# crossings.

an undergraduate arts journal

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA OASIS

volume five

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an undergraduate arts journal

volume five

Illustration by Morgan Johnson

# Land Acknowledgement

The Organization for Arts Students and Interdisciplinary Studies, Crossings and the University of Alberta occupies Indigenous land in Amiskwacîswâskahikan (Beaver Hills House), on Treaty 6 territory, from where this edition was conceptualized, edited and published. From time immemorial, the banks along the river valley have been known as the Pehonan and have served as a meeting place for the many First Nations People who have called this land home: the Nehiyaw, Dene, Anishnaabe, Metis, Niitsitapi, and Nakota Sioux. The University and the city are also on the unlawfully stolen land of the forcibly removed Papaschase Cree. The Crossings team respectively acknowledges this reality and engages to continue in the work of decolonization from the editorial process through to publication.

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# Olivia Labelle

*Editor-in-Chief*

*Hello, all! I jubilantly welcome you to the fifth volume of Crossings: An Undergraduate Arts Journal. As the only faculty-wide, undergraduate peer-reviewed journal for in the Faculty of Arts, we couldn't be more proud to present to you the best written and visual works spanning the fine arts, humanities, and social sciences at the University of Alberta. Crossings is so special because we feature all these disciplines. Although this year the work of going through each and every submission (almost 200 this year, double the numbers from previous years!) was lengthy, we wouldn't have it any other way; research in the Arts is almost always intensely interdisciplinary, so Crossings' breadth is its biggest strength. If your research straddles two or more disciplinary boundaries, you don't have to wonder where to publish.*

*Throughout this year-long endeavor, I have seen proof of why this Faculty is so strong. The depth of thought, creativity and academic rigour displayed in each and every submission is a testament to the quality of the work that gets done behind the scenes in every corner of this vast student body; in the studios, in the library, in the classrooms. The ideas, themes, and arguments contained within these works are diverse, yet they converge in a shared sense of purpose; it is now undeniable to me that this Faculty is committed to educating a generation prepared to shape the future. It is this collective energy–this synergy–that we felt so strongly while compiling this edition, and I hope, dear reader, that you feel it too as you turn these pages.*

*The successful completion of this volume is a testament to the hard work and dedication of this year's immense team of over 50 volunteers. First, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for our Art and Design Leads, Madelaine Mae Dack and Danielle Lacanienta. Although the work contained within this edition can stand on its own, they have helped elevate it all to a level unparalleled—I would say—to any other journal at this University.*

*The invaluable contributions of the Editorial Team are important to highlight. Thank you to our many Section Editors in leading their review teams and refining the work in this volume; their impact cannot be overstated. Our Senior Copyeditors, thank you for guiding the copyediting teams (made up exclusively of first-years!) through extensive revisions to ensure the highest quality of each submission; your leadership has been inviable—for both the journal and these first-year students as they embark on their university journeys. Lastly, my sincerest gratitude goes to Sophie Mahmood, my Editorial Director, who worked tirelessly alongside me to ensure a smooth execution of this year's processes. Sophie, I really feel as though you came into my life this year like a guardian angel.*

*I would equally like to thank every single peer reviewer and copy editor that worked in this year's edition. Their expertise in their respective fields and enthusiasm were unmatched. I extend my deepest appreciation to each and every one of them for their hard work and courage in putting themselves out there and contributing to the Arts community as a whole.*

*I would also like to express many thanks to my colleagues at OASIS: Nathan Perez, Logan West, Aoife Devlin-O'Connor, Leila Thomas and all of our wonderful councilors. Their support, assistance, and enthusiasm have been invaluable in producing this volume.*

*Couple more thank yous: Dr. Christine Brown, who has provided guidance and support to Crossings since its creation. Her contributions have been instrumental in promoting undergraduate research and fostering a sense of community within the Arts; and Katie Cuyler and her whole team at the University of Alberta Libraries, who's support throughout this whole process has been invaluable.*

*This fifth volume of Crossings is the result of months of thoughtful collaboration among students striving to make the most of their time at university—and to make an impact along the way. We hope the ideas within these pages inspire, challenge, and move you, just as they did us.*

**Olivia Labelle** (she/her)
*Editor-in-Chief*
*Crossings Volume Five*

*At OASIS, we work to elevate the undergraduate arts community through meaningful events, opportunities, and advocacy that highlight and celebrate the student experience. As a team, we watch with pride as our peers—fellow students, leaders, researchers, and artists—take the world in stride. From these observations, we draw inspiration and translate what we see into action and support our community in ways that help it thrive within its home here at the Faculty of Arts. Olivia and the Crossings team have truly embodied this mission. This year's team is remarkable. Not only in the sheer number of submissions received or the strength of those behind the scenes, but in the deliberate thought and care that shaped this edition. What makes this issue especially unique is its custom artwork, created by the journal's design team. Each year, Crossings becomes more than a publication—it becomes a truly interdisciplinary journal, bridging visual culture and written word to share a powerful message about the depth and dynamism of the arts.*

*To our readers, I invite you to take your time with this journal. Linger on the works that speak to you. Find something that resonates—whether it reminds you of a class you once took, ties into your own lived experience, or opens your eyes to something entirely new. Let the insights shared by your peers broaden your understanding of the world, inspire future research, or spark conversations with friends. As arts students, we know that one of our greatest strengths lies in our commitment to dialogue and our relentless curiosity, both of which are nurtured through work like this. Let us cherish our strengths, cultivate the arts with purpose, and continue to create for those who will one day walk where we stand.*

*On behalf of OASIS, I extend my deepest thanks to everyone who contributed to this year's edition of Crossings. To the authors, your commitment to critical discourse in the arts is a gift to this community. To the editorial team—peer reviewers, section editors, copy editors, and designers—your dedication and attention to detail brought this journal to life. And to this year's Editor-in-Chief, Olivia: your leadership and vision are evident on every page. The success of this edition is a direct result of your hard work and the tireless efforts of your entire team.*

*Happy reading everyone,*

**Nathan Perez** (he/him)
*OASIS President*
*Crossings Volume Five*

# Nathan Perez

*OASIS President*

# Sophie Mahmood

*Editorial Director*

*It was a pleasure to serve as this year's Editorial Director, and I could not be more thankful to Olivia for giving me this opportunity. Over the past year, I worked behind the scenes alongside our incredible team to produce a memorable fifth edition of Crossings. I had the chance to collectively manage and guide the team while bringing Olivia's vision to life. This edition truly stands out, representing the unity of the Faculty of Arts through the thematic intersection of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the new integrated illustrations from Fine Arts.*

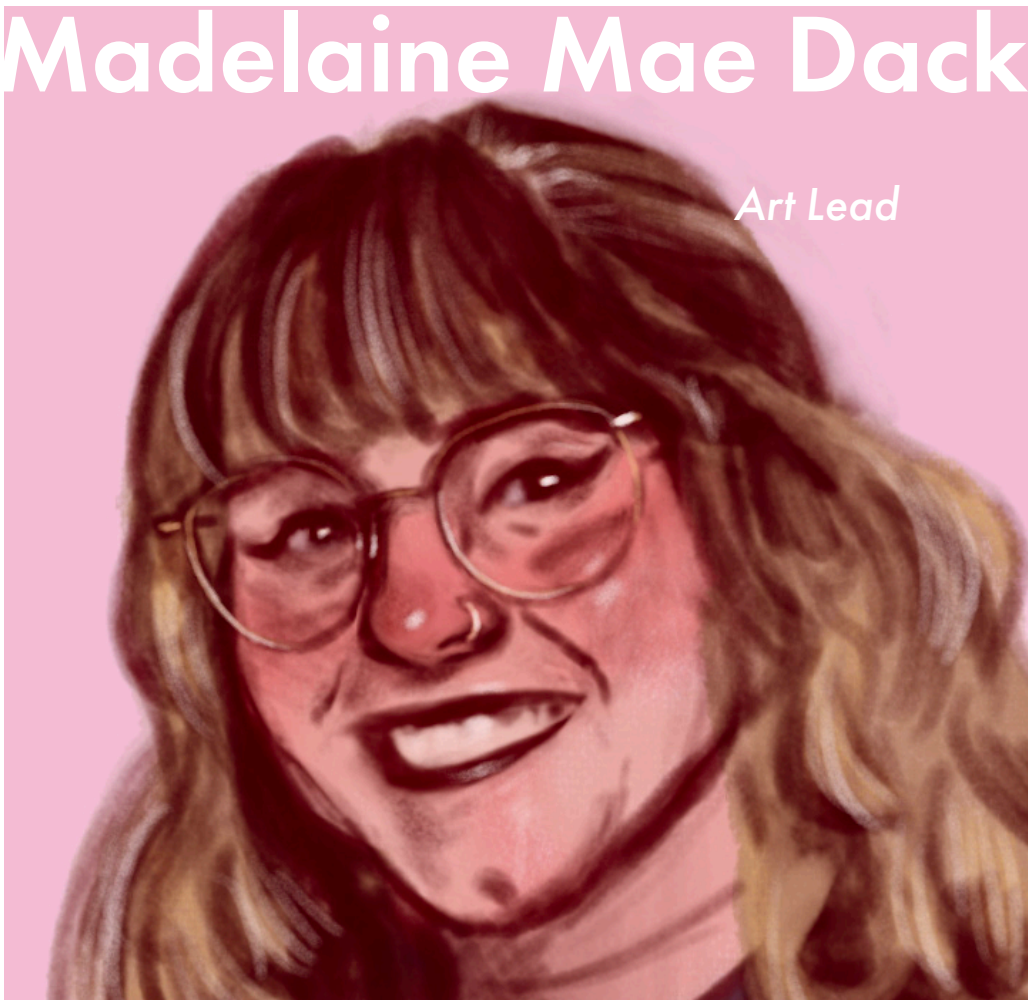
*Through publishing student papers in this volume, I have learned so much, not only about the research emerging from the Faculty of Arts but also about the passion and drive that define this university. While our campus is vast, it is remarkable what we can achieve when we collaborate across disciplines. The creativity, intelligence, and commitment within this community have been both eye-opening and deeply inspiring.*

*As I watched the product of this collaboration come together, I was reminded of what makes the Faculty of Arts so vital: its willingness to venture beyond. Students in the Faculty of Arts refuse to settle for easy answers; our strength lies in our bravery, curiosity, and commitment to contemplative dialogue. This dedication to inquiry is especially critical today, as AI challenges the sanctity of writing and technological advancements distance us and raise ever more complex ethical questions. Thus, nurturing human connections to our pasts, our cultures, and each other has never been so important. The spirit of inquiry cultivated here is not limited to our time as students either; it prepares us to become intuitive politicians, teachers, psychologists, writers, and leaders. The arts, like this journal, are demonstrations of the power of a united collective.*

*I hope, in reading our fifth edition, you feel the human presence behind every word, the wit of our authors, and the energy of our incredible team of volunteers who worked tirelessly from peer review to final production.*

*I encourage you, dear reader, to explore the themes of this journal. Let it deepen your appreciation for the arts. Let your eye be caught by the vibrant visuals and let your mind be enraptured by the valuable research. Most importantly, let it inspire you to ask why. Let it inspire you to venture beyond.*

**Sophie Mahmood** (she/her)
*Editorial Director*
*Crossings Volume Five*




*I am extremely grateful to be a part of the Crossings team and I'm overjoyed with what we have accomplished this year. My goal with volume 5 of the Crossings journal was to promote more integration and collaboration between the different branches of the Faculty of Arts. By introducing an illustrated element to this volume of the journal, we were able to provide creative opportunities to emerging artists and illustrators at the University of Alberta, as well as highlight how illustration can support academic writing. I wanted to demonstrate the place that visual art has within the grander academic setting, and showcase the importance of collaboration in the arts. I could not be prouder of the illustration team, and everything we have achieved over the last 8 months.*

*To my illustrators: Ava Fan, Namya Kohli, Hillary Vuong, and Sophia Grace Foder. Thank you so much for everything you have put into this journal. Your dedication and creativity has inspired me since day one, and I could not have asked for a better group of artists to work with. This journal would not have been complete without each one of you. I am so grateful to have worked with you, and I know you will all do amazing things in the coming years. Thank you so much!*

**Madelaine Mae Dack** (she/they)
*Art Lead*
*Crossings Volume Five*


*This year's edition of Crossings showcases the diversity and creative talent of the arts community at the University of Alberta. For this issue, we set out to ensure that the journal's visual identity is the strongest it has ever been. The Arts and Design teams aimed to create thoughtful illustrations that reflect the submissions with care, as well as accessible layouts that present each piece in a visually engaging way. Our goal was to craft an issue that offers a unified, immersive experience for readers—while always keeping our artists and writers in mind, and presenting their work in the best possible light. I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to our journal designers this year—Ashley Idahosa, Isaiahbel Micah Bailon, Macie Fenske, Rowan Franson, and Yushan Pian—for their dedication, creativity, and the joy they brought to this process. Their hard work made this journey both meaningful and memorable.*

*It has been incredibly rewarding to help bring this issue to life, and I hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.*

**Danielle Lacanienta** (she/her)
*Design Lead*
*Crossings Volume Five*

Annika Pries (she/her)

Claire Offenberger (she/her)

# Senior Copyeditors

Erin Stark (she/her)

Shannon Price (she/her)


FINE
ARTS

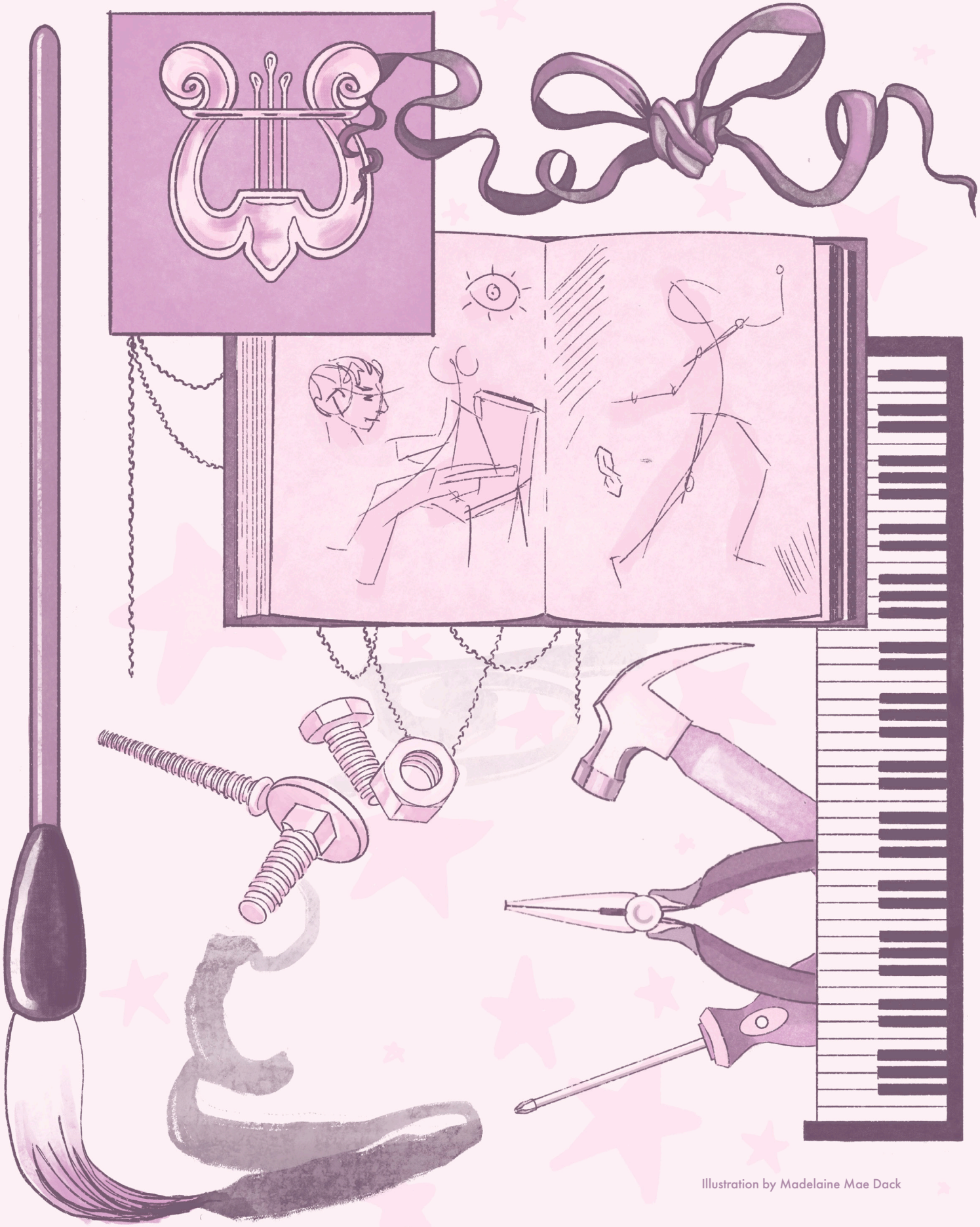
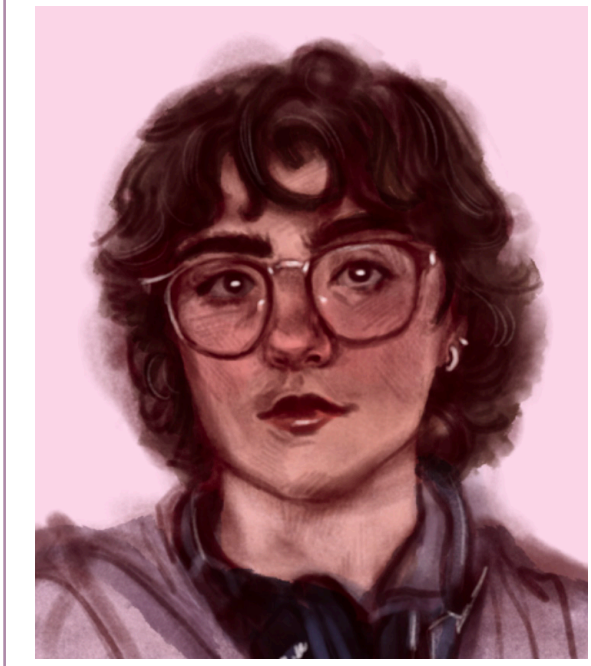


Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

# Section Editors



**Jenna Sampson** (she/her)
*Section Editor*

**Shi Yi Wang** (she/her)
*Section Editor*

*Research in and contributions to the Fine Arts are, at their heart, acts of cultural creation—of understanding, shaping, and reimagining the worlds we live in. As one contributor puts it, the insights gained through artistic practice "empower artists to make work that serves [their] communities."*

*Fine Arts is not simply about making or critiquing—it is about intentionally intervening in the human story, casting light on experiences and truths often left in shadow. The works in this section are deeply personal expressions, yet they speak to shared, profoundly human themes—love, beauty, kinship, pain. They remind us of what binds us, even in moments, such as our current one, of deep division. In doing so, they offer more than aesthetic reflection; they offer connection, healing, and a vision of the world made more whole through art.*

*If any of the themes contained within these works resonate with you—as we are sure they will—the mission of the phenomenal authors and artists in this section is complete. Enjoy!*

*"Betwixt,"* 36 x 48 in. Oil paint and foil paper on canvas. 2024.

# Betwixt

36 x 48 in. Oil paint and foil paper on canvas. 2024.

**Artist: Madelaine Mae Dack**

This work illustrates the limbo between leaving adolescence and becoming settled into adulthood. Exploring the turbulence of our early 20's, *Betwixt* seeks to demonstrate how we are forced to confront the fact that everyone experiences life at a different pace. Throughout these years of our lives, it can feel as though we are simultaneously outgrowing our previous selves, while also being left behind by those we grew up with. Often, we end up feeling lost and detached from our lives. As every day becomes less familiar, I find myself absorbed in the people and safety of my past. I began this work by creating collages with images from my present that felt connected to my past. Spending time with these images helped me combat my self destructive habits. Dwelling on nostalgia and the grieving of my childhood blinds me to the joys of my present. This work presents the safety of childhood intertwined with the turmoil of young adulthood and the empirical fear that accompanies it.

# Colour Theory & Association

## *Exploring the Role of Colour Associations in Creating Visual Identities for Academic Subjects*

**Author: Grace Pitre**

Keywords: Colour Theory, Mix-Methods, Psychology of Colour, Visual Design

Abstract:

*Colour significantly influences human perception, emotion, and memory, making it a powerful tool in educational contexts. This study explores the role of colour associations in creating visual identities for academic subjects to enhance student engagement, focus, and comprehension. By investigating common colour-to-subject associations among high school and university students, the research aims to determine if standardized colour schemes can improve the design of study materials and faculty communications. Using 11 participants, surveys, an interactive folder-labelling activity, and in-depth interviews, the findings indicate some consistent preferences, such as green for science and red for mathematics. These associations are shaped by early educational experiences, cultural connotations, and personal preferences. A mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and literature reviews, provides insights into the role of environmental factors and individual experiences in shaping these associations. The study concludes that creating standardized color-coded systems for academic subjects could significantly improve the organization and appeal of educational tools, ultimately benefiting student learning outcomes. Results suggest that integrating these colour associations into educational designs could make materials more intuitive, engaging, and effective for learners.*

## Introduction

Colour significantly influences human perception, emotion, and memory, making it a powerful tool in educational contexts. This study explores the role of colour associations in creating visual identities for academic subjects to enhance student engagement, focus, and comprehension. By investigating common colour-to-subject associations among high school and university students, the research aims to determine if standardized colour schemes can improve the design of study materials and faculty communications. Using 11 participants, surveys, an interactive folder-labelling activity, and in-depth interviews, the findings indicate some consistent preferences, such as green for science and red for mathematics. These associations are shaped by early educational experiences, cultural connotations, and personal preferences. A mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and literature reviews, provides insights into the role of environmental factors and individual experiences in shaping these associations. The study concludes that creating standardized color-coded systems for academic subjects could significantly improve the organization and appeal of educational tools, ultimately benefiting student learning outcomes. Results suggest that integrating these colour associations into educational designs could make materials more intuitive, engaging, and effective for learners.

## Framework

The psychology of colour demonstrates its significant impact on cognition and emotion. Blue, for example, is associated with calmness and focus, while red evokes urgency and attention (Adams & Osgood, 1973). In academic contexts, colour-coded materials have been linked to enhanced memory retention, reduced cognitive load, and increased engagement (Day, 2019). However, literature on specific colour-to-subject associations remains limited. Studies suggest that early exposure to colour-coded classrooms and personal experiences heavily influence these associations. This research addresses the gap by exploring how students relate colours to academic subjects and how this can inform better design practices.

This study seeks to explore the role of color associations in creating visual identities for academic subjects. This hopes to address the research question: How might we incorporate students' colour associations with academic subjects to evoke positive associations, enhance focus, and improve comprehension in studying materials? Drawing on prior studies and qualitative insights, the research aims to provide actionable strategies for using colour theory in educational design.

## Research Methods

This study used a mixed-methods approach, using quantitative and qualitative data collection.

### Data Collection

*1. Literature Review:*
Research on colour psychology and its impact on perception, memory, and emotion provides a theoretical framework for understanding the findings.

*2. Surveys:*
Students were surveyed to determine their emotional and academic associations with specific colours. Participants may match colours (e.g., blue, green, yellow) with feelings like calm or anger and assign those colours to academic subjects.

*3. Folder-Labelling Activity:*
Eleven participants were asked to label five coloured folders (red, blue, yellow, green, and purple) with subjects including mathematics, science, history, english, and art. While similar to questions during the survey, some participants may respond to the same questions differently when presented with the physical materials.

*4. Interviews:*
Interviews explores participants' reasons for their colour choices and the environmental or personal factors influencing their decisions.

**Data Analysis**

Survey responses were quantitatively analyzed to identify trends, while qualitative data from interviews and the labelling activity underwent thematic analysis to discover key themes, such as cultural connotations and emotional connections.

**Literature Review**

Existing studies support the role of colour in enhancing organization and memory retention. For instance, colour-coded flashcards and notes were found to aid in content recall by creating visual markers for key information. The literature on colour psychology provides a foundation for understanding how colours influence cognition, emotion, and memory, particularly in educational contexts. The following examples illustrate key findings relevant to this study's exploration of colour associations with academic subjects:

*1. Blue: Calmness and Focus*
Research highlights blue as a colour that promotes calmness and focus. Adams and Osgood's (1973) "A Cross-Cultural Study of the Affective Meanings of Colour" found that blue is often associated with stability and trustworthiness. In educational contexts, this can translate into enhanced focus during tasks requiring analytical thinking.

*2. Green: Nature and Balance*
Green is widely recognized for its connection to nature and balance, often associated with environmental studies or science. Day (2019) found that classrooms incorporating green decor improved students' attention spans and reduced mental fatigue, making it a preferred choice for subjects requiring observation and analysis.

*3. Red: Urgency and Energy*
Red, while energizing, is also linked to heightened stress or urgency. Wolfe (2022) noted that red is commonly used to draw attention in educational tools, such as marking incorrect answers or highlighting deadlines. This association with urgency may explain why several participants linked red to mathematics, a subject often viewed as demanding and requiring quick thinking.

*4. Purple: Creativity and Imagination*
Purple's connection to creativity and imagination makes it a natural fit for art and literature. According to Marshall and Stuart (2006), students exposed to purple in artistic settings reported greater inspiration and a willingness to explore unconventional ideas. This aligns with the study's finding that participants frequently chose purple for art, reflecting its cultural ties to creativity and individuality.

*5. Yellow: Optimism and Attention*
Yellow is associated with energy, optimism, and attentiveness. Piqueras-Fiszman and Spence (2012) noted that yellow can stimulate mental activity and is often used in educational materials to highlight important information. This could explain why participants in this study frequently associated yellow with history, a subject that often involves curiosity and discovery.

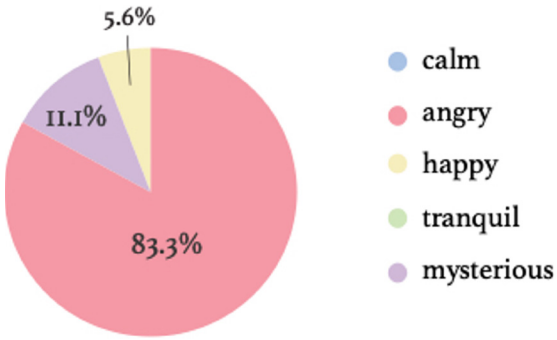
*6. Personal and Environmental Influences*
Environmental factors, such as early classroom experiences, also play a significant role in shaping colour associations. Kauppinen-Räisänen and Luomala (2010) found that students exposed to colour-coded organizational systems in their early education—such as green folders for science or red markers for corrections—often carry these associations into later stages of learning. Similarly, cultural and personal preferences, such as favourite colours or regional interpretations, were found to influence colour associations in unexpected ways.

## Survey Results

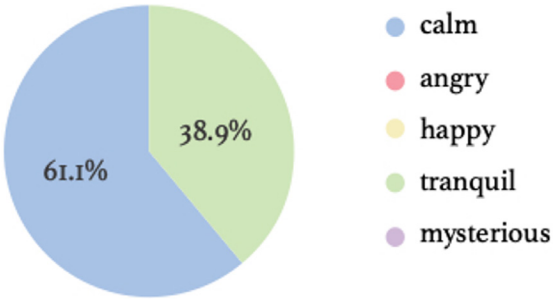
Participants were asked the following questions to determine their colour associations with emotions and academic subjects:

**Colour and Emotion Association:**

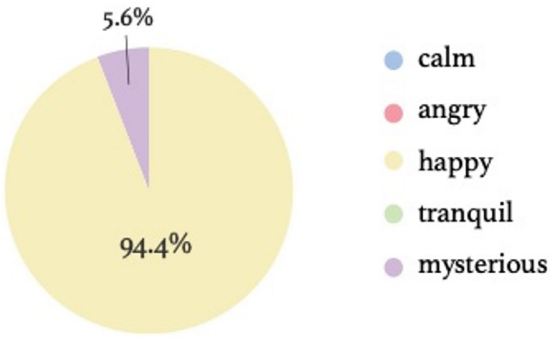
*Red:*
*Often associated with urgency and anger, reflecting its attention-grabbing qualities.*



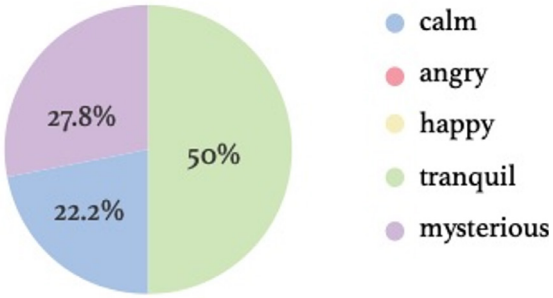

*Blue:*
*Commonly linked to math or science, frequently associated with calmness and focus.*



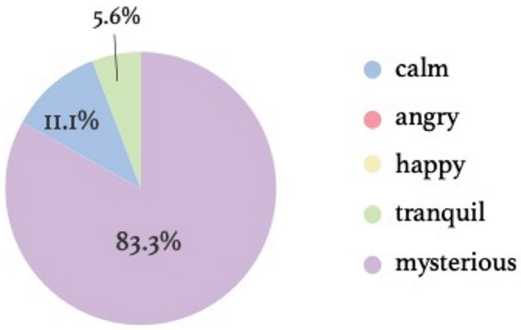

*Yellow:*
*Occasionally tied to originality and history, symbolizing energy and happiness.*




*Green:*
*Often associated with science due to its connection to nature and tranquillity.*

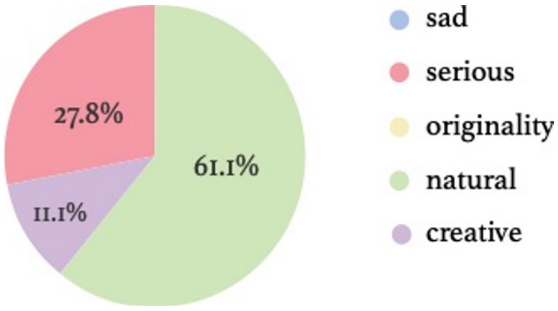



*Purple:*
*Frequently associated with mystery, symbolizing creativity.*

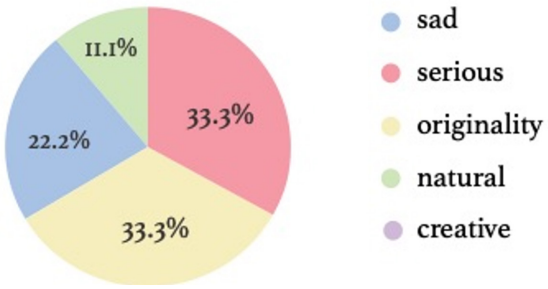



**Colour and Academic Subject Association:**

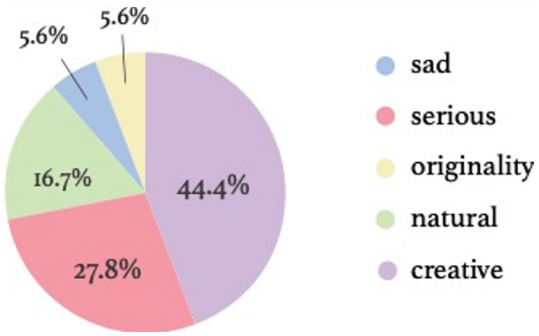
*What feelings do you associate with the word "Science"*



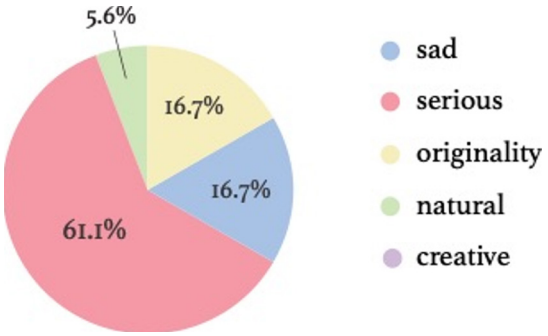
*What feelings do you associate with the word "History"*



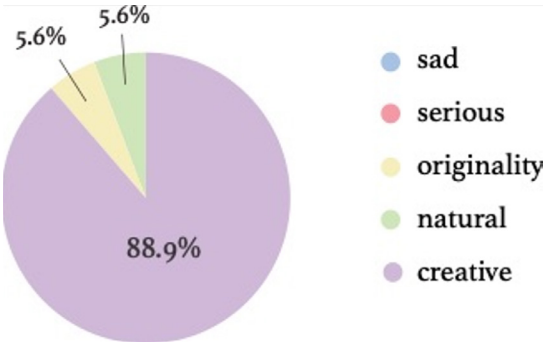

*What feelings do you associate with the word "English"*




*What feelings do you associate with the word "Math"*




*What feelings do you associate with the word "Art"*




## Interview Insights

Interviews highlighted the role of early educational experiences and cultural influences. Several participants reported associating colours with subjects based on classroom materials or their personal organizational strategies, such as using highlighters or coloured binders. Others noted that emotionally resonant colours, like red for urgency, shaped their associations.

The interviews consisted of 8 questions, including age, education background, and their thoughts towards colours having different associations or feelings. Some examples include, 'Would you say colour benefitted your learning? Why or why not?' or 'Would you say that different colours evoke certain emotions, connotations, or enhance your interest or focus on certain things?' or 'Do you think colour coding study materials based on their emotional associations would enhance your comprehension or focus?' (See figures 1 & 2).

**Interviews provided context to these patterns:**

1. Participants cited early exposure to colour-coded materials as a significant influence on their associations.

2. Several noted that visually appealing

materials motivated them to engage more actively with their studies.

3. Cultural factors, such as the use of specific colours in signage, shaped emotional responses to colours.

4. While identifying specific subjects with certain colours based on their associated feelings may not be suited for everyone, colour coding materials based on importance, or having colour coded study materials seem to be more useful and have a better retaining response.

*(Figure 1)*

*(Figure 2)*

## Folder-Labelling Activity Findings

The data revealed some consistent colour-to-subject associations among participants.

***Math: 5 participants chose red, 3 chose blue, 2 chose yellow, and 1 chose green, reflecting a mix of calmness and urgency.***

*(Figure 3 - Math)*

***Science: Green dominated with 8 participants, 2 chose blue, and 1 chose yellow, aligning with its natural and environmental associations.***

*(Figure 4 - Science)*

***Art: Purple was the leading choice with 8 participants, and 3 participants chose red.***

*(Figure 5 - Art)*

***English: A diverse range of colours was chosen, preferences varied, with 5 choosing blue, 2 purple, 2 yellow, 1 green, and 1 red.***

*(Figure 6 - English)*

***History: 6 participants chose yellow, potentially linked to its brightness. Followed by 2 red, 1 blue, 1 green, and 1 purple.***

*(Figure 7 - History)*

## Implications for Design

The findings from these studies suggest that leveraging established psychological and emotional responses to colours can enhance the usability and appeal of educational materials. For example, using red for study guides can promote urgency or heightened

attention, while incorporating green into organization resources aligns with its association with balance and nature. By integrating these insights into visual identity design, educational institutions can create materials that are not only visually appealing but also cognitively supportive.

This expanded literature review highlights the importance of combining psychological principles with personal and environmental influences to create effective and meaningful designs for academic materials.

For a design solution, I propose a flexible colour-coding system for study materials and calendars. From my research, I have not found any professionally designed study guides that use the same logic as this study. So, I propose a colour coded designed study guide that uses these findings in order to obtain the most retention from users when studying. Using insights from the article and survey data, this design solution focuses on creating a flexible and designed colour-coding system for study guides and calendars that accommodates varying individual preferences and associations with colours while also using the findings from this study to promote the best usage of colour within educational materials. (See figures 8 & 9 for potential design)

**Design Goals**

Use colour strategically to enhance memory retention, focus, and organization.

**Design Proposal**

Flexible Colour-Coding Study Materials: Create a colour-coding card or booklet with reusable labels that students can stick onto folders, books, or materials.

*Red* is associated with alertness and attention. Use red for critical information that requires focus and immediate recall.

*Blue* is known for promoting calmness and concentration, blue is ideal for enhancing memory retention. Assign it to essential concepts or information you want to remember long-term.
*Yellow* stimulates optimism. Use it for brainstorming sessions or notes that require innovative thinking.

*Green* is associated with balance and harmony; green is perfect for organizing information. Use it for structuring outlines or categorizing content.

*Purple* is linked to creativity; purple can be used for highlighting key insights or summarization.

Therefore, we can use green for organizing, blue for terms, red for definitions, purple for summarizing, and yellow for brainstorming.

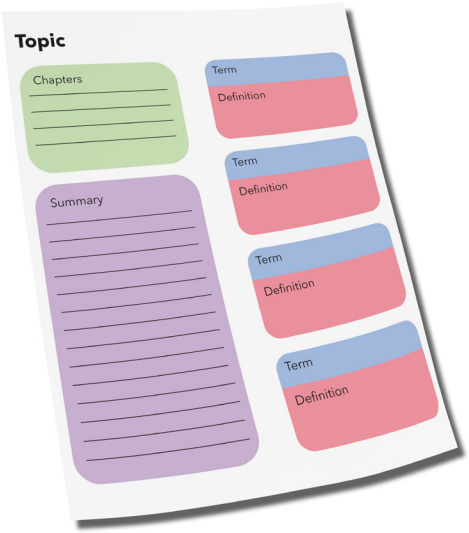
*Colour-Coded Flashcards:* Use multicoloured flashcards where students can choose colours based on their needs

**Customizable Academic Calendar Design Task-Oriented Colour Coding**

*Green:* Long-term projects or assignments.
*Red:* Immediate deadlines.
*Yellow:* Study sessions.
*Blue:* Review or self-tests.
*Purple:* Fun or personal activities

**Rationale for the Design**

1. *Enhanced Organization:* The use of colour, combined with icons and text, ensures that materials remain organized and accessible.




*(Figure 8)*

2. ***Cognitive Benefits:*** Colour can enhance memory and focus when used meaningfully. By allowing users to align colours with their emotional or cognitive associations, this solution maximizes learning benefits.


*(Figure 9)*

## Discussion

The findings suggest that colour associations for academic subjects are shaped by a combination of environmental, cultural, and emotional factors. For example, the strong association of green with science reflects its connection to nature and environmental studies. Similarly, purple's popularity for Art aligns with its cultural link to creativity and imagination. When asked 'Would you say that different colours evoke certain emotions, connotations, or enhance your interest or focus on certain things?', one participant answered, 'Yes, I believe colours evoke emotions and can enhance my interest in certain things. When I see something in presentations where the colours I like are in it then I'm more inclined to focus and pay attention.' However, subjects such as Math and English had a variety of colour opinions by participants and did not have a conclusive answer. Based on the interview portion of this study, participants prefer to use colour associations to label importance of information or use colour to identify terms vs definitions, not based on specific school subjects. When asked 'Do you think colour coding study materials based on their emotional associations would enhance your comprehension or focus?', one participant answered, 'Yes, I colour code based on the importance, writing in red is a deadline, or writing in red is the most important information.' Another participant answered 'Yes, highlighters make important information easy to read and study. I write in different colours to make my notes organized. When doing flashcards for example, titles are one colour and definitions are another.' A standardized colour-coded system for academic subjects could offer several benefits, including improved organization, faster recognition of study materials, and enhanced engagement. For example, a student with a consistent green theme for science materials may find it easier to locate and engage with related resources. The challenges and limitations of this study include individual variability in colour perception and cultural differences in associations. Flexible designs that allow for personalization could address these concerns, ensuring inclusivity while leveraging common patterns.

## Conclusion

This study highlights the potential of using colour associations to create effective visual identities for academic subjects. Consistent preferences, such as green for science and purple for art, demonstrate the viability of a colour-coded system for educational materials. By aligning visual design with these associations, educators and designers can enhance focus, comprehension, and engagement among students. Future research should explore larger and more diverse samples to refine these findings and develop universally applicable design guidelines.

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## Appendix

**Appendix A: Survey Questions**

Participants were asked the following questions to determine their colour associations with emotions and academic subjects:

**Colour and Emotion Association:**

1. Associations for Red
- Angry: 83.3%
- Creative: 11.1%
- Happy: 5.6%

2. Associations for Blue
- Calm: 61.1%
- Tranquil: 38.9%

3. Associations for Green
- Tranquil: 50%
- Mysterious: 27.8%
- Calm: 22.2%

4. Associations for Yellow
- Happy: 94.4%
- Mysterious: 5.6%

5. Associations for Purple
- Mysterious: 83.3%
- Calm: 11.1%
- Tranquil: 5.6%

**Colour and Academic Subject Association:**

1. Associations for Science
- Natural: 61.1%
- Serious: 27.8%
- Creative: 11.1%

2. Associations for History
- Serious: 33.3%

• Originality: 33.3%
• sad: 22.2%

3. Associations for Math
• Serious: 61.1%
• Originality: 16.7%
• Sad: 16.7%

4. Associations for Art
• Creative: 88.9%
• Natural: 5.6%
• Originality: 5.6%

5. Associations for English
• Creative: 44.4%
• Serious: 27.8%
• Natural: 16.7%

**Appendix B: Folder-Labelling Activity Results**

Participants labelled five coloured folders (red, blue, green, yellow, and purple) with specific academic subjects.

**Results Summary:**

Mathematics:
5 participants: Red
3 participants: Blue
2 participants: Yellow
1 participant: Green

Science:
8 participants: Green
2 participants: Blue
1 participant: Yellow

History:
6 participants: Yellow
2 participants: Red
1 participant each: Blue, Green, Purple

English:
5 participants: Blue
2 participants: Purple
2 participants: Yellow
1 participant each: Green, Red

Art:
8 participants: Purple
3 participants: Red

**Appendix C: Interview Questions**

Participants were asked the following during the in-depth interview sessions:

1. Would you say colour played a role in the early years of your learning? Why or why not?

2. Would you say that different colours evoke certain emotions, connotations, or enhance your interest or focus on certain things?

3. Do you think colour coding study materials such as flashcards, study guides, mind maps, or slide presentations based on their emotional associations would enhance your comprehension or focus?

4. Do you colour code your classes now? Whether it be in your planner, calendar, or other materials?

**Appendix D: Ethics and Consent Form**

Participants were informed about the study's purpose and provided consent.
"Welcome! This survey will take approximately 4 mins to complete. Your answers will be recorded for a study, but your information will be anonymous. Do you consent to take part in this study?"

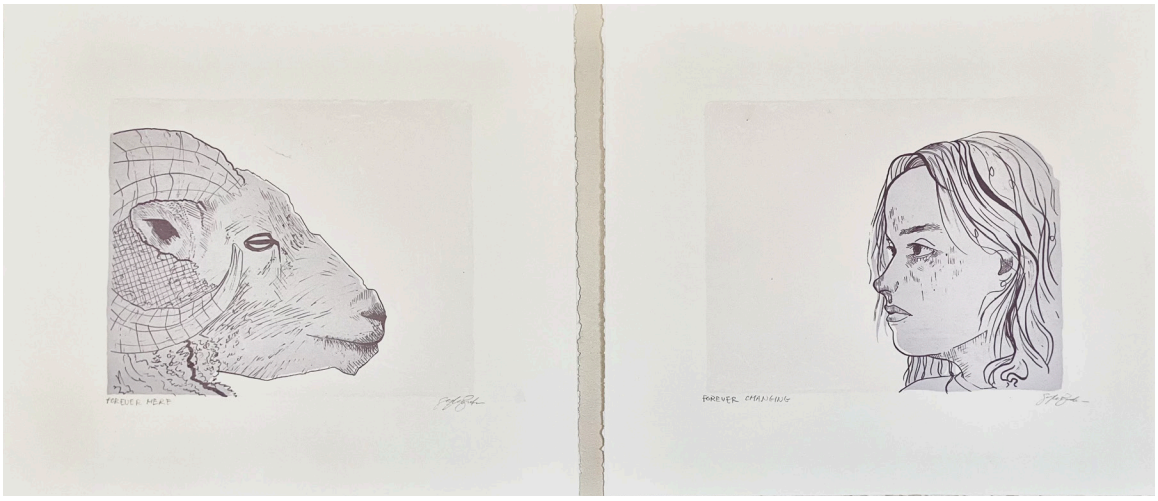
# Dream Sheep

*Selected illustrations from Dream Sheep,*
10.5x12.5 in silkscreen printed 28-page book bound by stab binding

**Artist: Sophia Grace Foder**

*"The rise and fall of a chest, snores bellowing into the celeste, the sheep slowly realize they no longer need to jump into the dreamt sky, return to the barn to rest, no longer on their quest."*

This is an excerpt from pages 5 and 6 of *Dream Sheep*, a story of the idiom to fall asleep by simply counting sheep, to slowly let them hop over the fence quelling you into a dreamful rest. Sleep for me started by being a kid, tucked into bed looking up at the ceiling where my dad would cover the big light with a book. These memories were what established the beginnings of this book. So many colorful pages shine through a few of the dark glimpses of what some nights of my sleep are in reality. For in truth, there are many nights of sobs, aches all over my body, and thoughts that seem to run for miles on end. My work focuses on both these aspects of sleep and how I still have a desire for sanctuary in sleep. Going into my childhood and recreating scenes of what would comfort me, I fully embrace counting sheep once more.





