over two decades of lecturing, offering a lesson plan in the curriculum of cosmic education: here is a figure with spiritual qualities that, if imitated, would foster world peace. Identifying with her, thus transcending linguistic, cultural, and religious differences between reader and exemplar, could engender a universalistic orientation and stimulate action.

## Cosmic Education and the Rhetoric of Unity

In the cycle of cosmic education, personal identification with universalism sparks direct peacemaking action, and such action inculcates personal identification with universalism. Root's reframing of Táhirih exemplifies this cycle. Root viewed her personal interests as coterminous with global wellbeing. Her identification with universalism led her to act, initiating her itinerant speaking career in 1919. Her travels led her to interact with admirers of Táhirih and to visit her birthplace. As she learned more about Táhirih's life and influence, her personal identification with the poet-preacher deepened. Ultimately, she

devoted herself to researching and writing the biography. With this project, she hoped her readers would experience universal identification as they learned about their global status and relished stories of Táhiriḥ's heroism. Reveling in the grandness of an individual's narrative, the reader may recognize kindred aspirations.

In the cycle of cosmic education, personal identification with the principle of universalism can emanate from such a sense of transcendent admiration for exemplars, or from the insight that individual welfare depends on collective peace. Root aimed to induce in her audiences a vision of world peace, sharpened by the threat of global warfare. She furnished a vision and the outlines of a plan, handing responsibility for developing and fulfilling it to her audience. Root was constrained by her visits' brevity, but such a vision would arise most effectively from an education program starting in infancy. She redefines education as instilling students with soulful knowledge of humanity's oneness: "it is spiritual, moral education that can change the hearts and create such love that war will be impossible" ("Woman's Place" 2). Intellectual training is insufficient; the spirit must be moved to acknowledge its interconnection with others. Root's foregrounding of education's capacity to move anticipates Alessandra Beasley Von Burg's proposal for rhetorical cosmopolitanism, which capitalizes on affect's power in identification. Also like Von Burg, Root encourages encounters with people of differing religions, regions, cultures, and periods. Her project of rehabilitating Táhiriḥ models such encountering, suggesting the universality of such virtues as fearless inquiry and selfless dedication. Even if a person has not imbibed such a globalist curriculum, they can still enroll in cosmic education through direct action. One method is purposeful intercultural interaction. Root advocates greater mixture between diverse people through travel, recommending international exchanges of students and professors and correspondence with international networks such as the Esperantists. With her vision of schooling and an auxiliary language becoming universal, such intermingling would not be an elite privilege but a popular undertaking. Indeed, Root demands universal participation in establishing peace, assigning tasks including language learning and civic petitioning. World peace is a grassroots project, and the individual has agency in advancing the collective.

Today, "globalization" denotes exploiting every market in pursuit of a supposedly universal value, capital. Yet, Root's oeuvre asks us, since we are already globally interdependent, why can't we do better than cooperating merely on material acquisition? Certainly, there are deep rifts between different groups' values—or so we suppose (Root's Bahá'í perspective would find in each religion the same principles). The trouble with universalism, then, might not be agreeing on values, but agreeing on their praxis, as per Appiah's

practical cosmopolitanism. For the cosmic student, the guiding principle in resolving these arguments should not be self-interest, and it should not even necessarily be reason. It should be universal love. Loving cosmically entails humility and—more radically in our neoliberal context—a diminishment of individual autonomy. Cosmic communication depends on a humbling process that begins not in the intellect, but in the spirit: that is Root's key theoretical intervention.

Participants in cosmic education should not only act, but also perpetuate the project by transmitting the vision to others in a viral peace movement. As Root exhorts an audience in 1937, "we must do not only our own work, but we must enthrust at least one hundred others to long to become internationally minded and servants to all humanity" ("The Bahá'í Message" 6). Working independently would, in the end, be less effective than collaborating, for, as she continues, "we must do what we have not given [others] the vision to do; and if we did awaken their love to work for the oneness of mankind, they might do many things better than we can do them" (6). Each listener must evangelize peace. Here is another theoretical intervention: every audience member should become a rhetor herself, moving others through purposeful language and modeling.

Rhetoric generated by religious zeal has a sullied record, from yesterday's colonizing proselytism to today's extremist propaganda. The positive outcomes of religious zeal are quieter and subtler. But it is important for us to listen to the quiet voices in the history of religious rhetoric, to recognize that religious belief can, even today, be a powerful unifier of dissimilar people. In rhetorical studies, we must mind the margins—looking especially toward women who creatively interpret and apply spiritual traditions—to find radically unifying practices. Rhetors located centrally lack a comparable exigence for developing inclusivity and universal love, since they are safely insulated within the majority. Those living at the edges, though, may also stand at the forefront, their liminality granting a wider perspective on what it means to coexist—to engage and deliberate—civilly. Root's synergistic approach toward persuading audiences worldwide to realize, both theoretically and practically, their role in fostering global unity, could productively be applied to interfaith and intercultural rhetorical practices today.

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