*Selected illustrations from Dream Sheep,* 10.5x12.5 in
silkscreen printed 28-page book bound by stab binding

# Edmonton Abandoned Houses

Series. Oil on hardboard or canvas. 2024.

**Artist: Kay Peters**

My work involves research in abandoned and derelict houses in Edmonton. As a basis for my work, I explore the city and document them through photographs which I then edit and turn into painting. Since census data is publicly available, I used that information to plot each house on Google Maps to get a general idea of where these houses are located. The majority of them are located in the inner ring of Edmonton, and many are built by the contractor Golden Homes, a housing contractor that thrived during the postwar era in the 1950s.

I am intrigued by how these spaces change over time, how nature weathers them and grows around them, and how people enact change on them. Particularly, the concept of 'ghosts' or what lingers or has been left behind after these spaces have been vacated and subsequently demolished. I explore what remnants, context clues, or fragments are left behind which let us infer a narrative of those whose lives shaped in and around the space.

*9650 on 63rd Ave,* 10x8 in, oil on hardboard, 2024.

*9943 on 80 Ave,* 14x12 in, oil on hardboard, 2024.

*10903 on 79th Ave,* 12x9 in, oil on hardboard, 2024

*Details of 10903,* 18x24 in, oil on canvas, 2024.

*10421 on 70th Ave,* 10x8 in, oil on hardboard, 2024.

*9829 on 77th Ave,* 16x12 in, oil on hardboard, 2023.

*9009 on 99th Street*, 8x8 in, oil on hardboard, 2024.

*10577 on 61st Ave*, 6x6 in, oil on hardboard, 2025.

# First Frost

18x12.25 in. Collagraph. 2024.

**Artist: Amy Pretorius**


*First Frost,* 18x12.25 in. Collagraph. 2024.

I remember the first year my brother and I had to pick all the tomatoes before the first frost. My mum grew bright red tomatoes on the south side of our house, but they were sensitive plants. The weather had forecast frost, and the tomatoes would not survive the freeze. However, the still-green fruits could be picked to ripen in our windows and thus be saved. So my brother and I were sent outside to pick all the tomatoes we could find. We spent hours picking tomatoes in the chilly fall air, our fingers going numb as we filled our buckets with green, orange and red fruits until the sun set.

I don't live at home anymore, and my brother and I grew apart during our teenage years. My mother's garden was a carefully cultivated space full of life, and when I think of home, I think of the birds chirping in the trees, of reading in the shade, of dinners in the garden eating food my mother grew herself. I find solace in the space of my memories in this print; the shadowy realm of time past; the tomatoes a ghostly structure of my childhood.

1/2

2024

# Forty-four, Twenty-two

24x30 in. Woodcut on coventry rag. 2024.

**Artist: Grace Aderemi**

*"forty four, twenty-two",* 24x30 in. Woodcut on coventry rag. 2024.

4,422 liters. 75 Igbo people who protested and chose the unpredictability of the sea over the futures predetermined for them by the Europeans. The Igbo people were sold out to become slaves in a new land; to construct an entire society that their immediate descendants would be barred from and in which the next generations would be discriminated against.

*Forty-four, Twenty-two* looks at this story from the perspective of the ocean. As such a large body of water, this significant moment is made miniscule. As a result of their actions, the ocean is displaced by 4,422 liters in comparison to the sextillion liters it is comprised of. Small waves in a big ocean. But to those around them, their forebearers, their friends that were left behind, and the generations after them that were choked out as they chose death over being slaves, their actions were a tsunami.

The print depicts the moments of hope before death, where for a few seconds they were free.

# FUNDAY

18x24 in, Oil on canvas.

### Artist: Catalina Cao

This painting is inspired by a collage I created as an exploration of juxtaposition between visually or contextually contrasting matters. In my works, I usually incorporate surrealistic and grotesque elements, and sometimes humour as well. I played around and experimented with a wide range of objects and paints in the planning process, allowing the composition to develop intuitively while maintaining a delicate balance between opposing elements. By incorporating both vibrant and grayscale components, the piece captures the duality of emotions and states of being and the intricate interplay between chaos and tranquillity. The word "Funday" introduces an element of irony, juxtaposing the notion of carefree joy with the underlying complexity of the depicted scenes. This contrast creates a sense of dark humour, emphasizing the absurdity and unpredictability inherent in life. The abstract forms and textures in the work are deliberately ambiguous, allowing viewers to engage with the piece on a personal level and derive their own interpretations.


*FUNDAY*, 18x24 in, Oil on canvas.

# I Will Be There, Mom

24x30 in. 10 layered silkscreen print. 2023.

**Artist: Leila Zolfalipour**


*I Will Be There, Mom*, 24x30 in. 10 layered Silkscreen print, 2023.

*I Will Be There, Mom* captures an intimate moment steeped in tradition and connection. The scene is set against a lush backdrop of green leaves, nourished by a watering can, with water droplets glistening on the foliage. In the foreground, two hands—a mother's and her daughter's—rest gracefully on a lace-covered table, both adorned with matching bracelets, symbolizing their unbreakable bond. A traditional Iranian tea set completes the scene, evoking warmth, heritage, and shared rituals. The layered silk screen technique brings depth to the composition, intertwining themes of care, nurture, and cultural identity. This piece celebrates the timeless connection between generations, highlighting the delicate balance of nature, tradition, and human relationships in a shared moment of togetherness.

*Layers of Home,* 45x60 in. Oil on canvas. 2024.

# Layers of Home

45x60 in. Oil on canvas. 2024.

### Artist: Leila Zolfalipour

As an Iranian-Canadian artist, both Canada and Iran are integral parts of my identity. My paintings reflect the richness of multiculturalism in Canada, where diverse cultural elements coexist harmoniously. Instead of comparing the two cultures, I depict them as interconnected layers of my experience. The Canadian backyard represents my life in Canada, while bubbles highlight elements of my Iranian heritage—a rooster from Iran beside a Canadian dog, a Persian carpet in front of a red Adirondack chair, and a Persian garden pool alongside a Canadian lawn. These details symbolize the blending of cultures that shape my sense of belonging. For me, culture is about embracing the connections between where I come from and where I am now, allowing both to coexist and enrich one another.

# Nursery

22x30 in. Stone lithography on somerset paper. 2025.

### Artist: Ava Fan

*Nursery* is inspired by pine beetle infestations, also known as "bug trails". These trails in wood are physical remnants of female beetles boring holes into a tree and laying their eggs into it, so that their children have bark to feed on after they hatch. Bug trails remind me of the artifacts of care created by my own mother and past generations of women in our family for their own children. In this single layer stone lithography print, I explore the connections of motherhood between humanity and insects.

*Nursery,* 22x30 in. Stone lithography on somerset paper. 2025.

# Playing Outside

24x30 in. Oil paint and fleece on canvas. 2024.

**Artist: Madelaine Mae Dack**

*Playing Outside,* 24x30 in. Oil paint and fleece on canvas. 2024.

*Playing Outside* explores themes of connection, memory, and societal shifts in the age of technology. This work explores the yearning to return to a childhood where connection to the natural world and those in it was easily accessible, either through reality or imagination. This painting refers to the animal nature within humans, as we are herd animals that crave connection with those around us as we grow and change. Using collaged references, I am reflecting on disjointed memories from when I was young. I piece together my composition from photos and videos taken by myself or my parents. Our oldest memories exist in a limbo between reality and dream, and we often question whether or not the things we have experienced really happened. They can fade and alter over our time spent with them, but our memories remain a place of comfort that can be romanticized and revisited as necessary.

# Portrait of Companions in Memories

18x24 in. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 2025.

**Artist: Catalina Cao**

This artwork is a visual representation of my identity and explores themes of sentimentality and childhood nostalgia. It portrays five teddy bears I own from the perspective of my child-self, whose imagination viewed these stuffed bears in an anthropomorphic way. As a child, my parents cared little for me and prohibited socializing with peers. These stuffed animals became my closest companions. On the right side, the larger bear has been with me since the age of one, the smaller since five. The two on the left were part of a much larger collection I once owned. The bear in the centre holds the deepest significance as it has accompanied me since early infancy, forming the foundation for this bond.

To this day, these five bears are just as valuable and dear to me as they were to my childhood self. They have witnessed my growth, accompanied me through difficult times, and provided a sense of security and comfort in my life–embodying the human-like emotional bond I lacked in childhood. Through this artwork, I capture the weight sentimental objects can carry. They can be a reminder of who we are, where we come from, and the experiences that have shaped us.

*Portrait of Companions in Memories,* 18x24 in. Oil and acrylic on canvas. 2025.

# Reflections

Series. Acrylic and oil on masonite. 2024.

**Artist: Hannah Walter**

*Bake 350'F,* Acrylic and oil on masonite. 2024.

Through my *Reflections* series of mixed media paintings, I approach coping with struggle, doubt, anxiety, and loneliness. This often results in art that relates just as much to healing and joy. My understanding is that maybe those feelings which we find difficult are just as precious and worthy of our attention as the more pleasant ones, and that they make the pleasant ones more potent. This philosophy directs my body of work, which takes on contemplative figures lost in complex representational scenes and moments of abstraction. I think that, although I am painting myself in this series, my attention is not focused on my image but rather the situation I exist in and the relationship between layers of space that collide and overlap against the same flat plane. By blurring the lines between what is inside and what is outside, what is real and what is felt, and what is rendered and what is suggested, I try to capture moments in time when I recognise the act and sensation of being alive in all its strangeness. I believe viewers could consider these works not as offering the main question "who is this person?" but rather "what are they thinking?"

*Display,* Acrylic and oil on masonite. 2024.

*Monolith,* Acrylic and oil on masonite. 2024.

# Roots in Two Worlds

30x40 in. Oil on canvas. 2024.

**Artist: Leila Zolfalipour**

*Roots in Two Worlds,* 30x40 in. Oil on canvas. 2024.

*Roots in Two Worlds* is a symbolic portrayal of the convergence between Canadian and Persian cultures. Set against the serene backdrop of an Alberta lake, the scene features goldfish swimming, alluding to Persian symbolism. A hand-drawn figure, draped in a richly patterned Persian carpet, stands in the foreground. A large tree with sprawling roots symbolizes the strength and permanence of heritage. The painting captures the harmony between nature and tradition, reflecting the artist's journey as an immigrant navigating her Iranian heritage and life in Canada. This work emphasizes cultural identity and resilience, showcasing a woman who embodies empowerment and dignity. She stands firmly within a Canadian landscape, representing the balance between heritage and adaptation. The goldfish and tree evoke a sense of continuity and connection, celebrating the coexistence of nature and culture.

# Straddling the Line Between Enlightenment and Romantic Approaches to Depiction of Animals: *Genius of British Wood Engraving and Puffin*

**Author: Sofya Beloded**

Keywords: Thomas Bewick, Wood Engraving, Naturphilosophie, Romanticism, Enlightenment, Animal Representation

Abstract:

*This paper examines the impact of Thomas Bewick's childhood on his sensitivity towards the natural world, analyzing the memoir of the artist and the print* Puffin *(1804). Through a comparative analysis of his work with George Stubbs's* The Anatomy of the Horse *(1766) and* Théodore Géricault's A Horse Frightened by the Lightning *(1814), this research argues that Bewick's prints align more closely with Naturphilosophie art than with the Enlightenment tradition. By reviewing the politics of animal representation in late 18th and early 19th century Britain, I argue that Bewick's work anticipated progressive philosophical thoughts on animal agency and human-nature unity. This study offers a previously overlooked perspective on Bewick's art, situating it at the intersection of scientific observation, emotional connection, and philosophical inquiry.*

Illustration by Sophia Grace Foder

Noted by a distinctive precision of technique, attention to detail, and accuracy in capturing animals, Thomas Bewick (1753-1828), "the greatest engraver of his day,"[1] earned a reputation and fame extending beyond his country and genre of art he pursued. Regarded by contemporaries and descendants as "national monuments",[2] Bewick's woodblock prints, created during the transitional period from Enlightenment to Romanticism, straddle the line between empirical observation, scientific accuracy, and empathetic approach with a touch of deeply personal sensitivity.

Unlike his British contemporaries and predecessors, who also worked with animal figures, Bewick never killed his subjects. Instead, he referred to drawing from life or using subjects loaned to him by institutions or private collections, which reflected his attempt to capture the life of the animals he depicted and deep admiration towards the "miracle of nature"[3] he frequently mentioned throughout his memoire and letters. Surrounded by his future models in the early years spent in the countryside, Bewick felt respect towards all living beings beyond the animals he interacted with regularly, which can be seen in the work taken as the major subject of the *Puffin* (1804) (figure 1). Bewick's rendering of the rare bird, which was recorded only in 1570[4], inhabiting the Atlantic isles of the British territories and coasts with rock massifs rising highly above the ocean surface, is not inferior in quality to the subjects of his daily observation and indicates the extensive research artist did on the animals he depicted and effort put into finding the reference sources.

Although the work of Thomas Bewick is typically studied in relation to either the Enlightenment or Romantic periods of British art, the examinations often omit Bewick's background from the narration and focus on the formality of his art more than the motivations behind it. The given gap in research prompts me to argue that Thomas Bewick worked neither in the realm of Romanticism, connecting the animals with human social order, nor purely scientific, educational illustration of Enlightenment. Instead, he established a unique approach prompted by empathy towards all living beings, which was ahead of the philosophical thoughts concerning the animal representation of the time in Britain, and encompassed the principles of naturphilosophie in his work, which emphasized the unity within nature and humans. To support the claim, I will study the politics of animal capturing in the late 18th and early 19th century and Bewick's art within this context, then look into the artist's childhood as a source of his empathetic approach towards the depiction of birds, connecting it with an instance of *Puffin* and compare the beliefs of Bewick with the concepts of Schelling's Naturphilosophie, highlighting the parallels between the two.
In the 18th century, the interconnections between art and science were of utmost importance alongside empiricism being the prevalent philosophy of the time in Britain. The depiction of the animals was the core basis of documentation, structurization, and classification of living species, aiming at accurate representation with scholarly precision. However, the animal painting underwent a major transformation of status[5] with the emergence of Romanticism in the 1770s - the viewpoint counter to the Enlightenment, encompassing the suggestion that for the understanding of the world and its complexities rationality requires the application of intuition and acknowledgment of emotion.[6] Previously regarded as a lower specialism, animal painting became a medium for grand narratives incorporating conventions of the history painting.

A notable practitioner of both animal historical painting regarded as Romantic, and Enlightenment ideologies of precision and classification, was Bewick's compatriot and contemporary, George Stubbs (1724-1806). Creating naturalistic portraits of animals, that functioned both as works of art, and

[1] Boyd, *Bewick Gleanings*, 1.
[2] Griffiths, "Thomas Bewick. London, Geffrye Museum," 766.
[3] Bewick, *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by Himself*, 271.
[4] Harris, *Puffin*, 15.
[5] Potts, "Natural Order and the Call of the Wild: The Politics of Animal Picturing," 13.
[6] Hamilton, *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*, 160.

as carefully observed and systematically conceived 'scientific' representations of the animal concerned,[7] Stubbs catered to the markets of art and science separately, receiving commissions from the wealthy and publishing anatomical studies of animals and humans, blending thorough research with the aesthetics of the elaborate artistic skill. To create his works in anatomy and veterinary medicine, the artist had to kill horses, cutting their jugular veins and letting them bleed to death, but the artist still found ways to honor the horses through his work[8] by encouraging the reader to exclusively focus on the animal through removal of the potentially distracting background and setting (figure 2). This process can be argued to be emancipation[9] and acknowledgment of their identity but uses the anthropocentric methods of production showing the diminishment of animal life.

Bewick's *History of British Birds* (1797), published 30 years after Stubbs's *Anatomy of the Horse* (1766), also presents animals as central subjects, however, it employs an approach indicative of the inclination to the social relativist position, that we can only know nature in relation to the social and cultural world[10], the human encounters and perceptions. Bewick's vignettes indicate the relationship between humans and animals and explore their connection in the acts involving both, building the narratives. However, his representation of animals as sole participants of the scenes, as seen in *History of British Birds* volumes, demonstrates the artist's acknowledgment of their sufficiency for independent portrayal in their natural habitats, as seen in *Puffin*, which is central to the current study.

[7] Potts, "Natural Order and the Call of the Wild: The Politics of Animal Picturing," 12.
[8] Bienvenue, "Riding into the Afterlife," 151.
[9] Bienvenue, "Riding into the Afterlife," 151.
[10] Potts, "Natural Order and the Call of the Wild: The Politics of Animal Picturing," 16.

*Figure 1*. Thomas Bewick, *Puffin*, ca. 1804. Wood engraving on paper, 5.5 x 7.9 cm. Art Gallery of Alberta, 90.41.144.

In the *History of British Birds* volume II, 1804, where *Puffin* was first published, Bewick introduces his classification method implemented throughout the book, grouping the water birds by their natural habitats and the physiological traits developed for them, introducing two main categories of swimmers and waders, and acknowledging both being far removed from the cultivated world.[11] Classified into the "of the auk or penguin" category, the Puffin shares the genus with other representatives of the class, due to its walk on the whole length of its leg, difficulty of taking flight, and breeding practice happening in flocks on the remote cliffs of Britain, Ireland and Isles in Atlantic. Prefacing the content of the book with an essentiality of "travel through the reeds and ruffles, with doubtful feet, over the moss-covered faithless quagmire, amidst oozing rills, and stagnant pools"[12] to encounter the subjects of his study, Bewick accentuates their alienation from the world known to him or the readers.

Admitting to execution of the puffin print based on the specimen provided to him, Bewick succeeds in conveying the liveliness of the bird through the spatial dimensionality created by the implementation of the intricate line work, clarity and accuracy of anatomy, and detailed descriptions of the bird's behavioral patterns. Noting the diet of various kinds of fish, such as small crabs, shrimps, sprats, and

[11] Bewick, Thomas, Ralph Beilby, and Henry Cotes. *A History of British Birds*, 7.
[12] Bewick, Thomas, Ralph Beilby, and Henry Cotes. *A History of British Birds*, 7.

*Figure 2*. George Stubbs, *The Anatomy of the Horse,* 1766, etching on paper, 46.4 x 58.4 cm., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

also sea-weeds,[13] nestless reproduction habits and preference to burrows and holes, selfless caring for the offspring and the dangers of the day-to-day routine the clown of the seas encounters, the artist presents the animal as sovereign and independent, leading the life undisturbed by human presence. Bewick's narrative follows the bird from when its egg is first hatched, taken care of by the parent birds, which they will defend to the last, by severely biting whatever enemy attempts to molest them,[14] to then, when nurtured and reared, the grown bird set to migrate with the swarm of other puffins. The detailed description, acknowledging the hardships the birds encounter and overcome, conveys the admiration the author has regarding the habits of his subjects of study.

The puffin, depicted in the print, can be perceived from the lens of accompanying textual narration, making the animal's gaze, seemingly unaware of the observer, but almost looking through one, personal, like one of the wise showing the colony of its fellows spreading on the background. Positioning the statuesque figure of the puffin on the central axis, Bewick accentuates the hierarchy in the figure ground-relationship of the print. Negative and positive shapes, formed by the presence or absence of black ink, create curved visual lines that lead the viewer's gaze from top to bottom. These lines allow the viewer to examine the puffin's pointed, striped beak, its pitch-black head, neck, and back, which culminate in a small tail and webbed feet with sharp claws that confidently stand on the stone pedestal. However, the background does not compromise on detail, implementing diminution and atmospheric perspective techniques, the rock massifs rising above the stillness of the ocean surface are accompanied by hordes of puffins circling it and residing on the beach. The detailed depiction of the environment happening in *Puffin* contrasts with a scientific omision of the setting, seen in Stubbs's *Anatomy of the Horse*, and lacks the imposition of the human emotion or the duality of meaning prompting the parallels between human and animal affiliated with the Romantic animal history painting.

Bewick's unique approach towards the representation can be rationalized and contextualized according to his letters: "to obtain all the information in my power respecting Birds-in younger days-I prowled about the fields & woods-night or day-Summer or Winter-to hear their cries as they passed in the Night ...I had no learned authors to consult- at that time I had never heard of such & was obliged to do as I could without their help". [15] The seclusion of the rural setting accompanying his early years, exposure to the manifestations of nature, and lack of acclaimed references other than life proves his work to be influenced not by his contemporaries, artistic experience, or observation of the art existing but by personal views and beliefs. Arguably, the quotation allows the duality of interpretation, implying its accuracy exclusively to the species of animals that surrounded Bewick. However, the puffin could not have been encountered by the artist, prompting the study of artist's biography to understand his belief system.

According to the memories of Bewick's daughter, Jane, it was the details of artist's childhood and not the day-to-day routine of his adult life which stayed in his memory and brought out his eloquence,[16] leaving the memories of his early years as formative experience on the art practice. Growing up in the countryside yet untouched by industrialization, brought up by a religious family, Bewick was exposed to an assortment of folklore superstitions, which provided further stimulus to his imagination in the form of belief in ghosts, boggles, and apparitions being a powerful force within nature surrounding his day-to-day life, and prompted the artist's deep love of every manifestation of life.[17] Exhibiting romantic regret,[18] Bewick felt compassion towards the subjects of his observation, documenting the experience of harming the bird as deeply hurtful when

[13] Bewick, Thomas, Ralph Beilby, and Henry Cotes. *A History of British Birds*, 170.
[14] Bewick, Thomas, Ralph Beilby, and Henry Cotes. *A History of British Birds*, 170.
[15] Flower, "Letters of Thomas Bewick," 52.
[16] Reynolds, Thomas Bewick: A Résumé of His Life and Work, 12.
[17] Reynolds, Thomas Bewick: A Résumé of His Life and Work, 17.
[18] Boyd, Bewick Gleanings, 7.

the victim "looked him piteously in the face, and as he thought, could it have spoken, it would have asked him why had he taken his life."[19] Studying its body, admiring every part of it, and naming it a human name, the artist humanized his subject, gave it the devotion of time and effort as an act of redemption for the vicious act, and never killed any animal after.

While Bewick acquired the recognition within the industry for his expertise and extensive professional practice, his belief systems of the interconnection between human and animal were becoming more prominent, equalizing the two in the worldview of the artist. Writing in his memoir, "It is peculiarly easy for a man to invest birds with human attributes. Almost any bird looks like a face and a stomach on two legs. (There) are men who look like birds, and correspondingly most birds have an expansively human look,"[20] Bewick shows that the moral conclusions he acquired since his early years through intricate observation were reflected in his perception of the visual world, therefore influencing his methods of depiction.

The interdependency between the personal morals of the creator and their visual arts is found common in the philosophy-prompted movements of the period studied, happening in Enlightenment and Romanticism previously described, but also found in a range of doctrines gaining popularity around Europe. According to Snelders, Romanticism and Naturphilosophie, as tandem developments in German speculative thought at the turn of the nineteenth century[21] found representation in science, art, and morals. Naturphilosophie, established by German philosopher and writer Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling in the 1790s, suggested the interconnectedness of all things natural, defying the superiority of human knowledge and promoting a view of nature as a self-regulated system. Based on the blending of poetry and science, philosophy and mythology,[22] Naturphilosophie argues nature to be the absolute, the manifestation of the uncontrolled forces of the universe and the Creator in which human is an element, therefore proclaiming equality between all beings and acknowledging their value to the abstract fluidity of the world.

Exemplary of such a viewpoint in the visual culture is *A Horse Frightened by the Lightning* (1814) (figure 3) by Theodore Geracault, which depicts the horse frozen in fright of the powerful storm. Its stance is firm, but the expression reveals the emotion of helplessness, the surrounding landscape of the mighty sea and the heavy cloud hanging low above it transmits the tension between the two embodiments of natural forces, the interplay between the weather and the living being influenced by it.

Geracault's horse lacks the rider; it is deserted on the seashore, confronting the environment in a wild, crude setting with no sign of humans, exemplifying the world of the animal, with its struggles, emotions, and responses. Comparing the work with Bewick's *Puffin*, the characters of both paintings are dealing with non-human matters, immersed in the struggle and contemplation, they are acknowledged of experience and life going beyond and after the limits of human perception. The similarity in the formal qualities of the delicate, scientifically accurate execution of animal pictures in *A Horse Frightened by the Lightning* and *Puffin* and their interaction with the landscapes they are situated in prompts me to argue Thomas Bewick's prints of birds to be connected to the art echoing Naturphilosophie.

According to Bewick, at the end of his life he turned to religion and manifestations of the spiritual within the natural realm, speculating on the "miracle of the universe"[23] being the greatest satisfaction for one capable of its appreciation. In his memoir, the artist argues that religion and belief systems are influenced by social and governmental orders, and while the worship practices more often than not pursue good intentions, they subject the

[19] Reynolds, Thomas Bewick: A Résumé of His Life and Work, 32.
[20] Reynolds, Thomas Bewick: A Résumé of His Life and Work, 32-33.
[21] Snelders, "Romanticism and Naturphilosophie and the Inorganic Natural Sciences 1797-1840," 193.
[22] Lindsay, James. "The Philosophy of Schelling," 259.
[23] Bewick, A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by Himself, 271.

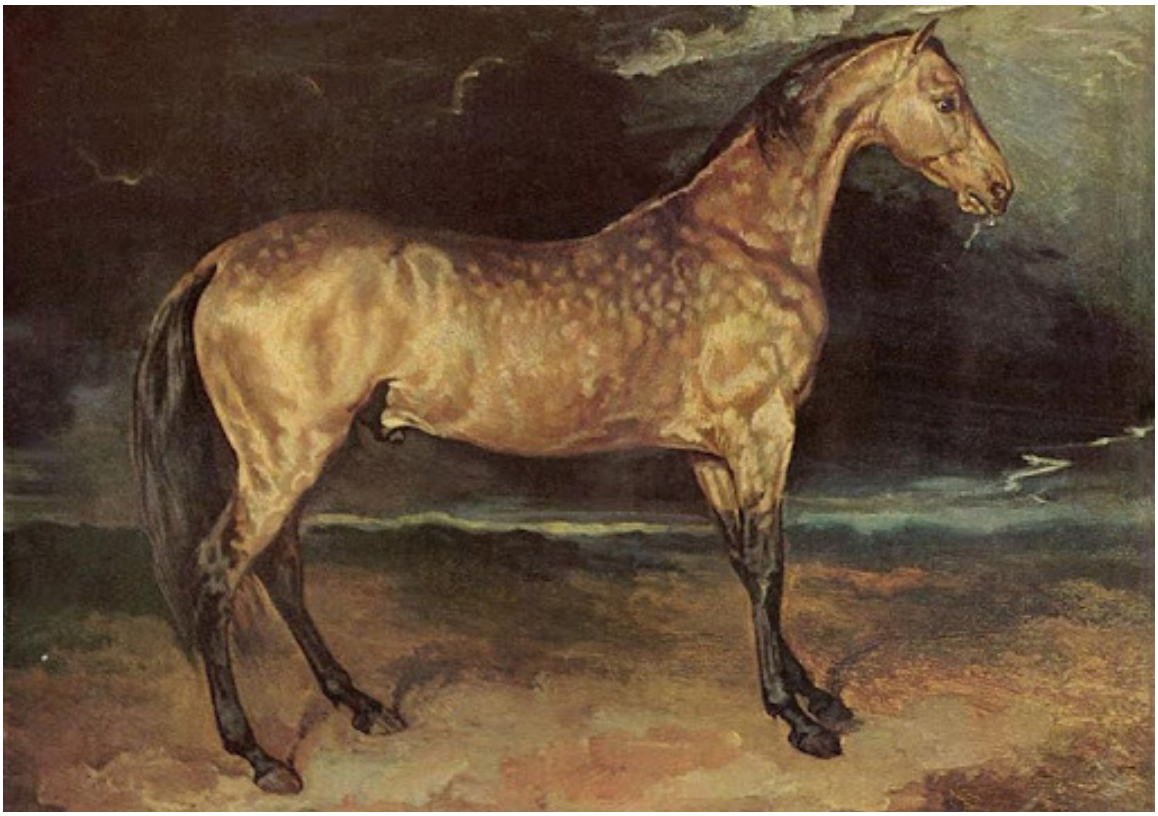


*Figure 3*. Theodore Gericault, *A Horse Frightened by the Lightning,* 1814, oil on canvas, 49 x 60 cm., The National Gallery, London.

religion to unnatural, human-imposed orders, defying their sufficiency without the rituals and practices created. Claims of religion being uniform, consistent, and of the same complexion and character in all nations[24] support the viewpoint suggested by Schelling that the perfect ideality is reached, but such spirit not being Creator of the world. In this way infinite nature came to objectivize itself in its own perfected works. [25]

The works of Thomas Bewick, gaining popularity that extended beyond his life, are documentations of the relationships between humans and animals, portraying the realities of rural life and its inhabitants. Immersed in the setting his prints explored, Bewick documented his personal philosophy through mastery of technique and exhibited empathy towards his subjects prompted by his inner spirituality. Admiring the animal creatures, their behaviors, and interactions in the world hardly accessible for humans through his writings, Bewick showed an inclination towards the philosophical thoughts regarded as romantic, despite his works often serving as educational enlightenment media. The analysis of the artist's notes, letters, and published works, as well as the comparative study conducted of Bewick's *Puffin* with the works of his contemporaries, suggest the possibility of his art being representative of Naturphilosophie doctrine, based on the unity of all forces natural and their interconnectedness.

[24] Bewick, A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by Himself, 269.
[25] Lindsay, James. "The Philosophy of Schelling," 262.

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*The bodies are lying under my window!!* Oil, soft pastels on canvas. 2024.

# The bodies are lying under my window!!

Oil, soft pastels on canvas. 2024.

### Artist: Sofya Beloded

Piecing together fragments of objects and thoughts, dissecting them first, cutting away the excess so everything fits. It conforms to a size far beyond a suitcase, yet I still hope that when removed from the stretcher, the canvas will fit into the luggage for transport. Everything overlays in these repeated attempts—so many times that I lose count—leaving behind holes and circles that offer glimpses of what once existed before decisions were made hastily in the stillness of midnight, during the naïve pursuit of expressionism. The objects left behind peer back at me through the gaps, their gazes confrontational. Their sight is obstructed and likely blurred, yet still present, woven into the dimensionality of perspective, its wreckage, and the variety of strokes. Compiled from National Geographic photos found on archive.org, countless portraits of "always yours," and the walls of Istanbul adorned with controversial oppositional graffiti, *The bodies are lying under my window!!* reflects the interconnectedness of past and present, the diminished significance of distances and cultural differences in an age of rapid globalization and immediate exchange of information.


Illustration by Sophia Grace Foder

# SOCIAL SCIENCES

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*Research in the social sciences asks us to dwell in the tensions stirred by the great questions of our time. For young people, these are not abstract ponderings engaged simply in the interest of academic exploration or to obtain their degree. The questions raised by the authors in this section are lived realities.*

*Questions of justice, power, kinship and resistance that motivate undergraduate research in this section make these contributions not just timely and important to academic dialogue, they are deeply personal endeavors for many of these authors. As one contributor reflects, "[research in the social sciences has] taught me how to think through writing."*

*Each paper, then, is more than a scholarly offering—it is a testament to the intellectual and emotional labour of wrestling with the world as it is, and imagining what it might become. These pieces echo the uncertainties, convictions, and hopes of a generation asking not only what is, but what could be.*

*We hope these pieces and their incredible authors inspire as much hope for the future in you as they did us. Enjoy!*

# Amnesty International's "Stolen Sisters" Report

## *Martyrdom and Unintended Challenges of Life Narratives*

**Author: Sithara Naidoo**

Keywords: Decolonial Pedagogy, Indigenous Studies, Life Narratives, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), Consent-Based Narratives

***Trigger Warnings: Discussions of MMIWG and generational trauma***

Abstract:

*This paper examines the efficacy and ethical implications of using life narratives in representing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls crisis (MMIWG) in Canada, focusing specifically on Amnesty International's 2004 "Stolen Sisters" report. Through a critical analysis informed by Tuck and Yang's theoretical framework on refusal in research and decolonial pedagogy, this study argues that while third-person life narratives can be effective tools for raising awareness, they risk perpetuating harm through unintentional political martyrdom. The paper demonstrates how these narratives, though well-intentioned, can facilitate settler moves to innocence through conscientization, where empathy becomes a substitute for actionable change. Furthermore, the analysis reveals how such representations can lead to revictimization and reduction of Indigenous women to mere symbols of a cause, ultimately undermining genuine decolonial efforts. The research concludes that alternative approaches, particularly first-person narratives and Indigenous kinship-based storytelling methods, may offer more ethical and effective means of representation while avoiding the pitfalls of martyrdom and exploitation. This study contributes to broader discussions about ethical representation in Indigenous studies and advocates for a shift toward more community-centered and consent-based narrative practices.*

Illustration by Namya Kohli

## Introduction

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) crisis in Canada refers to the human rights crisis and movement that centres the disproportionate racist and sexist acts of violence towards Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA folk. It is a relatively new social and political focus, despite the long history of this violence. The movement manifests in projects like the National Inquiry into MMIWG, different literatures, research initiatives, and reports such as the 2004 Amnesty International Report "Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada." This report argues for a "comprehensive national response to the crisis" (Hargreaves 72) by presenting qualitative and quantitative research, as well as calls to action. Notably, the fourth section of the report uses life narratives to shed light on nine Indigenous women who are victims of disappearance or murder. Activism initiatives use life narratives as a means to educate the public, raise awareness, and encourage

remembrance (Hargreaves 66). Life stories can also highlight alternative and marginalized histories (Hargreaves 73) and "serve as vehicles of social and political transformation" (Lénárt-Cheng & Walker 141). The first story that the report shares is Helen Betty Osborne's, a Cree woman who was murdered in 1971 in The Pas, Manitoba at the age of 19 by four white men. Since her murder, Osborne has become a martyr-like figurehead for violence against Indigenous women. Her symbolism has brought an important amount of attention to the crisis over the years, and she continues to be an instrument for education. However, the presumed transparent relation between telling MMIWG stories like Osborne's and a hopeful outcome of change may present certain risks (Hargreaves 66). In this essay, I argue that although third-person life narratives, such as those used in the Stolen Sisters report, may be a useful tool for representation and activism in the MMIWG crisis, they may also pose the challenge of false or unintentional political martyrdom, which in turn may cause more harm than expected.

## What is Martyrdom in the MMIWG Context?

Traditionally, martyrdom has a religious background referring to the voluntary suffering, persecution, or death as adherence to a faithful cause. It has a focus on intentionality and self-infliction. The individual's unnatural or violent death, consecrated and made sacred in history, then transmitted to following generations is a defining process of martyrdom (Murphy 269). Rooted in early Christian tradition (Murphy 466), discourse of martyrdom has evolved to acknowledge a contemporary and political shift as evident in cases like George Floyd's death in 2020, a man that became a martyr at the hands of social movements and community as opposed to self-driven intention. Contemporary martyrdom differs from traditional definitions in the sense that it is not always born from intention or a willing death for a cause. In the representations of the MMIWG crisis, women like Helen Betty Osborne take on this contemporary, political, and unintentional shape of martyrdom; they were inducted into martyrdom on account of their consecration and memorialization, less so in regard to intentional suffering. While martyrdom serves as a tool for community solidarity and collective memory (Murphy 466), it is also problematic in the sense that many of these individuals are first victims, not martyrs. In activism efforts like the Stolen Sisters report, the use of life narratives can give rise to martyr-like characteristics in women victims by putting their experiences on a pedestal and painting them as a symbol of a cause. This brings in the question of how victims should be remembered and if they should be used as a tool for activism. Is it a meaningful method to honour the victims and the cause? Or does it inflict further damage?

## Life Narratives, Martyrdom, and their Consequences

The martyrdom generated through the life narratives in the Stolen Sisters report may encourage a settler move to innocence, understood through Tuck and Yang's critical lens of damage-centered research (Tuck and Wayne, "Unbecoming Claims" 811), as well as the revictimization and reduction of the women in the report. Damage-centered research focuses on people's pain as objects for observation, instead of the spaces or conditions that surround that pain. This gaze refers to the "logics of pain" (Tuck and Wayne, "R-words" 231) that overshadow structures around tragic events and uphold racial hierarchies. Damage-centered research confines what is otherwise a complex and dynamic history and reality of a person or community (Tuck and Wayne, "R-Words" 231), by only considering trauma, tragedy, and loss. Among the consequences of revictimization and reduction of women through damage-centered research is the underlying irony that by being inducted into martyrdom as symbols for a cause, action-driven decolonization falls to the side when in reality, "decolonization is not a metaphor".

Essentially, settler moves to innocence entails a set of evasions that attempt to "reconcile settler guilt and complicity" (Tuck and Wayne, "Not a Metaphor" 1). It refers to the growing casual and surface level approach to decolonization, and can be exhibited by

settler nativism, fantasizing adoption, colonial equivocation, conscientization, at risk-ing or asterisk-ing Indigenous peoples, and re-occupation and urban homesteading (Tuck and Wayne, "Not a Metaphor" 4). A settler move to innocence through damage-centered research is in part orchestrated by fetishizing life stories and commodified pain narratives, especially regarding how they place empathy as a substitute for action. Tuck and Yang refer to this as "conscientization". Subscribing to the idea that "critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism" (Tuck and Wayne, "Not a Metaphor" 19) allows for a critique of the life narratives presented in the report. Although such stories build empathy that may be subsequently mobilized for social change, they might restrict activism by keeping the public in a position where they assume that they are sufficiently enlightened. In other words, because they are no longer ignorant to these stories and they have done the mental work of being exposed to victims' experiences, people may presume that they are on the "good side" of the cause and do not need to push much further. In stories like Pamela Jean George's, the public can read about two men who "beat her severely and left her lying face down in the mud" (Amnesty International 26) and then move on with their days because they are now enlightened to the crisis. Martyrdom plays an important role in this given that it brings in a somewhat parasocial effect that makes information more appealing, compared to being shown an exhaustive list of facts or dense literature. If decolonization is not a metaphor, then why are these women being used as metaphors for the MMIWG crisis? In this case, settler guilt is replaced by a "freed mind" which can be mistaken for decolonization efforts. Likewise, poverty porn and complacent voyeurism of traumatic stories contributes to the irony of conscientization. Ultimately, the lack of responsibility to the cause and tendency towards performative activism is reinforced by the martyrdom created by life narratives, where empathy without action only further contributes to the critique that decolonization has become metaphorical.

The damage caused by this settler move to innocence is further engineered by the pedagogic purpose of the victims' martyr-inducing life narratives. While education regarding settler colonialism is important to decolonization, the way in which it is carried out is precarious because it can easily revictimize individuals and reduce their identities. This revictimization is facilitated by how "easy" it is to do research on people in pain (Tuck and Wayne, "R-words" 234), and in the case of the Stolen Sisters Report, it is even easier to do research on the pain of people who are no longer living because it feels more objective or entails less emotional responsibility. Revictimization is also invasive in the way that it pries into victims' lives and their communities by mining for trauma to share (Tuck and Wayne, "Unbecoming Claims" 813), which is exploitative regardless of it being used in activism. The irony here is that in aiming to tell marginalized stories to decolonize and move society forward, the subjects or the victims carry the brunt of it; they must continue to face their trauma and undergo emotional labour rather than benefit from tangible actions of change. In regard to reduction, victims are essentially treated as objects instead of subjects. In academia, they are misrepresented as "anthropological objects" (Tuck and Wayne, "R-words" 241) of study for social science, and in public life they are used as tools for activism. This instrumentalization is a significant part of martyrdom because the whole point of such characterization is to be an image or token. It is devaluing if these women are only deemed as important or useful when they are deceased and ironically, victims seem to lose some of their voice and agency in efforts to represent MMIWG. If they never chose to be martyrs, who are activists to turn them into one? It seems cheap to use abused women as potential instruments of change when there are less exploitative and less spectacularized forms of storytelling (Hargreaves 87) as outlined in the following section. If decolonization is not a metaphor, then the use of MMIWG victims as martyrs needs to be reconsidered to avoid harm in the form of settler moves to innocence, revictimization, and reduction.

## Looking Forward

Among other issues generated by political martyrdom in the context of the MMIWG crisis are confirmation bias and the propagation of stereotypes regarding Indigenous women, as well as the exploitation of victims' communities. These would be relevant subjects for future study and may be guided by Tuck and Yang's work regarding refusal in research. Furthermore, it would be positively impactful to shift further towards first-person representations, such as memoirs, instead of relying on third-person life narratives to move social movements and activism forward. An example of such work is MMIWG survivor Brandi Morin's memoir *Our Voice of Fire: A Memoir of a Warrior Rising*. Some scholarly work encourages sharing autobiographical narratives because first-person, willing, and enthusiastic story sharing is more impactful and less damaging than third-person life stories about victims (Lénárt-Cheng & Walker 151). By relying on a form of expression where the subject of an experience chooses to tell their story on their own volition, criteria, and boundaries, the public benefits from the same empathy and pedagogy but escapes some of the harmful effects that come with the implied martyrdom. Overall, the life narratives used in Amnesty International's report succeed at sensitizing the public to the MMIWG crisis but by turning victims into martyrs, they undermine actionable decolonization efforts and pose greater harm to victims and their communities.

## Author Positionality Statement

I am a second-generation South African Indian settler born on Treaty 6 territory, the lands of the Nehiyaw, Denesuliné, Nakota Sioux, Anishinaabe, and Niitsitapi peoples, otherwise known as Edmonton. My father's family immigrated to Yellowknife, Treaty 11 Chief Drygeese territory, and my mother's family to Saskatoon on Treaty 6. Upon settling, our people's history of indentured labour and enduring values of ambition, curiosity, and humanity to others married local ideals of collectivism and generational well-being, particularly of Denendeh communities. I acknowledge the systems and structures which afford me unearned privilege on Treaty 6 and Turtle Island, and I intend to contribute to decolonizing literature through the research presented in this paper.

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# An Attack on the Open Society

## *The Orban Government's Closed Society Turn and the Central European University*

**Author: Max Michta**

Keywords: Authoritarianism, Central European University, Higher Education, Open Society Theory, Viktor Orban

*"How afraid sometimes I was of my freedom, how afraid most of us are of freedom, how hard it is to maintain the sovereignty of our own judgment. To see the world as it is, not as we would wish it to be, how truly we must all struggle to be free men and women in a world saturated with manipulation and lies. Yet to call ourselves free and to actually deserve it is the prize that matters most in a life."*

*- Michael Ignatieff*

Illustration by Namya Kohli

Abstract:

*During the twilight hours of Soviet influence over Eastern Central Europe, a young Viktor Orban called for respecting "open society" ideals, like democracy, for Hungarians. However, since taking power in 2010, Orban has become a political juggernaut by championing illiberalism and openly criticizing the ideas he advocated for in his youth, for which he may still win the 2026 election. This illiberal turn is particularly represented by his attacks on universities in Hungary, notably the Central European University (CEU). The literature on this topic is vast, though most papers fail to properly analyze the theoretical arguments for an "open society" versus a "closed society" in Hungary. As a result, this paper's central question is why Orban has attacked "open society" values and its leading representative, the university, and what messaging he uses for that success. To do so, I will analyze primary sources of writings by influential philosophers on the concept of "open" and closed" societies and secondary sources that demonstrate how Orban has mobilized the "revolution of resentment" – the economic and cultural changes of Hungarian society – to mobilize the Hungarians against the CEU, causing the CEU to leave Budapest. "Closed society" ideals are on the rise. The case study of Hungary is an essential way to understand the rationale behind that rise and to demonstrate how "open society" values can fightback.*

## Introduction

In the summer of 1989, the Soviet empire's grasp on the nations of Central Eastern Europe began to falter. Momentum was with the opposition forces across the Iron Curtain who took advantage of the declining power of the Soviet Union. One movement, a protest of over 250,000 people in the remnants of the still intact Hungarian People's Republic, challenged this three-decade-long government's repressive "closed society" apparatus. One demonstration leader, a young activist with a scruffy beard, gave a seven-minute speech about the courage of standing up to tyranny, the movement's goal for an "open society" of free elections, and that Hungary's future is democratic. That man was Viktor Orban, now president of Hungary and head of the right-wing Fidesz Party, whose youthful calls for a bright, open democratic future for Hungary have vanished with age and power. With hindsight, it is shocking that once the man who publicly advocated for ideas of what Karl Popper would call the "open society" became a leading advocate of illiberal democracy and a turn towards a "closed society," particularly symbolized by his adamant attacks on the exemplar of the "open society" ideal: universities. Through an analysis of the core ideas of "open" and "closed" societies from leading intellectuals Karl Popper, Hannah Ardent, Isaiah Berlin, and Michael Ignatieff, this paper will demonstrate how the Orban government's anti-university policies, particularly aimed at the Central European University (CEU) symbolize a direct attack on the "open society." Pursued through Orban's mobilization of Hungarian citizens' resentment and legacy, his government has turned towards a "closed society" where many freedoms that the protests in 1989 called for have disappeared. Overall, this paper argues that through his mobilization of Hungarian citizen's "revolution of resentment," the Orban government's attack on the CEU was an attack on the "open society" and represents Orban's desires for a Hungarian revival through an illiberal "closed society."

## Methods

An illiberal democracy, according to János Kis, is a democracy in the sense that the government is elected; it is illiberal through its use of a weak constitution to take over institutions (2018, 181). As an institution, universities in this paper are viewed as a rule-governed community of scholars whose identity is a commitment to scholarship, learning, and a search for the truth irrespective of its utility (Olsen 2007, 29). The Orban government is a strong case study to demonstrate the illiberal turn, through his open pronouncements that he is a proud illiberal and the famous attack on the CEU as essential components of this case study. Hungary is one of the leaders of the international illiberal movement, and if we want to understand the turn to “closed societies,” then Hungary is essential to the analysis. Further explanations are below.

## Freedom, the University, and Society

Karl Popper (1902-1994), an Austrian from Jewish ancestry, fled from the Nazi Anschluss of Austria and wrote his tour de force: *The Open Society and its Enemies*. The values of what Popper calls the "open society," that of "free minds, free politics, and free institutions" (Ignatieff 2018, 1), have existed since the Greeks. Pioneered by figures like Socrates, they taught that we must have faith in human reason and beware of dogmatism, avoid the distrust of theory and reason, and follow the spirit of science in our criticism of ideas (Popper 2020, 176). These concepts of reason have constantly been challenged by the elements of the "closed society." For example, Plato's "Just City" is a utopian dream that divides individuals into collective castes, where free thought and the truth are challenged, and political miracles and superstition are defended (Popper 2020, 189). Similarly, Marx's historical determinism created a prophet in Marx, who unquestioningly accepted the morality of the future and the state's determination of moral standards (Popper 2020, 411–412). For Popper, both figures tried to create an innocent “closed society” to create the dream of heaven on earth. In reality, we must accept the

strain of civilization, and the uneasiness felt in times of significant social change. “Open society” is complex; the demands of being rational and existing as rugged individuals are a tremendous emotional challenge. However, this is the price we must pay to be human Popper argues (Popper 2020, 168).

In a similar vein, Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997), a Latvian-born Jewish intellectual, escaped Soviet tyranny and became a leading voice of "open society," particularly in his unapologetic preference for freedom. In the work *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Berlin argues for negative freedom over positive freedom. Specifically, there is negative freedom in that each individual is given a minimum set of personal freedoms, and the state or other individuals cannot use deliberate coercion to interfere in your pursuit of the goods and rights you hold sacred (Berlin 1958, 9). For Berlin, some part of human existence must remain independent so the free market of ideas can emerge, where "spontaneity and originality" can take hold in each of us; this is the creative scientific mind Popper argues Socrates advocated for (Berlin 1958, 11-12). Similarly to Popper, Berlin warns us about the manipulation by proponents of the "closed society" and their utopian thinking. Positive freedom is when people become slaves of their unbridled passion, and people's "lower nature" takes hold, where individuals can manipulate this nature and argue they know what you want, resulting in the individual disappearing in the collective (Berlin 1958, 19).

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), who also came from a Jewish background, this time in Germany, where she escaped to America, became the leading figure in the criticism of the "closed society." In her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she demonstrates how the totalitarian regime was created and how it perpetuates its evils. Through a narrative of a "great task," the totalitarians recruited their members from the masses of neglected people from the traditional political camps who argued they were too stupid for politics (Arendt 1973, 344). They mobilized people through the use of memory, the memory of a glorious past; they created a falsified history that argued the democratic state was not representing them (Arendt 1973, 346). Popper


Illustration by Namya Kohli

warns that the "closed society" reimagines history through the lens of superstition and historical determinism, arguing that they are the ones to make the state "great again." This process resulted in the abandonment of the individual to the masses; the totalitarian broke down the independent people and made a fabricated mass "the people." The negative freedom of Berlin is replaced by positive freedom, where the creative and independent mind of the individual disappears. This homogenization is symbolized in what Heinrich Himmler defined as the "SS Man" who under no circumstances will do "a thing for his own sake" (Arendt 1973, 356). Overall, resulting in the total control of the state, they create a narrative that following their "great task" means being part of the "people" while designating enemies as the "other" who must be eliminated if the ideal way is to be achieved (Arendt 1973, 380).

Michael Ignatieff brings together the core ideas of an "open society" from these philosophers. The key ideas are the upholding of the respect and dignity of others, especially of those we may disagree with, the anti-majoritarian principles, the gradualist defense of negative freedom that is critical of utopian and determinist thinking, and the practice of scientific methods resulting in the constant falsification of theory, and an ethic of tolerance (Ignatieff 2024, 4). The university represents a sustaining principle of “open society” through the freedom of

publishing, the tolerance of differing opinions, looking at the individual for what they say, not what they look like, and processes where theory and ideas are tested and replicated (Ignatieff 2024, 194-195). They value merit based on fair opportunity according to ability; they create and disseminate knowledge by challenging established doctrine, which helps create a democratic culture (Grigoriadis and Canpolat 2024, 434-435). It creates critical thinking and a value for your voice in the "negative freedom" sense, where it's about what you say, not who you are. It's the ideal representative of what Popper, Berlin, and Arendt have argued for what an "open society" can demonstrate. Establishing a successful "open society" is represented by the freedom of its academic institutions. However, the "open societies" traditional enemies have not disappeared; they have shifted from the totalitarian to the illiberal (Kis 2018, 179). The absolute totalitarian regimes Popper, Berlin, and Arendt witnessed in the 20th century, notably Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, are now only represented by North Korea in the 21st century. However, their warnings of the "closed society" still resonate with the illiberal turn. In contrast with totalitarian states, these illiberal states are not "closed societies" in the classical Popperian sense; they are members of the EU, NATO, and the WTO. Though minimized, opposition voices can still be heard, and these states legitimate themselves through free but highly manipulated elections (Ignatieff 2024, 12). However, particularly represented by Hungary, the rise of right-wing populists has defied "open society" norms many thought were sacrosanct after the fall of the totalitarians. Though they were elected, they continuously ignored constitutions, depriving citizens of fundamental rights and liberties in the negative freedom sense, limiting academic and media freedom, and suppressing human rights (Rosenblatt 2021, 24). As the totalitarians Popper, Berlin, and Arendt warned about, the illiberal denigrates "open society" ideals through the manipulation of history by arguing that migrants and "woke" ideology are trying to destroy "traditional values" and that they are the only ones to fix it. Therefore, they try to ban "open society" values, establishing a historical determinist, utopian, and anti-independent thinking ideology like the totalitarian leaders before them (Rosenblatt 2021, 25).

Therefore, academic institutions tend to be some of the most targeted by the representatives of the "closed society"; they have been drawn to the center of democratic struggle. Represented by the CEU, whose founding mission statement was to defend the "open society" by furthering these ideas in post-communist states like Hungary (Ignatieff 2024, 2), the Orban government has systematically targeted this independent institution, arguing it is a political institution masquerading as a university. By mobilizing the angry segments of Hungarian society, Orban initiated the illiberal counterattack. Which represented a cultural backlash of Hungarian's changing society and the economic insecurity the Hungarian people faced due to 2008, notably directed towards the EU and the liberal norms from which they have existed since the end of 1989 (Greskovits 2018, 296). As a result, the Orban government had the excuse to target institutions that he argued did not represent "true Hungarians," who instead represent foreign interests and are controlled by elites from Brussels.
The CEU was his main target; a law passed in 2017 required foreign universities to pass specific criteria to operate in Hungary. Specifically, it required a deal between the Hungarian and university state governments (Enyedi 2018, 1067). This means that the right to conduct educational activities is not based on merit but on Orban's relationship with the government. Figure 1.1 *Academic Freedom Decline in Hungary* demonstrates the steady decline of academic freedom, with Fidesz's electoral win in 2010 signifying a dramatic decrease, and the closing of the CEU in 2019

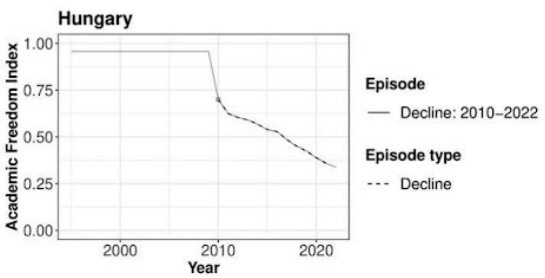


*Figure 1.1. Academic Freedom Decline in Hungary*.
Source: Larrs Tott 2023, 1007.

resulted in a sharp decline representing a shift to the high .20 in the academic freedom index (Lott 2023, 1010).

Orban has proudly called himself an opponent of the "open society" and has called for respecting the Hungarian right to national sovereignty and majoritarianism in the name of illiberal democracy (Enyedi 2018, 1069). Therefore, his attacks on the university represent an attack on the principles of the "open society," which he truly distrusts. How the Orban government was able to target the "open society" and why he is turning towards a new form of "closed society" through his preference for illiberal democracy is an essential question about legacy.

## The Revolution of Resentment

Since the end of the Second World War, the liberal order, through the practice of the "open society," has prospered. Liberalism was at the root of inclusion and tolerance, where they were represented as the "adults" of governing. A belief emerged that as long as you follow the liberal ideals in economics and social politics, your society will succeed. However, these ideas have faced dramatic and intense pushback from the populist right, which has taken the ideas of national sovereignty, economic equality, and traditional culture as fundamental principles that the "open society" has tarnished through their cosmopolitan alliance with migrants (Lendvai 2019, 53). Even though Hungary was a full democracy from 1990 to 2010, disillusionment with the political system increased due to the Hungarian liberal-socialist government's mistakes in handling the 2008 recession and the controversial movement toward the EU (Bozoki 2024, 6-7). This has allowed Viktor Orban to mobilize this "revolution of resentment" in his last three election wins—the legitimate concerns Hungarian citizens have about the economic problems, cultural change, and elite judgment of Hungarian society.

If the tragedy of Central Eastern Europe was, as Milan Kundera wrote, "a kidnapped West," "culturally in the West and politically in the East," 1989 signified a rebalancing (Rupnik 2018, 25). The "closed societies" of the *ancien régimes* of the Soviet empire collapsed, and a new sense of European identity with "open society" ideals came hand in hand (Rupnik 2018, 25). However, since the Hungarians joined the EU, rhetorical continuity from the days of the Soviet Union has returned through figures like Orban. Specifically, the limited sovereignty given by the Soviet Union under Brezhnev in 1968 to Hungary has just been replaced by the EU government in Brussels (Bickerton 2009, 732). EU accession required states to incorporate 80,000 rules and regulations into domestic law; therefore, the EU asked states to give up their claims to political autonomy in the name of material interdependence (Bickerton 2009, 744). The EU is just another part of Hungary's long history of being a subject to foreign powers, forcing their ideology onto the Hungarian people. As a result, like the "closed societies" of the past, Orban has reconstructed Hungarian history to proclaim a sense of national sovereignty that directly challenges the "open society." Orban has used Miklos Hortey (1868-1957), the former autocratic leader of Hungary, as a symbol for "true Hungarians," the rural country folk who represented traditional Hungarian culture and opposed the Treaty of Trianon that reduced Hungary's traditional borders after the First World War (Toomey 2018, 88). Through revisionist history, Orban has argued that the Hortey government represented a desire for self-determination and that Orban himself is the successor to this tradition, ignoring the Hortey government's role in the Holocaust and Terror campaigns (Toomey 2018, 100). Instead, Orban represents the "great task" of achieving national sovereignty for Hungary and if you don't follow this idea, he argues you want Hungary to fail and are not part of the "people."

The failure of the liberal-socialist government in Hungary to properly best the debt crisis caused by the 2008 recession created an immense amount of political capital for Orban. In short, from 2002-2006, a mortgage boom occurred in Central Eastern Europe. Figure 2.1. *House Price and Mortgage Lending* demonstrates how, from 2002 to 2006, East Central Europe states (ECE) received substantial mortgages with increased house prices (Bohle 2018, 290).

Foreign banks from states like Austria gave out mortgage loans to citizens of Hungary in foreign currency like Swiss Francs but at a flexible exchange rate (Bohle 2018, 290). As a result, when the 2008 financial crisis hit, it left Hungarian homeowners in a precarious position, resulting in a dramatic increase in the distrust of foreign banks and financial elites in Hungary, which Orban and Fidesz took advantage of in 2010 (Bohle 2018, 291). Those left behind due to the economic crisis were the ones who couldn't afford to go to higher education, causing resentment of the university elite, who were able to scramble to the middle class while leaving the "losers" in the dirt.

Overall, Orban has been able to mobilize the Hungarian people's resentment over the sovereignty and economic crisis to target the CEU. He has revived tools of the *ancien régime* of the "closed society" to attack academic freedom. Specifically, through his mobilization of history, Orban designated

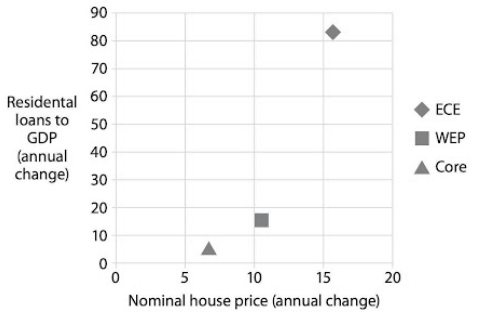


***Figure 2.1. House Price and Mortgage Lending.*** **Source: Bohle 2018, 290.**

the rural folk of Hungary as the "people" and that the "urban elite" were not true Hungarians (Toomey 2018, 88). Orban framed the CEU as part of this "urban elite" thanks to its connection with George Soros, who, through the CEU's Gender Studies program, was supposedly trying to "weaken family values" in Hungary (Enyedi 2018, 1069). The Fidesz Party has used its propaganda apparatus to attack George Soros as the enemy of all "true Hungarians," using terms during the 2018 election like "don't let Soros have the last laugh" and that Soro's "open society" belief was in reality about "open borders" both of which are recycled anti-Semitic tropes from the 1930s (Ignatieff 2024, 201). Like the "closed societies" of the past, Fidesz's power resides in its ability to create imagined national fictions. Through mobilizing resentment, Orban used the deep emotions of the Hungarian people to make people say and do things that they would usually not do. This has allowed him to limit the freedom to pursue an independent education and the freedom to think in an alternative way. Like "closed societies," Orban values one road of thought; the ideas that come with the illiberal majoritarian system cause the destruction of diverse independent thought that creates rational beings (Applebaum 2018, 249).

Nevertheless, even with the laws weakening academic freedom and the mobilization of the "revolution of resentment," in April 2018, a demonstration of support for the CEU occurred in Budapest, with 80,000 people coming to the defense of the "open society" (Enyedi 2018, 1068). However, Fidesz quickly dismissed them as "a coordinated attack on Hungary's bravery for standing up for itself" (Enyedi 2018, 1068). Fidesz continued to implement anti-intellectual rhetoric and specifically attacked social sciences, which they argue are just "intellectual boot camps for liberalism"; they were training activists to impose cosmopolitan values on Hungary (Enyedi 2018, 1068). Through these arguments and the Hungarian people's resentment towards elites, Orban could stack the Hungarian Supreme Court with allies so that it would strike down the CEU's challenge to these laws (Ignatieff 2024, 200-201). Doing away with the constitutional guarantee for free and independent universities and stacking the Supreme Court and other institutions with Fidesz loyalists caused the CEU to leave the country; it was Hungary's most significant attack on academic freedom since the 1930s (Ignatieff 2024, 200-201). However, CEU was just a blueprint for what Orban did to other academic institutions. Hungary stripped the Hungarian Academy of Sciences of its vital research role. It privatized domestic Hungarian universities, placing Fidesz loyalists on the boards of the universities, greatly affecting university autonomy–a fundamental pillar for a democratic society (Ignatieff 2024, 202). Finally, Orban invited Fudan University

to take over the remnants of the CEU's old campus in Budapest (Ignatieff 2024, 202). Demonstrating his allegiance to the "strong man" states of the world and training a new generation of Hungarians not in the "open society" ideals that the CEU championed but a new class of elites who subscribe to the ideology of illiberalism, a new generation living under a "closed society."

## Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how the Orban government's attack on the Central European University represents an attack on the "open society" and a return to a "closed society." Through its mobilization of the "revolution of resentment" of the Hungarian people, Orban has cemented Hungary as an illiberal state that is against the "decadent Western" ideals the CEU stands for–that being the "open society." Specifically, Orban mobilized the people who believed their societies were changing too fast by the inclusion and tolerance of the "open society" and felt neglected by the liberal elite. Popper warns that the "open society" is not an easy place to live; life in the "open society" requires us to be rational, independent individuals who are free to speak and think critically. However, this is the price we must pay to be human. Though the illiberal "closed society" may sound like a "utopia on Earth," it, in reality, weakens the very nature of being human. Nevertheless, the illiberal turn in states like Hungary represents a significant challenge for these "open society" notions. There is hope. In Poland, we saw the election of Donald Tusk, a significant victory for the "open society," which demonstrates if citizens mobilize to protect liberal values, they can beat the "closed society" turn. A lesson from Socrates demonstrates that we must avoid misology and value our reason and freedom over dogmatism. Therefore, we can't lose hope in change; if we value the ideas of an "open society," no matter how difficult these ideals may be, we must not compromise and strive to continuously protect them.

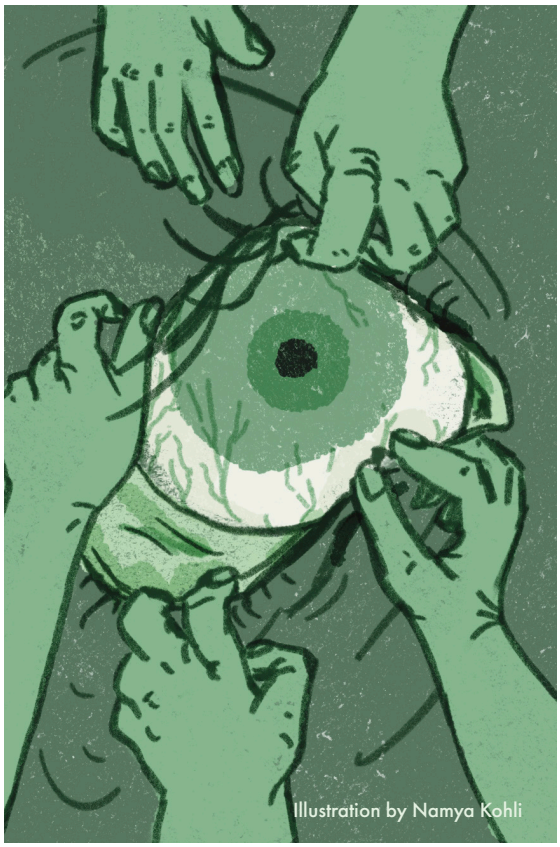

Illustration by Namya Kohli

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# *Equus caballus* in Iceland
## *From Landnám to Christianization*

**Author: Finn Leland**


Illustration by
Madelaine Mae Dack

Keywords: Archaeology, Icelandic Horse, Literary Analysis, Norse Paganism, Old Norse Literature

Abstract:

*In the late 9th century CE, Iceland was colonized by settlers from Norway and surrounding Norse settlement areas. With them, they brought the domestic horse, Equus caballus. This paper aims to examine how early Icelanders used horses to survive a hostile climate and how the relationships between Icelanders and their horses have changed over time. This examination is conducted primarily through literary analysis, in which literature from archaeologists, anthropologists, lawyers, and historians is considered. Archaeological sites in which horses have been intentionally buried are also consulted. Widely-accepted conclusions include that horses were initially used for transportation, but were also practical sources of meat when the need presented itself. Horses were also vital to several pagan rituals, including ritual consumption of horseflesh, horse sacrifice, and horse-fighting. After the Christianization circa 1000 CE, horses remained to be important symbols of the collective Icelandic identity. There remain gaps in archaeologists' understanding of how horses were actually used in pagan ritual. More research may illuminate the gaps between historical literature and the archaeological record.*

## 1. Introduction

*Equus caballus*, the domestic horse, has been integral to Iceland's national identity since its establishment. Horses provided one of the mechanisms behind early Icelanders' ability to adapt and survive in an unfamiliar, hostile environment. They acted as spiritual ties between Icelanders, their landscape, and the supernatural, becoming the objects of several rituals. This article offers a brief overview of horses' many roles during the medieval period in Iceland, beginning with the Settlement period, covering the Viking period, and ending with the Christianization.

Horses were initially brought to Iceland from Norway as mounts. They helped to connect the small, dispersed communities across the island, and they provided a convenient food source. In addition to subsistence-based horsemeat consumption, Norse pagans ate horsemeat as part of their rituals. These rituals were accompanied by other practices such as horse-fighting, horse sacrifice, and ceremonial horse burial.

Changes in how Icelanders treated horses are visible through the archaeological record. Practices such as butchery or ritual burial waxed and waned over the Viking period. Such practices were strongly influenced by factors such as social status and location. By dating these sites, archaeologists can infer how the roles of the horse changed and developed over time. Archaeologists, accompanied by historians and anthropologists, might also infer how the shifting roles of the horse correlated with cultural changes in Iceland.

In this article, I review evidence published in primary archaeological reports and cross-reference literature published by archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and lawyers. In Iceland, law, religious beliefs, the supernatural, and the landscape are all deeply connected and foundational to the structure of the collective Icelandic identity. Through studying horse remains, we can better understand how the associated daily and ritual practices were foundational to Iceland's modern identity.

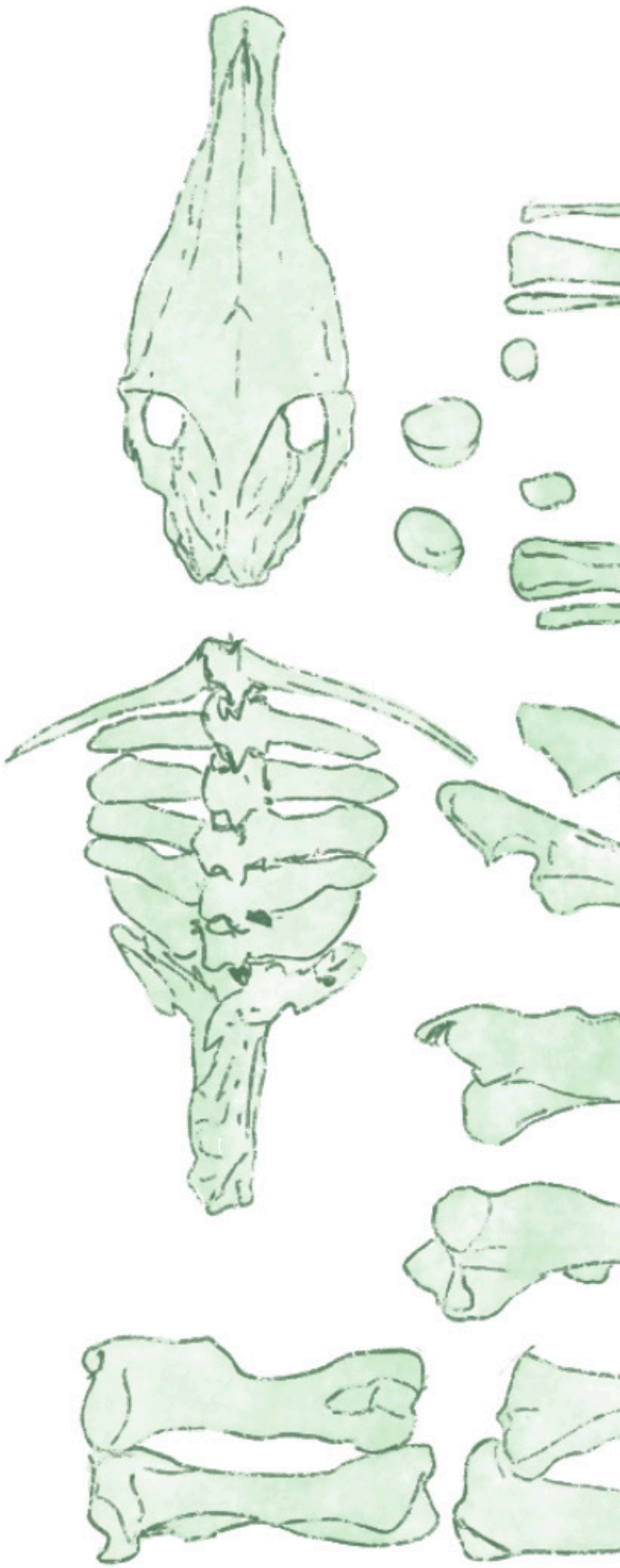


Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

## 2. Background

### *2.1 Colonization and Christianization*

The Icelandic medieval period may be split into three broad intervals for general applications. The Settlement period, the *Landnám*, began in 874 CE, during which settlers from Western Norway and Norse settlement areas in the British Isles began to colonize the island in waves (Bennett, 2014,p. 33; McGovern et al., 2007, p. 27; Smith, 1995, p. 319). The Viking period began in the late eighth century and lasted until circa 1100 CE, overlapping with Iceland's conversion from paganism to Christianity in 1000 CE (Bennett, 2014, p. 33). The Age of the Sturlungs began circa 1220 CE and lasted until Iceland was subjugated under Norway in the early 1260s (Bennett, 2014, p. 33; McGovern et al., 2007, p. 29). For this article, the second division will be placed at 1000 AD, bisecting the Viking and Conversion periods, the latter of which is also known as the Christianization. Dividing medieval Icelandic history into discrete periods in this way bars any finely nuanced interpretations of cultural changes. However, these divisions create benchmarks by which we can better understand those cultural changes that developed relatively distinctly.

The traditional narrative surrounding the Christianization in 1000 CE is that conversion was universally agreed upon, thereby promoting a collective Icelandic identity unified through a common legal system (Phelpstead, 2020, p. 54; Self, 2010, p. 182). Whether or not the conversion was actually peaceful has become a source of debate. However, archaeological evidence of burial practices has illustrated some of the cultural shifts that co-occurred with the Christianization.

### *2.2 The Icelandic Horse*

Norse colonists imported several domesticated livestock species, including cattle (*Bos taurus*), pigs (*Sus scrofa*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), goats (*Capra aegagrus*), and horses (McGovern et al., 2007, p. 30). Early Icelanders relied heavily on cattle and pigs,

and only later would they begin to emphasize sheep and goats (Smith, 1995, p. 329; Stelter, 2014, p. 16). The volcanic soils were prone to erosion and were suboptimal for providing nutrients to plants. Colonists, therefore, could not establish the same agricultural practices and domestic grazing animals that they had succeeded with in the past, creating long-lasting impacts on farming (McGovern et al., 2007, pp. 29-30; Stelter, 2014, p. 15). Early Icelanders looked to other resources, such as seafood, to sustain their populations. They also needed to re-evaluate the cost and benefits of each livestock species and consider which were worth investing their resources into (Stelter, 2014, p. 16). Horses, being incredibly versatile in their uses, were an obvious choice.

Colonists began to import horses from the Settlement period until the Icelandic central governing body, the *Alþing*, was formed (Einarsson, 2010, p. 4; Stelter, 2014, p.14). In 982 CE, a law (which remains in place today) was enacted to ban the import of new horses. The earliest horses in Iceland were imported from Norway (Stelter, 2020, p. 30). Individuals were likely selected for their potential to survive the voyage rather than solely for their breed. Careful selection of imported animals and isolation of the population for over a millennium allowed Icelanders to tailor and maintain a breed optimized for their needs (Einarsson, 2010, p. 4; Stelter, 2014, p. 14). Modern Icelandic horses are similar to their earliest ancestors with their stout bodies and thick manes, each generation well-adapted to the arctic environment (Stelter, 2014, p. 11). These horses helped early Icelanders adapt to and navigate their newfound landscape.

## 3. Archaeological Evidence

Broadly, Icelandic burials can be divided between two characteristic traditions: *kuml* and Christian (Leifsson, 2018, p. 6; Vésteinsson, 2020, p. 187). *Kuml* burials preceded Christian practices and are typically defined by the inclusion of grave goods. These burials were highly exclusive as to whom they were offered and followed strict protocols. Typological, radiocarbon, and tephrochronological dating place most of these burials within the 10th century CE, with only a few occuring post-Christianization (Vésteinsson et al., 2019, p. 3). Not all pagan burials are *kuml* burials, but all *kuml* burials are pagan. There are pagan burials which do not fit under the definition of a *kuml* burial but clearly do not follow the Christian paradigm. For simplicity's sake, all *kuml* and pre-Christian burials will be referred to as 'pagan' henceforth.

Christian graves, in contrast, are relatively distinguishable. Christian burials are always placed in a graveyard associated with a church or chapel within the homefield (Friðriksson & Vésteinsson, 2011, p. 55; Vésteinsson et al., 2019, p. 3). Where pagan burials are heavily biased towards men, Christian burial sites frequently include women and children as well as men (Vésteinsson et al., 2019, p. 3). Christian graves also follow an east-west orientation and do not often contain grave goods or animal remains (Vésteinsson et al., 2019, p. 7; Vésteinsson, 2020, p. 191). Categorizing burials in this way aids in correlating Icelandic cultural and religious practices with their treatment of horses. Horses have always been an intrinsic part of Icelandic culture (Einarsson, 2010, p. 5). As a result, their remains are frequently found as part of the archaeological record (Figure 1), from which anthropologists may deduce their given role in society.

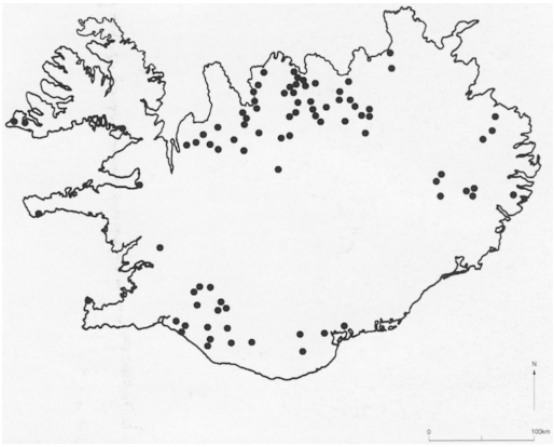


*Figure 1. A map marking Viking Age horse graves in Iceland. Note.* Image from Sikora (2003).

Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

## 4. Discussion

### *4.1 Horses as Transportation*

Across countless temporal and geographic ranges, horses are most commonly used as transportation. Iceland is no different. Iceland's landscape is characterized by rocky terrain, rolling lava fields, and waterways that carve through the land. The earliest Icelandic horses were relatives of other sure-footed breeds, such as the Dølehest, the Coldblooded Trotter, and the Fjord (Stelter, 2020, p. 31). Horses played a vital role in Icelanders' ability to navigate land and water more efficiently than by foot or boat (Einarsson, 2010, pp. 5-6; Stelter, 2014, p. 17; Stelter, 2019, p. 31). This was necessary for establishing and maintaining interconnectedness between settlements.

The most direct line of evidence of horse riding is the presence of skeletal lesions. The physical burden resulting from carrying the rider, their gear, and any cargo may result in changes to the skeleton. These changes include ankylosis of joints or the formation of osteophytes. The young horse at Mörk (Figure 2) displayed the fusion of the metacarpal and the accessory second metacarpal, which may have resulted from riding (Leifsson, 2018, p. 68). An older adult horse at Öxnadalsheiði (Figure 2) had three ankylosed thoracic vertebrae and two ankylosed tarsals (Leifsson, 2018, p. 116). A young horse at Kolsholt had osteophytes forming along the articular surfaces of its thoracic vertebrae, which may have resulted from riding or other load-bearing activities. As investigated by Leifsson (2018), riding most frequently bore marks on the skeleton as changes to the thoracic vertebrae or podials.[1]

Indirect evidence for horse riding includes remnants of riding equipment (tack), regardless of whether the horse is present. Most components of a tack set are made of organic materials such as leather, wood or fabric. Therefore, the most commonly found remnants of tack are iron bits, such as those found at Mörk or Brimnes, or buckles, like those found at Öxnadalsheiði (Leifsson, 2018, pp. 67, 104, 116). Other notable artifacts include iron nails, decorative copper fittings, or, in rare cases, wooden saddles. Horseshoes, however, were not used during the Viking period and are absent from these assemblages (Stelter, 2014, p. 44). Tack is indirect rather than direct evidence because there are some cases in which tack

[1] "Podial" refers to the bones of the lower portion of any of the four limbs.

is associated with the remains of horses too young to have been ridden (Leifsson, 2018, p. iii). Regardless, the intentional burial of riding tack reinforces the importance of horses to early Icelanders.

### *4.2 Horses as Food*

The presence of burned or tool-marked horse bones suggests that as well as being loyal steeds, horses were being eaten by medieval Icelanders. Some historical sources[2] express that horses were a crucial part of the Icelandic diet, either by necessity or by preference (Miller, 1991, pp. 2086-2087). However, the archaeological record suggests that horses were not nearly as large a portion of Icelanders' diets as cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs (Leifsson, 2018, pp. 264-265).

Horse bones in food waste middens often bear butchery marks (Leifsson, 2018, p. 263). For example, the horse remains at Hrísheimur (Figure 2) were part of a midden that also included cattle and caprines,[3] all of which bore chopping marks indicative of dismemberment (McGovern & Perdikaris, 2002). The horse bones at Vígishellir (Figure 2) are accompanied by cattle, pigs, and caprines, which had been highly processed but not burned (McGovern, 2003, p. 4). However, the horse bones at Aðalstræti (Figure 2) were burned in a hearth alongside other butchered animals (Tinsley & McGovern, 2001, p. 2).

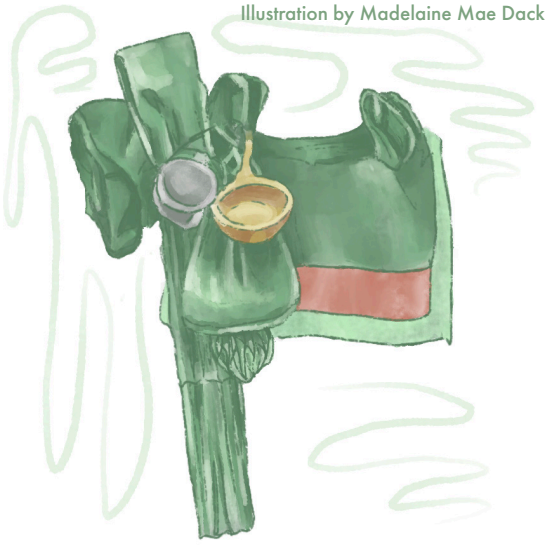
The consumption of horsemeat continued beyond the medieval period, but tapered after the Christianization (Hicks, 2010, p. 15; Leifsson, 2018, p. 264). The relative scarcity of horse bones in food middens suggests that eating horsemeat was likely a special occasion rather than a preferred subsistence strategy. Historians and archaeologists have deduced that Icelanders most likely consumed horsemeat as part of pagan rituals (Miller, 1991, pp. 2086-2087). This ritual activity was a remnant of Norwegian pagan practices and was outlawed following the implementation of Christian law (Einarsson, 2010, p. 6; Stelter, 2014, p. 28).

### *4.3 Horses as Pagan Ritual Objects*

Horses were central figures of the Icelandic pagan ritual, possibly due to their associations with the gods Odin and Freyr (Sikora, 2003, p. 87; Leifsson, 2018, p. 10). Rituals such as horse-fights, horse sacrifice, consumption of horsemeat, and horse burials were pagan practices. Of these rituals, horse sacrifices and subsequent burials are most easily observed through the archaeological record.

Sacrifices may have been performed as offerings to the gods or as the basis for communal feasts, establishing and strengthening inter-communal connections (Gogosz, 2013, pp. 18, 31; Stelter, 2014, pp. 17, 18; Vesteinsson, 2020, p. 191). In cases where a horse was interred alongside a human, strict protocols were followed. Protocol dictated who received such a burial, how the horse was killed, how its carcass was arranged, and what artifacts the individuals were buried with (Leifsson, 2018, p. iii). Conversely, not every horse burial is associated with a human grave (Leifsson, 2018, p. iii; Stelter, 2019, p. 31).

Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack



[2] Such as the sagas, a series of books describing Icelandic history written after the Christianization.
[3] Either sheep or goats, indistinguishable in the archaeological record.

The burials at Saltvík and Dadastaðir (Figure 2) illustrate the pagan burial paradigm, each including a horse burial with an associated human grave (McGovern, 2004a; 2004b). Each skeleton most likely represents a single adult horse. Unfortunately, both sites were looted before the 1477 tephra, so no artifacts have been recovered. Neither site report lists any evidence that these animals were butchered. However, they were likely sacrificed. These graves each fit within the expected temporal range for pagan burials and are representative of the Icelandic interpretation of this tradition.

### *4.4 From Norway to Iceland*

Although Norwegian predecessors of Icelanders were primarily responsible for the ritual significance of horses, many of the traditional mainland Scandinavian practices were abandoned or modified in Iceland. For example, Norwegian horse remains were cremated before interment, but Icelandic horse remains were not (Sikora, 2003, p. 93). Additionally, the demographics of such burials shifted in Iceland. In Norway, horses are typically found buried alongside males, but in Iceland, this inequality is less exaggerated. Other rituals, such as horse-fighting, morphed from special yearly assemblies in Norway to more frequent sport-like gatherings in Iceland (Gogosz, 2013, p. 19).

Horses were cemented firmly as underpinnings of pagan practices, but they maintained their status as integral pieces of Icelandic identity even post-Christianization. Foremost, practices such as horse-fighting and consumption of horsemeat may have been outlawed on paper, but such laws were difficult to enforce in practice. Horses also gained roles in Christian practices, such as carrying coffins during funerals (Stelter, 2014, p. 18). Sites like Gásir (Figure 2) illustrate that horses remained culturally significant to Icelanders post-Conversion (Woollett & McGovern, 2002).

## 5. Conclusions

The archaeological record provides insight into the many uses Icelanders had for horses from the Settlement period onward. Horses were raised for practical uses, such as transportation and meat. They were also used as ritual offerings and burial objects. The boundaries between practical and ritual use, however, are not often as clear-cut as we might expect. Horsemeat was eaten as a pagan ritual practice as well as for nutrition, and sacrificial horse burials often included riding tack.

In most cases, it may be impossible to distinguish between practical and ritual use, assuming they were never one and the same. Currently, multimodal approaches from archaeologists and historians have revealed to a reasonable extent the practical uses for horses in medieval Iceland. However, ritual practices that used horses demand a more thorough understanding.

Although historical literature tends to mention that rituals such as eating horseflesh and horse-fighting happened, it rarely provides much detail. Usually, the intended audience would have already been familiar with these rituals and would not have needed them explained. However, when drawing from these historical sources, we lack information that might be revealed through improved or different archaeological approaches. Archaeologists may be able to carefully infer the frequency and seasonality of ritual practices such as horse sacrifice. They might also be able to investigate any skeletal lesions that may have resulted from horse-fighting or sacrificial killing. Continual comparison of horse burials in Iceland to those in Norway will reveal differences between practices. Ultimately, archaeological evidence of horse-based pagan rituals in Iceland has been largely restricted to excavating horse burials, so there is plenty of room for further exploration.

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# For the Love of Lesbians

## *A Case for Queer World-Building*

**Author: Cass Duxbury**

Keywords: Gender and Sexuality Studies, Kinship, Lesbianism, Queer World-Building

Abstract:

*In this paper, I make a case for the value of a specifically lesbian critique to the world of queer theory and beyond. I begin by discussing some concerns levied against queer theory and lesbian separatism, then offer a definition of lesbianism. Next, I consider how, due to the distance it inhabits from cisheteropatriarchal maleness, lesbianism "fails" by dominant standards for gender performance and kinship relations. In turn, I argue that this failure gives rise to radical creativity, as lesbians reimagine gender, power, and relationality in practice. Finally, I suggest that a lesbian critique, which insists that gender and relationality be matters of love and creativity rather than dominance and hierarchy, can be useful broadly. The unique perspectives arising from lesbian experience can therefore be the basis for a queer world-building project that works to the benefit of all people.*

Illustration by Sophia Grace Foder

Lesbian voices are often missing in queer discourses despite the important insights they bring. Lesbianism inhabits a unique distance from patriarchal maleness as opposed to other queer identities. No other orientation is by its nature able to operate at all times completely independently from cisgender, heterosexual men. For this reason, I argue that lesbian experience provides valuable insights into gender hegemony, which refers to the dominant conceptions of gendered life that privilege men and masculinity over women and femininity, and are maintained through behaviours and structures that reinforce these beliefs. In this paper, which is argumentative but has its roots in a profound love for this identity which shapes my life, I analyze the ways in which lesbianism "fails" by dominant standards for gender performance and kinship relations. I argue that this failure gives rise to radical creativity, as lesbians reimagine gender, power, and relationality in practice. Following an analysis of the creative potential arising from lesbian failure, I suggest that the insights derived from lesbian experience need not be useful exclusively to lesbians. A lesbian critique demands the deconstruction of gendered power dynamics in a way that is valuable widely, as the enforcement of cisheteropatriarchal inequity puts pressure on every person's gender possibilities and social life. After addressing some concerns about the limitations of queer politics and explaining

what "lesbian" means to me, I will move on to the analysis of lesbian failure that will inform my claim that a lesbian critique can be the basis for a queer world-building project that works to the benefit of all people.

## Addressing Concerns & Defining "Lesbian"

Before analyzing the unique insights arising from lesbian experience, it is important to address some valid criticisms that have been raised about queer politics and to clarify the definition of lesbianism that I will be working from. In "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" Cathy Cohen argues that "a truly radical or transformative politics has not resulted from queer activism" because of the problematic perspectives some queers take towards heterosexual people (438). Many queer activists mistakenly consider heterosexuals to be universally privileged and antagonistic to queer aims, rather than acknowledging that heteronormativity harms them too. Queer activists contradict their own rejection of totalizing categories when they group all non-queer people into one uniform group and assume a reductive "dichotomy between those deemed queer and those deemed heterosexual" (Cohen 440). The failure of queer theory to translate into a productive queer politic rests on ignorance of the varying proximities to power that people experience based not only on sexual and gender identity, but also race, class, ability, and religion, to name a few (Cohen 452). Sexual norms play a role in other forms of oppression; racialized and impoverished individuals, even when they are heterosexual, suffer from the targeted regulation and degradation of their sexualities. The disproportionate weaponization of sexual violence against Black individuals and the demonization of single mothers on welfare are among many examples of how heterosexual people can be victimized by sexual oppression (Cohen 454-455).

Further to the ways in which gender hegemony harms more than just queer-identified individuals, class and race-based power imbalances also exist among queer people. A queer politic that ignores race and class issues in its pursuit of a narrow conception of queer liberation becomes a racist and classist movement unwelcoming and unhelpful to queers who are affected by these marginalizations and align themselves with non-queer allies they share them with (Cohen 450). Cohen therefore asserts that "queer activists who evoke a single-oppression framework...limit the comprehensive and transformational character of queer politics" (441). "Shared history or identity" does not in itself indicate solidarity; Cohen argues instead that "shared marginal relationship to dominant power" ought to be the basis for political allyship (458). Such a shift would allow for people to be united based on their political aspirations, rather than the assumption that shared non-normative identities are enough to align people politically, and that everyone else belongs to the enemy. It is this model for solidarity across difference that I aim to follow in the development of a lesbian critique.

Lesbians have also been the target of fair criticism for relying on a single-oppression framework that esteems womanhood as the sole site of solidarity. The Combahee River Collective (CRC), a Black feminist activist organization, argues in their collective statement that their "situation as Black people necessitates...solidarity around the fact of race." The CRC criticizes lesbian separatists, who advocate for complete rejection of all men and deny the possibility of solidarity with them. Echoing the concerns of the CRC more than twenty years later, Kathy Rudy details how the radical feminist community she lived in crumbled when Black members began to speak up on the issue of race and align themselves with Black men. In "Radical Feminism, Lesbian Separatism, and Queer Theory," Rudy writes that these radical feminists' "assumption that being lesbian was enough" to bond women together meant that other struggles, such as those to do with race and class, were "forced into secondary positions or overlooked entirely" (200).

Rudy praises the turn she has witnessed in younger, queer-identified lesbian communities towards the kind of politics that Cohen envisions, where shared orientations towards power are prioritized over shared identities.

Echoing Cohen, Rudy imagines that at its best, queer theory rejects "categorization" in favour of "building coalitions of difference along political lines" (213). In contrast to lesbian separatists, queer lesbians take a more nuanced perspective in formulating their politics. For queer lesbians, pitting men and women, or queers and non-queers, against each other as dichotomous and irreconcilable is unproductive; the distinction that matters most is "between those who espouse progressive politics...and those who don't" (Rudy 209). This new generation of lesbians refuses to enforce any "membership criteria for queerness" other than the shared commitment to identifying and critiquing sexual norms (Rudy 212).

While she admires the radical shift among young queers, Rudy raises an important concern with queer activists that claim to reject gender hierarchy meanwhile favouring aggressive political tactics traditionally associated with masculinity. The queer circles Rudy observes "easily dismiss the domesticity and emotionality associated with the private sphere...in favor of the dynamism, development, and aggression of the public" (218). The devaluation of what has been historically considered 'women's work' risks relegating these forms of labour to underprivileged communities. Rudy aptly summarizes that

> somebody has to do these things, and if they're not done by queers, they will be done by women, and if some 'women' manage to get out of these tasks by identifying themselves as queer, then the work will be done by women of color and other disenfranchised people who cannot afford the luxury of an identity like queer. (219)

In other words, when queers espouse defiant pride as the only way to be queer, those who are also marginalized along race and class get left behind. This is because having the option to be openly queer is a privilege, so the emphasis on being queer in public excludes those who do not have access to the protection offered by being white and upper-class. Rudy therefore argues that queer theory should retain radical feminism's original commitment to valuing the work that women have historically been responsible for. Until gendered social roles are fully deconstructed, it is vital to "pay as much attention to the functions of (what we used to call) women, as we do to overcoming or rising above such categorization" (Rudy 220-221).

Before I move on to a case study of lesbianism, I note that in the spirit of both Rudy and Cohen, I intentionally do not offer an explicit, inflexible definition of "lesbian." Extensive discourse about who can or cannot claim this identity is neither productive nor relevant to the arguments I make in this paper. Importantly, I reject any lesbianism that is exclusive to cisgender women, and like Cohen, I know that every individual that shares this label in common with me is not automatically my ally. Most generally, I think of lesbianism as a label that anyone with some lived experience of 'womanhood' who experiences attraction primarily or exclusively to other people with a relationship to womanhood can claim, regardless of their gender identity (trans or otherwise), sex, or sexual history. Lesbian, to me, is both a gender and a sexual/romantic orientation, though lesbians may identify with the term in both these respects to varying extents.

The definition I work from is intentionally broad, but not completely open-ended. I hope to make clear that lesbianism is about self-identification and self-affirmation, coupled with a sense of community and solidarity with other lesbians. While I reject unnecessarily divisive identity politics, I see the value in labels that allow us to understand and affirm ourselves alongside those who share them with us. We can do this at the same time as we pursue allyship with all who share our political aspirations, regardless of the identities and experiences that we do or do not have in common. In this paper, the perspectives made available specifically through lesbian experience form the basis for a critique that can be useful more broadly for thinking about alternatives to restrictive gender and kinship hegemony.

## Lesbianism: A Queer Case Study

Perhaps paradoxically, I believe that the promise of lesbianism as a case study in queer world-building begins with its status as a "failure" by dominant conceptions of gender and kinship. In his introduction to *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam writes that "failure is something queers do and have always done exceptionally well" (3). Failure, as Halberstam understands it, "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior" (3). In other words, failing by externally imposed standards for success can allow us the freedom to operate outside of them. Failing therefore provides the opportunity "to poke holes in the toxic positivity" of socially enforced standards of normalcy (Halberstam 3). In a similar vein, Sara Ahmed writes in "Unhappy Queers" that being "happily queer" in a world that ascribes unhappiness to queer life can make obvious "the unhappiness that is concealed by the promotion of happy normativity" (117). By Ahmed's view, choosing self-acceptance and fulfillment in queerness in the face of a world that considers queerness an "unhappiness-cause" is a radical act (95).

"Failing" to adhere to norms that are themselves constraining and harmful therefore makes room for powerful critiques of these norms, and gives us the potential to prove that something *can* be created outside of them. Lesbianism fails at gender and relational norms in a unique way due to its distance from maleness, the centre of patriarchy. This is because lesbian identity and relationships by definition do not incorporate and appease cisgender men. Lesbianism is particularly threatening to gender hegemony precisely because it proves that there are relational forms that do not need to orient themselves around a negotiation of male dominance. Halberstam writes that "gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals" (4). The spectacular failure of lesbianism therefore gives lesbians the ability to envision new ways for people to perform gender and relate to one another. As I will discuss, lesbianism in practice both critiques gender hegemony and is itself evidence of the possibility of gender performances that are not reducible to oppressive power dynamics or essentialist gender expectations.

First and most obviously, lesbianism reimagines womanhood. In an analysis that echoes the problems Cohen and Rudy identify with narrow identity politics, Ladelle McWhorter attempts in her essay "Practicing, Practicing" to formulate a solution to the "the turn away from radical creativity and toward discovery...[that] haunts all of feminism" (151). She argues that feminist woman-affirming practices are not as liberating as they ought to be, because in order for women to collectively 'return to' and affirm their inherent womanhood, the term must be defined in advance. While intended to be a productive solution to the degradation of women, McWhorter identifies "a demand that [one] abandon [their] developmental self" in the celebration of a supposedly innate, static, and shared experience of womanhood (155). In this way, many feminists still depend on the essentialization of womanness, simply re-valuing it as positive and empowering.

Offering *self*-affirmation as an alternative to woman-affirmation, McWhorter argues for the importance of "find[ing] ways to rethink, but even more importantly to re-create...both the concept and experience of womanhood" (156). She considers that 'womanhood' may be thought of "not as a category of human being," but rather as a site for the "creative formation" of a deeply personal understanding of one's gender (156). I consider McWhorter's critique to be relevant to lesbian experience. Given that womanhood has historically been defined in relation to some idea of manhood, lesbianism as independent from manhood entails vexed relationships to womanhood. The empowerment that lesbians find in spite of, or perhaps because of, their complicated proximity to traditional womanness is evidence for the value of the self-affirming practices that McWhorter advocates for. When narrowly conceived womanhood fails, the commitment to interrogating identity categories in pursuit of constructive and personal relationships to gender is vital. A lesbian critique has the potential to escape the totalizing tendency that some feminisms have failed to get away from, as solidarity among those with lived experience of

patriarchal womanhood can occur alongside the tension and variation inevitable in any conscious engagement with one's gender.

To discuss the potential for resistance to masculine hegemony through lesbian gender performances requires an understanding of the existing model of gender hierarchization that lesbianism must work from. In "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt explain that hegemonic masculinity does not refer to "a certain type of man," but rather to "a way that men position themselves" in relation to others through their ways of being and interacting (841). Men are defined by their proximity to an ideal which, whether or not it is achievable, determines their position in a culture of social dominance and subordination. Importantly, this process "requires the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women" (Connell & Messerschmidt 844). Thus, given the relational nature of gender, women are also implicated in any model of gender hierarchization, and hegemony is impacted by "new configurations of women's identity and practice" in addition to men's (Connell & Messerschmidt 848). I argue that lesbianism, by definition entailing unique relational formations that complicate 'normal' gendered power dynamics because they do not involve cisgender men, can be an important site for analysis. Lesbiandisruption of gender hegemony can therefore act as a "demonstration of its vulnerability" and of alternatives to it (Connell & Messerschmidt 851).

If gender failure is to be thought of as "a refusal of mastery" (Halberstam 11), then lesbian ways of being and relating, unconstrained by the heteropatriarchal ideals they will never live up to, can be a site for reimagining normative gender performance in practice. In "Patriarchy Interrupted: Differential Realizations and Manifestations of Power in Butch/Femme Relationships," Rachel Silverman and Kristin Comeforo argue that "femme and butch identities disrupt the hegemonic power of the gender binary" (146). While outwardly appearing to imitate heteronormative gender performances, butch and femme lesbians in fact *rethink* gender as they construct themselves "outside of the male gaze" (Silverman & Comeforo 145). Silverman and Comeforo write that lesbian "gender performances are imbued with, and derived from, power;" subsequently, the ways in which lesbians disrupt patriarchal power dynamics in their relationships is what makes their genders "transgressive" (148). Independently from the constraints of normative expectations about what it is to be a 'man', and to be a 'woman' in relation to a man, lesbians experiment with the concepts of masculinity and femininity without having to ascribe superiority to either of them.

As a butch-femme couple, Silverman and Comeforo construct and enact gender in relation to each other, exchanging and deconstructing power with a "fluidity [that] is the opposite of patriarchy" with all its entrenched rules and limitations (148). Butch individuals, whose gender expression is typically more outwardly masculine, more visibly experiment with a synthesis of masculinity and experience of womanhood; however, femme individuals' engagement with taken-for-granted norms of femininity also results in "a more conscious understanding of gender performance" (Silverman & Comeforo 146). As every lesbian gender performance complicates ideas of masculinity and femininity by enacting them outside of the male gaze, lesbian experimentations with gender "can be used as a weapon to dismantle the patriarchal gender binary" (Silverman & Comeforo 146). Lesbians exercise radical creativity as they relate to each other without cisgender heterosexual male intervention, and with a critical attitude derived from shared experience of patriarchal subordination under the constraining gender norms they "fail" at.

Following from the ways in which gendered hierarchies of power can be disrupted within lesbian identities and relationships, lesbianism in turn models alternative kinship formations. In "Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family," Kim Tallbear explains that the patriarchal nuclear family structure is a settler-colonial invention that has been enforced to oppress and assimilate Indigenous peoples. She argues that many Indigenous kinship formations, based on interdependence and collective caretaking, "*[exceed]* rather than *[fail] to meet* the

requirements of settler sex and family" (156). For Tallbear, deconstructing the colonial idea of the nuclear family will involve "recognizing possibilities of other types of intimacies" not bound to reproduction and the self-contained family unit (154). Tallbear suggests that nonmonogamy is one way of disrupting the constraining norms of settler sexuality, and I argue that lesbian communities also provide an example of the ways in which groups of people can "collectively fortify" each other (163).

Lesbians regularly relate to each other in ways that transcend the limits of traditional relationships, blurring the lines between intimate relationships and friendship. For lesbians, the closeness and camaraderie of women's friendships exists alongside sexual and romantic attraction and relationships. Lesbian communities can therefore be spaces where "love and relations are not considered scarce objects" (Tallbear 163). Beyond personal relationships, Elizabeth Currans argues in "Claiming Deviance and Honoring Community: Creating Resistant Spaces in U.S. Dyke Marches" that Dyke Marches complicate an "easy distinction between social and political work" (95). Sistahs Steppin' in Pride, a Dyke March organized by Black lesbians, prioritizes "communal care" with emphasis on both "sexual and nonsexual love" in the face of a culture that fails to care for Black women (Currans 96). The New York Dyke March offers a different but nonetheless transgressive vision, organizing defiantly around a shared "rejection of cultural norms" that regulate sexuality (Currans 76). In advocating for and celebrating themselves, lesbians resist normative expectations for kinship, emphasizing instead the interdependence implied in Tallbear's "spider's web of relations" (161). The fluidity central to lesbian ways of being and relating runs counter to normative tendencies that draw harsh distinctions between sexual, personal, and political social life.

## Lesbianism and Queer World-Building

In "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about Intersectionality?" Kevin Duong outlines the requirements for an effective queer politic reminiscent of Cohen's de-emphasis on identity categories. For Duong, a truly transformative queer politic must rest on a "collective *politicized* identity" from which people act towards a shared "vision of justice" (372). Subsequently, "demographic commonality" is less important to such a politic than is the shared desire for transformative action (Duong 380). As with Halberstam's conception of failure, queer world-building has "a fundamentally creative or inventive dimension" (Duong 380). This creative element is visible in the lesbian relationships that Silverman and Comeforo describe, where in a space "of sexuality and of otherness, there is equality...[and] a redefining of power and a reimagining of what can be" (152). Creativity is also key to McWhorter's envisioning of womanhood as a space for tension and construction rather than predetermination. Furthermore, a creative dimension appears in Currans' account of Dyke Marches, which "queer public space" in order to "model alternative visions of social relationships" to the people in their communities (74).

Lesbian solidarity stems from deep dissatisfaction with taken-for-granted beliefs about gender, power, and human relationships. Lesbian creativity acts on outrage at the incessant hierarchization and policing of gendered life, proving in practice that gender can exist without hierarchization and dominance, and that intimate partner love can exist within and alongside collective interdependence. In "Love as Political Resistance," adrienne maree brown writes that "we need to learn how to practice love such that care—for ourselves and others—is understood as political resistance and cultivating resilience" (24), and I believe that lesbians have long understood love this way. To "cultivate...cultures within a society invested in [our] devaluation" (Currans 75) is radical, and we do it every day.

While I have argued that due to its inherent distance from maleness, lesbianism specifically offers unique perspectives on and reimaginings of oppressive gender hegemony, I believe that these insights can be meaningful for anyone who is unsatisfied with the constraints of dominant gender norms. Ahmed

writes that "we must stay unhappy with this world" that polices human life according to limited ideals of happiness and normalcy (105). A lesbian critique, which derives from but is not exclusively beneficial for lesbians, refuses any 'happiness' that has a place for oppressive gender hierarchy, and it welcomes anyone who shares this perspective. In this way lesbianism, a unique site of gender failure and reconstruction, alternative kinship forms, and radical creativity, can be a jumping-off point for the "leap from individual subjectivity to shared collective identity" (Duong 382) that imagines a queer world *for us all* where gender and relationality are not matters of dominance, but of love and creativity.

## Conclusion

I have argued that because lesbians inevitably fail to live up to normative beliefs about how people should enact gender and relate with each other, lesbianism enables the creative power to subvert and reimagine what it means to be gendered and in relation with others. Lesbians can experiment with gender outside of the male gaze and without pressure to recreate the power imbalances that patriarchy demands. The ability to imagine gender outside of power is an incredible strength of lesbianism; I draw on this insight, as well as on a rejection of narrow identity politics, to suggest that anyone, no matter their sexual or gender orientation, can commit to practicing gender from a similar place of intention and care. What might our social relations look like if they were not always limited by a gendered power matrix that affects all of us? Lesbians prove that it is possible to enact gender, and to do so in relation with others, without paying regard to the power inequities associated with patriarchal conceptions of cisgender, heterosexual manhood. As a blueprint for transformative enactments of gender and kinship that run intentionally counter to restrictive hegemony, the unique insights derived from lesbianism can provide the foundation of a queer world vision that works for everyone.

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# Memes vs. Machines

## *Comparison of AI-generated Images vs. Traditional Memes in Right-Wing Social Media Discourse*

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Keywords: Digital Political Communication, Generative AI, Meme Culture, Propaganda, Right-Wing Extremism Online

Abstract:

*This paper examines the use of traditional internet memes and AI-generated images in the dissemination of right-wing ideologies on social media, focusing on their prevalence and engagement. Data was collected from prominent right-wing accounts and meme-centric profiles on Twitter/X during the two months preceding the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Prevalence, measured by the volume of posts, demonstrated that traditional memes dominate right-wing discourse, accounting for 77% of visual content shared by large accounts and 90% by smaller ones. Engagement metrics, including weighted interaction and virality scores, revealed that AI-generated images, while less frequent, achieved significantly higher engagement levels, particularly in large accounts. These findings suggest that memes serve as versatile and broadly appealing tools for ideological dissemination, while AI-generated images are more impactful in targeted, high-engagement contexts. The study highlights the complementary roles of these formats in right-wing messaging strategies and raises critical questions about the evolving implications of generative AI for political propaganda, emphasizing the need for future research into its influence across digital platforms.*

## 1. Introduction

"In Springfield, they're eating the dogs—They're eating the cats."[1] This sensational claim, made by then-presidential nominee, Donald Trump, during a televised debate with Vice President Kamala Harris on September 10, 2024, quickly became a cultural flashpoint in that year's US presidential campaign. Though immediately debunked, the claim was an instant hit with right-wing audiences and generated an incredible amount of discourse on social media. Before the debate ended, right-wing Twitter/X accounts were alight with images produced by generative artificial intelligence (AI) which amplified the theme: immigrants eating pets and Trump cast as the pets' saviour.

The right-wing's strategic use of social media, particularly through visual elements like "memes," has been widely studied, with much attention paid to their reliance on humour and cultural references to spread ideology. The rise of generative AI, however, marks a significant shift in this dynamic. The proliferation of accessible text-to-image tools has enabled the creation of AI-generated images on a massive scale. This phenomenon raises an important question: how do generative AI images differ from traditional internet memes in conveying right-wing ideologies?

This paper begins by looking at traditional memes and generative AI models, with a brief focus on its harmful potential for social media manipulation, followed by an exploration of how right-wing actors use social media to spread ideological messages. The methodology section explains the social media platform and account selection processes, as well as the engagement metrics used for analysis. The findings section compares engagement patterns across memes and AI-generated images, revealing different strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the discussion considers the broader implications of these findings for the online dissemination of right-wing ideology, an overview of this study's limitations, and concludes with suggestions for further research into the use of generative AI for ideological spread.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Internet Memes:*

The term *meme* was originally coined by biologist Richard Dawkins in 1976 to describe the way humans "pass on cultural information and ideas between individuals and generations."[2] Internet memes, however, represent a relatively recent phenomenon that builds on this concept in a digital context. Scholars define internet memes in various ways, often emphasizing their humour and visual appeal. For example, they are described as "digital items that use humor, by conveying a picture or illustration with simple captions."[3] They are a form of "vernacular online communication" or critique which amplifies ordinary voices through accessible (visual) and relatable (humorous) formats.[4] Internet memes are effective due to their brevity, humour, and emotional resonance. Lyndon Way explains memes are "short, snappy, entertaining—express a particular point of view through humour."[5] They encapsulate complex ideas concisely, all while creating an emotional impact. Way summarizes memes as "manipulated texts produced and distributed for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, —to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence discourse."[6] In this sense, memes are inherently participatory — they are digital items that are "remixed, altered, and produced or co-produced by multiple users."[7]

[1] Riley Hoffman, "READ: Harris-Trump Presidential Debate Transcript," *ABC News*, September 10, 2024. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/harris-trump-presidential-debate-transcript/story?id=113560542.
[2] Lyndon C.S. Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right: Emotive and Affective Criticism and Praise," *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 25, no. 3 (December 15, 2021): 791.
[3] Karoline Ihlebæk et al., "What Is the Relationship between the Far Right and the Media?" *C-REX - Centre for Research on Extremism* (blog), September 7, 2020.
[4] Katharina Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog? A Visual Meme Caught Between Innocent Humor, Far-Right Ideology, and Fandom." In *Perspectives on Populism and the Media*, ed. Benjamin Krämer and Christina Holtz-Bacha. (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2020), 339.
[5] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 791.
[6] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 791.
[7] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 338–39.

Internet meme culture, which includes viewing, creating, sharing, and commenting on memes, has become one of the most important forms of political participation and activism, used to criticize, ridicule, or *troll*[8] authority figures.[9] Memes, with their ability to easily bring mainstream media topics to social media users, have the power to influence the way viewers perceive other people and the world around them.[10] As a result, internet memes have become a way to understand and challenge concepts, identities, and claims made by various political groups.[11] The creation, viewing and sharing of memes has become a ubiquitous, near paramount part of modern politics and activism.[12]

A dominant characteristic of memes is that they don't communicate through logically structured arguments. Rather, they use short quips and images to engage and entertain viewers through emotional appeal.[13] This type of communication simplifies facts and opinions, reducing them to bite-sized, affective messages;[14] additionally, memes often "strategically mask bigoted and problematic arguments."[15] By leveraging "affective and emotional discourses of racism, nationalism, and power," memes exploit the visual form to engage with and influence their audience.[16] This intertextuality (the links that are created between the single element and the broader memetic narrative) explains why memes are powerful tools for expressing hate on the web.[17] Through these intertextual references,[18] users can perform their belonging to specific communities and values, creating a sense of identity through shared memes (i.e., proximation illusion).[19] This further illustrates the role of social media in enabling selective exposure, where users are more likely to encounter content that resonates with their existing beliefs and emotions.

Internet humour further intensifies the impact of these messages and helps to normalize harmful stereotypes. When racial or violent content is presented humorously, it becomes easier to mask and make acceptable.[20] Memes achieve this by employing visual symbols which, much like language, gain meaning through usage and context. Hate symbols are particularly effective because they convey "meaning, intent, and significance in a compact, immediately recognizable form," making them more potent than words alone.[21] This masking of ideological claims with humour allows right-wing ideologies to remain accessible and even attractive to a wider audience. As a result, memes serve as a vehicle for aestheticizing racism, blending seemingly innocent pop-culture references with extremist views.[22] Far-right actors have been at the forefront of this process, using memes to mainstream extreme content through humour and coded language.[23] Social media platforms, for their part, have given these actors considerable visibility, helping normalize their beliefs and spreading them further.[24] This highlights the critical role of memes in right-wing online strategy, where the use of visual elements and humour makes hateful content appear more palatable and circumvents traditional barriers to hate speech.

### *2.2 Generative AI:*

Generative AI is a broad term that refers to artificial intelligence systems capable of creating various types of media in response to user-generated prompts. It is an advanced type of "machine learning", with Large Language Models (LLMs) and Text-to-Image (TTI) models being the most developed

[8] Internet "*trolling*" is a term that refers to "any form of abuse carried out online for the pleasure of the person causing the abuse or the audience to which they are trying to appeal." (Lobinger et al. 2020, 343-344)
[9] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 789, 791.
[10] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 791.
[11] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 792.
[12] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 791.
[13] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 789.
[14] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 792.
[15] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 347.
[16] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 789.
[17] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 339.
[18] "To be identified as part of the same meme, the single elements need to share recognizable common features or aesthetic commonalities, which can be certain visual style, a recurring motif or a topic expressed in similar manners or with similar keywords." (Lobinger, et al. 2020, 339)
[19] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 339.
[20] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 339.
[21] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 340.
[22] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 341.
[23] Ihlebæk et al., "What Is the Relationship."
[24] Ihlebæk et al., "What Is the Relationship."

and widely used types.[25] LLMs function by analyzing patterns in human language and predicting the most probable next word in a sequence. This allows them to generate contextually appropriate and human-like responses, whether answering questions or engaging in conversation, one word at a time.[26] Meanwhile, TTI models take a different tack. These systems are trained on massive datasets of labeled images, which they encode into numerical representations in a multidimensional latent *space*. By simulating the process of adding random noise to an image and then reversing it, these models can start with a text prompt, generate a random visual structure, and iteratively refine it into a synthetic image that aligns with the given prompt.[27] The final result is often a high-quality, photorealistic image that can be difficult to distinguish from genuine photographs. An important distinction to keep in mind throughout the remainder of this paper is that memes are nuanced, subtle, and interpretive; AI-images, on the other hand, are an exact representation of a user-generated text prompt. This means the person creating a racist, violent, or hateful AI image has to craft a very specific and detailed text-prompt to achieve the final result.

The evolution of content generation technologies can be thought of in three distinct generations, each marking a significant step forward in the sophistication of digital manipulation. The first generation, referred to as "crudefakes," relied on rudimentary techniques to create false or misleading content, often lacking in realism or credibility.[28] The second generation, characterized by the emergence of bots with more human-like features, improved the ability to spread disinformation by automating content delivery and mimicking authentic interactions online.[29] The current third generation uses generative AI to enhance both the quality of content and the plausibility of its messengers. This iteration combines photorealistic visuals, deepfake videos, and convincingly human-like communication to create and disseminate disinformation at an unprecedented scale.[30] Generative AI blurs the line between authentic and synthetic content, challenging human and machine-based detection systems.

Generative AI represents a technological leap that transforms social media manipulation by addressing key limitations of previous approaches. Unlike earlier methods, which required extensive human labour and were constrained by cost and scalability, generative AI enables the production of authentic-looking content at a fraction of the effort.[31] This includes not only realistic images and videos, but also the ability to create plausible *messengers*, making tactics like astroturfing—coordinated efforts to create the illusion of grassroots support—more convincing than ever.[32] Moreover, generative AI supports large-scale social media manipulation campaigns by combining high-quality content with *resonant* messaging and human-like interactions.[33] The simplicity and adaptability of generative AI enables a variety of actors to use these tools for social media manipulation, including "technically sophisticated nonstate actors," both domestic and foreign.[34] Although detection technologies continue to evolve, it's questionable whether they will keep pace with the evolution and improvement of generative AI itself.[35]

The key takeaway from the previous two sections is that memes, particularly when used as hate symbols, rely on their ability to convey meaning, intent, and significance in a compact and immediately recognizable form. Their power lies in their ambiguity and emotional resonance; the visual elements of memes are difficult to articulate verbally, allowing ideological claims, hateful messages, and racism to be softened or masked when paired with humour or pop-culture references. This ability to obscure harmful intent while

[25] William Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI and the Coming Era of Social Media Manipulation 3.0: Next-Generation Chinese Astroturfing and Coping with Ubiquitous AI." *RAND Corporation*, September 7, 2023, 5.
[26] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 6.
[27] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 6-7.
[28] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 3.
[29] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 3.
[30] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 4.
[31] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 4-5.
[32] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 1.
[33] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 9.
[34] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 2.
[35] Marcellino et al., "The Rise of Generative AI," 5.

maintaining widespread appeal makes memes uniquely effective as tools for mainstreaming extremist ideas. By contrast, generative AI does not operate within this framework of subtlety and intertextuality. Instead, it creates highly realistic images that reflect precisely what the user specifies. While AI images may be humorous, they lack the ambiguity, seemingly innocent aesthetics, and pop-culture references that make traditional memes so effective as instruments of ideological spread.

### *2.3 The Right-Wing on Social Media:*

Today's social media landscape is shaped by what scholars describe as *scroll culture*, a phenomenon in which users are guided by their thumbs: skimming, reading, liking, and commenting on a continuous flow of content that entertains and informs.[36] Within this framework, several key factors help explain how social media facilitates ideological dissemination. One such factor is the proximation illusion, whereby "virtual communities recreate physical communities via personal identification among its members."[37] In this context, individuals can develop a strong sense of identification and belonging toward online groups, just as with real-life groups.[38] Another significant concept is "emotional contagion:" the transfer of emotional states between individuals. Research has long established that emotions, both positive and negative, can spread without conscious awareness. This is particularly relevant to the study of extremism, as experimental evidence now demonstrates that this process can occur on a massive scale via social networks,[39] and it is well documented that what we experience and feel online can impact how we feel and act offline.[40]

Selective exposure to political information, another critical feature of social media, is a process that isolates users from alternative perspectives and leads to escalating political polarization.[41] On most social media platforms, the news feed serves as the primary mechanism by which users see content shared by their friends; however, this content is not presented in its entirety. Because the volume of content produced and shared is far greater than could reasonably appear on a newsfeed, posts must be filtered into something manageable.[42] These filtering decisions are driven by ranking algorithms, which social media providers program to show viewers content most relevant and engaging to them.[43] While such algorithms are ostensibly designed to enhance user experience, they often reinforce echo chambers, prioritizing content that aligns with users' prior engagement and pre-existing beliefs.

Why are these concepts important? They form the foundation for understanding how right-wing actors have leveraged social media to spread their ideologies to global audiences. Historically, individuals seeking right-wing discourse had to actively search for it in online discussion groups, bulletin boards, or forums, such as *Stormfront*: a white supremacist website founded by Don Black in 1995, that became a hub for extremist discussions and community-building.[44] These early online platforms had limited reach and presence,[45] in marked contrast to modern social media which has largely removed traditional barriers to disseminating harmful content; fringe political actors now have the unprecedented ability to popularize their extreme views to mainstream audiences.[46] The visual elements of these platforms have, therefore, become strategic tools in the right-wing playbook. While "ideologically driven websites consist

[36] Way, "Trump, Memes and the Alt-Right," 790.
[37] Julián Castro-Rea, "My Girlfriend Became Neo-Nazi: The Right's Presence and Activity in the Internet." *Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies Working Paper Series*. (UC Berkeley, 2019): 2.
[38] See also: *Social Identity Theory* in Kalin and Sambanis, "How to Think About Social Identity" (2018).
[39] Adam D. I. Kramer et al., "Experimental Evidence of Massive-Scale Emotional Contagion through Social Networks." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111, no. 24 (June 17, 2014): 8788.
[40] Kramer et al., "Experimental Evidence," 8790.
[41] Castro-Rea, "My Girlfriend Became Neo-Nazi," 5–6.
[42] Kramer et al., "Experimental Evidence," 8788.
[43] Kramer et al., "Experimental Evidence," 8788.
[44] Lorraine Bowman-Grieve, "Exploring 'Stormfront': A Virtual Community of the Radical Right," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 11 (October 30, 2009): 996–97.
[45] Prashanth Bhat and Ofra Klein, "Covert Hate Speech: White Nationalists and Dog Whistle Communication on Twitter," In *Twitter, the Public Sphere, and the Chaos of Online Deliberation*, eds. Gwen Bouvier and Judith E. Rosenbaum. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 151.
[46] Castro-Rea, "My Girlfriend Became Neo-Nazi," 5.

of a variety of textual, visual, and participatory elements,"[47] scholars argue that "the visual form is increasingly used for strategically masking bigoted and problematic arguments and messages."[48] This "vagueness of the visual mode" provides an advantage, as it allows for the creation of images, memes, and symbols that subtly convey extremist ideas while masking their intent.[49] By using discretemeans such as euphemisms, coded and multivocal[50] language, or images, ideologically-motivated groups seek to repackage their ideas in ways designed to appear less extreme and more palatable to a broader audience.[51] Social media features like retweets, shares, likes, and hashtags further amplify these messages, creating an enabling environment for right-wing groups to distribute their message outside of their immediate ororiginal network.[52]

Social media providers use automated moderation tools in an effort to curb the spread of harmful content. In response, ideologically motivated actors have adapted their behaviour to evade detection, often relying on deliberate and strategic ambiguity. This approach ensures that "supporters can decode the message in a radical way, but this interpretation can also be denied" if challenged.[53] To achieve this, these groups develop coded languages, cultures, and symbols designed to circumvent censorship.[54] A key tactic in this adaptation is the use of implicit hate speech, including dog whistles, coded language, humorous hate speech, and implicit dehumanization. Such methods spread "hateful messages using subtle expressions and complex contextual semantic relationships instead of explicit abusive words."[55] Furthermore, these groups continuously reinvent and appropriate symbols to prevent them from becoming too recognizable to the general public as coded hate speech.[56] This constant evolution not only sustains their ability to disseminate ideologies but also helps them maintain cultural and symbolic relevance within their social networks.

The final set of ideas to consider before delving deeper involves the ideologies of the groups themselves. Movements like White supremacists, the Alt-Right, the New-Right, and right-wing populists base their worldviews on the conception of 'the people' as a "culturally, ethnically, racially, and/or religiously homogenous community which is to be protected from hostile groups."[57] This perspective positions 'the people' in opposition to perceived enemies, specifically immigrants, minorities, or other groups seen as threatening. Thus, their messaging is framed as a defensive effort against these perceived threats. At the same time, these groups often frame themselves as champions of free speech (which they believe is under siege), arguing that "exaggerated political correctness" and censorship of right-wing discourses by mainstream media, politicians, social media platforms, and other elite institutions have stifled their ability to express their views openly.[58] In response, their use of visual elements, combined with strategies of ambiguity and coded language, becomes more than a communication tool; it is reimagined as an act of resistance or symbolic defiance against a system they perceive as oppressive.[59]

### *2.4 Existing Gaps:*

So far, this paper has established the main differences between traditional memes and AI-generated images, as well as the ways in which they're used by right-wing groups to spread ideological messages through social media. It's important to analyze whether the

[47] Ihlebæk, Figenschou, and Haanshuus, "What Is the Relationship between the Far Right and the Media?"
[48] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 347.
[49] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 347.
[50] Multivocal Communication (aka dog whistle): "...refers to the use of words, phrases, and terminology that mean one thing to the public at large, but carry an additional, implicit meaning only recognized by a specific subset of the audience." (Bhat & Klein 2020, 153)
[51] Bhat and Klein, "Covert Hate Speech," 165.
[52] Bhat and Klein, "Covert Hate Speech," 166.
[53] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 343; Marten Risius et al., "'Substitution': Extremists' New Form of Implicit Hate Speech to Avoid Detection," *GNET*, (June 24, 2024).
[54] Bhat and Klein, "Covert Hate Speech," 152.
[55] Bhat and Klein, "Covert Hate Speech," 166.
[56] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 342.
[57] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 342.
[58] Lobinger et al., "Pepe – Just a Funny Frog?," 342.
[59] Alexis Benveniste, "The Meaning and History of Memes," *The New York Times* (January 26, 2022).

Illustration by Sophia Grace Foder

reception of memes was changed with the introduction of generative AI. There appears to be a research gap in the comparison of traditional memes and AI-generated images vis-à-vis their effectiveness – a concept this paper operationalizes using two key metrics: prevalence and engagement. Prevalence refers to the volume or frequency of content shared across social media platforms, providing insight into how extensively a particular format is used in ideological messaging. Engagement, on the other hand, measures the level of interaction these visuals generate among users (such as likes, comments, shares, or other reactions.) Together, these metrics allow for a comprehensive assessment of how well each medium spreads its intended messages and resonates with audiences.

## 3. Methodology

This research faced several challenges in the data-gathering stage, particularly regarding access to social media analytics. Free, publicly available analytics platforms such as Meta's CrowdTangle were discontinued (e.g., CrowdTangle was shuttered on August 14, 2024), while others, like Twitter/X's internal analytics, were hidden behind paywalls. Many commercial software tools are designed for analyzing personal accounts and require costly subscriptions, which were beyond the scope of this study. Because of these circumstances, adjustments were made and certain limitations had to be accepted. Twitter/X was selected as the social media platform for analysis for two primary reasons: its popularity among right-wing actors and the availability of basic engagement metrics such as comments, retweets, likes, and number of views.

### *3.1 Selection of User Accounts:*

Accounts were chosen based on the following criteria: they had over one million followers, were commonly associated with right-wing discourse in the United States, and were not affiliated with sitting politicians. Using a fresh incognito Chrome browser and a brand-new Twitter/X account, X's own recommendation algorithm was used to select user accounts as they were suggested by the platform (provided they met the above criteria). Beginning with the highly popular account of Donald Trump Jr (@DonaldJTrumpJr) who had 12.5M followers, this method of selection yielded the following accounts for analysis (in no particular order):

| |
|---|
| CatturdTM (@catturd2) – 3.5M |
| Tomi Lahren (@TomiLahren) – 2.6M |
| Dinesh D'Souza (@DineshDSouza) – 4.4M |
| Jack Posobiec (@JackPosobiec) – 2.8M |
| Tim Pool (@TimCast) – 2.2M |
| Ben Shapiro (@benshapiro) – 7.1M |
| Candace Owens (@RealCandaceO) – 5.8M |
| Breitbart News (@BreitbartNews) – 2.2M |
| Tucker Carlson (@TuckerCarlson) – 14.2M |
| Andrew Tate (@Cobratate) – 10.1M |
| James Woods (@RealJamesWoods) – 4.2M |
| Vivek Ramaswamy (@VivekGRamaswamy) – 2.7M |
| Kellyanne Conway (@KellyannePolls) – 3.5M |
| KimDotCom (@KimDotCom) – 1.7M |
| Zerohedge (@zerohedge) – 1.9M |
| Alex Jones (@RealAlexJones) – 2.9M |

Initial observations when gathering data from these accounts showed their use of memes or AI-images was quite limited. Therefore, to ensure a richer dataset, the scope was expanded and an additional search was conducted for 'meme-centric' accounts. The same algorithmic recommendation process was used in the selection, this time starting with LibsofTikTok (@libsoftiktok) with its 3.6M followers and End Wokeness (@endwokeness) with 3.1M. Given the rich amount of data available from meme-specific accounts, the selection parameters were modified to capture right-wing, meme-specific accounts of medium size (between 400,000 and 900,000 followers). The following smaller-sized accounts were recommended by Twitter/X and analyzed in this research:

| |
|---|
| End Wokeness (@endwokeness) – 3.1M |
| Mostly Peaceful Memes (@MostlyPeaceful) – 461.7K |
| The Right to Bear Memes (@grandoldmemes) – 604.9K |
| Declaration of Memes (@libertycappy) – 845K |

### *3.2 Data Collection:*

Without the aid of automated analytics software, the scope was narrowed to focus specifically on the period of time between September 1st and October 30th, 2024—the two months before the US Presidential Election. Using Twitter/X's search function, each social media account in this study was queried using the following two prompts:

> (from: name) since:2024-09-01 until:2024-09-30 filter:media
> (from: name) since: 2024-10-01 until: 2024-10-30 filter:media

The data was gathered over a period of four days, between October 30 and November 2, 2024. Only static images, including memes and AI-generated images, were included. Videos, GIFs, and images in which users "memed" themselves (inserted their own likeness for promotional purposes) were excluded.

### *3.3 Defining Memes and Identifying AI-Generated Images*

Memes were identified for inclusion in these datasets by using simplified criteria drawn from *The New York Times*:

- Memes and their meanings are constructed by multiple users in a social context;
- Memes are pieces of media that are "repurposed to deliver a cultural, social or political expression, mainly through humour";
- Pop-culture: memes are basically editorial cartoons for the internet age;
- The power of a meme lies in its transmissibility and "unique knack for being cross-cultural";
- Memes are shareable by nature – their format catches one's eye and may be read and understood in seconds; and

- "Memes can be quite exclusive," as only people who are familiar with their origin will understand them.[60]

All AI-generated images which appeared on selected user accounts within the search parameters were selected; images not easily perceived as AI-generated were verified via an online AI image detector.[61]

### *3.4 Recorded Metrics*

When compiling the dataset, the following data-points were recorded:

- Engagement metrics: number of comments, retweets, likes, and impressions (number of views);
- Posting date; and
- Brief description of the meme/AI-image.

Additionally, the following derived metrics were calculated and tabulated as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Total interactions | $comments + retweets + likes$ |
| Weighted Engagement Score[62] | $\left(\frac{comments+retweets}{views}\right) * \log log\,(likes)$ |
| Weighted Virality Score[63] | $\frac{comments+retweets}{likes+views}$ |

### *3.5 Data Segmentation*

Once data collection was complete, the number of Twitter/X posts in the dataset (n= 1,013) was divided into two groups for comparative analysis:

- Dataset 1: large accounts (>1M followers); and
- Dataset 2: smaller accounts (400K – 900K followers).

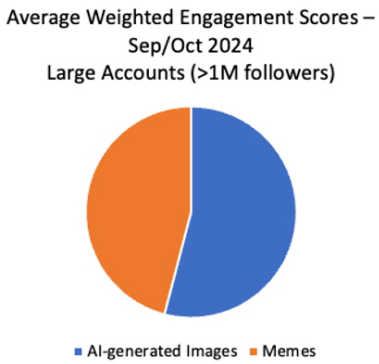
[60] Is It AI?, "AI-Generated Image Detector."
[61] Is It AI?, "AI-Generated Image Detector."
[62] A metric that emphasizes interaction intensity by combining user comments and retweets relative to the number of views, further scaled logarithmically by the volume of likes. This score highlights engagement beyond passive likes, focusing on active participation such as sharing and commenting.
[63] A measure of a post's shareability, calculated as the ratio of comments and retweets to the combined total of likes and views. This score underscores the extent to which a post inspires audience action compared to passive impressions.

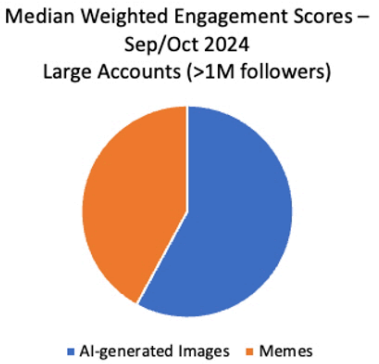
## 4. Comparative Analysis

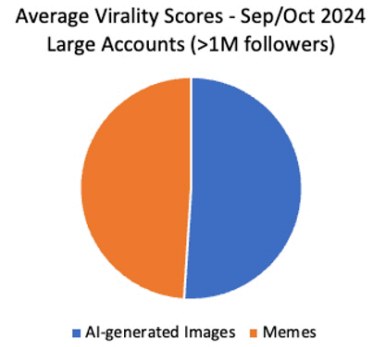
This section compares the differences in engagement between traditional memes and AI-generated images in the collected datasets. Understanding how traditional memes and AI-generated images engage audiences offers insight into the mechanisms through which far-right ideologies are disseminated and amplified on social media. It should be noted that many of the large accounts did not post many memes or AI-images (if at all). Some, such as Tucker Carlson and Ben Shapiro preferring to post video clips linking to their primary venture (e.g., YouTube channel or website). Some accounts, such as Alex Jones, relied heavily on AI-generated images in their video clips; however, those did not meet the selection criteria for this research project and, therefore, were excluded.

### *4.1 Engagement Comparison:*

The datasets revealed that both generative AI images and traditional memes are integral to right-wing social media discourse, though they fulfill different roles. According to the operationalized definition of *effectiveness*—*prevalence* (volume) and *engagement*—traditional memes dominate in volume, accounting for 77% of content in Dataset 1 (large accounts) and 90% in Dataset 2 (smaller accounts). This prevalence underscores their role in right-wing discourse as a "workhorse" for disseminating ideological messages across diverse topics. However, when engagement metrics such as Weighted Engagement and Weighted Virality Scores are considered (see Figures 1 to 4), AI-images consistently outperform traditional memes, particularly among large accounts. This suggests that while memes are more widely used, AI-generated images may serve as a more potent vehicle for capturing attention and sparking reactions in targeted contexts.



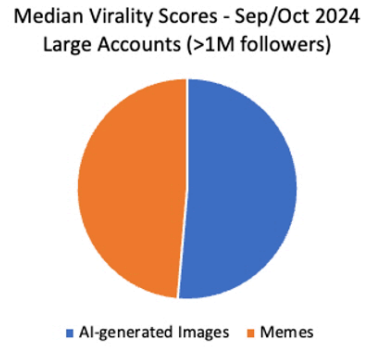
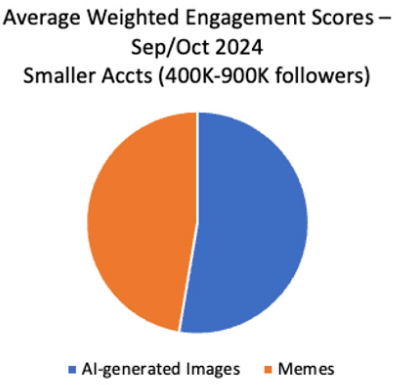
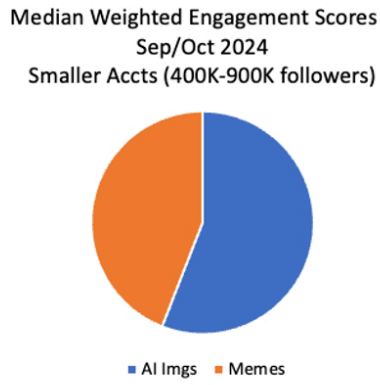
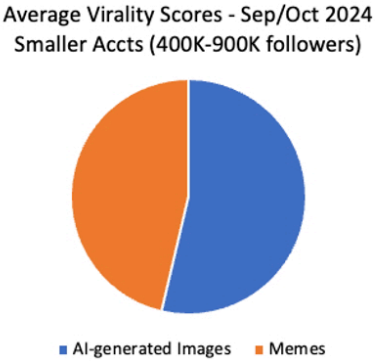




*Figure 1: Metrics for Large Accounts.*



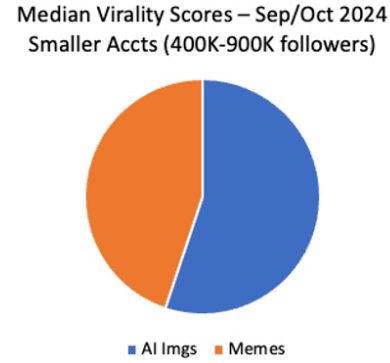




*Figure 2: Metrics for Smaller Accounts.*

### *4.2 Analysis of Engagement Metrics: t-Test Results:*

To ensure the reliability of this study's findings, t-tests were conducted to assess whether the differences in engagement between traditional memes and AI-generated images were statistically meaningful. These tests helped determine whether the observed differences were likely due to chance or reflected real patterns. For total interactions (likes, comments, and retweets), no significant difference was found, indicating that both types of posts generated similar levels of engagement. However, when considering more nuanced metrics like the weighted engagement scores and weighted virality scores, AI-images showed statistically higher scores. These results highlight that while traditional memes remain a powerful tool for ideological dissemination, AI-generated images tend to foster more focused and deliberate engagement and have a greater potential for viral spread on social media.

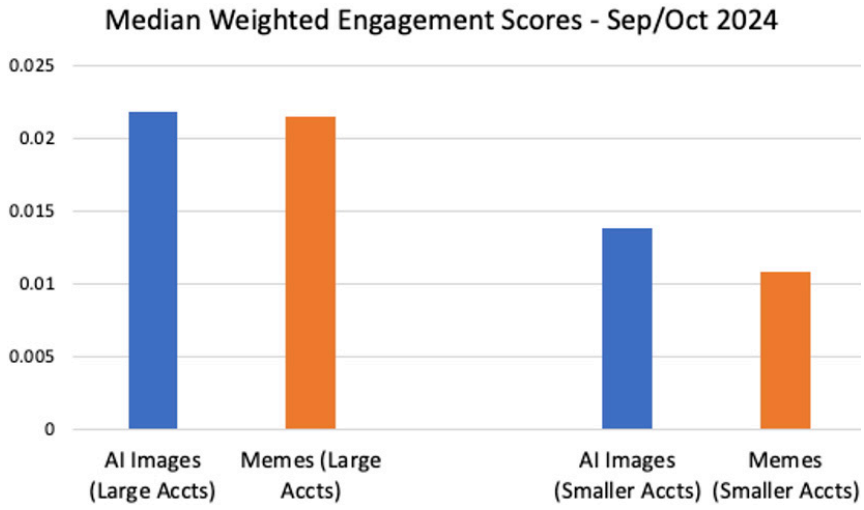



*Figure 3: Median Engagement - Combined.*

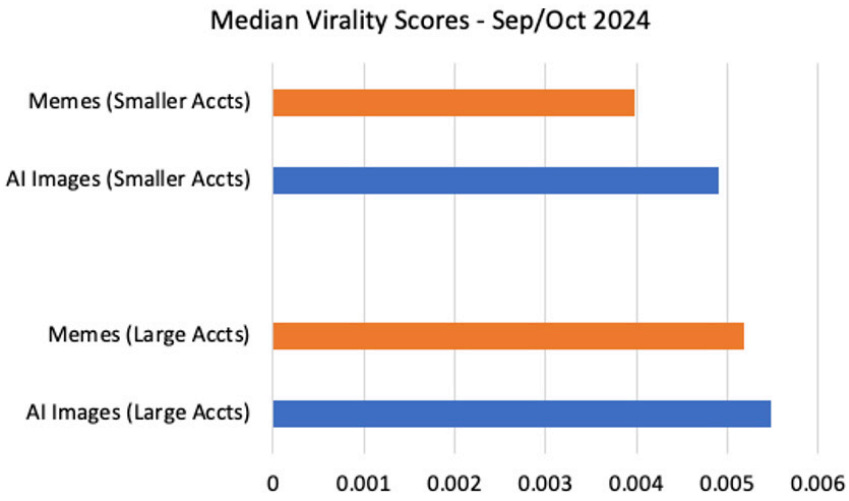



*Figure 4: Median Virality - Combined.*

### *4.3 Engagement Patterns: Findings*

These findings suggest that memes dominate in volume because they are low-effort, high-reward: they are easy to create, understand, and share – which makes them ideal for widespread use. They leverage inside jokes and cultural references, fostering a sense of community among followers.

On the other hand, AI-generated images, though less frequent, may garner more attention because they are novel and visually striking, potentially breaking through the noise of endless meme scrolling. Thinking back to "scroll culture," AI-generated images may have a competitive advantage due to their eye-catching, high-resolution visuals, which can disrupt habitual scrolling behaviour. AI-images may, therefore, be better suited to single, impactful statements rather than sustained narratives.

### *4.4 Engagement Variations by Account Size:*

An interesting disparity was observed when comparing average total interactions with memes and AI-images within each dataset: in large accounts, AI-images were interacted with more than memes. This was reversed when looking at the smaller accounts (Figure 5).

This presents an intriguing question: why do AI-images outperform memes on larger accounts but not on smaller ones? There are a number of possible explanations for this. Larger accounts may have a more diverse following, making visually striking AI-generated images stand out more. Recalling that memes are nuanced and often require a shared cultural knowledge, AI images may be more universally understood due to their explicit and unambiguous representations of a user's text-prompt. Another explanation may be the accounts' posting strategies: smaller accounts may focus more on memes because they cater to the niche audiences that already share the cultural context for meme comprehension.

### *4.5 Broader Implications of Findings*

The overwhelming frequency of traditional memes reinforces their broader appeal and utility in right-wing discourse; their recurrent appearances and ability to address diverse topics suggest they are effective and versatile tools for broad dissemination of ideological messaging. The slightly higher engagement with AI-generated images suggests they may capture more attention when they appear and may be more effective in sparking reactions for specific, visually striking posts. These patterns might reflect the evolving role of AI in political propaganda and signal a shift toward more personalized, targeted, and emotionally engaging content.

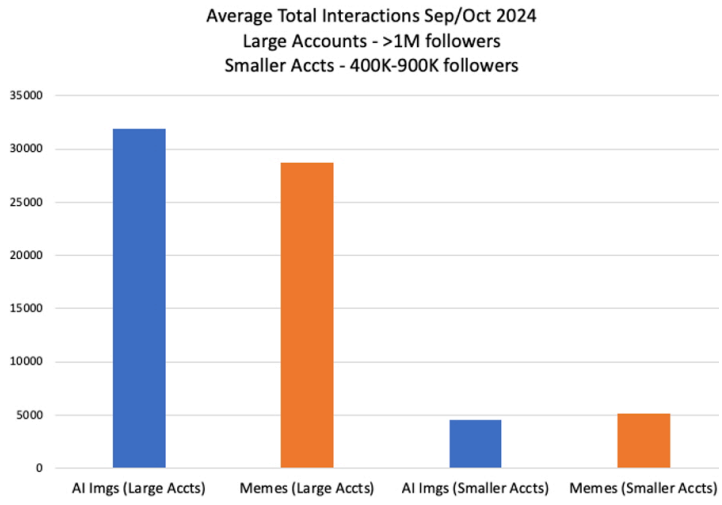



*Figure 5: Average Total Interactions – Combined.*

## 5. Discussion

This paper has explored the roles of traditional memes and AI-generated images in the spread of right-wing ideologies on social media. While each format serves a distinct purpose, together, they reveal the emerging strategies used to capture attention and spread ideological messages.

### *5.1 Effectiveness of Memes:*

Traditional memes dominate right-wing discourse in terms of volume – they made up 77% of posts from large accounts and 90% of posts from smaller accounts in this study's datasets. Memes are easy to create and share, often leveraging humour, pop-culture references, and inside jokes to build a sense of community among like-minded followers. This relative simplicity and accessibility make them an effective tool for covering a broad range of ideological topics. However, their higher prevalence does not necessarily translate into stronger engagement. Compared to AI-generated images, memes were less effective at driving interaction on individual posts. In other words, there is a trade-off between memes' strength as a tool for reaching large audiences, and their relative weakness in creating the kind of visual or emotional impact that grabs more direct attention.

### *5.2 Effectiveness of AI-Generated Images:*

Generative AI images proved to be more effective at capturing attention in specific contexts, particularly among large accounts. While not all AI-generated images were popular (possibly due to their bland nature), a few poignant images generated immense engagement rates. Nevertheless, these findings suggest AI images' novelty and polished visuals stand out on news feeds saturated with memes and text-based posts. They appear especially suited for posts aiming to make a bold statement or provoke strong reactions. Put another way, unlike memes, which are well-suited for continuous, low-effort posting, AI-generated images may serve a different purpose: they are attention-grabbers when used sparingly, but

Illustration by Sophia Grace Foder

strategically, for maximum impact.

***5.3 Limitations:***

This study's scope has several limitations, which has already been alluded to. First, the datasets were limited to only one social media platform (Twitter/X) and covered only a short time-period (September to October, 2024). This focus on a single platform and specific moments in time may not fully capture the broader trends in right-wing social media activity. Second, this study did not consider hybrid formats, such as videos, that might have incorporated AI-generated content (even though these are becoming more common as generative AI evolves). Additionally, without access to advanced analytics tools, it was not possible to analyze the role of algorithms in boosting engagement, to explore user demographics in detail, or to determine when certain posts received the most engagement. The decision to focus on prominent right-wing accounts may also skew the findings, as these accounts may have more resources and (in the case of large accounts especially) professionalized social media strategies.

***5.4 Implications for Future Research:***

These findings suggest several directions for future research. As generative AI technology becomes more accessible and realistic, its use in digital propaganda is certain to grow. Studies could explore how AI-generated content evolves over time and whether it eventually overtakes traditional memes in their effectiveness for spreading ideological messaging. Expanding the analysis to other platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, etc. could also provide a clearer picture of how these two mediums function in different digital ecosystems. Additionally, thematic analysis of the content itself could help identify trends in messaging strategies employed by right-wing groups, as well as to determine which themes are most appealing to their audiences. Finally, understanding the role of algorithms in shaping what users see is key. Platforms that rely on personalized recommendations may be amplifying certain types of content over others, influencing the reach and engagement of right-wing messages in ways that creators might not anticipate.

## 6. Conclusion

This study originally hypothesized that traditional memes are more effective than AI-generated images in spreading right-wing ideology, due to their subtlety, humour, and cultural resonance. However, the findings reveal a more nuanced reality. Traditional memes are more prevalent and broadly used tools for right-wing ideological dissemination due to their adaptability and broad appeal. Generative AI images, while less frequent, achieve higher engagement rates when used strategically, particularly around emotionally charged or already-viral issues. In other words, the findings demonstrate that memes' effectiveness lies in their prevalence and thematic versatility, while AI images excel in engagement for niche, but impactful, topics.

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# Perceptual Distinction of English /l/ and /ɹ/ by Japanese Native Speakers

## *A Phonetic Study and Analysis*

**Author: Phoebe Lam, Kristine Singson and Sean Chan**

Keywords: Phonetic Perception, Second Language Acquisition, Speech Production

Abstract:

*The conventional belief of language acquisition studies assumes that language learners must first be able to perceive phonetic differences between sounds before they can produce said sounds distinctly. In particular, second language acquisition theorists typically assume that phonologically distinct sound production in L2 (the second language) cannot happen without its perceptual distinction. However, existing research regarding native Japanese speakers learning English challenges this framework. While we were unable to conduct a full study due to constraints of time and resources, we were interested in investigating sound perception in Japanese speakers with a low level of proficiency in English. In this study, we tested five participants who were native Japanese speakers who had spent between six months to a year in Canada. Their ability to differentiate /l/ and /ɹ/ sounds in minimal pairs were tested and graded, with the results analyzed for patterns or tendencies.*

## Background

In language acquisition studies, it is often thought that phonological errors made during speech production in a second language learner fall into one of two categories: inability to perceive phonological distinction, or the learner can perceive the difference but cannot produce it. A study by Wrembel et al. (2022) demonstrates that second and third language learners score significantly better on phonological perception tasks than production tasks. These findings suggest that learners may often be able to perceive phonological distinctions while being unable to produce them accurately. However, research by Goto (1971) and Sheldon and Strange (1982) contradict this framework and suggests instead that Japanese speakers learning English may be able to produce certain phonological differences even without perceiving it. This prompts investigation regarding the applicability of the typical production error categorization on Japanese learners of English. Indeed, it may be the case that this group of English learners produce phonetic differences without being able to accurately perceive their distinction. In an educational context, language instruction often emphasizes auditory feedback as a way for language learners to produce the "correct" phonemes. However, if production can, in fact, come before perception, this may not be the most effective method of teaching pronunciation. It is entirely possible that a focus on instructed articulation and proprioception may be more beneficial. Thus, exploring Canadian English speech sound perception and production in Japanese speakers may be crucial to second language acquisition and pedagogy.

The English sound system has a diversity of phonetic differentiations that do not exist in the Japanese language. One of the most salient examples among these is the Japanese use of the tap /ɾ/ compared to the English usage of /ɹ/ and /l/. The Japanese sound system uses the tap /ɾ/, romanized as "r", and does not contain the alveolar approximant /ɹ/ and alveolar lateral approximant /l/. The tap /ɾ/ is not typically spelled with an "r" in Canadian English. This sound is sometimes described as a "soft d sound" and appears in words like "ladder" and "butter" in Canadian English, spelled with a "dd" or "tt". Conversely, English contains both the /ɹ/ and /l/ sound and they are phonologically distinct, appearing in words like "red" or "light" respectively. As a result, native Japanese speakers are unlikely to perceive and produce the /ɹ/ and /l/ sounds of Canadian English in the same way as a native English speaker. It has been suggested that native Japanese speakers with low levels of fluency often struggle to differentiate between these two sounds in production.

## Research Questions

In this study, we are investigating if Japanese native speakers can perceive the distinction of /ɹ/ and /l/ in Canadian English. We hope to gain better insight into the level of perception that a native Japanese speaker might have between these sounds, which are not phonologically distinct in their native language. As well, the study will aim to explore whether /ɹ/ and /l/ are easier to perceive in the onset or following a consonant, and if this differs depending on the vowel that occurs after the target sound. By testing a variety of phonological environments that /ɹ/ and /l/ occur in, we hope to find potential patterns in the ease of recognition based on the environment. As such, our two central exploratory research questions are as follows: if Japanese speakers can distinguish the difference between /ɹ/ and /l/ sounds, and if the phonological environment impacts the ability to differentiate.

## Methodology

The experiment used 12 minimal pairs for a total of 24 words. Minimal pairs are defined as word pairs that are identical in pronunciation with the exception of one phoneme, which can then be used to isolate and test those specific sounds. Of the words used in this experiment, 8 pairs contained the target sounds /ɹ/ and /l/ while the remaining 4 contained /b/ and /v/ differentiation and

served as distractors. Within the 8 target minimal pairs, 4 of them contain words that start with the target sound, such as “light” and “right”, while the other 4 contain words which use the sound in consonant clusters, such as “fly” and “fry”. However, there were no words which ended in the target sound as minimal pairs that fulfill this distribution do not exist in English. There were some near minimal pairs, such as “car” and "call", but we decided against the inclusion of near minimal pairs as we could not guarantee possible influence of any phonological rules in these cases.

The word list is as follows:

1. Read
2. Fly
3. Berry
4. Clock
5. Root
6. Vowel
7. Gland
8. Right
9. Bat
10. Pray
11. Rip
12. Bowel
13. Loot
14. Vain
15. Grand
16. Lead
17. Play
18. Very
19. Light
20. Bane
21. Crock
22. Lip
23. Fry
24. Vat

The study was conducted through a facilitator, who met with several Japanese youths, either in person or over zoom, one at a time. Directions were given in both Japanese and English. The participants were given a fill-in-the-blank questionnaire where the target consonants were left blank, and with the rest of the word provided for them. They were then asked to listen to a single continuous audio file of a native English speaker reading the words aloud in order, with a brief pause between each word. See below for an example of the test provided:

> 音声を一回聞いて、直感で空欄を埋めてください！同じ単語が何回も出て来る可能性があります。お願いします。

Please play the audio once and fill in the blank based on what you hear, trust your intuition!! It is possible that certain words may appear multiple times.

1. *_ead*
2. *F_y*
3. *_erry*
4. *C_ock*
5. *_oot*
6. *_owel*
7. *G_and*
8. *_ight*
9. *_at*
10. *P_ay*
11. *_ ip*
12. *_owel*
13. *_oot*
14. *_ain*
15. *G_and*
16. *_ead*
17. *P_ay*
18. *_ery*
19. *_ight*
20. *_ane*
21. *C_ock*
22. *_ip*
23. *F_y*
24. *_at*

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the experimental design and materials. A Japanese exchange student was asked to perform the task and provide feedback to the researchers and her results were analyzed for any possible patterns that could have been a result of experimental design. After completing the task, the participant expressed that she found the audio too fast and struggled to determine and write down the correct sound in the time allotted. This was fixed in the experiment, a new audio file was recorded with a 2-3 second pause between each word. Further, the facilitator noted that the participant expressed desire to listen again and was inclined to search words up on the internet to confirm the spelling. As a result, it was determined that it is preferable for a facilitator to be present for each participant to guarantee experimental integrity and consistency.

## Participants

The study was conducted with a total of 5 participants, with ages ranging from 20 to 24. Each individual had spent between 6 months to a year living in Canada, learned English since middle school, and continued to study the language at the university level. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of time and resources, 4 out of 5 trials were conducted over video chat. Detailed participant information can be found in Figure 1.

| Participant | Age | English Education | Duration in Canada | Region of Origin | Familiarity with keyboard |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant #1 | 21 | Elementary (1hr per week), Middle school, High school and UofA EAP 103 and EAP 135 | 7 months | Niigata | yes |
| Participant #2 | 24 | Middle school, 3 years high school and 2 university classes at 北海道教育大学岩見沢校 | 1 year | Hokkaido | yes |
| Participant #3 | 20 | 3 middle school, 3 years High school and self study 1 hour a day | 1 year | Shiga | yes |
| Participant #4 | 22 | Middle school to university | 8 months | Kyoto | yes but "bad" in typing English (prefers handwritten) |
| Participant #5 | 20 | Middle school to university | 6 months | Niigata | Yes but prefers handwritten |

*Figure 1: Participant Information Chart.*

## Results and Analysis

The results can be found in Figure 2. The table is given in the same order as that which the participants were given the words in. However, all distractors have been removed for clarity. In the table, green is used to denote correct responses and red for incorrect ones. The far-right column totals all five responses; here, green is used for words that received a score of 4 or more, red used for words with 1 or less, and yellow for everything else. The participants' individual totals are provided at the bottom of the table.

As seen, all participants correctly identified the words "read" and "fly", while none were successful in identifying "pray" or "gland". The results do not appear to be influenced by the type of vowel nor whether or not the word contained a consonant cluster. In the aforementioned cases, "read" and "gland" are followed by front vowels, whereas "fly" and "pray" are followed by diphthongs. In one notable case, a participant responded with "w" for "rip", which was an unexpected response. The experiment was designed under the assumption that participants would only struggle between alveolar sounds and did not account for any other type of misidentification. Interestingly, one participant requested to repeat the task, which was allowed. Their second set of responses differed from the first, yet did not result in improved accuracy. This data was excluded from the analysis. Figure 3 further divides up the score, with each participant's individual performance calculated, and a total at the bottom. Experimental score is defined as the number of correct responses out of all the times that "L" or "R" should have appeared, whereas accuracy scores are calculated out of the number of times "L" and "R" were given as a response. Hence, all the experimental scores were out of eight, while the accuracy score varied.

| L/R Words | Participant #1 | Participant #2 | Participant #3 | Participant #4 | Participant #5 | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Read | R | R | R | R | R | 5/5 |
| 0. Fly | L | L | L | L | L | 5/5 |
| 0. Clock | L | L | R | L | L | 4/5 |
| 0. Root | L | L | R | R | R | 3/5 |
| 0. Gland | R | R | R | R | R | 0/5 |
| 0. Right | R | L | R | L | R | 3/5 |
| 0. Pray | L | L | L | L | L | 0/5 |
| 0. Rip | L | W | R | L | L | 1/5 |
| 0. Loot | L | R | R | R | R | 1/5 |
| 0. Grand | R | L | R | R | L | 3/5 |
| 0. Lead | L | R | L | L | R | 3/5 |
| 0. Play | L | L | L | L | R | 4/5 |
| 0. Light | L | R | L | L | R | 3/5 |
| 0. Crock | L | R | L | L | L | 1/5 |
| 0. Lip | L | R | L | L | L | 4/5 |
| 0. Fry | L | R | L | L | L | 1/5 |
| Total | 10/16 | 6/16 | 10/16 | 10/16 | 6/16 | 42/80 |

*Figure 2: Participant Results.*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Participant #1**<br><br>Raw: 18/24 (75%) | | L | R | Total |
| | Experimental Score | 7/8 (88%) | 3/8 (38%) | **10/16 (63%)** |
| | Accuracy Score | 7/12 (58%) | 3/4 (75%) | 10/16 (63%) |
| **Participant #2**<br><br>Raw: 12/24 (50%) | | L | R | Total |
| | Experimental Score | 3/8 (38%) | 3/8 (38%) | **6/16 (38%)** |
| | Accuracy Score | 3/7 (43%) | 3/8 (38%) | 6/15 (40%) |
| **Participant #3**<br><br>Raw: 16/24 (67%) | | L | R | Total |
| | Experimental Score | 5/8 (63%) | 5/8 (63%) | **10/16 (63%)** |
| | Accuracy Score | 5/8 (63%) | 5/8 (63%) | 10/16 (63%) |
| **Participant #4**<br><br>Raw: 11/24 (46%) | | L | R | Total |
| | Experimental Score | 3/8 (38%) | 3/8 (38%) | **6/16 (38%)** |
| | Accuracy Score | 3/8 (38%) | 3/8 (38%) | 6/16 (38%) |
| **Participant #5**<br><br>Raw: 13/24 (54%) | | L | R | Total |
| | Experimental Score | 6/8 (75%) | 4/8 (50%) | **10/16 (63%)** |
| | Accuracy Score | 6/11(55%) | 4/7 (57%) | 10/18 (56%) |
| **Total**<br><br>Raw: 70/120 (57%) | | L | R | Total |
| | Experimental Score | 24/40 (60%) | 18/40 (45%) | **42/80 (53%)** |
| | Accuracy Score | 24/46 (52%) | 18/35 (51%) | 42/81 (52%) |

*Figure 3: Expanded Participant Results.*

Overall, the participants performed slightly better at identifying /l/ sounds compared to /ɹ/ sounds, though the difference was not substantial. This may be because they tended to choose /l/ more frequently overall. While /l/ sounds have received a test score of 24/40 between all 5 participants, the accuracy score per use is actually 24/46. In other words, the higher percentage score is a result of "L" being selected more often, and is not necessarily a result of a higher ability to perceive the sound. The reverse is also true for the /ɹ/ sound– although the sound received a test score of 17/40, the accuracy score was 18/35. The level of accuracy was at chance and seems to vary without a distinct pattern or influence. In examining further categories, similar results were found. With the score divided by vowel type, the totaled performance of all participants was 16/30 on front vowels, 9/20 on back vowels, and 16/30 on diphthongs. Participants' accuracy based on the placement of the target sound within the word was 23/40 for those at the beginning of the word and 18/40 in consonant clusters. While there was a higher success rate in the words starting with the target sound, it was not by a significant margin and the evidence is inconclusive. As such, the phonological environment did not seem to impact the level of accuracy and no clear patterns can be pointed out. Overall, the results show some tendencies, but it's difficult to draw definitive conclusions due to the small sample size of 5 participants. Given the relatively minor differences observed in the results, it seemed that the performance was at chance level.

## Discussion

Based on the results of the experiment, it can be seen that Native Japanese speakers have significant difficulties distinguishing the difference between /l/ and /ɹ/. While we initially hypothesized that the phonological environment of the word was a significant factor, that also did not seem to be the case. However, we have some theories regarding the possible factors and limitations that could have influenced the results.

### Potential Influences

1. **Order Effect:** Participants may have been influenced by the order in which sounds appear as all participants correctly identified the first two experimental items.

2. **Cognitive Load:** Hearing a high frequency of /l/ and /ɹ/ sounds in a row may have affected participants' sound perception. This, too, may have contributed to all participants correctly identifying the first two items.

3. **Word Familiarity:** While it seemed unlikely that participants avoided unknown words, this possibility cannot be entirely ruled out. When asked, participants claimed that they knew some of the words they got wrong. As well, one of the participants expressed uncertainty regarding how "real" the words were. Thus, we believe that it is unlikely that word familiarity played a factor.

### Methodological Limitations

1. **Participant Constraints:** Time and participant availability were significant limitations. Initially, an in-person task would have been preferred, however this proved difficult. We had to recruit participants online as a result, but this introduced unexpected challenges. Each participant listened to the audio with a different device, leading to inconsistency with the audio quality. As well, it introduced the need for confirmation of each participants' keyboard competency and computer literacy to ensure that conducting the experiment online did not take away focus on sound perception.

2. **Demographic:** The small number of participants made it difficult to draw strong conclusions. A larger group of participants would have increased the reliability and validity of the results, especially if similar trends had persisted.

3. **Stimulus Design:** The lists were not counterbalanced across participants, which could have minimized the order effect.

    a. The use of capitalization in the fill-in-the-blank task may have introduced inconsistencies; using all lowercase letters would have been preferable.

    b. More distractor items could have been included to better isolate experimental data as the current list consisting of 2/3 experimental items is disproportionately high.

4. **Task Length:** Efforts were made to keep the experiment brief to avoid participant fatigue, however, this limited the scope of the data collected.

## Conclusion

Our task was to explore if Japanese speakers can distinguish the /l/ and /ɹ/ sounds, as well as investigating any influence from the phonological environment in which these sounds appear. Although the conditions of our study were not ideal and there were confounds that should not be disregarded, we believe that our results hold valid. Our participants were unable to distinguish the two sounds, regardless of phonological environment and the scores were at chance across all categories. As also demonstrated in a study by Miyawaki et al (2022), Japanese speakers score significantly worse in speech sound perception compared to their English speaking counterparts. However, the aforementioned study showed that Japanese participants score above chance level. As such, we believe that a more thorough study, with a greater focus on phonological environments may yield more conclusive results.

A nuanced understanding of how phonological environments impact speech sound perception would be highly beneficial to understanding second language acquisition and language pedagogy. The conventional belief regarding order of acquisition may lack nuance and provide a one dimensional approach to language teaching. As such, we believe that further research should be conducted in order to understand the subtlety of sound perception by Japanese speakers.

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# Protectionism's Paradox
## *Catalyzing Change in the Global South*

**Author: Wyatt Jerome**

Keywords: Donald Trump, Global South Studies, International Political Economy, Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930, Trade Protectionism, U.S.-China 2018 Trade War

Abstract:

*This paper examines the economic and geopolitical implications of Donald Trump's proposed sweeping tariffs on the Global South, contextualizing them within broader global trends of protectionism and multipolarity. Using case studies such as the 2018 U.S.-China Trade War and the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930, the analysis reveals the far-reaching consequences of U.S. protectionist policies, including disruptions in global trade flows, retaliatory measures, and the emergence of new trade alignments. It applies a blend of realism and constructivism to explore power dynamics driving U.S. economic nationalism and the Global South's adaptive strategies, including regional cooperation and alternative institutions like BRICS and the African Continental Free Trade Area. The findings suggest that while tariffs disproportionately strain developing economies, they also catalyze South-South cooperation, technological innovation, and a shift toward multipolarity. By reshaping trade networks and challenging Western-led institutions, the Global South emerges as an active architect of a decentralized global order. The paper argues that these dynamics reflect not only resistance to selective liberal norms but also a proactive redefinition of global trade. Limitations include the need for broader industry analysis and consideration of counterarguments regarding potential U.S. benefits from protectionism. This study underscores the evolving role of the Global South in shaping an inclusive and resilient global economy.*

Illustration by Madelaine Dack

## Introduction

The increasing pressures of the climate and global debt crises in conjunction with ongoing geopolitical conflicts, between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel and Palestine, make the recent American presidential election historically consequential. The implications of this election extend far beyond U.S. borders; They compel nations across the globe to anticipate and adapt to its ripples. Donald Trump's intention to raise tariffs upon his re-election poses significant economic uncertainty for the Global South (Goldman, 2024; Mignolo, 2011). This essay explores the potential these tariffs have to disrupt global trade flows, strain diplomatic relations, and severely alter existing economic conditions in developing nations. To do so, the paper examines two case studies: the U.S.-China 2018 Trade War and the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930. It applies a blend of realism to assess the power dynamics and economic nationalism driving U.S. protectionist policies, and constructivism to explore how the Global South can adapt through coalition building and the creation of alternative institutions. Ultimately, this paper argues that Trump tariffs mirror a broader global trend of protectionism because they increase regional trade alliances and institutions among Global South nations which expedite the progression toward multipolarity.

## Tarrifs — Overview

Before delving into specificities, it is crucial to examine existing literature on the broader economic impact of tariffs. During Trump's campaign, he paraded an unprecedented 10-20% increase on all imports to the U.S. Most recently, he announced levying a 25% tariff on Mexico and China, with "an additional 10% tariff, above any additional tariffs" for China (Pistas, 2024). Furceri et al. (2020) examined macroeconomic data on 151 different countries from 1963 to 2014. Their study found that increases in import tariffs are associated with persistent declines in GDP growth. Specifically, a one-standard-deviation increase in tariffs (3.6 percentage points) led to a 0.4% decline in GDP over five years. Advanced economies generally

experience less volatility due to diversified industries and stable trade relations, while emerging economies face moderate impacts, exacerbated by dependence on global trade. Low-income economies, however, endure the greatest challenges, with higher tariff volatility (standard deviation of 19.2%) and a significant reliance on exporting raw materials. These disparities highlight that tariffs disproportionately affect countries with less economic resilience, potentially reducing labor efficiency, increasing input costs, and hindering productivity growth. As such, the macroeconomic consequences of Trump's proposed tariffs will likely vary across trading partners.

One limitation of the previous study is that it looks at data regarding tariffs for imports. In other words, it merely concerns the countries imposing the tariffs and what impact it had on them. When considering the implications of these tariffs, such as retaliatory measures, it paints a clearer picture of what this means for countries in the Global South, their economies, and their relationship with the U.S. One compelling case study that exemplifies the far-reaching consequences of such tariffs is the 2018 U.S. China Trade War, which highlights the global effects additional tariffs might have. Although this is still an ongoing matter, it can be analyzed nonetheless. To provide a brief overview the 2018 Trade War began during Donald Trump's first term when his administration imposed tariffs on Chinese goods. This move aimed to address what the U.S. perceived as unfair trade practices by China, including significant trade imbalances and alleged intellectual property theft, particularly in areas such as advanced technology and military innovations. To respond, Beijing initiated tariffs of their own on a wide range of American goods (Bradsher, 2019). While China was the focus of these tariffs, the U.S. also imposed, among a few others, a 25% and 10% tariff on steel and aluminum, respectively (Blackwill, 2019). These served to extend the impact from China to other foreign trading partners including the European Union and Mexico.

Carter and Steinbach (2020) analyzed the far-reaching effects of the trade war, particularly on U.S. agricultural and food exports. Their study highlighted that retaliatory tariffs imposed by key trading partners significantly reduced U.S. exports to these markets, resulting in over $15.6 billion in lost trade. They argue that these losses were felt most acutely in the agricultural sector, with products such as soybeans, pork, and coarse grains experiencing the greatest declines. For instance, U.S. soybean exports alone dropped by $7.1 billion. The study also underscored the limited ability of the U.S. to offset these losses. While U.S. exporters attempted to redirect goods to non-retaliatory markets, this effort yielded only $1.2 billion in compensatory trade gains, demonstrating the challenge of finding alternative markets in an interconnected global trade environment. Conversely, non-retaliatory countries, particularly in the Global South, capitalized on these disruptions. South American nations like Argentina, Brazil, and Chile emerged as significant beneficiaries, collectively gaining $13.5 billion in additional trade with retaliatory countries. Brazil, for example, expanded its soybean exports to China, filling the void left by U.S. producers.

Another critical case study of U.S. tariffs is the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930. This american act imposed over 900 tariffs on imported goods by an average of 40-60% (Corporate Finance Institute, n.d.). They were designed to safeguard U.S. farmers and businesses (akin to the potential tariffs of today); however many believe it only served to contribute to the Great Depression and worsened America's economic state overall, making it even more challenging to pull themselves out of economic difficulty. Analyzing the global impact of the act, Michener, O'Rourke, and Wandschneider (2022) found that the Smoot-Hawley Tariff triggered a cascade of retaliatory measures across 35 countries, leading to an average decline of 28%-32% in U.S. exports to retaliatory trade partners. This decline disproportionately affected countries in the Global South, such as Mexico and the Dominican Republic, which experienced import reductions of 53.8% and 37%, respectively. Guatemala, while protesting the tariffs, experienced a smaller trade impact, but its export economy almost certainly faced pressures due to the broader contraction in global trade flows. The study also highlighted

that retaliatory actions extended beyond tariffs, including boycotts and quotas. For example, countries like Argentina and Uruguay actively targeted U.S. goods such as automobiles, reflecting the broader frustration of nations that were economically dependent on U.S. markets. The global response resulted in significant distortions in trade networks, with overall welfare losses in retaliating nations estimated at 8%-16%, particularly affecting economies with limited trade diversification. For the Global South, these shifts amplified vulnerabilities. The collapse of commodity prices and the breakdown of traditional trade relationships left many economies struggling to maintain growth. As such, the Smoot-Hawley Tariff can serve as a historical example of how sweeping protectionist policies by the United States can disrupt global trade and disproportionately harm less resilient economies, further exacerbating inequalities between the Global North and South.

While one can interpret these case studies to seemingly paint an optimistic view of the Global South fostering mutual reliance and thriving as a result, the reality is far more complex and nuanced. These shifts can also illustrate how trade realignments can amplify disparities between Global North and South economies, with some countries benefiting from geopolitical tensions while others bear the brunt. Furthermore, Carter and Steinbach noted that retaliatory tariffs have previously led to increased import prices in affected countries, which weighed heavily on consumers and businesses. In China, the redirection of supply chains to non-U.S. suppliers increased costs, translating into economic inefficiencies and market distortions. These effects were mirrored in other retaliatory countries, further exacerbating economic challenges for nations with limited domestic production capacities. Taken together, though, these findings still suggest that Trump's proposed sweeping tariffs could trigger cascading economic consequences akin to those observed during the 2018 Trade War, which is still exemplified today. While the Global North may face moderate disruptions due to diversified economies and resilient trade networks, the Global South—characterized by higher economic dependence on exports and more limited trade flexibility—stands to suffer disproportionately. As U.S. tariffs disrupt global trade flows, nations in the Global South may either lose access to critical markets or face intensified competition from newly realigned trade partnerships.

## Multipolarity and Protectionism

Protectionism can be broadly defined as an economic policy which aims to restrict imports through governmental regulations such as tariffs. In theory, it is supposed to "promote domestic producers and thereby boost the domestic production of goods and services" (Corporate Finance Institute, n.d.). However, this is not always the case. Although protectionism may seem appealing in theory, its implementation has the potential to reshape the U.S. position on the global stage by redirecting economic dependencies and disrupting the balance of trade relationships between Global North and South countries.

Daria Taglioni's (2023) analysis of global trade highlights the nuanced nature of rising protectionism, revealing how it operates alongside continued liberalization efforts. While tariffs, subsidies, and trade-related climate policies have surged, reflecting a broader shift towards economic nationalism, the global trade system remains dynamic, with countries negotiating deeper agreements and reallocating trade. This interplay reinforces the argument that protectionist policies like Trump's tariffs disrupt global trade flows but do not eliminate them entirely. Instead, these measures catalyze new regional alliances, such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), accelerating the Global South's pursuit of autonomy through alternative trade frameworks. She argues that these developments illustrate that the rise in protectionism, rather than simply reversing globalization, is reshaping it, pushing toward a multipolar world order with more decentralized economic power.

Goldberg and Reed (2023) argue that protectionist policies have gained traction

through events like Brexit (the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union), the Trade wars, and increased nationalist sentiment. They point to how policymakers in major economies have shifted focus from globalization to protecting domestic industries, using terms like "national security" and "reshoring" to justify trade barriers (Goldberg and Reed, 2023, p. 6). It is noted that although this has curbed trade between China and the U.S., it did not lower global trade altogether. Rather, trade was simply reallocated. It can be presumed, according to the article, that they were reallocated into regional or pluralistic trading arrangements exhibited through institutions such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the CPTPP.

Investment in protectionist policies often leads to a diminished stake in international institutions as nations prioritize domestic agendas over collective global cooperation. Protectionism, by design, seeks to insulate national industries through tariffs, subsidies, and trade barriers, which directly undermines the principles of liberalized trade underpinning institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO). For instance, countries that enact protectionist measures often sidestep international trade agreements or weaken compliance with existing commitments, diminishing trust and reducing the relevance of these institutions (Baccini & Kim, 2012). Moreover, as nations become increasingly self-reliant, they may divert resources away from collaborative initiatives in favor of domestic priorities, further weakening institutional funding and influence. The rise of regional trade blocs and bilateral agreements, spurred by protectionist policies, also dilutes the importance of global frameworks by creating parallel systems that bypass traditional structures. This shift not only reduces the effectiveness of international institutions but also risks fragmenting the global order, making it harder to address transnational issues such as economic stability, climate change, and security. This is pertinent because, in many of these cases, the U.S. is seen as the main proprietor of these institutions. As a result, protectionist measures like Trump's tariffs act as a catalyst for recalibrating global power dynamics, enabling emerging economies to assert greater influence and reshape international norms to reflect their priorities, as opposed to the U.S.

Protectionist policies like Trump's potential tariffs compound the world's shift in power dynamics from a unipolar world under the U.S. to a more multipolar world, where actors—members of the Global South—like Brazil, India, and, of course, China become more pivotal key players in the international arena. In the instance of Trump's sweeping tariffs, while they are aimed at strengthening U.S. economic independence, they paradoxically contribute to the erosion of the liberal international order and the rise of a multipolar world, a phenomenon observed by Oliver Della Costa Stuenkel (2024). By disrupting global trade networks and imposing economic pressures on key trading partners, these protectionist policies compel nations in the Global South to seek alternatives to the U.S.-dominated systems. For instance, coalitions like BRICS, which Stuenkel describes as a "diplomatic life raft" (2024, p. 398) for its members, exemplify how the Global South navigates these challenges by fostering regional cooperation and creating parallel institutions, such as the New Development Bank. These efforts do not reflect a rejection of liberal norms but resistance to their selective application, wherein Western powers leverage rules to serve geopolitical interests. Consequently, Trump's tariffs inadvertently amplify the Global South's push for greater autonomy, accelerating the transition to a multipolar order where power is more diffused and less centered on traditional Western hegemony.

## Resilience, Redefinition, and the Global South's Response

Crucially, between protectionism and the rise of multipolarism lies the Global South's ability to exhibit resilience and innovation in the face of tariffs and protectionist policies. While the Global South has often been framed as a reactive player in the international trade system, recent developments underscore its proactive efforts to reshape global trade

dynamics and establish alternative frameworks that reduce dependence on traditional Western-led institutions. This shift reflects not only a strategic recalibration in response to Western policies but also a broader ambition to construct autonomous and inclusive trade systems that prioritize regional and South-South cooperation.

One of the most prominent ways the Global South is navigating the challenge of tariffs is through the formation of regional trade agreements and economic blocs. Initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) highlight the region's ability to consolidate economic resources and foster intraregional trade. By reducing tariffs and harmonizing trade regulations among African nations, the AfCFTA creates a platform for countries to mitigate the adverse effects of external protectionist policies. As analysts like Taglioni (2023) argue, such frameworks not only shield member nations from external shocks but also stimulate local economies by redirecting trade flows internally. This approach enables countries in the Global South to capitalize on untapped regional markets, promoting economic self-sufficiency and reducing reliance on Western imports.

In parallel, nations in the Global South are leveraging technological advancements to circumvent traditional trade barriers. Blockchain technology, digital trade platforms, and the rise of financial technology innovations are revolutionizing how trade is conducted. For example, India's *Digital India* initiative, through efforts such as digitizing customs and trade documentation, promoting e-governance, and enhancing digital infrastructure, has improved trade efficiency by reducing transaction costs and streamlining cross-border exchanges while fostering economic self-sufficiency and empowering citizens with greater access to digital tools and services (Goswami, 2016). Similarly, Brazil's financial technology sector has become a key enabler of trade facilitation, offering innovative, low-cost solutions that help smaller exporters access global markets, bypassing the barriers of traditional, western-led banking systems (Joia & Proença, 2022). Such technological interventions demonstrate the Global South's capacity to innovate and adapt in ways that not only counteract the impacts of tariffs but also strengthen its position in the global trade ecosystem. These efforts are not merely reactive; they represent a deliberate attempt to establish financial autonomy and reshape global economic governance. As Stuenkel (2024) notes, such initiatives reflect the Global South's resistance to the selective application of liberal norms by Western powers, paving the way for a more equitable global order.

The impact of protectionism on trade realignment further underscores the Global South's capacity for resilience. Historical examples like the U.S.-China Trade War illustrate how protectionist policies can inadvertently benefit non-retaliatory nations. During the trade war, South American countries like Brazil and Argentina capitalized on disrupted U.S.-China trade relations by expanding their agricultural exports to China, particularly soybeans. This shift not only provided these nations with new market opportunities but also reinforced the importance of diversification in trade strategies. As Carter and Steinbach (2020) highlight, the ability of Global South nations to adapt and seize opportunities during global trade disruptions reflects their growing agency in the international trade system. Ultimately, the narrative of the Global South as mere respondents to Western protectionism overlooks their role as active architects of alternative trade systems. By forging regional alliances, embracing technology, and leveraging South-South cooperation, these nations are redefining the rules of global trade and challenging the traditional hegemony of the Global North. This proactive approach not only strengthens their resilience against external shocks but also contributes to the broader trend of multipolarism, where global power is more evenly distributed. As Mignolo (2011) and Taglioni (2023) suggest, these developments signal a shift toward a more inclusive and decentralized international trade system, where the Global South plays an increasingly central role in shaping global norms and institutions. This evolution underscores the importance of viewing the Global South not as a passive participant but as a dynamic and innovative force driving the future of global trade.

## Conclusion and Limitations

This essay has argued that U.S. protectionist policies, particularly Trump's tariffs, have served as a catalyst for the Global South's transition toward greater economic autonomy and multipolarity. By exploring historical case studies and contemporary examples, it highlighted the resilience and adaptability of nations in navigating these challenges. However, critical limitations remain. While historical analysis provides valuable insights, the global economy has evolved significantly since the era of the Smoot-Hawley Act. The unprecedented complexity of modern supply chains, technological advancements, and the rise of alternative power blocs means that historical parallels, while instructive, cannot fully account for today's global trade dynamics.

Furthermore, while the essay focused heavily on the agricultural sector as a case study, it is essential to broaden the analysis to include other critical industries such as technology, energy, and manufacturing. These sectors are at the forefront of modern trade disputes and hold immense potential for reshaping the global economic landscape. The interplay of protectionism with emerging technologies like green energy and digital trade warrants deeper exploration to understand the full implications of such policies. Addressing opposing perspectives also enriches the discussion. While protectionism may appear to disadvantage the U.S., some argue it creates opportunities for localized growth and industrial diversification. Moreover, the Global North's ability to adapt through strategic alliances, innovation, or targeted investments could challenge the trajectory toward a multipolar world, adding layers of complexity to the narrative.

Ultimately, this essay emphasizes the agency of the Global South in forging a new path amidst protectionist pressures. The shifts underway reflect not just a reaction to Western policies but a redefinition of global trade norms. As the world transitions into an era of multipolarity, it is this dynamic interplay of resilience, innovation, and opposition that will shape the global order—a world no longer defined solely by the power of the few but by the collective aspirations of many.

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# Skinship
## *Tension in Korean Popular Culture*

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Keywords: Liminal National Identity, K-Pop, Postcolonialism, Queer theory, South Korean media, Skinship.

Abstract:

*While conservative patriarchal ideals remain a dominant force in South Korean society, same-sex "skinship" has found a paradoxical footing on the line of socially unacceptable homoeroticism and Korean cultural heritage. However, it is precisely this contradiction that may provide insight into the discursive production and articulation of a modern "authentic" Korean self through a term I coin as 'liminal national identity'. Using literary studies, qualitative research, and case studies, this research aims to explore the phenomena of "skinship", especially in terms of sexuality, the evolution of how it is understood and exists in Korean society and media, and the means by which it reflects 'liminal national identity'. In doing so, this research elucidates the deprivation of an "authentic" Korean identity through cultural amnesia caused by colonialist conflicts and how it has transformed the way the Korean consciousness interprets, negotiates and contends with its own identity in a modern world. Such critical examination of the interplay between sexuality, colonialism, and power sheds light on the lasting impact that imperialist rhetoric has had on shifting social paradigms in South Korea and provides insight on how South Korea reconstructs identity and reclaims agency through the use of 'liminal nationalism' in a Eurocentric world.*

The *hallyu* wave, as a form of soft power, has been pivotal in facilitating South Korea's rise as a formidable player on the global stage by proliferating Korean popular culture across international audiences. The Oxford English Dictionary (2023) describes this cultural phenomenon, also known as the Korean wave, as the "increase in international interest in South Korea and its popular culture [since the 1990s], especially as represented by the global success of South Korean music, film, television, fashion, and food." Manifestations of this phenomenon include linguistic terms that have infiltrated the English lexicon such as 'skinship' which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (2023), refers to "touching or close physical contact between parent and child or (esp. in later use) between lovers or friends, used to express affection or strengthen an emotional bond." This is particularly demonstrated by K-pop (Korean popular music) idols– one of the most prolific and influential aspects of contemporary Korean pop culture– and more specifically, male idols. Such intimacy amongst these male idols may appear to be fundamentally incompatible with the conservative and patriarchal South Korean societal values due to its subliminal homoeroticism. Yet, such perceived homoerotic interactions between these idols are romanticized by both domestic and international fans who produce fan content such as 'edits' that are disseminated on social media platforms like TikTok. Despite such fan cultures that are potentially resistant to dominant social ideologies and norms in South Korea, there is little fanfare or outrage against such behaviours and it has, in fact, seen encouragement by the popular culture industry instead.

I posit that this perceived tension is posed by the advent of Western cultural ideals which reshaped perceptions of gender, sex and sexuality in South Korean society. While this has facilitated beliefs that skinship is transgressive and radical, in reality, skinship has pre-existed colonial influences as a cultural tradition. Thus, using the lens of queer and postcolonial theory, I aim to conduct ethnographic research using literary studies, content analysis popular media, and anecdotal evidence due to the relative lack of scholarship on this topic in English and Korean. I will begin by laying down the framework of intersectionality through which we will be examining skinship. I will then do an in-depth analysis of skinship as a term and concept, exploring its evolving implicit social connotations throughout South Korea's modern history. In particular, I will focus on pre-Japanese colonialism, the colonial period until the Korean War, and post-colonialism following the war. Finally, I will analyze the complexities of skinship and its success as it applies to contemporary popular culture in the sociocultural context of K-pop. In doing so, I aim to elucidate how skinship reflects the means by which South Korea as a cultural entity must negotiate with reconstructing and articulating its own "authentic" culture under Western influences, especially in the powerful vehicle of popular culture, which is mediated by what I refer to as the liminality of Korean culture.

## Framework of Intersectionality between Queer Theory and Postcolonial Theory

It is first imperative to define gender and masculinity under the lens of queer theory. Judith Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity defines gender as the "stylized repetition of acts" built upon physicality scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideals (p. 519). Therefore, gender is a social construct created by performances in which, rather than "being" a fixed gender as a role, one "does" gender, which is recognized by corporeal markers. From this, we can model masculinity as not monolithic but instead, variable and fluid, responding to its spatial and temporal context which then manifests in various physical and behavioural notations that are prescribed as "masculine." Gender does not make the person; it is the person who constructs gender and hence, gender can be articulated in a multitude of ways through one's behaviours that constitute their gender.

While Butler's proposition of gender performativity delineates different manifestations of gender and masculinity within different societies, it is important to note that these manifestations are not mutually inclusive between different

societies. In fact, differences in sex/gender systems have traditionally been used as justifications for imperialist rhetoric in the form of gender hierarchies. In the context of the East, Edward Said (1994) describes Orientalism, whereby the Occident (Western society) positions the Orient (Eastern societies) as a foreign, fetishized and exotic "other." By asserting Western ideology as being "progressive and modern" in contrast to "backward and barbaric" Eastern ideology, "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" conducive to Eurocentric dominance is proliferated, thus warranting colonial genocide of opposing societal thought, which extends to constructions of gender (p. 13). Thus, through an intersectional paradigm of sex, gender and race, the conflation of masculinity with power gave rise to emasculation as a tactic to deprive Eastern societies of agency, which I will explicate further in the Korean context.

## Definitions, Origin and Pre-Colonial Perceptions of "Skinship"

As aforementioned, skinship or 스킨십 is a portmanteau of skin and kinship, entailing touching or close physical contact. It originated in 1966 as a pseudo-anglicism coined by Japanese scholar Hisako Kokubu in the context of child-rearing (スキンシップ), initially denoting physical intimacy between parents and children. This term was later recontextualized in Korea to refer to "the affectionate touching that often occurs between members of the same sex without necessarily being construed as sexual" (Cho, 2020, pg. 270). What is most significant about this definition is the clarification of skinship as an act that is platonic rather than sexual.

As Cho (2020) explains, "much of this behavior was understood not as homosexuality but as a natural form of intimacy between "younger and older brothers" or juniors and seniors at work or in school" (p. 270). Thus, such acts were not initially perceived or coded as queer but rather, were seen as a form of kinship in line with the prevalence of collectivism in line with Neo-Confucian ideals. The importance of this camaraderie and fraternity is also demonstrated by the term of endearment 'hyung' (형), a term that literally translates to "older brother," but is also used in non-blood relationships to indicate closeness between two men. Oftentimes, the relationship between a hyung and his friend involves skinship and from this, we can understand that skinship is distinctively platonic in nature. It was then in "the twenty-first century that skinship began to gain more widespread use and international recognition, in part due to its appearance in Korean popular culture and media" (Ahn & Kiaer, 2024, p.74). This is exemplified by K-pop idols who engaged in physical intimacy such as hugging (cherryrozes, 2023), sitting on laps (bustyskrt, 2023), and even (but less commonly) kissing (iLikeWooyoung, 2023). Such behaviours in South Korean society also extend into everyday life, as corroborated by personal anecdotes of friends and mentors who recalled casual physical contact between men.

While in Western contexts, the above actions may demarcate queerness or homosexuality, it is imperative to distinguish Korea's unique models of gender and sexuality pre-colonialism which predominantly revolved around the principles of Neo-Confucianism. "Confucian biopolitics has... prioritized the collectivity of the family (and nation)" (Cho & Song, 2020, p. 266), thus equating virtue with adherence to the patrilineal family. In this manner, homosexuality is viewed as disruptive to the social order and kinship system which, therefore, saw the entrenchment of hegemonic heteronormativity. This was especially strictly enforced within the gender class of men due to the androcentric nature of the family system. Ironically, while oppressing queerness, the precedence of familialism and compliance to the model of heterosexuality concealed and, to an extent, created concessions for queerness. As public physical displays of affection between the opposite sexes were frowned upon by Confucian standards, this engendered increased same-sex touch. Thus, as explained by Cho, "homosexuality is not something that can be easily pinned down in South

Korea because there is a widespread belief that men can be intimate with each other, especially while intoxicated" (Cho & Song, 2020, p. 270). Ultimately, as skinship operated within the rigid gender roles of Neo-Confucian patriarchal society, it was not coded or even deemed as possibly being indicative of homosexuality.

## The Transformation of the System due to Colonialism

Korean history has been riddled with conflict, war and occupation by foreign forces, resulting in what John Lie (2015) refers to as 'cultural amnesia': the forgetting and disconnect of peoples to their cultures as induced by rifts. There are two significant rifts in the modern period that I will be focussing on, the first being Japanese colonial rule (1910-45). The Japanese occupation resulted in the cultural genocide of Korea; Korean sentiment was oppressed in an attempt to assimilate the Korean population into imperialist Japan. Language, arts, and so on were (often violently) replaced with that of the Japanese ruling state and any opposition was brutally eliminated. This effectively decimated traditional Korean culture as the nation was deprived of agency and, therefore, an "authentic" identity. Though aspects of the Korean culture were able to persist following liberation from the thirty-five-year Japanese colonial rule, this first rift fundamentally transformed the means by which Korea as a nation articulated its own identity.

The second major rift was the US occupation (1945-48) and the Korean War (1950-53) which further fractured the unified Korean identity; the separation of North and South Korea— the North allying with Russia and South with the US— saw the divergence of political and social ideologies. Simultaneously, this period saw the earnest adoption of Western ideology and policy. As previously explained, Orientalist rhetoric labelled Korea as inferior, weak, and "feminine," in diametric opposition to the strong and "masculine" West. This was further propelled by Korea's history of colonization

Illustration by Ava Fan

and occupation, hence purporting Korean society as primitive compared to the modern and progressive West. Thus, in order to gain respect on the global stage and rid itself of its "savage" and "shameful" past, "[the] postcolonial state engaged in a project of compressed modernization that mimicked the masculine process of colonization by denigrating anything that smacked of the 'feminine'" (Cho & Song, 2020, p. 268). This entailed the militarization of Korea as a means of reinvigorating nationalism and reclamation of "masculine" power. Conversely, this process of "modernization" in which Korea Westernized in order to conform to global colonial systems of power saw the further distancing and othering of Korea from its past self, destabilizing Korean culture as a unique entity.

Another major aspect of Western culture that South Korea adopted was religion in the form of Christianity; as indicated by the Pew Research Centre, Christianity grew rapidly starting from the 1950s (Connor, 2014). While the entry of Christianity pre-exists the modern period (having roots in the Joseon Period), the religious movement was largely suppressed in favour of Neo-Confucian ideals. However, this opening to Western religious influences was a factor that galvanized changes in ideology such as gender and sexuality. Christian values placed gender on a strict binary, assigning corporeal markers and behavioural notions as either masculine or feminine; transgression of this paradigm could be judged as queer and, therefore, unacceptable by social norms (Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982).

Previously, under Korea's traditional sex/gender system, homosexuality was a non-identity that remained relatively unrecognized as a social class in itself. However, Christian intolerance towards "deviant" behaviours combined with Neo-Confucian family ideals, which was further augmented by President Park Chung Hee's "authoritarian ideology of the family-state" that restricted official information about non-normative sexualities (Cho & Song, 2020, pp. 268-269). This dramatically amplified public scrutiny towards potentially homosexual behaviours such as overt acts of intimacy

between members of the same sex, as can also be observed in Western society. Korean views towards homosexuality then become more overtly hostile, a trend which persists to this day, as seen in a study by the Pew Research Center (2023), which showed that 56% of Koreans opposed same-sex marriage in 2023. Sentiments such as homosexuality being viewed as a mental disease and higher levels of queer persecution in South Korea have been personally observed through conversations while residing in Seoul, which could be attributed to the tactics of masculinization as a means of reclaiming power as a nation.

In more recent years, "postcolonial nations worldwide [such as South Korea] have been the site of vigorous new LGBT movements that both mimic and challenge Euro-American models of identity, sexuality, and citizenship," dubbed "queer globalization" (Cho & Song, 2020, p. 263). Linguistically, English queer terms such as gay were transliterated into the Korean language (게이), reflecting the adoption of the Western sex/gender system and, with that, its subsequent social implications such as emancipation from its negative connotations. This was made possible by "the Internet, cinema, and other technologies [which] have... been seen as critical in unmooring these categories from their static and sedentary locations in the "West" and transplanting them to 'Asia'" (Cho & Song, 2020, p. 264). These labels qualified queerness by creating and reconfiguring the very definitions and boxes that compose queerness and in doing so, would have presumably transformed the associations of skinship from that of platonic to more sexual intimacy. Yet, skinship has remained somewhat intact as a cultural heritage of the Korean people. It is precisely this dichotomy between pre and postcolonial Korea that has generated discourse surrounding the tension and dissonance of skinship in popular culture such as K-pop, which I will explicate in the next section.

## The "Performance" of Skinship in K-pop

Skinship has become one of the most iconic and essential aspects of K-pop, specifically in the aspect of fan service. However, it would first be wise to examine the phenomenon of K-pop as a general concept. The K-pop idol refers to a type of celebrity working in K-pop, either as a solo act or, more often, as a group (Elfving-Hwang, 2018). This distinctive factor of working in a group is significant as it allows for skinship through interactions between members within the group itself. Oftentimes, idols (seemingly) foster deep relationships with each other, further tying in with familial and therefore brotherly aspects lent by Confucianism that are displayed by acts of skinship. Another element that distinguishes idols from other types of celebrities is their marketing as a holistic product as opposed to simply for their music; dance, visuals, fashion and even interpersonal interactions are all consumed by fans in content released by companies, thereby packaging the celebrity not just as a singer but an 'idol'. This can largely be attributed to the IMF Crisis of 1997 which fueled neoliberal capitalism. During this time, the socioeconomic status of women drastically rose as they began taking more space in the workforce. Thus, "due to the deconstruction of traditional division of labor, men have been losing hegemonic masculinity" which necessitated a shift in marketing towards catering to female fans and consumerism in the popular culture industry (Jang et al., 2019, p. 683).

This was accomplished by using two major strategies: reversing the gaze and projection and identification. In the first, idols become objects consumed by the female gaze, thus subverting yet not directly challenging the patriarchy. In this manner, the female fan is empowered and liberated from the objectification of their bodies, emancipating them from power dynamics and denaturalizing femininity. In the second, female fans posit themselves into the role that the male idol plays which allows for fantasy. This in turn fosters a deeper feeling of closeness due to the perceived gentleness and warmth of the male idol who subverts hegemonic masculine norms, thus giving a sense of agency to the female fan who is identifying with a male figure (Oh & Oh, 2017). The latter of the two has proved pivotal in the fan activity of "shipping," "the practice of

imagining members of a K-pop group in romantic and sexual relationships," often same-sex (Baudinette, 2023, p. 249). The rise of shipping can be traced to Korean policies of *segyehwa* (globalization) which saw Japanese influences from BL (boys' love, an Achillean genre of media) translated into K-pop pairings. As explained by Baudinette (2023), "idol shipping was a kind of 'play' designed to enjoy their fandom... in 'exciting and sexy ways,'" giving fans the space to articulate and explore their own sexual attraction to their idols under a system that stigmatizes it (p. 260). Thus, by inserting themselves as one of the "othered" K-pop idols engaging in skinship, the female fan is able to fantasize themselves as being in a romantic relationship. This identification of the male K-Pop idol as the "other" also parallels the female fans' own experience of being "othered" – subordinate and unequal to men in their social contexts– and enhances feelings of kinship. These various factors allow female fans to construct their own gender identities in relation to male idols, thus contributing to the success of K-Pop.

The parasocial relationships between fan and idol are capitalized on by the industry who not only tolerates but even encourages acts of skinship and such intimacy. Thomas Baudinette (2023) succinctly explains:

> "In strategically deploying shipping in their marketing and production practices, Korea's popular culture industries have expanded and diversified their markets by absorbing what was once an underground subculture into the mainstream. It has become routine for K-pop idols to perform "fan service," often involving "skinship" and other acts of "performed intimacy" that passionate fans subsequently draw on in the production of fan fiction and fan art." (p. 253)

From this, we can see an interesting social dissonance in the tacit understanding of interpretations of skinship as being "queer" yet simultaneously being exempt from the repercussions of the label of being "queer." While some may credit this purely to profit-based motivation, it is important to take note of the use of the term "performed intimacy" by Baudinette. If we recall, the notion of performativity was previously mentioned by Butler in their theory on gender performativity. It is this understanding of K-pop idols as *entertainment* who are *performing* skinship that permits it to subvert dominant ideology. Chuyun Oh parallels queer performance in K-Pop to *talnori*, a traditional mask dance, which is seemingly able to challenge hegemonic patriarchal ideas through cross-dressing as it was considered "entertainment" and not deemed as a valid means to address social issues. In a similar vein, queer performance – such as the purposeful use of skinship to encourage shipping – in K-Pop "is a symbolic mask that allows the performance of queer identities, while at the same time shielding its performers from being perceived as queer" (Oh & Oh, 2017, p. 11). Queerness in K-Pop can exist to denaturalize gender, blur queer lines and weaken gender codes only because it relegates the act of queering as playing a performance– "a temporary transgression in which masculinity, especially, heteronormativity is not directly challenged" (Oh & Oh, 2017, p. 17) – that further entrenches heteronormativity. Queer performance will never be coded as queer due to Korean compulsive heterosexuality, shielding idols from such negative associations. Therefore, the idols of K-pop could be understood as a gender that exists solely in the realm of entertainment and fantasy and separate from the social constraints of the real world. This implicit recognition of the subversive elements of popular culture has been a key area of discourse in understanding its relationship with hegemonic institutions of power.

## Mediation of Reconstructing Identity by Liminality

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a running theme throughout this paper: the absence of an "authentic" national identity as a result of rifts in Korean history, the dissonance of skinship as being simultaneously exempt yet interpreted as homoerotic due to it being an act of performativity, the detachment of K-pop as a realm of fantasy from reality. Each

of these discussions brings forth the term that I coin as 'liminal national identity' of Korea. Liminality often refers to a quality of ambiguity or disorientation, a space of "limbo" that exists between states and yet does not exist at all. This poses irony as liminality can be understood as a destabilization of the self as opposed to national identity, which denotes a stable and established institution of self. However, it is precisely the intrinsically liminal nature of the Korean culture and identity that has allowed for subversion yet submission to hegemonic institutions of power. In this way, liminality is a site to produce narratives that circulate, negotiate, and subvert identities, whether they be gender, national, or "authentic" identities.

In this paper, we have spoken specifically on the discursive articulation of identity through produced narrative in the interplay between the producer (K-pop) and the consumer (female fans) surrounding the issue of skinship. However, gender and sexuality serve as a microcosm of greater social identity and in more broad terms, liminality can be equated to power. This power, though operating within dominant institutions and social constraints, allows for the construction of identity and resistance against dominant ideologies. And while K-pop and, by extension, popular culture as a whole, may be deemed as separate from reality, it simultaneously has very real-world implications that are recognized by its audience, whether it be the local fan or institutions like the industry and government. For example, China has banned K-pop within the country due to fears of emasculation and consequently, deprivation of power of the Chinese male populace (Chen, 2023). As such, it is imperative to understand liminality not simply as a vehicle but in and of itself as a state that South Korean society exists in. Consequently, the actions that operate within liminality and are interpreted as "performances" are inherently tied to and impact South Korea, thereby aiding the process in which South Korean society reconstructs its own "authentic" identity.

## Conclusion and Evaluation

As demonstrated by this study, skinship is not necessarily representative of a purely radical queer movement but, rather, has existed as a deeply entrenched cultural heritage in Korean culture. Under the traditional Korean gender/sex system, skinship has been practiced not as a means of expressing homosexuality but instead, paradoxically, entrenched heteronormativity. However, colonial influences and globalization have shifted the definitions under which Korean society understands queerness, consequently shifting the coding of skinship in a way that has posed tension against the dominant patriarchy. Despite this, skinship has seen major visibility in popular media, especially in the realm of K-pop as a form of interpersonal interaction between idols to cater to the fantasies of female fans. This success can be attributed to a complex system that can be essentialized as liminality, a feature that is entrenched in the very cultural DNA of South Korea. Thus, I proposed that liminality can be equated to power, allowing the South Korean society to reconstruct its own sense of "authentic" identity in spite of hegemonic institutions of power.

As the scope of this paper focused on skinship in popular culture, it would be of interest to further explore skinship in respect to that as practiced by "normal" everyday people. Much of my work on this demographic lacks significant scholarly research due to a lack of literature in this area. As such, it may prove useful to gather more data and explore perceptions of skinship amongst the general populace. Additionally, it would also be of interest to observe the effects of liminality in North Korean culture; has the North Korean regime exploited this absence of "authentic" culture to institute its own structures that will allow it to remain in power? Such research could provide an interesting parallel to South Korea in order to better grasp the magnitude of the influence of 'liminal national identity'. Finally, another further line of inquiry would be whether the proposed power of liminality will eventually be able to break the paradigm of hegemonic masculinity and greater institutions of power or if it will remain subordinate to it. While it has been a site for local articulation of identity, it remains to be seen whether it can translate to a more significant movement

in collective social ideologies. Can Korean cultural values and practices, which have been proliferated through the internet and fandom culture, challenge the very colonial system it has remained subordinate to on a global scale? Can they successfully defy institutions of power, such as compulsive heterosexuality, or will they be confined to simply operating within them?

Illustration by Ava Fan

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# The Weaponization of Sexual Violence
## *Genocide and Terror in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

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Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, Necropolitics, Feminist Security Studies, Genocide Studies, Settler Colonialism

***Trigger Warning: Discussions of sexual violence, settler colonialism and dehumanization narratives in the context of armed conflict***

Abstract:

*This research investigates the weaponization of sexual violence as a strategic tool within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, emphasizing its role in perpetuating terror, dismantling social structures, and amplifying genocide. Sexual violence in conflict extends beyond individual harm, functioning as a mechanism of control that fragments societies and suppresses resistance. The study situates this phenomenon within theoretical frameworks of settler colonialism, necropolitics, and biopolitical control, arguing that sexual violence is deliberately embedded within systemic structures of oppression. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature, human rights reports, and firsthand accounts, the paper highlights the calculated use of sexual violence by Israeli forces to destabilize Palestinian communities, suppress resistance, and reinforce domination.*

*Key findings underscore the normalization of sexual violence within settler colonial frameworks, its profound psychological and social impacts on Palestinian women, and its strategic use to instill fear and suppress resistance. This study frames sexual violence as an extension of necropolitical governance, asserting control over Palestinian lives through psychological trauma and societal fragmentation.*
*By exposing the systemic nature of this violence, the research underscores its broader implications for understanding state-sanctioned oppression and its genocidal dimensions. Future research and advocacy are vital for amplifying survivors' voices and fostering accountability within the international community.*

## Introduction, Background and Significance

Sexual violence functions as a mechanism of terror, extending its reach beyond immediate victims to affect entire societies. The trauma inflicted during war resonates across generations, leaving deep scars on the social fabric (Medien, 2021, p. 710). In conflict-ridden landscapes, the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war perpetuates a cycle of suffering that extends far beyond the immediate battleground (Baaz & Stern, 2009, p. 506). This phenomenon is not merely an unfortunate consequence of conflict but a deliberate strategy soldiers employ to instill fear, subjugate communities, and weaken the resilience of adversaries (Buss, 2009, p.149). The primary objective of war rape is to cause trauma and disrupt familial bonds and group cohesion within an adversary's society (Diken et al., 2005, p, 111). Thus, rape must be understood not just as another side effect of war but as a literal weapon of war (Diken et al., 2005, p. 112).

Within the Israeli Palestinian conflict, where the dynamics of power, occupation, and resistance are deeply entrenched, the strategic use of violence—including sexual violence—emerges as a mechanism to amplify the suffering of the oppressed (United Nations, 2024). This conflict has seen numerous documented and alleged instances of sexual violence, which intersect with broader efforts to undermine Palestinian social cohesion and reinforce domination (United Nations, 2024). By weaponizing intimate trauma, such acts contribute to the disintegration of familial and communal bonds, intensifying the genocidal dimensions of systemic oppression (Amnesty International, 2023). In examining the ongoing plight of Palestinians, scholars and human rights organizations have highlighted how the exploitation of sexual violence functions not only to degrade individuals but also to perpetuate cycles of dehumanization and dispossession (Mbembe, 2019, p. 80). For example, the reported use of sexual humiliation and assault during detentions and interrogations reveals the calculated nature of such violence as a tool for dismantling resistance and enforcing submission (Abdulhadi, 2019, p. 547). These patterns mirror the deliberate strategies observed in other genocidal contexts, underscoring the broader framework within which sexual violence serves as a weapon of war.

This research paper aims to investigate sexual violence as strategically employed as a weapon of war to perpetuate control, terrorize communities, and dismantle social structures, often serving as a mechanism to amplify genocide. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this paper argues that the systematic use of sexual violence against Palestinians functions as a deliberate tool to further oppressive agendas, undermine resistance, and deepen the socio-political and psychological impacts of genocide.

## Research Question

The central focus of this research is to explore how and why sexual violence is employed as a weapon of war and its role in amplifying genocide. Specifically, this research aims to investigate the strategic use of sexual violence in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly in the context of the genocide faced by Palestinians.

## Literature Review

The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is a well-documented strategy invarious conflict zones, deployed not only for its immediate physical impacts but also as a tool of physiological warfare and structural oppression. This literature review focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It examines how sexual violence has been systematically employed to further the objectives of settler colonialism and genocide, synthesizing recent scholarly analyses that highlight its intersections with state violence and necropolitics.

## Sexual Violence as a Tool of Settler Colonialism

Abdulhadi (2019) situates sexual violence within the broader framework of Israeli settler colonialism. The author argues that gendered violence, including sexual assault, is normalized within the project of erasure and control over the Palestinian population (Abdulhadi, 2019, p. 550). Abdulhadi links this normalization to a celebration of Palestinian death and the strategic use of fear to dismantle resistance (Abdulhadi, 2019, p. 549). Sexual violence becomes a way to reinforce power hierarchies, not just physically but symbolically, serving as a form of biopolitical control over Palestinian bodies (Abdulhadi, 2019, p. 550). At the same time, Medien (2021) furthers this argument by examining the role of "humanitarian warfare" in legitimizing such violence (p. 705). Medien argues that Israeli state rhetoric often couches its military actions in terms of human rights and security, obscuring the systematic use of gender-based violence as a strategy of domination (Medien, 2021, p. 702). The sexual assault of Palestinian women, particularly in detention centers, is framed as an "inevitable" consequence of security operations, effectively erasing the agency and humanity of its victims (Medien, 2021, p. 702). This convergence of arguments underscores how sexual violence operates not merely as an incidental byproduct of conflict but as an intentional mechanism of settler colonial control, normalizing dehumanization under the guise of security and humanitarian rhetoric.

## Sexual Violence in Detention Centres

Al Issa and Beck (2021) and Madar (2023) collectively illuminate the systemic use of sexual violence as a tool of oppression within the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Al Issa and Beck emphasize how Israeli forces reportedly employed sexual violence as a deliberate strategy to instill fear and facilitate the expulsion of Palestinians, contributing to the mass displacement of approximately 700,000 people during the Nakba (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p. 169). Historical accounts, specific incidents, and testimonies highlight the systemic nature of this violence, portraying it as a calculated tactic rather than a series of isolated acts (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p. 168). The ongoing use of sexual violence and its threats within the Israeli Palestinian conflict underscores its role as a tool of suppression and coercion, mainly targeting women (Al Issa and Beck, 2021, p. 168). This narrative critique attempts to downplay such acts as the work of "bad apples," instead framing them as manifestations of broader structural forces tied to militarization, patriarchy, and state policy (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p. 170). Through documented cases, statements by influential figures, and personal accounts, the examples reveal the profound psychological and social impacts of sexual violence in conflict, connecting it to enduring themes of humiliation, control, and resistance (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p. 169).

Similarly, Madar (2023) situates sexual violence as a systemic feature of the occupation, transcending isolated misconduct by soldiers to function as a state-sanctioned mechanism of enforcement (p. 79). Madar argues that this violence serves dual purposes: directly subjugating women and symbolically threatening the broader Palestinian community, reinforcing patterns of submission and control (Madar, 2021, p. 74). Furthermore, Madar highlights how the administrative and legal frameworks of the occupation create conditions of vulnerability and dependency, making Palestinians susceptible to exploitation and sextortion (Madar, 2021, p. 75). For example, Palestinian women face implicit and explicit sexual threats when seeking to access fundamental rights, such as visiting imprisoned relatives or passing through checkpoints (Madar, 2021, p. 80). These power imbalances often lead to situations where victims are coerced into compliance, with their silence reinforced by fear of retaliation or community condemnation (Madar, 2021, p. 79). Together, these analyses reveal sexual violence not as an aberration but as a deliberate, gendered tactic embedded in the machinery of occupation.

## Necropolitics and the Governance of Palestinian Lives

Building upon Foucault's biopolitics, as coined by Mbembe, necropolitics refers to exercising political power through controlling and regulating mortality and asserting sovereignty by determining who may live and who must die (Mbembe, 2019, p. 80). In essence, necropolitics involves the deployment of power to dictate not only the conditions of life but also the conditions of death within a society or a particular group (Mbembe, 2019, p. 80). By rendering certain bodies vulnerable to extreme violence, including sexual assault, the Israeli state asserts control that extends beyond physical survival to psychological subjugation, ensuring the continued compliance and fragmentation of Palestinian resistance (Mbembe, 2019, p. 79).

Puar introduces the concept of maiming to expand the scope of biopolitics beyond merely administering life and death (Puar, 2017, p. 136). The notion of maiming intertwines with necropolitics and offers insight into Israel's exerting power over Palestinian life. Biopolitics traditionally involved strategies for overseeing human populations, encompassing decisions and practices that affect all life and death (Puar, 2017, p. 137). Puar, however, highlights the limitations of biopolitics, particularly concerning colonialism. Under colonialism, biopolitics underscores the significance of maiming, debilitation, and stunning as components of population management (Puar, 2017, p. 137). Hence, Puar's concept of the "right to maim" signifies a deliberate shift in state authority. Instead of solely asserting the "right to kill," claimed by states of warfare, the "right to maim" can be seen as an extension or distortion of "the right to kill" (Puar, 2017, p. 135). In other words, Puar suggests that maiming inflicts injury or disability without causing death, thereby becoming a significant tool of biopolitical control, especially under colonized spaces (Puar, 2017, p. 136). By viewing sexual violence as a form of maiming, it becomes clear that such acts are not incidental but integral to colonial domination, aiming to weaken resistance and maintain control over oppressed populations. This perspective shifts the focus from isolated acts of violence to their role within the broader machinery of settler-colonial power.

The reviewed literature collectively demonstrates that sexual violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not incidental but deeply embedded within the structures of settler colonialism and state governance. This violence functions to disrupt Palestinian social cohesion, impose psychological terror, and reinforce the dominance of the Israeli state. Future research should explore resistance strategies against such forms of violence and the role of international advocacy in holding perpetrators accountable.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research paper is rooted in the intersection of settler colonialism, necropolitics, and biopolitical control, emphasizing sexual violence as a deliberate weapon of war (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, pg. 150). It draws upon Mbembe's necropolitics to conceptualize how power is exercised by regulating life, death, and suffering in colonized spaces. Sexual violence is framed as a strategic mechanism embedded within broader systems of oppression, used to disrupt social cohesion, instill fear, and dismantle resistance within Palestinian communities (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p. 168). Settler colonialism provides the foundation for understanding the systemic and intentional nature of this violence. Scholars like Abdulhadi (2019) and Medien (2021) argue that sexual violence is normalized within the Israeli settler-colonial project, functioning as a tool to assert control over Palestinian bodies and lives. This is achieved through direct acts of violence and fear to suppress resistance and reinforce hierarchical power dynamics.

The research paper also integrates Mbembe's necropolitics, focusing on how the Israeli state employs sexual violence to assert sovereign control over Palestinian lives, extending beyond physical survival to psychological domination (Mbembe, 2019, p. 70). This complements Puar's concept of maiming, which shifts the lens from outright killing to harm that debilitates and ensures compliance (Puar, 2017, p. 134). Sexual violence is framed

Illustration by Sophia Grace Foder

as an act of maiming, designed to weaken resistance and perpetuate domination without necessarily resulting in death. By synthesizing these perspectives, the framework positions sexual violence not as an incidental byproduct but as an integral tool within the machinery of settler colonialism and systemic genocide (Diken et al., 2005, p. 112). It highlights the deliberate use of intimate trauma as a mechanism of socio-political control, contributing to the dehumanization and dispossession of Palestinians while reinforcing state power (Baaz & Stern, 2009, p. 506). This theoretical approach situates the phenomenon within broader patterns of violence in colonial and genocidal contexts.

## Methods

This research employs a qualitative methodology, integrating critical analysis of secondary data, discourse analysis, and case studies to explore the weaponization of sexual violence within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study synthesizes existing scholarly literature, human rights reports, and firsthand accounts to identify patterns and contextualize the systemic use of sexual violence as a deliberate mechanism of oppression (Abu-Sittah, 2023). The interdisciplinary frameworks mentioned in the previous section situates sexual violence within broader structures of settler colonialism, necropolitics, and biopolitical control, illuminating its role as a tool of terror, subjugation, and genocide (Abu-Sittah, 2023). Additionally, the research employs a comparative analysis of sexual violence in other genocidal and colonial contexts to draw parallels and deepen the understanding of its strategic use. By integrating theoretical perspectives, such as Mbembe's necropolitics, the methods elucidate how sexual violence intersects with broader governance mechanisms, resistance suppression, and socio-cultural destruction (Mbembe, 2019, p. 60).

## Preliminary Findings

The ongoing investigation into the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has yielded several compelling observations. These findings underscore the systemic nature of sexual violence in this context, revealing its function as a tool for domination, dehumanization, and control. Three key observations emerge: the normalization of sexual violence within settler colonial frameworks, the psychological and physical impacts of sexual violence on Palestinian women, and the strategic use of sexual violence to instill fear and suppress resistance.

## Normalization of Sexual Violence within Settler Colonial Frameworks

The data reveals a disturbing pattern of normalization of sexual violence as an inherent aspect of Israeli settler colonialism. Abdulhadi (2019) highlights how gendered violence, including sexual assault, is deliberately embedded within the broader colonial strategy (p. 555). This normalization is not accidental but is supported by institutional policies and societal narratives that devalue Palestinian lives (Abdulhadi, 2019, p. 560). For example, Medien (2021) discusses the role of "humanitarian warfare," which often obscures or justifies acts of violence against Palestinians by framing them as security measures (p. 710). This framing not only legitimizes the violence but also erases its gendered and sexualized dimensions, allowing these acts to persist unchecked (Medien, 2021, p. 711). Such findings suggest that sexual violence is not merely incidental but a calculated mechanism to sustain colonial dominance.

## Psychological and Physical Impacts on Palestinian Women

The data also points to the profound psychological and physical impacts of sexual violence on Palestinian women. Al Issa and Beck (2021) document the experiences of women who endure sexualized harassment and intimidation during visits to incarcerated family members (p. 178). This violence extends beyond the immediate victims, affecting their families and communities (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p. 179). For instance, one testimony from their study describes how invasive body searches and sexually charged verbal abuse leave women feeling humiliated and powerless (Al Issa & Beck, 2021 p. 179). These experiences underscore the dual function of sexual violence: it operates as a personal violation and as a method of collective psychological warfare. The long-term trauma inflicted on these women reinforces their communities' sense of vulnerability and despair.

## Strategic Use of Sexual Violence to Instill Fear and Suppress Resistance

Perhaps the most striking finding is the strategic use of sexual violence to instill fear and suppress Palestinian resistance. The Middle East Monitor (2024) reports on testimonies from survivors who describe how rape and other forms of sexual violence are used by Israeli soldiers to terrorize entire communities (MEM, 2024). Such acts are not isolated incidents but part of a broader campaign to destabilize Palestinian society (MEM, 2024). The reports reveal that the threat of sexual violence is often as potent as the act itself, creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear that discourages resistance (MEM, 2024). This observation aligns with Mbembe's (2019) concept of necropolitics, where the state exerts control over life and death to maintain power (pg. 70). In this context, sexual violence becomes a tool of governance, subjugating not only individual bodies but entire populations.

These preliminary findings illustrate the multifaceted role of sexual violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The normalization of this violence within settler colonial framework, its devastating impact on Palestinian women, and its strategic use as a means of fear and control highlight the urgent need for further investigation (MEM, 2024). By situating these acts within broader systems of oppression, this research aims to shed light on the intersectionality of gender, colonialism, and state violence.

## Discussion

The findings of this research highlight the deliberate and systemic use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, underscoring its broader role within the machinery of settler colonialism and genocidal oppression. Far from being incidental or isolated, acts of sexual violence are revealed as integral tools in the exercise of power, aiming to dismantle resistance, impose fear, and fracture the socio-cultural fabric of Palestinian society (Amnesty International, 2024). This analysis situates sexual violence within a nexus of biopolitical and necropolitical control, offering a nuanced understanding of its role as both a physical and symbolic weapon. A key insight emerging from the study is the dual nature of sexual violence: it operates both directly—through physical and psychological harm—and indirectly by perpetuating fear and shame across communities (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p.173). As seen in detention centers and during military operations, sexual violence targets individuals while also symbolically assaulting the collective identity of Palestinians (Al Issa & Beck, 2021, p.176). The use of sexual violence in such contexts mirrors patterns observed in other genocidal regimes, where bodily harm extends to societal destruction. By framing these acts within Mbembe's (2019) necropolitics and Puar's (2017) concept of maiming, the research illustrates how sexual violence not only seeks to harm but also to subjugate and debilitate populations under colonial rule.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of literature that frames sexual violence as a strategic and systemic tool of war and oppression. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the weaponization of sexual violence emerges as a deliberate effort to assert dominance, dismantle resistance, and deepen the socio-political impacts of genocide (MEM, 2024). By situating these acts within theoretical frameworks of necropolitics and settler colonialism, this research underscores the structural and symbolic significance of sexual violence as an instrument of state power. Future research must focus on amplifying the voices of survivors, exploring avenues for accountability, and examining resistance strategies within affected communities. International advocacy and legal mechanisms also play a crucial role in addressing these violations and ensuring justice for victims (United Nations, 2024). Recognizing sexual violence as a weapon of war is a critical step toward dismantling the structures that perpetuate such violence and fostering a more just and equitable global response to conflict and occupation.

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HUMANITIES

*Research in the humanities is, as one contributor put it, "a task of human self-reflection"—a meditation on our histories, our stories, our cultures, and what they reveal about the human condition.*

*Through the reflexive nature of the papers in this section, these authors are engaged in a deeply creative work—a work of adding complexities and nuance to the narratives we tell about ourselves.*

*The act of adding such nuance is not ornamental—it is essential. It reminds us to remain just, to remain open, and to imagine futures beyond the ones that feel foreclosed. In a world marked by "oversaturated moments and encounters," the humanities offer us pause. They invite us to linger—to bask—in the many meanings of being human.*

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# Caesar's Violence in Gaul

## *Traditional and Genocidal Narratives on the Roman Conquest of Gaul*

**Author: Ranger MacLennan**

Keywords: Caesar's Gallic Wars, Genocide Studies, Historiography, Roman Imperialism, Antiquity

*Trigger Warnings: Discussions of violence, war, imperial and genocidal intent.*

Abstract:

*This historiography examines the differing portrayals of Caesar's violence in Gaul during the Gallic Wars. It aims to compare and contrast traditional bibliographic narratives with more recent texts analyzing specific events from a genocidal perspective. These texts include a critical article considering the extent of genocide during the conflicts, an archaeological paper arguing that the Romans were indeed genocidal, a traditional biography of Caesar's life, and a somewhat bibliographic historical critique from the perspective of a significant Gallic resistance leader. It also views how these unique texts utilize and interpret their shared primary source. The events this article focuses on are the massacre of two Germanic tribes, the persecution of a Belgic tribe, and finally the destruction of a Gallic town. By emphasizing the circumstances of the native inhabitants of Gaul, who have often been overlooked in favor of the imperialist Roman viewpoint, this article discusses an alternate lens through which to view this conflict and the human cost of Caesar's conquests.*

The Gallic Wars, fought between 58 and 50 BCE, were a series of military campaigns waged by the Roman Republic against several Celtic and Germanic tribes in the ancient region of Gaul. The Roman forces were commanded by Gaius Julius Caesar, who showcased his strategic brilliance alongside his brutality. For Caesar, these conflicts were a pathway to achieve personal prestige and fortune,[1] yet this came at the cost of extreme violence against the native populations, including non-combatants, entailing massacres and enslavements. Over time, historians have interpreted and portrayed Caesar's actions during the Gallic Wars in various ways. This historiography will examine these differing perspectives, comparing and contrasting traditional biographies that glorify his military genius with modern academic articles assessing the morality of his actions.

Caesar provides firsthand accounts of his Gallic campaigns in *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (commonly translated as *Commentaries on the Gallic War*), the most important primary sources related to the Gallic Wars. However, they are barefacedly shaped by Caesar's perspective, serving as pieces of propaganda.[2] In them, he justifies his military actions by portraying the conflicts as necessary and inevitable,[3] proudly exaggerating the scale of the violence he enacted.[4] Though these sources provide a morally and factually questionable representation of historical events, historians still extensively rely on them. While carefully recognizing their overstatements and dramatizations, they use these texts to contextualize the Gallic Wars and, more recently, to analyze a narrative of genocide associated with them.

One scholar who uses these primary sources to support his argument is Tristan Taylor, whose 2012 article "Caesar's Gallic Genocide," examines instances of Caesar's mass killings and enslavements during the Gallic Wars, questioning whether they should be classified as genocidal. Taylor argues that, while "Caesar expressed no intention to destroy these peoples," he was nonetheless unhesitant to use violence against them to achieve his goals.[5] Taylor concludes that the "spectrum of mass violence," Caesar employed against the Germanic and Celtic peoples was primarily driven by ruthless imperialist ambition rather than genocidal intent.[6] Another source that analyzes the morality of Caesar's actions during these conflicts is Nico Roymans' 2019 article, "Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping." Roymans uses archaeological evidence to examine these conflicts' demographic and material-cultural impacts on the native populations. He also argues that the Romans' xenophobic attitudes towards Germanic peoples contributed to the extreme violence Caesar inflicted during the Gallic Wars, which Roymans explicitly labels as genocides.[7]

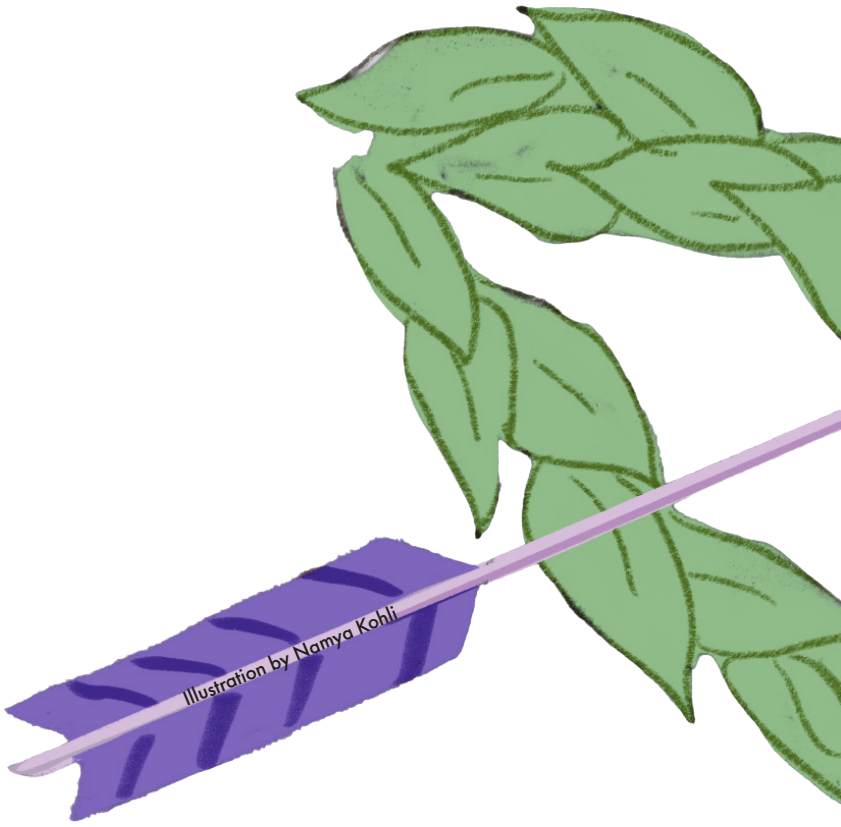
However, not all scholars have used Caesar's commentaries to argue if the Roman general should be considered a genocidal figure. J.F.C. Fuller, in his 1965 biography *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, presents a different perspective on Caesar's actions in Gaul. Fuller describes Caesar's life in three main stages: his early years, his major military campaigns, and his later position as dictator of Rome. He praises Caesar as a military leader, classifying him among the greatest generals of the classical age.[8] His criticisms of Caesar during the Gallic Wars focus primarily on his poor organization and overreliance on improvisation[9] rather than the mass violence he widely employed. The article "Vercingetorix," published by G. B. Malleson in 1889, provides a contrasting view to Fuller's by primarily describing the later years of the Gallic Wars from the perspective of Vercingetorix. Through his historical critique, which includes bibliographic

[1] Braman, "Caesar's invasion of Britain," 3.
[2] Riggsby, *Caesar in Gaul and Rome*, 191.
[3] Ademma, *Speech and Thought in Latin War Narratives: Words of Warriors*, 108–112.
[4] Henige, "He came, he saw, we counted: the historiography and demography of Caesar's Gallic numbers," 215–236.
[5] Henige, "He came, he saw, we counted: the historiography and demography of Caesar's Gallic numbers," 215–236.
[6] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 328–329.
[7] Roymans, "Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping: investigating Caesar's actions in the Germanic frontier zone," 457–458.
[8] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 324.
[9] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 316.

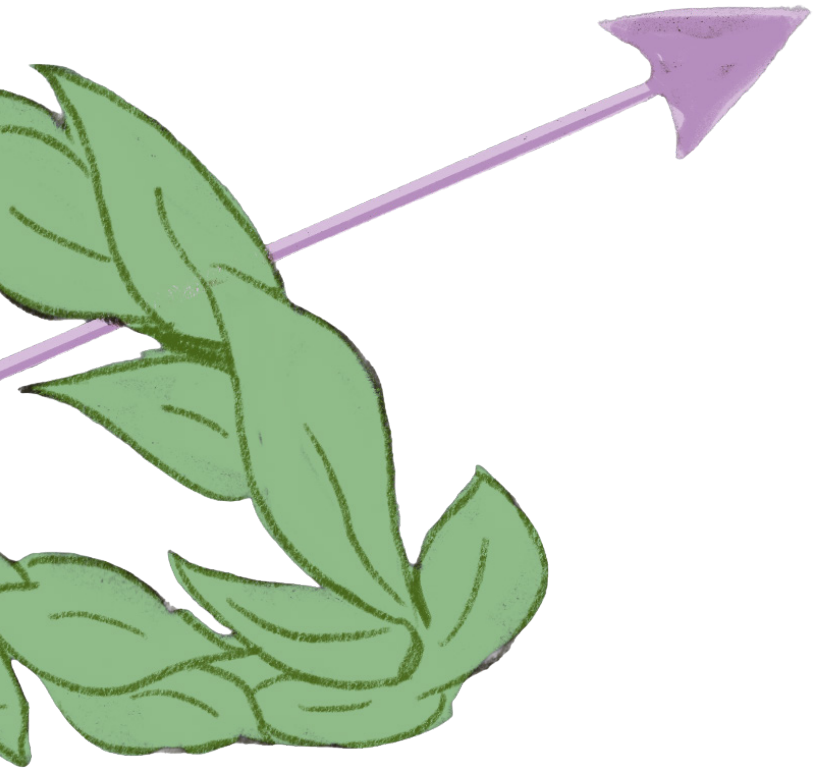
elements, Malleson attributes the failure of Vercongetorix's resistance against Caesar to the lack of true unity among the Gallic tribes.[10] These sources reflect the traditional perspective of Caesar, which, while occasionally acknowledging the negative aspects of his actions during the Gallic War, is unconcerned with the genocidal nature of his campaigns.

The first example of Caesar's extreme violence this historiography will examine occurred against the Usipetes and Tencteri. In his commentaries, Caesar describes how these two Germanic tribes were pushed across the Rhine River and settled in Northern Gaul shortly before the Roman military arrived in 55 BCE.[11] Upon learning of Caesar's approach, the tribes sent a message expressing their desire to avoid conflict and requesting permission to remain in Gaul. Caesar, however, rejected their plea and positioned his military forces around them instead.[12] When the Usipetes and Tencteri sent a sizeable delegation of their leaders to apologize and seek peace with the Romans, Caesar had the delegation arrested.[13] Left without their leaders, the remaining Germans – primarily composed of "boys and women,"[14] – panicked and desperately attempted to escape.[15] Despite this, Caesar ordered their massacre, boasting in his commentaries that he allegedly killed 430,000 of them.[16]

The sources analyzing this event from a genocidal perspective offer differing interpretations. Taylor states that Caesar's massacres during the Gallic Wars should be viewed as extreme deterrents and collective punishments rather than attempts to commit genocide.[17] While these actions might seem genocidal,[18] he argues that instances of mass violence like that committed against the Usipetes and Tencteri should be understood within the broader context of Roman expansionism. Taylor suggests these actions should be viewed as harsh "exercise[s] of Roman imperialism," in Gaul rather than deliberate efforts to eradicate these peoples.[19] Roymans, by contrast, settles on a more condemnatory view of Caesar's actions. He agrees with Taylor by asserting that while "Caesar did not display a conscious policy of ethnic cleansing," the results of his actions had




[10] Malleson, "Vercingetorix," 40.
[11] Dewey, *Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 170.
[12] Roymans, "A Roman massacre in the far north: Caesar's annihilation of the Tencteri and Usipetes in the Dutch river area," 168–169.
[13] Roymans, "A Roman massacre in the far north: Caesar's annihilation of the Tencteri and Usipetes in the Dutch river area," 169.
[14] McDevitte and Bohn, *The Gallic Wars, Book IV*, Chapter XIV.
[15] Roymans, "A Roman massacre in the far north: Caesar's annihilation of the Tencteri and Usipetes in the Dutch river area," 168–169.
[16] Dewey, *Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 188.
[17] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 328–329.
[18] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 318.
[19] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 329.



the same effect.[20] Unlike Taylor, however, he does not believe that the context of Roman imperialism excuses the genocidal nature of Caesar's actions. Roymans also suggests that Caesar and his soldiers were morally justified and motivated by a cultural and historical prejudice against the 'barbarians' living beyond their borders, particularly the Germanic peoples, enabling the Romans to use extreme violence against them.[21] For Roymans, the slaughter of the Usipetes and Tencteri represented one example in a broader pattern of genocidal violence perpetrated by Caesar.

Fuller, writing from a traditional, bibliographic perspective, offers a unique view into this incident. He praises Caesar's strategic brilliance in subduing the Usipetes and Tencteri leaders, describing it as "cunning bordering on genius."[22] When discussing the massacre itself, Fuller directly quotes Caesar's account of the flight and subsequent slaughter of the women and children.[23] He recognizes the immorality of the act, mentioning how the incident represents an inglorious moment in Caesar's campaign,[24] aligning with Taylor and Roymans in this way. However, his condemnation is immediately undermined when he praises Caesar again, calling the massacre "one of the most complete victories in history."[25] Ultimately, while Fuller attempts to portray the violence as immoral, the praise he bestows upon Caesar makes his criticism seem insincere. The brutality exemplified during this massacre would continue throughout Caesar's campaigns, notably against the Eburones.

From 54 to 53 BCE, the Eburones, a Belgic tribe, revolted against the Roman military stationed in northern Gaul. The uprising was sparked when the nearby Roman winter camps requisitioned resources from the local population, despite the poor harvest that year.[26] In response, Caesar returned to Gaul the following spring with ten legions,[27] intent on hunting down Ambiorix, the revolt's instigator and the surviving king of the Eburones. However, Caesar's motivation extended beyond his desire for revenge against the Belgic leadership. In his commentaries, he expresses an intense determination to eradicate "the race and name," of the Eburones entirely.[28] He describes his intention to destroy the Eburones' foodstuffs, shelters, and inhabitants so thoroughly that no survivors could return to normalcy after he finished.[29] This led to a "severe and systematic"[30] campaign that targeted the rebellious Eburones and their broader population. Despite this widescale destruction and mass violence, Ambiorix still managed to evade Caesar.[31]

[20] Roymans, "Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping: investigating Caesar's actions in the Germanic frontier zone," 457.
[21] Roymans, "Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping: investigating Caesar's actions in the Germanic frontier zone," 457.
[22] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 120.
[23] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 120.
[24] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 120.
[25] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 120.
[26] Burns, *Romanization and Acculturation: The Rhineland Matronae*, 43.
[27] Burns, *Romanization and Acculturation: The Rhineland Matronae*, 36.
[28] Dewey, *Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 343.
[29] McDevitte and Bohn, *The Gallic Wars, Book VIII*, Chapter XXIV.
[30] Burns, *Romanization and Acculturation: The Rhineland Matronae*, 39.
[31] Burns, *Romanization and Acculturation: The Rhineland Matronae*, 62.

In contrast to the massacre of the Usipetes and Tencteri, there is more consensus among the sources focusing on the genocidal narrative about this instance. Taylor explicitly states his opinion about this incident, describing Caesar's actions as "undeniably genocidal."[32] Of all the instances of mass violence during the Gallic Wars, Taylor argues that the atrocities Caesar inflicted on the Eburones most closely resemble genocide.[33] He points to Caesar's blatant admission that he intended to destroy the Eburones as an ethnic group[34] as incriminating evidence.[35] Roymans also addresses the Romans' brutality against the Eburones in his article, though less directly than Taylor. He mentions how northern Gaul experienced an especially high degree of Roman violence, particularly due to Caesar's relentless pursuit of Ambiorix.[36] He also emphasizes how the Eburones were heavily targeted by the Romans' scorched-earth policy,[37] a strategy that undoubtedly had long-term consequences on the local population. Ultimately, both authors underscore the significant violence and brutality that the Romans inflicted upon the Eburones.

Like Taylor and Roymans, Fuller briefly touches on the scale of the destruction.[38] However, he minimizes the sheer scale of Caesar's devastation by describing it as a mere "harassing campaign."[39] While Fuller draws on the same sources as the previously mentioned authors (Caesar's commentaries), he neglects to mention the overtness with which Caesar expresses his desire to exterminate the Eburones. Instead, he only alludes to this using another author's description of Caesar's destructive campaign.[40] In summary, Fuller fails to mention the true extent of Caesar's genocidal intent toward the Eburones and downplays the elements he does discuss. Nonetheless, the violence Fuller does touch upon would reappear as Caesar continued conquering Gaul, notably following the Siege of Avaricum.

In 52 BCE, Caesar faced renewed resistance in his conquest of Gaul when Vercingetorix, the chief of the Arverni tribe, united a diverse coalition of Gauls to revolt against the ongoing Roman annexation.[41] One of the earliest major engagements of this revolt occurred at Avaricum, the largest and most fortified settlement in the territory of the Bituriges tribes,[42] which had been spared from Vercingetorix's thorough scorched-earth campaign.[43] With dwindling supplies due to his army's inability to forage the local area, Caesar chose to besiege Avaricum.[44] When the Romans eventually breached the walls, Caesar claims his troops pillaged the settlement and slaughtered 40,000 inhabitants, noting that "they spared neither (those) worn out with age, nor women nor children."[45]

Taylor highlights the significance of Avaricum's residents belonging to the Bituriges tribes.[46] He argues that this targeted massacre of non-combatants from this specific ethnic group was not committed with the intent of deliberately eliminating the Bituriges entirely. Instead, Taylor suggests that this violence served as retribution for resisting Roman interests,[47] aiming to send a brutal message to the remaining Biturigies and other Gallic tribes. Once again, Taylor asserts that this act of mass violence was driven by imperialist ambition rather than genocidal intent.

Fuller also discusses the bloodshed that transpired at Avaricum. He paints a harrowing scene of the wives and children of Avaricum begging Vercingetorix not to leave them

[32] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 326.
[33] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 329.
[34] Dewey, *Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 343.
[35] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 318.
[36] Roymans, "Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping: investigating Caesar's actions in the Germanic frontier zone," 456.
[37] Roymans, "Conquest, mass violence and ethnic stereotyping: investigating Caesar's actions in the Germanic frontier zone," 443.
[38] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 131.
[39] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 131.
[40] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 131.
[41] Matias, "Vercingetorix," 6.
[42] Dewey, *Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 372.
[43] Krausz, "Gauls under Siege: Defending against Rome," 165.
[44] Gilliver, *Caesar's Gallic Wars*, 58-50 BC, 51–60.
[45] Dewey, *Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic War*, 392.
[46] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 320–321.
[47] Taylor, "Caesar's Gallic Genocide: A Case Study in Ancient Mass Violence," 321.

to the Romans.[48] Despite pleas from the innocents, he ignores them and proceeds to leave. While Fuller acknowledges Vercingetorix's excellent leadership abilities,[49] this callous depiction undermines his praise. When the Romans arrived, Fuller reiterates Caesar's justification for his troops' brutality.[50] Fuller then attributes the massacre at Avaricum as a consequence of Vercingetorix's apathy and the short-sightedness of the Buturiges.[51] Rather than placing responsibility for the bloodshed on Caesar and the Romans, as Taylor does, Fuller shifts the blame to the Gauls instead, suggesting that the massacre was an inevitable result of their actions.

Finally, Malleson provides an account of the massacre at Avaricum orientated from the perspective of Vercingetorix. He is more upfront with assigning guilt to Caesar, mentioning how he allowed the inhabitants of Avaricum to be senselessly slaughtered.[52] However, like Fuller, Malleson also assigns blame to the Gauls themselves. He argues that Vercingetorix's failure to convince the Gallic council to destroy Avaricum as part of his scorched-earth strategy[53] contributed to the subsequent Roman massacre. This perspective portrays the Romans as an unstoppable, bloodletting force that could have been avoided if the Gauls had succeeded in razing Avaricum themselves.

Vercingeotix's defeat at the climactic Battle of Alesia in late 52 BCE was a turning point for the Roman subjugation of Gaul. With this last major attempt at Gallic resistance snuffed, the Romans pursued mopping-up operations and politically consolidated the region. Viewing how modern scholars interpret the Gallic Wars in hindsight is like looking through a kaleidoscope of perspectives. The time and academic angle someone researches and writes on it from is certainly one explanation for the wide variety of interpretations. Another could be the source they almost universally draw upon. Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, containing some details that are at best aggrandized and at worst entirely fabricated, force each author to discern the truth between the lines.

The traditional and genocidal narratives on the Gallic Wars offer contrasting perspectives on the same conflicts. Taylor and Roymans, though they are not in complete agreement, both provide a critical postcolonial retrospective on a millennia-old historical discussion, previously sustained by traditional authors like Fuller and Malleson. The academic debate over whether Caesar's extreme violence in Gaul should be considered genocidal challenges the dominant black-and-white understanding of the Gallic Wars, which typically portrays the Romans as an unstoppable military force under Caesar's brilliant leadership. By focusing on the impact on the Gallic population, the genocidal narrative humanizes the Celtic and Germanic tribes inhabiting the region, underscoring the human cost of Caesar's unwavering ambition.

[48] Fuller, Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant, 137.
[49] Fuller, Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant, 138.
[50] Fuller, Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant, 138.
[51] Fuller, *Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant*, 138.
[52] Malleson, "Vercingetorix," 20.
[53] Malleson, "Vercingetorix," 19.

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# How the Tempest Explores Prospero's Degrading Language Toward Caliban

**Author: Afua Dwumah**

Keywords: Adoption and Kinship, Colonial Discourse, Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

*Trigger Warnings: Discussions of colonialism and slavery*

Abstract:

*This essay focuses on Shakespeare's The Tempest, exploring the themes of language, history, and adoption. It examines the role of language as a tool of power and control, particularly through Prospero's degrading language toward Caliban. Rooted in colonialist theory, the analysis reveals how Prospero's treatment of Caliban reflects European biases against Indigenous peoples and reinforces colonial authority. Additionally, the essay addresses the theme of adoption, by analyzing the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. It highlights how their dynamic evolves from one resembling a father-son bond to one marked by domination and subjugation, and the profound effects this transformation has on both characters.*

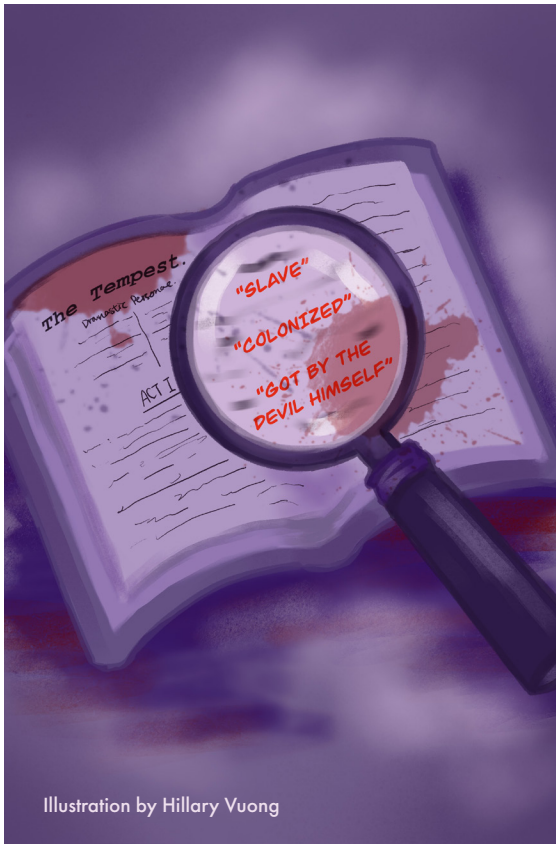


Illustration by Hillary Vuong

Language is one of humanity's most powerful tools, capable of uniting communities and being used as a weapon of power. Language can be defined as "the system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, or community ... typically consisting of words" ("Language," def. 1.a). In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare explores the extent of this power through Prospero's use of demeaning descriptions to subjugate Caliban—a tactic rooted in colonialist practices. Thus, arguments made in this essay will be based on colonialism, which Hogan defines as "a systematic restriction on the autonomy of a national group" (37). Firstly, I will examine how Prospero's treatment of Caliban embodies European fears and biases toward Indigenous people. Next, I will examine Shakespeare's term "slave" (1.2.369) and its effect on Prospero and Caliban's relationship, exploring how it reinforces colonial authority. In this paper, I will claim that Caliban is colonized, which is "to affect, influence, or shape" the minds and culture of Indigenous people to ensure their submission to colonial power ("Colonize," def. 2.d). Finally, Prospero's descriptions of Caliban as "got by the devil himself" (1.2.383) will be explored as a tactic of demonization, labelling Caliban as a taboo to be feared. Additionally, I will analyze Caliban's poetic descriptions of the island as acts of resistance against Prospero's suppression or, essentially, colonization.

From his very introduction, Caliban is associated with racist and derogatory stereotypes that reflect both Prospero's colonial mindset and the prejudices of Shakespeare's audience. "Caliban" is an anagram of "cannibal," meaning "devourer of human beings," and it joined European vocabulary after Christopher Columbus discovered the New World (Walton 2). Shakespeare not only used this language to reveal the innermost thoughts of his characters (Mahood 34), but also to mirror the prevailing views of his audience. For the Europeans, these foreign populations were known by their differences in appearance, customs, and mannerisms and often labelled as "savages" (Takaki 893). When Caliban is called a "freckled whelp," "hag-born," and "not honored with a human shape" (1.2.337), each term works to frame him as less than human. A "whelp" refers to a young dog, and the modifier "freckled" implies being "spotted" ("Freckled," def. 2), connoting a marked, sinful, or dirty state. Thus, Caliban is reduced to a stained animal, inherently unclean. Moreover, the term "hag" traditionally implies a witch, but it also refers to an "ugly woman... who is malicious or immoral" ("Hag," def. 1.2.a.), casting Sycorax, his mother, as evil. By extension, Caliban is framed as malevolent by birth, further stripping him of any moral standing. Christenbury states that "[w]hen we name we control" (17), which encapsulates the idea that Prospero is given the power to define and limit Caliban's identity. Before their first interaction in the play, Prospero creates a foundation on which he is the superior and Caliban is the inferior, setting the stage for his eventual consignment of Caliban to the role of slave.

This toxic relationship is even more insidious because Prospero and Caliban initially shared a bond resembling a father-son relationship. After Prospero arrived on the island, he took the orphaned Caliban into his care, nourished him physically and educated him. Caliban recalls: "Thou strok'st me and made much of me...then I loved thee" (1.2.397-402), and Prospero pitied him and became his "adoptive father" (Shin 374). However, Shakespeare shows through Caliban's later demotion from "son" to "slave" how powerfully mere words cannot only transform social relations but also reshape identities—a process Prospero argues is a moral obligation.

Prospero's view of Caliban as subhuman reinforces his power over him and facilitates Caliban's functional enslavement. The term "slave" (1.2.412) is defined as "a person who has the status of being the property of another, has no personal freedom or rights, and is used as forced labour" ("Slave," def. 1.1). The word strips Caliban of his agency, reducing him to a possession rather than a person. This label solidifies a stark power imbalance that is highlighted when Prospero commands him, "Fetch us in fuel...If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly...I'll rack thee with old cramps" (1.2.441-444). Here, Prospero's imperious language leaves Caliban no choice but to obey under threat of physical

punishment, much like a subjugated animal. In Ng's preface entitled "Power of Language and Power Behind Language," he further illuminates this hierarchy by arguing that "verbal behavior towards the negotiating partner is more controlling when the latter has been labeled as submissive than it is when the latter has been labeled as dominant" (349). By constantly referring to Caliban as a "slave," Prospero positions himself as master and conditions Caliban to internalize this identity. The ramifications of this become evident when Caliban willingly offers to serve Stephano, saying "I will kiss thy foot" and "I prithee, be my god" (2.2.155). The term "slave" can be likened to being colonized, and after years of being exposed to Prospero's verbal abuse, Caliban no longer sees himself as worthy of freedom but believes his only option is to serve a new master, revealing the psychological toll of language.

Lastly, Prospero's description of Caliban as "got by the devil himself" (1.2.383) escalates his disdain to outright demonization, as mentioned earlier, framing Caliban as inherently evil. Shakespeare's choice to name Caliban with an anagram of "cannibal" likely signals to the audience a taboo associated with barbarism so that they, alongside Prospero, would dislike Caliban. Similarly, Prospero saw Caliban as "filth" (1.2.415), but viewed himself as morally obligated to civilize Caliban, casting his control as a duty rather than an abuse of power. One way he does this is by teaching Caliban his language, and Shakespeare shows the vast difference between these two characters in their speech. When Caliban curses, saying, "Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye; And blister you all o'er!" (1.2.387), the strong "o" sounds create a tone of unrestrained, primitive anger. Prospero's response—"to-night thou shalt have cramps, / Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up" (1.2.389-390)—uses softer, hissing "s" sounds, conveying controlled yet ominous anger. This juxtaposition underscores Prospero's view of Caliban as "savage" and himself as "civilized," supporting the idea that his domination is a natural right. However, Caliban fights back against the false accusations about him through his poetic descriptions of the island: "The isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not" (3.2.148-150). His lyrical imagery in his well-known speech underscores his unbroken spirit and shows his true character—one with profound depth and connection to his environment, unlike the beast that Prospero wishes to portray. When Caliban describes the beauty of the island, he mentions "scamels'' (2.2.178), a word absent from the English dictionary (Lindsay 418) which "owes its force to Caliban's adherence to his mother tongue, his doughty refusal to let his thinking be dominated by Prospero's master-tongue" (Abrams 26). This subtle defiance implies that, despite abuse and indoctrination under Prospero's command, Caliban clings to his original identity, as the native master of the island, free before Prospero's arrival. This is also a resistance against colonization. In fact, Shakespeare restores Caliban's land at the play's end, boldly mocking his xenophobic audience. By highlighting Caliban's resistance and reclamation of his identity, Shakespeare challenges colonial narratives of supremacy and moral superiority.

In conclusion, *The Tempest* is a carefully crafted and controversial play for its time. Shakespeare masterfully explores the duality of language as both a tool of domination and a means of resistance. Despite Prospero's attempts to degrade him, Caliban's poetic language and steadfast connection to his identity reveal an unbroken spirit that defies the colonial authority imposed upon him. By the play's conclusion, Shakespeare critiques the very notions of superiority and control that Prospero represents, leaving the audience to question the morality of colonization and the legitimacy of power built on the suppression of others.

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# Parasites, Pests, and the Working-Class
## *Necropolitical Extermination in Parasite*

**Author: Zuairia Shahrin**

Keywords: Class Struggle, Dehumanization, Film Studies, Necropolitics, Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*, Spatial Inequality

*Trigger Warnings: Discussions of death and dehumanization*

Abstract:

*Bong Joon-ho's* Parasite *(2019) offers a scathing critique of class disparity when viewed through the lens of necropolitics, illustrating how the systemic dehumanization of the working class relegates them to conditions akin to "social death." Through its portrayal of the Kims—an impoverished family infiltrating the affluent Park household—*Parasite *uses physical spaces, metaphors, and the concept of necropolitics to critique capitalism's role in perpetuating class stratification. The Kims' semi-basement apartment, a space marked by environmental toxicity, flooding, and overcrowding, becomes a symbol of their marginalization, reflecting Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, whereby the lives of the poor are governed by forces that dictate who should live and who must die. In contrast, the Parks' spacious, elevated home symbolizes a stark separation from such precarious conditions. Through this spatial divide, the film demonstrates how capitalism's structural inequalities push working-class populations into vulnerability, stripping them of agency and dignity. Moreover, Bong's use of pest metaphors, such as the comparison of the Kims to cockroaches, underscores the dehumanizing effects of this systemic violence.* Parasite *ultimately presents a dual parasite metaphor: while the Kims rely on the Parks for survival, the Parks, in turn, exploit the Kims' labor. The violent climax suggests that this mutually parasitic system is unsustainable, as it collapses in on itself, implicating even the wealthy in the systemic violence. By exposing the precariousness of social hierarchies,* Parasite *serves as a reminder of the shared vulnerabilities that underpin global capitalist systems and the urgent need for collective action to challenge them.*

Bong Joon-ho's 2019 South Korean dark comedy *Parasite* provides a satirical account of the class difference between two families, the working-class Kims and the wealthy Parks. It demonstrates the Kims infiltrating the lives and household of the Parks in search of better lives. Using physical spaces, metaphors, and necropolitics as frameworks, Bong critiques the systemic dehumanization and "social death" inflicted upon the Kims. Ultimately, *Parasite* portrays capitalism as a necropolitical system that distinguishes the working-class as the parasites and pests of society, who are sacrificed so that the upper-class may thrive.

Bong's portrayal of physical spaces depicts the influence of spatial necropolitics in the Kims' lives. While the Parks reside on a hill in a tastefully designed, spacious home (*Parasite* 13:27-14:07), the Kims are confined to a dark, cramped, semi-basement apartment, where they struggle to make ends meet (01:01-03:19). The Kims' neighbourhood is in a low-income area that is often adversely affected by pollution, uncleanliness, and a urinating drunkard (06:08-32). Unlike the Parks' affluent neighbourhood, the Kims' poverty-stricken neighbourhood and semi-basement apartment are also prone to flooding with sewage water (01:35:40-01:36:53). This creates a zone of death as the Kims are segregated into spaces with limited access to healthcare, clean water, and sanitation, exposing them to severe health risks. As such, they significantly lose control over their health and bodies. Such debilitating circumstances, Sang-Keun Yoo explains, subject the Kims to necropolitical environmental toxicity, where systemic forces compel working-class populations to endure life-threatening conditions (Yoo 62). Achille Mbembe's "necropolitics" – which refers to the institutional powers that govern which populations should live and which must die (Mbembe 92) – provides a framework to understand the Kims' challenges. Seoul's semi-basement apartments were originally built in the 1970s during the Cold War to serve as emergency shelters, but "became permanent dwellings" due to a housing crisis (Yoo 63). These conditions render the Kims partially dead, as they are partly buried in a substandard residential environment and are subject to conditions that strip them of agency and dignity. Likewise, Geun-sae's condition in the Parks' basement further resembles a living corpse fully deprived of necessities (*Parasite* 01:09:01-10). In contrast, the Parks are not subject to the same toxic environmental conditions as the Kims or Geun-sae, suggesting how spatial necropolitics predisposes working-class populations to adversity and health crises while protecting the upper-class.

Serving as a bleak commentary on class-specific environmental toxicity and spatial necropolitics is the architectural build of the Kims' toilet, which becomes a symbol of their poverty (Yoo 63). With "the city's sewer pipeline [running] higher than the floor" (63), The Kims are forced to climb the stairs for even the most basic human functions. The health risks of such endangered spaces evoke sympathy for Geun-sae as he represents the working-class population that is even more dilapidated, invisible, and marginalized than the Kims. As an individual who is hiding from loan sharks (*Parasite* 01:09:12), he is factually homeless. Additionally, by imagining a metaphorical "wedding" ceremony (01:22:31-48) in the basement bunker, Geun-sae indicates his comfort in such precarious conditions. Agreeably, Yoo's claim that "the most terrifying aspect of [Geun-sae's] metamorphosis is his normalization of necropolitical conditions" (Yoo 61) is persuasive, because Geun-sae's behavior reflects his psychological adaptation to and wholehearted acceptance of substandard living conditions, reflecting his loss of rights over his body and mind. Geun-sae's state is what Mbembe aptly describes as "social death," a condition where one loses control of their home, body, and political agency (Mbembe 75). The Kims' and Geun-sae's tolerance of such spatial inequality and environmental toxicity underscores how necropolitical exploitation can become so seamlessly integrated in the minds of the working-class that they begin to identify with a life that is determined by death, devastation, and dehumanization.

The precarious conditions of the spaces that the Kims and Geun-sae are seen in depict the predatory nature of capitalism, suggesting a


Illustration by Hilary Vuong

neglect of the working-class populations on the system's part to the extent that it subjects these populations to death-like circumstances. The capitalist system in *Parasite* resonates with Mbembe's concept of "sovereign," the higher constitution that "largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die" (Mbembe 66). Mijeong Kim explains that this neglect could be largely because the system views the Kims as a "surplus" to the economy who do not deserve to be saved (Kim 22). These boundaries underscore how capitalism cancels the working-class populations so that the wealthy can flourish. One might therefore argue that Bong portrays capitalism as a necropolitical system that governs lives not for the benefit of individuals (Simpson) but for the functioning of the system and the maintenance of social hierarchies. Consequently, it feels reasonable to posit that the Kims' apartment is not only a portrayal of the working-class' subterranean existence but also their undeniable proximity to death. Death is almost declared and imposed upon the Kims and Geun-sae, and as working-class individuals who do not possess any power, they cannot escape this institutional control. Instead, they internalize these mechanisms of control, demonstrating how necropolitical influence forces the working-class to transform into languid and almost lifeless, or, "[socially dead]" entities (Mbembe 75).

Besides treating them as living corpses, necropolitical forces also subject the Kims to subhuman treatment. When city workers spray insecticide near their semi-basement apartment, Ki-taek insists on leaving the windows open to benefit from the "free" fumigation (*Parasite* 03:24-55). As the chemicals used during fumigations in Korea are "heavily toxic to human bodies" and increase air toxicity, Yoo's argument about the health risks being greater in the Kims' neighbourhood than in the Park mansion is logical (Yoo 64), but one might explicate that the fumigator in this instance symbolizes the necropolitical influence that swears to eradicate the Kims, as though they are pests (Farahbakhsh and Ebrahimi 99). This represents the dehumanization of the working-class (Simpson), as the fumigator literally and metaphorically "metamorphosizes" (Yoo 66) the Kims into disease-causing insects. The pest imagery recurs when Chung-sook jokingly compares Ki-taek to a cockroach that would hide if Mr. Park suddenly returned home (*Parasite* 01:01:53-58), and that is what precisely happens as Ki-taek hides under a table upon Mr. Park's return (01:25:35). Cockroaches are often associated with filth and darkness, and this imagery underscores that the poor, like pests, often remain hidden in the presence of the wealthy. Albeit jokingly, Chung-sook's dialogue echoes the societal constraints that the working-class must accept to survive in a capitalist system. Alternatively, Alireza Farahbakhsh and Ramtin Ebrahimi also offer another interpretation of this scene, mentioning that the Kims "can only become themselves in the shadow of the rich, or through hiding their true identity during the day" (99). Accordingly, this fear and instinct for survival attaches an almost non-human, vampiric characteristic to the Kims, as they embrace their identities only at night, away from the eyes of the Parks. The cockroach imagery thus critiques the necropolitical "sovereign" (Mbembe 79) that promises the wealthy a life of light, comfort, and luxury by sharpening the boundaries between the upper- and working-classes, predetermining the latter to both social and literal death.

As the Kims metamorphosize into subhuman, insect-like creatures, the metaphor of the title *Parasite* takes greater significance. Effectively, Bong invites his audience to recognize that the pest references and the metaphorical connotations of the film's title are interwoven (Simpson). Although the cockroach imagery exclusively signals the subhuman treatment of the Kims, the parasite metaphor functions omnidirectionally (Simpson). The Kims and Geun-sae are undeniably parasitic to the Parks. However, the Parks are equally parasitic to the Kims. The Parks remain oblivious to the challenges the Kims undergo (*Parasite* 01:44:18-32) but continually rely on them for the various laborious services that help manage their lifestyle. While the Parks assume that they are immune to hardships, the violence in the climax of the film (01:50:56-01:56:15) suggests otherwise. As the rich experience the same outcomes as the poor – literal death – the dual function of the parasite

metaphor further unravels. Although Ki-taek knows that Mr. Park is repulsed by his odor, his galvanizing moment of recognition strikes only when Geun-sae is subjected to the same aversion (Simpson). This suggests that the actions of the necropolitical system produce repercussions that are problematic to the system itself – the thematic violence portrayed throughout the film manifests literally in the climax (Simpson) as the system's reliance on exploiting and dehumanizing the poor backfires. This collapse of social hierarchy reveals that the systemic violence that is confined to the working-class can dissipate, implicating even the wealthy into chaos, destruction, and death.

Bong's *Parasite* portrays capitalism as a necropolitical system that normalizes the exploitation and dehumanization of the working-class. Bong's film ultimately prompts us to understand that class and wealth disparities are universal challenges, and various global systems of power often determine who is deemed worthy of a dignified existence and who is destined for death – social or literal. But, most importantly, Bong uses his film as a reminder that we can all find ourselves in the same plight as the Kims unless collective action is taken to prevent these systemic forces from invading our lives.

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# Queer Identity through the Dismantling of Gender and Self

## *A Study of Qiu Miaojin's Last Words of Montmartre, Notes of a Crocodile, and "Platonic Hair"*

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Keywords: Chinese Language Literature, Taiwan, Ku'er Movement, Qiu Miaojin, Queer Theory, Notes of a Crocodile, Last Words from Montmartre, "Platonic Hair"

*Trigger Warnings: Discussions of violence, suicide and vivid descriptions of bodies*

Abstract:

*Qiu Miaojin (1969-1995) is a Taiwanese author recognized for kickstarting the Ku'er literary movement in Taiwan. They are best known for their works that focus on exploration of identity and homosexual love, largely set in a post martial-law era of Taiwan, bringing about a revolutionary perspective for their time. Their debut novel, Notes of a Crocodile (trans. by Bonnie Hue), the semi-autobiographical novel, Last Words from Montmartre (trans. by Ari Larissa Heinrich), and one of their most well-known short stories, "Platonic Hair" (trans. by Fran Martin) have been chosen for this study. The essay aims to study the use of gender expression, identity, and body imagery within these works, and goes on to examine the depiction of violence as a way to articulate queer love. This paper argues that Qiu's depiction of queer identity through these aforementioned facets are influential to shaping the literary landscape of Chinese language literature and the onset of the Ku'er movement.*

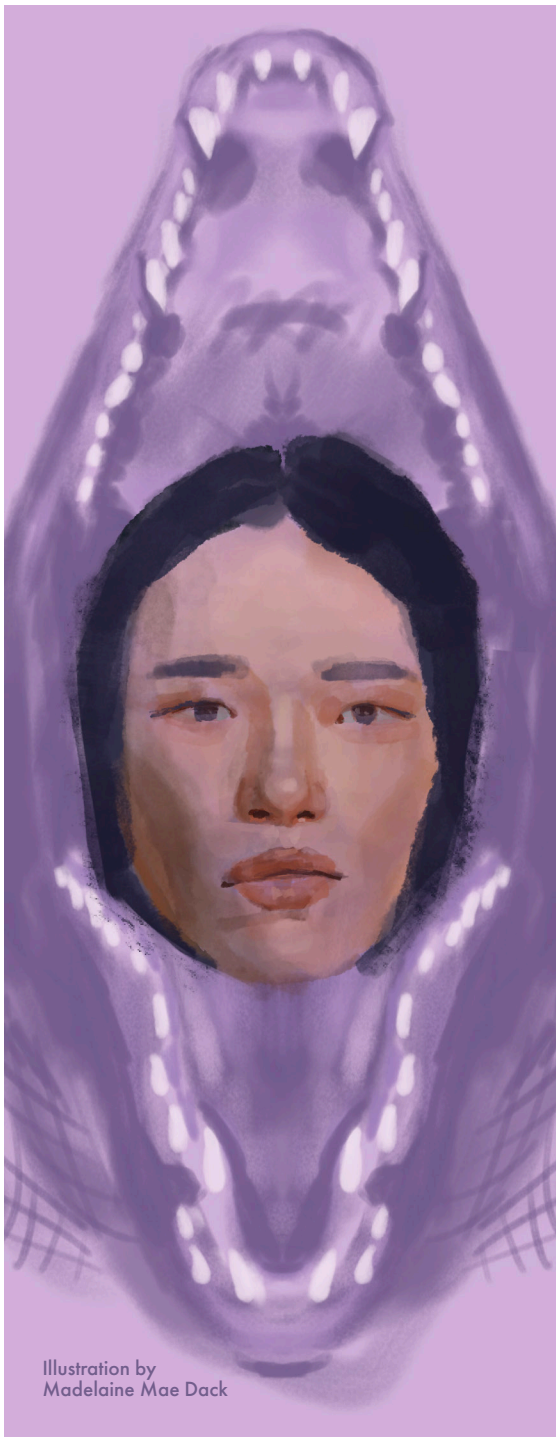

Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

## Introduction

Qiu Miaojin (1969-1995) is a queer Taiwanese author recognized for contributing to the onset of a new wave of queer literature in Taiwan. They are best known for their novel, *Notes of a Crocodile*, written from the perspective of a lesbian narrator nicknamed Lazi, alongside several other works that focus on exploration of identity and homosexual love, these stories primarily set in the post martial-law era of Taiwan. Qiu's writings were experimental for their time, but ultimately revolutionary to queer literature of the Chinese speaking world. Often cited as the emblem of *Ku'er* literature, these pieces explore themes of gender, body dysmorphia, and death through queer characters finding their place in their world. They present a unique perspective on the LGBTQ community that embraces individuality and rejects labels. Qiu's writing often connects to the audience through an intimate perspective of an obsessive and idiosyncratic narrator.

The essay will delve into three of Qiu Miaojin's writings and explore the representation of gender, body, and death within these works. Their debut novel, *Notes of a Crocodile*, the semi-autobiographical novel, *Last Words from Montmartre*, and one of their most well-known short stories, "Platonic Hair" have been selected for this study. Throughout these works, Qiu emphasizes a distinction between the characters' biological sex, which they refer to as "female" or "male", and the gender expression of these characters, "masculinity" and "femininity". While the former is binary, the latter is depicted as coexisting facets of an individual. This representation of gender provides perspective into queerness that differs from conventional understanding of gender and sexuality as separate. Furthermore, Qiu uses the changing and warping of the characters' physical bodies to paint an image of homosexual desire as alienating and othering. Most famously, *Notes of a Crocodile* intersperses a motif of an unsightly and inhuman crocodile masquerading behind a human skin, an extended metaphor that Qiu likens to the experience of a queer person in heteronormative society. All three pieces also feature violent depictions of bodily disfigurement as a result of a character's supposed twisted nature. The intensity and othering nature of queer love is expressed throughout their writing by interlacing passion with death.

## Self Through Gender Ambiguity

The narration of all three pieces are written from the first person perspective and depict a narrating voice that is ambiguous in their gender expression; yet, the three pieces present a vastly different self perception of gender within these biologically female characters. *Notes of a Crocodile* sets up the protagonist as a lesbian right from the beginning, with her declaration that "[they are] a woman who loves women" (Qiu, Notes 21). Lazi, though certain in their identity, does not use any labels and their social identity is overshadowed by their self-consciousness as a woman and a queer.

In contrast, neither *Last Words of Montmartre* nor "Platonic Hair" established the gender of the narrator until much later in the story. In particular, the short story "Platonic Hair" relies on a deliberately misleading masculine depiction of the narrator to create a false sense of heteronormativity in the piece. However, the audience is unable to confirm the "true" genders of the characters as the use of gendered pronouns are written in quotations in the scenes set in the present when referring to the character later established as Han-Han. Both the narrator and their lover are written with intentional ambiguity to further blur the sense of self and gender identity of the two characters.

In *Last Words from Montmartre*, Qiu is particularly vague and uses both masculine and feminine self-referential terms for the narrator, Zoë. It is worth noting that Qiu Miaojin was already established as a lesbian author by the time *Last Words from Montmartre* was published and it was not unlikely that the reader would have had an expectation of a female narrator in approaching the text. This novel is primarily written as a series of letter from

Zoë, who refers to themself as a father figure to their pet bunny, though some of the gendered implications were lost in the English translation (Lee, 61). Furthermore, the narrator romanticizes a version of "Zoë who is handsome and beautiful" (Qiu, *Last Words* 35), emphasizing an ideal self that encompasses masculinity alongside femininity. Zoë's biological female-ness is cemented in later scene describing intimacy between the narrator and another female characters (Qiu, *Last Words* 114).

As their respective stories unfold, all three main characters explore a different side to their gender identity. While Lazi was clear in how they identified at the beginning, we see that label crumble for them, expressing that "though [they] couldn't define the kind of person [they were], [they] knew what [they weren't]" (Qiu, *Notes* 122) and that while others perceive them as a woman, they were a "beast straight out of Greek mythology" in their own mind. Qiu continues to push the boundaries of a gender binary intrinsically tied to biology by introducing Lazi's idea for "a gender-free society" (113), demonstrating a queer character who is grown sick of imposed labels and tired of the societal position they occupy. On the other hand, the unnamed narrator of "Platonic Hair" is "very seldom aware of [their] own gender" (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 65) and only seems to realize their own female-ness in relation to that of Han-Han. As the both narrators progress in their relationships, the divide between "femininity" and "female-ness" is widened.

*Last Words from Montmartre* and *Notes of a Crocodile* include musings from the narrator about what it means to be "feminine" and 'masculine" simultaneously. Zoë writes, "I hate that I am too 'male' (and I guess this hatred is driving me to become more 'female')" (Qiu, *Last Words* 83). Throughout the novel, Zoë often cites their imbalanced male-ness as a source or cause of their internal turmoil. Likewise, Lazi wonders at a gender binary that "stems from the duality of yin and yang, or some unspeakable evil" (Qiu, *Notes* 47), establishing the dichotomous nature of gender along with the narrator's disdain towards it. Both of these characters describe the dichotomy of male and female as a painful reality they endure, seemingly unrelated to their homosexual attraction but tied to the way they express love nonetheless.

However, the male-ness and female-ness of the characters in Qiu's works are only imposed upon them biologically and do not correspond with their expression of yin and yang, of femininity and masculinity. Qiu goes on to paint the character Meng Sheng, a "lunatic" gay man who moves in a "womanly manner" (Qiu, *Notes* 112) but remains a masculine figure. Meng Sheng ultimately confesses that "[his] masculine side loves [Lazi], and [his] feminine side loves Chu Kuang" (Qiu, *Notes* 219), the latter of whom is a male character. Such a declaration shows that he claims both yin and yang within himself and establishes these as mutually attractive forces. Towards the end of *Notes of a Crocodile*, the narrator themself begin to reconcile masculinity and femininity as coexisting forces within themself that draw towards one another, not necessarily contradicting.  Instances of masculinity and femininity as forces of mutual attraction are also established in "Platonic Hair" when the narrator discusses the masculinity within the narrator being drawn to the femininity of Han-Han (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 66), disregarding the biological female-ness of the narrator. While Qiu Miaojin's interpretation of a dichotomy between the active yang and passive yin rely on gendered implications, it presents these ideas as two sides of the same, both present in each individual. Unlike other rhetorics that may apply binary expectations onto homosexual attraction, Qiu artfully intertwines yin and yang within these characters without compromising their queerness.

## The Body as Abstract

Beyond the coexistence of femininity and masculinity within these queer characters in a metaphorical sense, Qiu Miaojin also manipulates the physical body, drawing on it as a representation of desire and queer identity. Albeit presented in different ways, the narrator of each story experiences a change within the physical body that reflects turmoil of the heart.

"Platonic Hair" depicts the hair of the narrator as a part of one's body but with a life of its own, growing at will and reaching for Han-Han despite the narrator's resistance. As a symbol of the narrator's unwanted homosexual lust, the hair takes on a supernatural nature and seeks to take control of Han-Han. Hair is used throughout the story as both the object of desire as well as the manifestation of desire–desire that was carefully cultivated by Han-Han as the pair "[became] conscientious actors" (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 57). The short story sets up the character's obsession over hair right from the opening line and the narrator claims that they had "come to depend on [their] love for it" (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 53). In turn, Han-Han too, uses the narrator's hair to shape them into someone that she could project her love onto (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 60). When Han-Han's hair is forcibly cut short, she becomes unrecognizable to the narrator who says that they "can't tell who it is" (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 72), dropping the use of gendered pronouns altogether and completely dehumanizing Han-Han. The femininity of Han-Han, manifested through her hair, is mutilated beyond recognition, just as the love that the narrator had toward her had become twisted and unbearable.

*Last Words from Montmartre* takes a different, more abstract approach to how desire manifests between bodies. Within this novel, Qiu explores the relationship between Zoë and Xu outside of a gender binary as the narrator, Zoë takes on both masculine and feminine roles within their relationship. The narrator identifies the spark in their relationships as "passion. It's not a male body's and it's not a female body's ... Passion is a quality" (Qiu, *Last Words* 112). The novel navigates Zoë's introspection as they fluctuate between the boundaries of masculinity and femininity, creating what Lee refers to as "a mystique of trans-genderism or de-genderism" (64). The letters that make up *Last Word of Montmartre* are addressed to Xu, who Zoë acknowledges as "the soul [they] have cared for" (Qiu, *Last Words* 105), despite the "betrayal" of Xu. This tender confession of love rejects gender and body, instead declaring the 'soul" of Xu as the true object of Zoë's ardent love. The narrator also iterates a separation between their spiritual self and the secular life they are expected to lead (Qiu, *Last Words* 20), further separating their body and soul. The deliberate dissociation between the corporeal self and that of the heart is brought up again and again; this too, could be understood as a form of bodily manipulation.

*Notes of a Crocodile* used a recurring emphasis on body imagery throughout the book to express the fixation that Lazi feels towards the physical self. There is an ongoing metaphor of a crocodile masquerading as a human, searching for joy and companionship whilst hiding its hideous, unhuman appearance. The episodes of this crocodile are interspersed throughout the novel and mirror Lazi's journey of identity. However, the bodily fixation in *Notes of a Crocodile* do not appear only in the form of the crocodile self. The narrator believes that their emotional pain is manifested in the body, describing an intimate moment with their lover, Shui Ling, with crude, vivid body imagery: "To paint a picture of our embrace, I'd almost have to use her blood and guts" (Qiu, *Notes* 56). Further, when Meng Sheng takes them to a gay bar, Lazi reveals that they felt as though "[their] mind and [their] body are out of sync" (Qiu, *Notes* 144) after vomiting, unable to reconcile and accept facets of their own queerness, leaving them only able to purge and expel these feeling from their body, perhaps a result of internalized disgust or a case of abstraction. The narrator's self-harming tendencies could also be understood as an attempt for them to reconcile with the body they cannot seem to comfortably occupy, a means to gain control over their "deviant sexual desires" (Qiu, *Notes* 53). While the tragedies Lazi experiences may not always take a physical form, they perceive it as corporeal, thinking that "[they'd] been waiting for the ax to fall, and now a bloody limb hit the ground with a thud." (Qiu, *Notes* 226). Throughout *Notes of a Crocodile*, Qiu draws attention to the discomfort that Lazi feels in their body as a result of an inability to reconcile their attraction to women as well as the masculinity within them.

## A Love that Parallels Death

Ultimately, Qiu Miaojin's works were instrumental in shaping perception of queer people as a result of their artistry in expressing the intensity and passion that these queer characters experience. All three narrating voices experience moments of impulse, driven by obsession, resulting in acts of violence. The queer love that Qiu writes of is vivid and painful, intense and destructive.

In particular, *Last Words from Montmartre* portrays a passion between Zoë and Xu that drives both of them to lose control. From the perspective of Zoë, "tranquil love is not love" (Qiu, *Last Words* 94). Throughout the non-chronological retelling of their story along with many musings and meditations on their love, there are ideas that Zoë returns to time and time again. Of these is their belief that the true expression of love is death, feeling that "[they] have a fatal, mortal, terminal passion for [Xu]. Ultimately [they] have no choice but death: an unconditional allegiance, an eternal bond to [Xu]" (Qiu, *Last Words* 77). Not only is death the final demonstration of love, it is also the ultimate unity between Zoë and Xu. While Xu was unreachable to Zoë as they write letter after letter, the narrator believes that this distance could be bridged through death by "extinguishing the dual layers of [their] spiritual life and corporeal life" (Qiu, *Last Words* 53). Death would bring a conclusion and "eternal bond" between the two and offer Zoë themself solace as their spirit and body would be united. Zoë writes of longing for someone "who will be able to look into my eyes and know that I am myself" (Qiu, *Last Words* 48). Inspired by Osamu Dazai and Yukio Mishima, both of whom wrote extensively about the human condition and mortality in the most-war era of Japan before famously committing suicide, the narrator believes that the true self and ideal self would be rejoined through death. Zoë feels that "[their] desire became unhinged and [their] pain excruciating" (Qiu, *Last Words* 77), and thus their love could not be separated from pain and Zoë desperately relied on it.

Through *Notes of a Crocodile*, Qiu writes of a cast equally haunted by their love. Lazi sees an ideal love as something that maintains life, feeling as though "she (Shui Ling) was my lifeline." (Qiu, *Notes* 19). Lazi is not the only character who was dependent on a blossoming romance to get through their daily life. Zhi Rou, another queer character, similarly stated that she chases after love time and time again because "[she didn't know how to live without it. [She'd] have no will to go on..." (Qiu, *Notes* 160). In the aftermath of the breakup, Lazi describes their life as "constantly on the border of life and death" (Qiu, *Notes* 146). Without the "lifeline" of Shui Ling, the narrator becomes increasingly unstable. Not unlike Zoë, Lazi is reliant on a passionate and fulfilling love to drive their life. The desire that these characters experience is both the cornerstone of their sense of self and the source of their pain. Lazi claims that "the problem was the way [they] loved: It was the very cause of [their] pain" (Qiu, *Notes* 124); likewise, the narrator of "Platonic Hair" states that "to be a woman who loves another woman is to be sharply, heart-piercingly humbled" (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 69). To be unable to fulfill a perfect love is likened to death. The narrator of "Platonic Hair" laments, "I can't protect you... I wish I was dead ..." (Qiu, "Platonic Hair" 72), a sentiment that mirrors from Zoë's "fatal, mortal, terminal passion" for Xu. To be parted from their lover is to experience death; the inevitability of the parting means that to love is boundless pain. The representation of queerness throughout these stories crafts an impactful and personal experience without sugarcoating the tortured underpinnings of "deviant" desires. The intensity of love and of passion in Qiu Miaojin's writing is powerful and striking, inviting the reader into the minds of the narrator intimately.

## Conclusion

Qiu Miaojin works have undoubtedly shaped the literary landscape of not only Taiwan, but of the Sino-sphere of literature. Beyond their willingness to explore queerness beyond labels, their post-modernist views of society, politics, and autonomy was groundbreaking for its time and continues to be impactful today. The three texts explore the manipulation of gender identity, blurring and redefining the lines between physical and spiritual self, and the depiction of love and obsession. Through their apologetically explicit expressions of identity and attraction, Qiu MiaoJin's stories dismantle conventional beliefs of queer identity and helped build the foundation for the *Ku'er* movement. Unafraid to challenge the perception of queer identity, these works take on an intimate and personal perspective of the queer experience while pushing the readers to grow and shift alongside the characters. Only scratching the surface of Qiu's work, this discussion of queerness and identity aims to deconstruct the revolutionary approach they took to their work.

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# Roman Empire Slaves in Literary and Administrative Roles, and their Correlation with Identity

**Author: Brooklyn Hollinger**

Keywords: Identity, Literary and Administrative Labour, Marcus Tullius Cicero, Manumission, Pliny the Elder, Roman Slavery

*Trigger Warnings: Discussions of slavery*

Illustration by Namya Kohli


## Abstract:

*While slavery was not a foreign concept to many ancient societies, the Roman Empire was unique in the types of roles slaves were involved in. While most, if not all, slaves were involved in laborious work of some sort, a topic of interest is slaves in urban settings who did administrative and literary work for their owners. The type of work that is of interest is those slaves who were copyists, amanuenses, readers, and writersa. With these types of jobs in mind, I examined how the slaves' involvement in these roles would have contributed to their identity as slaves. Consequently, there is also the converse side of the analysis that examines how slave owners would have formed their elite identity by tasking their slaves with these duties. Specifically, I surveyed two cases of slave owners who engaged their slaves in literary and administrative work: Pliny the Elder and the hundreds of slaves he owned, and Marcus Tullius Cicero and his slave Tiro. Through these two contrasting accounts of aristocratic slave owners and their slaves who were involved in the administrative and literary work, I theorize about how both groups would have thought, or didn't think, about their identity. Aspects of social hierarchy, physical labour of the body, and manumission are all discussed and considered.*

The Roman Empire was characterized by many aspects ranging from those of cultural, linguistic, economic, political, and social categories. An interesting component of the Roman Empire that was unlike that of any other ancient society, was slavery. It was not uncommon for many ancient societies to practice slavery, yet the Romans were of a certain eccentricity in that their slave society had a high percentage of manumission[1]—the act of being freed from slavery. A large population of enslaved people performed extremely laborious jobs in rural settings under harsh conditions, such as wearing collars and chains.[2] Yet slaves also existed in urban settings as household slaves, public imperial slaves, and were involved with anything regarding physical labour.[3]

There are various discourses on slave identity during the Roman Empire, and it is difficult to define without having any direct evidence from slaves themselves.[4] A particular interest when it comes to slaves in the Roman Empire is those who were tasked with administrative roles, particularly regarding a literary aspect. There is evidence that slaves performed certain roles under their owners pertaining to literary customs, such as copyediting and being an amanuensis (someone who took dictation).[5] However, due to the lack of personal and anecdotal evidence from slaves themselves, the concept of how these roles shaped their identity can only be speculated about. Additionally, this theory is based on evidence that exists from other literate groups, mostly the elite population. There are specific accounts of aristocratic, elite Romans who owned slaves that performed literary roles, such as Pliny the Elder[6] and Marcus Tullius Cicero.[7] With these elite owners in mind, along with general accounts of slaves involved in these literary and administrative roles, an understanding of how the identity of both the slaves and their owners was formed can be evaluated.

Many influential texts that we have today come from the period of the Roman Empire. During a time when everything needed to be written out by hand to be mass produced, it's clear that this process was not performed by a single individual. One method of producing, upkeep, and distributing literature was using slaves.[8] Because slaves assisted with these aspects of literature, the Roman literary world was able to thrive on the illustrious and comprehensive scale that it does to this day. This also shows the variety and range of roles that a slave would have had in the society of the Roman Empire. If one slave lived in a rural setting doing physically laborious work, and another slave was involved in the domestic, administrative side of things, it can be difficult to define a comprehensive slave identity. The roles they were involved in during their enslavement, and the skill sets they acquired as a result, most likely were starkly different. Therefore, it makes sense to examine slave identity based on the roles they were involved in, rather than by a singular group definition.

Any Roman author that produced literature in the empire would have been part of a small group of educated and literate men. There was not a large percentage of the population that possessed literacy skills, let alone the ability to create and utilize customs of literature.[9] So, for a slave to be involved in the composition and production of literature, when there was already a small percentage of people with the skills to do so, arguably would have greatly influenced their self-perception in terms of their identity. It is difficult to say exactly how many domestic slaves would have been involved in these literary and

[1] Bankston, Zach, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Review* 31, no. 3 (2012): 205.
[2] Roymans, Nico, and Marenne Zandstra. "Indications for Rural Slavery in the Northern Provinces." In *Villa Landscapes in the Roman North: Economy, Culture and Lifestyles* (Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 162.
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[4] Fitzgerald, William. "Introduction: living with slaves." In *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*. (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.
[5] Johnson, William A., and Holt N. Parker. "Situating Literacy at Rome." In *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 122.
[6] Blake, Sarah, "Now You See Them: Slaves and Other Objects as Elements of the Roman Master," *Helios* 39, (2012): 194.
[7] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 203.
[8] Fitzgerald, "Introduction: living with slaves," 2.
[9] Johnson, William A., and Holt N. Parker. "Literacy or Literacies in Rome?" In *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 46.

administrative roles. However, it is plausible that these duties would have been a step-up from the usual domestic roles that slaves in urban settings were often involved in.[10] Duties such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the owner's children were all responsibilities that urban slaves did in the household. Therefore, being involved in the elite space of producing literature, alongside the owner who had the skillset to do so, would have influenced the enslaved person's identity—whether directly or indirectly.

It is unclear whether the elite owner instructed his slaves to be involved in these literary roles because of their skillset, or due to the convenience of having slaves. It was most likely the latter. Nevertheless, this decision by the owner to employ slaves for literary and administrative roles would have influenced how the enslaved person thought of themselves; especially as someone who possessed the ability to be involved in the act of producing literature.

As Habinek puts it, slaves were involved in writing, "sometimes in the practical sense that a slave [would] function as copyist or amanuensis"[11] which further emphasizes that they were engaged in the literary world. However, Habinek also makes the statement that because writing involved the body there was a "submission to an externally imposed system of constraints, and thus treated as socially inferior to the free exercise of the voice."[12] This goes to show the other side of slave involvement in the writing process, and how this would have contributed to their identity. While their role as a copyist or an amanuensis might have granted them the privilege of being part of an elite group akin to their owners, these types of jobs still reinforced their physical condition of being a slave. Ultimately, in terms of Roman social structure, slaves were an inferior group. Therefore, it stands to reason that regardless of how prestigious these literary duties appeared, there would always be the underlying label regarding their social status.

This in turn shows how slave and owner identity go hand-in-hand with one another. Even if the owner involves his slaves in something as prestigious as creating literary work, he still must maintain his authority. Therefore, as Habinek said, there is still the underlying concept of slave work involving the body, which puts the owner above the slave—both physically and socially. This also reinforces the concept of inferior slave identity for the enslaved person, and superior identity for the aristocratic owner. The slave ultimately was subjected to work involving labour, and their owner was the one reinforcing it.

The case of the author Pliny the Elder, and his utilization of slaves in the literary process, as well as their accommodation to him, showcases this concept of elevating the elite owner's identity and status. Pliny's slaves tended to him in many respects: reading to him, bathing him, along with other ways of serving him.[13] Here there is a focus on these actions being done to Pliny, making him a passive subject. This concept enhances the fact that owners used their slaves to uplift their own identity. Pliny had his slaves accommodate him, and he used them as objects to enhance his aristocratic identity as an elite slave owner. In terms of literary involvement, Pliny's slaves acted as readers and writers for him.[14] This example is consistent with the idea that even though slaves might have been involved in literary work, the concept of their physical roles being used to uplift their owner is reinforced here. Additionally, someone like Pliny would have had around 500 slaves.[15] Therefore, uniqueness in terms of literary skill set would not have been outstanding, since his slaves would have shared these traits. On the other hand, for Pliny, the constant attention given to him from his slaves, and the fact that he

[10] Garnsey, Peter, Richard Saller, Jaś Elsner, Martin Goodman, Richard Gordon, Greg Woolf, and Marguerite Hirt. "Family and Household," In *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed., (University of California Press, 2015), 153.
[11] Johnson, William A., and Holt N. Parker. "Situating Literacy at Rome," In Ancient Literacies:: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 122.
[12] Johnson, "Situating Literacy at Rome," 122.
[13] Johnson, William. A, "Reading for Efficiency in Ancient Rome: The Case of Pliny the Elder," *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*, 15, (January 2023): 17.
[14] Johnson, "Reading for Efficiency in Ancient Rome: The Case of Pliny the Elder," 17.
[15] Johnson, "Reading for Efficiency in Ancient Rome: The Case of Pliny the Elder," 17.

was able to get credit for his literary work on the backs of them, reinforced the elite idea that slaves are lesser than; and that they are used to bring attention to the elite status of the owner. As well, to reinforce their elitist, superior identity through the literary roles of slaves.[16]

Pliny the Elder is one case of an elite owner utilizing his slaves for literary production and consumption. Yet, it is an exceptional one because of the sheer number of slaves that he had, and that were involved in that process. Another elite owner who had a slave work on the technical production of literature and administration was the politician Marcus Tullius Cicero and his slave Marcus Tullius Tiro.[17] Tiro's case is unique, in that the skillset he acquired in his role as Cicero's assistant and letter-writer, allowed him to garner status. Additionally, "his talents were always in demand"[18] even after Cicero's death. Compared to the slaves of Pliny the Elder, Tiro is a significant case because of his acquired skill set. Due to Tiro's abilities, and Cicero's elite status, he could be classified as a unique case of a slave involved in literary tasks for their owners.[19]

This exceptional relationship between Cicero and Tiro would have significantly contributed to the evolving formation of both their roles within the social structure of Roman society, but also their identity as well. While it was not uncommon to have one's slaves involved in these literary and administrative roles,[20] the language Cicero uses in his letters to Tiro shows his extreme affection and admiration for the slave. In one of his letters, Cicero addresses him as his "dear Tiro" and highlights the intricacies of their relationship; Cicero advises Tiro to "look after your health—or as you know I care for you."[21] Based on the treatment from other owners towards their slaves in literary roles—such as Pliny for instance—it is clear that Cicero cared deeply for Tiro.

This display of affection, and evidence of an exceptional relationship, would have been unique for someone in Cicero's position. Most of the time Roman owners used slaves for a variety of different kinds of work, and in this case, it was for literary purposes. One would think based on the evidence of slavery from the Roman Empire that these kinds of relationships would have been economically motivated towards the interests of the owner. It would not be uncommon for some type of relationship to form between the slave and the owner—especially in an urban domestic setting, as they would see each other on a regular basis. However, Cicero and Tiro's connection seems like a deviation from the Roman societal norm. This may have led to Cicero having confusing feelings regarding his identity as an elite male citizen. Roman social classes existed in such a way that each person who was situated in their class would have been socially aware of the position and its implications.[22] Therefore, for someone of higher status like Cicero to be publicly writing his admiration for his slave contends with what might be thought of as the social norm of interactions among people in Roman social classes.

However, as was seen previously, this is an exceptional case. Bankston points out that Cicero was keen on loyalty and affection from his freedman, yet often did not receive these qualities he aspired for.[23] Therefore it ascertains that if someone like Tiro was providing these values to his owner, then Cicero would think highly of him. However, Tiro may have devoted his loyalty to Cicero

[16] Blake, Sarah, "Now You See Them: Slaves and Other Objects as Elements of the Roman Master," 207.
[17] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 203.
[18] Renzo, Anthony Di, "His Master's Voice: Tiro and the Rise of the Roman Secretarial Class." *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 30, no. 2 (April 2000): 155.
[19] Bankston "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 203.
[20] Fitzgerald, William. "Introduction: living with slaves." In *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.
[21] Cicero. *Letters to Friends, Volume II: Letters 114-280*. Edited and translated by D. R. Shackleton Bailey. Loeb Classical Library 216. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.
[22] Garnsey, Peter, Richard Saller, Jaś Elsner, Martin Goodman, Richard Gordon, Greg Woolf, and Marguerite Hirt. "The Social Hierarchy," In T*he Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 2nd ed., (University of California Press, 2015), 134.
[23] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 205–6.

on account of the fact that he was a slave, and because he was obligated to. A freedman (someone who was freed from slavery by their owner) could have the luxury of not following these types of commands from their former owner. At the end of the day, they are not legally contracted to their employer. Someone like Tiro would not have been able to ignore these qualities their owner desired from them, because he was a slave.

While Tiro was highly skilled in what he did for Cicero, there is the underlying fact that he was Cicero's slave, and his position in the Roman social hierarchy defined him as such. It is evident that not all urban domestic slaves would have had the privilege to be allowed in such a serious role. While Tiro's skills would have bolstered his concept of his identity as a slave, the fact remains that Tiro inevitably was a slave until his release from slavery (manumission) in 53 BCE.[24]

When Tiro was freed from slavery he continued to work alongside Cicero, who employed him.[25] This concept is nothing new in terms of freedmen's employment in the Roman Empire. Often freedmen would have been employed by their previous owners for a variety of reasons.[26] It seems that Tiro was once again an exceptional case, in that his skills of literary and administrative knowledge were valued during his time as a slave, as well as when he was manumitted.

Along with the case of Tiro, there was the possibility that freedmen who were involved in literary and administrative roles as slaves would have had sets of skills that employers found valuable. As seen, these literary roles that some slaves were in were not typically part of routine urban customs of slavery.[27] Additionally, it was not uncommon for Roman owners to employ their past slaves as freedmen. Sometimes these freedmen would be doing similar work in literary and administrative settings, like when they were a slave, and then would carry these skills with them into their employment.[28] It's clear that being educated in the Roman Empire was highly acclaimed, and it's evident that this value of education extended from owners to their slaves, and carried through to their lives after manumission. Therefore, slave identity in relation to literary skill goes beyond the status of being enslaved. Slaves being a part of literary production while in the confines of their status were able to benefit them when it came to manumission. This would have influenced their identity as more than just a slave who could possess privileged roles—it would have allowed them to find work and value in their role as a freedperson that could contribute to the production of literature.

However, this notion is slightly challenged by Temin's view that regardless of social status, education prevailed: "The fundamental economic division...was between educated and uneducated—skilled and unskilled—not between slave and free."[29] This further complicates the notion of slave identity in terms of literary involvement. If education was valued the most in terms of what it can provide for the economy, then the idea of status is irrelevant. However, that cannot be the only case. Pliny the Elder's slaves were involved in the literary process alongside him; yet they were used as a means to an end for Pliny. Their role was to read and write for him, but this practice was intended to uplift and bolster him. This would have elevated his perception of his identity regarding being an elite slave owner and would have diminished the slaves' perception of the value of the education they had, and the jobs they did. However, for Cicero's slave Tiro, the relationship appeared more fraternal and somewhat equal—Cicero cared for Tiro deeply, and this was expressed through the content of his letters. Additionally, Tiro was employed by Cicero in his freedom in the same duties he had as a slave. Therefore, Tiro's individual slave identity would have differed from those of Pliny's slaves. Even

[24] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 208.
[25] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 208.
[26] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 208.
[27] Garnsey, "Family and Household," 153.
[28] Temin, Peter. "The Labor Market of the Early Roman Empire." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 34, no. 4 (2004), 537.
[29] Temin, "The Labor Market of the Early Roman Empire." 538.

though both Tiro and Pliny's slaves would have been involved in assisting their owners in the reading and writing process, it was ultimately the owner's treatment towards their slave(s) that resulted in the slave's formation of their literary identity.

Additionally, because the slave owner both directly and indirectly curates the slave literary identity, they are also shaping their identity as an elite owner. Cicero is someone who prides himself on high manumission rates for his slaves and likes loyalty from his freedmen.[30] Pliny on the other hand had hundreds of slaves tending to him personally that resulted in him being credited as the author yet was done through him being the passive subject. This would have contributed to his identity as a Roman slave owner who uses slaves as a means to an end. Cicero's elite slave owner identity, however, presents him as someone who values the work slaves do and it was evident in his actions as an active subject.

It is clear that the involvement of slaves in the literary and administrative environment of their owners in the Roman Empire had an influential impact on their identity, as well as their owners. Through general understandings of what kind of roles they did, such as taking dictation and being copyists, along with specific case studies of slaves such as those of Pliny the Elder, and Tiro, a comprehensive understanding of identity can be evaluated. Both slave and owner identity influence each other through the owner's treatment of their slaves in the literary process, as well as the individual skill set the slave had in the role.

Additionally, there is one notion of how in terms of the Roman economy, one's status was irrelevant, as long as their literary skill set could contribute to the economy.[31] While this complicates the notion of identity in terms of slave skill set in the function of literature, the overall idea was that slaves in administrative and literary functions were dependent on their owners; and in turn, the owner's identity and perception of themselves was influenced by their treatment of their slaves. Furthermore, any sort of literary skill acquired in slavery was beneficial for that individual in their manumission. Because the Roman economy depended on these skill sets for its production of literature, it would have been vital for a freedman to possess these skills. This further emphasizes the idea that regardless of the treatment of the slaves while under the ownership of their master, the skills they acquired were of value in the larger social structure. However, because their identity was influenced in slavery related to literacy and administrative roles, there would have been an opportunity in their freedom to continue these skills, and have a newly formed identity in relation to their skills, but also their newfound freedom.

[30] Bankston, "Administrative Slavery in the Ancient Roman Republic: The Value of Marcus Tullius Tiro in Ciceronian Rhetoric," 205-6.
[31] Temin, "The Labor Market of the Early Roman Empire." 538.

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# The Assassination of Olof Palme
## *A Reflection of the Modern Effects of Scandinavian Mythology?*

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Keywords: Modern Swedish Politics, Old Norse Literature, Olof Palme Assassination, Scandinavian Folklore, Scandinavian Radicalization

*Trigger Warnings: Discussions of political violence and radicalization*

Abstract:

*This paper aims to explore the continued intermingling between modern politics, Scandinavian folklore and Old Norse texts. This is done through the medium of the assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986, an event that permanently changed the course of Swedish political history. Palme's untimely murder was influenced by the Scandinavian folklore, sagas and eddas (a term for two important Old Norse texts) that are deeply intertwined with modern Swedish modes of politicking. Whether it be the alt-right radicalization of one suspect, the degeneracy of another, or the socialist and environmentalist politics of Palme himself, this paper aims to give readers a better understanding of how key Scandinavian literature is relevant in the everyday political lives of the Swedish public and political elite alike.*

The assassination of Olof Palme was a critical event in Swedish history that forever changed the political landscape of Scandinavia. To some extent the morals and politics of pre-modern Scandinavian texts and folktales can be explored through the suspects and the politics involved in Palme's unfortuitous death. Viktor Gunnarsson as a suspect allows a deeper understanding of the alt-right's connection with Old Norse texts. Christer Pettersson's characterization as a psychopath incapable of a calculated assassination can exemplify the shift away from the ethics of the Viking Age. Whereas, Palme's socialist views and policies are reflected in a variety of cornerstone Scandinavian texts, which may have inspired him from childhood. The environmentalist aspects of Sámi and Finnish folklore as well as medieval Norse texts, could also have shaped Palme's policies. Overall, the death of Olof Palme allows for the analysis of the remaining significance of mythological texts and tales from Scandinavia during a crucial point in Swedish history.

There were two key suspects in the assassination of Olof Palme: Viktor Gunnarsson and Christer Pettersson. Though Christer Pettersson continues to be widely considered the true assassin and was convicted as such, some people continue to believe Gunnarsson was involved in the killing which was a wider conspiracy involving the American government (Bondeson 171). Gunnarsson was initially the prime suspect and was a former member of the ultra-right European Workers' Party (Jenkins 22). This group was closely associated with known fascists and anti-semites, such as Lyndon LaRouche (Gilbert 5-7). Gunnarsson's radical and extremist views, and open vitriol towards Palme made him appear even more suspicious to investigators. As well as being a right-wing extremist, it was said "The female sex was Gunnarsson's prime interest in life" (Bondeson 62). The behavior of Gunnarsson towards women, as described in *Blood on the Snow: The Killing of Olof Palme* is indicative of the modern "incel" (involuntarily celibate) behavior, a mode that can be associated with Odinism and Asatru (Kitts 14). "Incels" commonly believe that a woman is owed to them, often with certain implications of sexual purity and servitude included. This is relevant to the hyper-masculine tendencies and stringent gender roles that are reflected throughout Old Norse texts, particularly in the cult of Odin. The links between anti-semitism, Odinism and Asatru are even stronger; the belief held by the German National-Socialist party that the Aryan race is the most supreme and all others should be eradicated was inspired by Norse mythology. The Nazis used this rhetoric based in Scandinavian legend, to rationalize the horrors of ethnic cleansing committed during the holocaust. Most notably lauded psychologist Carl Jung's essay "Wotanism" which became the basis for this rhetoric points to *The Lay of Rig* and the Æsir-Vanir rivalry to support this view (Jung 20). This belief had began prior to the second world war in Scandinavian paganism and by Gunnarsson's time was already firmly rooted in some right-wing circles (Asprem 48). After the second world war right-wing extremists and white supremacist continued to use this line of thinking to vindicate their racism. Gunnarsson's political beliefs likely had a plethora of influences, yet his upbringing in Sweden makes it undeniable he would have been exposed to Norse mythology. Being exposed to hyper-masculine characters such as Odin and Thor in childhood possibly contributed to the earliest formulations of his belief of ownership over women that eventually led him down the path of the radical right. Ultimately, given a modern perspective it seems unlikely that Viktor Gunnarsson killed Olof Palme, but the influence of Norse mythology on Gunnarsson and other haters of Palme is undeniable.

Christer Pettersson, the most likely suspect of Palme's assassination, appears to have no political motivation. Pettersson, also known as "the Bayonet Killer," appears to have been a violent psychopath, with a history of crime and murder; his only motive for killing someone as notable as the Prime Minister would have been attention. In many ways Petterson is a much better representation of the fearless warrior of the Viking era than Gunnarsson. Pettersson's history of violently attacking people with seemingly

little notice, has been equated to going "berserk" (Bondeson 116). The morality presented in medieval Scandinavian literature is vastly different to the morality of modern society and Pettersson embodies several of the values put forth in *Sayings of the High One*:

> Quite enough baseless blather comes
> from the man never silent;
> a quick tongue, unless it's held in check
> often talks itself into trouble
> (*The Poetic Edda* 17).

Pettersson embodied this verse in his trial by keeping his story short and sweet and never giving away more details than necessary. His honesty about previous crimes and his description of his rather pathetic life as an alcoholic and habitual drug user, persuaded the Swedish public that he was far from a calculated assassin (Bondeson 133).

> Cattle die, kinsmen die,
> the self must also die;
> I know one thing which never dies:
> the reputation of each dead man
> (*The Poetic Edda* 23).

In the previous stanza the speaker mentions "a good reputation," something Petterson definitely did not have. However, I would argue that killing the political leader of Sweden would come with much acclaim in medieval times, despite murder now being considered widely amoral. One thing widely agreed upon in the case of Olof Palme's assassination, is that it would have been highly difficult for someone to have calculated Palme's whereabouts that night; this means that if Pettersson was in fact the killer he was most likely an opportunist. In the case Pettersson truly was the killer, and there was no larger conspiracy at play, he certainly made a lasting reputation for himself. Rather than his memory being lost in time, Petterson has become a crucial player in modern Swedish history. However, Pettersson being portrayed as an ideal man of the Viking age is not wholly accurate, as stated:

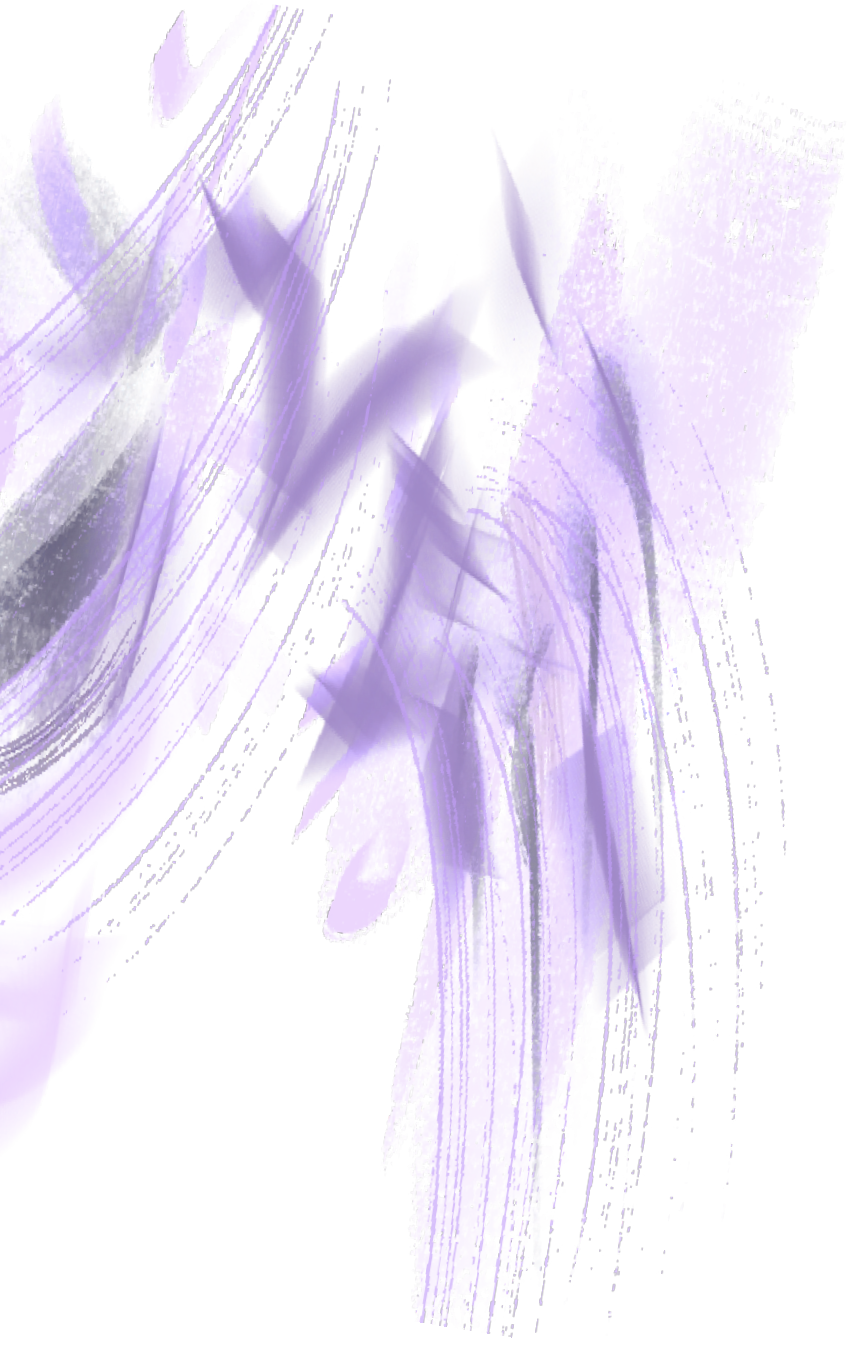

Illustration by Sophia Foder

Let no man hold onto the cup, but drink
mead in moderation
let him say what's necessary or be silent;
no man will scold you
because you go off early to bed
(*The Poetic Edda* 15).

Pettersson certainly was not consuming his alcohol in moderation, and though amphetamines were not invented at the time *The Poetic Edda* was composed, it can be assumed that drug use would fall under this umbrella as well. Overall, analyzing Christer Pettersson through an Old Norse lens, reveals that he may have fit within the medieval moral workings in regards to violent crime, but his drinking and drug use would have prevented him from becoming a respectable Viking.

Fascists have borrowed from Norse mythology; however, socialists (and democratic socialists) also employ ideals expounded from folk tales dating back centuries. There has been some debate as to whether Palme's killing was of a political nature. However, the also seemingly random stabbing of another leftist politician, Anna Lindh in 2003 suggests the politics of Lindh and Palme may have been their downfall. Sweden is generally considered to be a safe country and thus the assassination of the Prime Minister was seen as a freakish one-off incident, when the Foreign Minister was killed, Sweden was forced to accept political violence as part of its identity as a nation (Eyerman 75-76). Olof Palme was a member of the Swedish Social Democratic party, a left leaning party that embraced socialism. The socialist anti-capitalist views of modern-day Scandinavia are reflected in *The Kalevala*, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, *The Poetic Edda*, and *Snorri's Edda*. In *The Kalevala*, a mystical device called the Sampo is responsible for all the prosperity in Pohjola. The Sampo is kept under lock and key, and the prosperity it brings is not shared with the people of Kalevala. After Pohjola's leader Louhi refuses to share the Sampo, Väinämöinen, Ilmarinen and Lemminkäinen opt to steal it for their people (Lönnrot 547). A great battle occurs between the soldiers of Pohjola and the heroes from Kalevala, resulting in the Sampo being destroyed. Kalevala retains a

few pieces, but the prosperity brought by the Sampo will never be matched after its destruction (Lönnrot 562-574). This folktale dates back over a millennium, and at the time of its collection by Elias Lönnrot it continued to be sung about by peasants laboring away in the harsh conditions of menial farmwork. This presents a decidedly anti-capitalist idea, that shames the bourgeoisie for hoarding prosperity and highlights the threat accompanied with the rise of the proletariat, and the destruction to infrastructure that this may cause. Both *The Saga of the Volsungs*, and *The Prose Edda* (and to a much lesser degree *Snorri's Edda*) recount the story of Sigurd the dragon slayer and more importantly the curse of Andvari (*The Poetic Edda* 147; Byock 57-59). Possibly another analogy for the defects of capitalism, Andvari curses his hoard of gold to bring death and misfortune to whomever it belongs to. Between the two renditions of this tale there are multiple discrepancies, even within the *Poetic Edda* having The Poem of Atli and The Greenlandic Lay of Atli providing two different accounts of Atilla the Huns downfall, both ending in gruesome bloodshed (*The Poetic Edda* 211-234). Regardless of the lack of one concrete storyline, the gold hoard to various degrees is responsible for the massacres that occur between kin and brethren. The tale of Andvari's gold posits that even when someone as pure and good as Sigurd holds immense riches, the people around him can still be corrupted by it. This is displayed in Palme's politics and in the overwhelmingly socialist politics throughout Scandinavia. Socialism aims to spread wealth more evenly, preventing situations such as Sigurd's.

Some scholars such as Ursula Dronke have even theorized that the coming of Ragnarok as described in *Snorri's Edda* and *The Poetic Edda* is akin to the coming of a Communist revolution (*The Poetic Edda* 3-12; Sturluson 60-63). Dronke writes that "couched in the social and economic terms of Marx's political vision, the inevitable downfall of the world of capitalist society will lead to the emergence of the new world of the socialist order" (41). Though Palme's socialism is very different from pure Marxism, Marx's influence on all socialist thought is undeniable. Furthermore, the tight hold the Social Democratic Party had on Sweden during their forty-year reign, broken only one term prior to Palme's appointment as Prime Minister, meant that no communist revolution was required to achieve socialism in Sweden. This insinuates that Sweden was able to push back the date of Ragnarok by using socialist values to keep workers happy, though in modern times Sweden appears to be gravitating towards capitalism once more. Perhaps Marx and mythology are correct, and Ragnarok/a communist revolution of the masses is inevitable. Overall, throughout Old Norse literature and Scandinavian folk history there are anti-capitalist themes that were reflected in Palme's politics, potentially creating a motivation for his assassination by the anti-communist far-right.

Olof Palme is notable in his generation for being a firm environmental advocate and campaigning for environmental change before it is too late (Sundström 83). Palme famously stated " it is absolutely necessary that concerted, international action is undertaken . . . solutions will require far-reaching changes in attitudes and social structures" (Palme). Carolyne Larrington theorizes that Yggdrasil's portrayal in *Snorri's Edda* and *The Poetic Edda* influences modern day environmental perspectives (*The Norse Myths that Shape the Way We Think* 25-52; *The Poetic Edda* 19; Sturluson 27-30). Larrington connects the idea of Yggdrasil as the center of the world and its existence providing sustenance for all, human or animal, to earth and the great duty it accords to humanity by allowing for our very existence (25-31). Even after Ragnarok, Yggdrasil is key to the survival of the new generation of humans that survived the battle of gods and giants (33). Furthermore, trees in Norse mythology are associated with wisdom and communication, as Odin hangs from a tree to gain his wisdom and Yggdrasil connects all the nine realms (31-33). Lastly Larrington emphasizes the myth that man came from driftwood, making the connection between humans and nature intrinsically linked to the existence of people (38-40). The connections extrapolated upon by Larrington show the importance of environmental protection in Norse mythology, this may be one reason why Nordic leaders such as Palme were so ahead of the curve in regards to counteracting the effects of

climate change. *The Kalevala*'s powerful natural imagery underscores the importance of the natural environment in Finnish life. Despite the moisty mires of Finland creating formidable conditions for farming, and the bitter cold creating an environment that seems vindictive at times, respecting and honoring nature is a key theme of *The Kalevala*. The national instrument of Finland, the Kantele, is hugely important in Finnish culture, and the appreciation for the services of the birch tree in creating this wonder are demonstrated by the forty fourth *runos* of *The Kalevala* (Lönnrot 575-584; Van Cleef 54-55). Though Palme was not from Finland the close geographic and diplomatic ties of Sweden and Finland means the cultural influence of *The Kalevala* in Sweden is not completely null and void. Lastly, the influence of Sámi culture and mythology on the environmentalism of Swedish politics is not to be forgotten. Palme was a staunch supporter of multiculturalism, including the rights of Sámi people to preserve their culture and communal life (Tawat 481). Juha Torvinen explores Sámi music in a "mytho-ecological framing," analyzing the significance of ecology and the natural environment in Sámi musical works inspired by the mythology (168). Thomas DuBois' work in regards to *sieiddit* reveals that many of the most sacred objects and sites in Sámi culture were and some still are naturally occurring (2). Through both Torvinen and DuBois' work the emphasis on nature's value in Sámi circles is clear. In spite of the colonialism that has wiped much of Sámi mythology from collective memory, the key aspect of rituals involving the natural world remain essential to continued Sámi practices. Thus, Olof Palme's environmentalism may have been tied to his pro-multiculturalism stance linked via the Sámi and their practice of earth-worship. Comprehensively, the texts and oral tales passed down over centuries of Scandinavian history may have been of influence in the environmentalist politics of the Olof Palme era; the very same politics that resulted in the *Palmehatet*[1] phenomenon and his assassination.

In conclusion, through the medium of Olof Palme's assassination an analysis of the effects of Old Norse Literature and Scandinavian folktales on modern politics and morals can be performed. Upon closer examination of Viktor Gunnarsson and his right-wing radicalism, Norse mythology can be connected to a variety of right-wing modes, including antisemitism, racism, white-supremacy and misogyny. The second suspect, Christer Pettersson can be used as an exemplification of the changing morals between medieval and modern times. The socialism of Palme and like-minded politicians is uncovered through the potential influences of *The Kalevala*, *The Saga of the Volsungs*, *The Poetic Edda*, and *Snorri's Edda*. The environmentalist aspect of Palme's policy may have also stemmed from Sámi and Nordic folktales and mythological literature. None of this is to say that Norse mythology and Northern European folklore played a direct role in Palme's death, but rather Palme's assassination can be used as a tool to understand the subtle influences it continues to have centuries later.

[1] This roughly translates from Swedish to "Palme hatred".

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# The Convergence of Death and Rebirth in Orphic Cosmogony and Christianity

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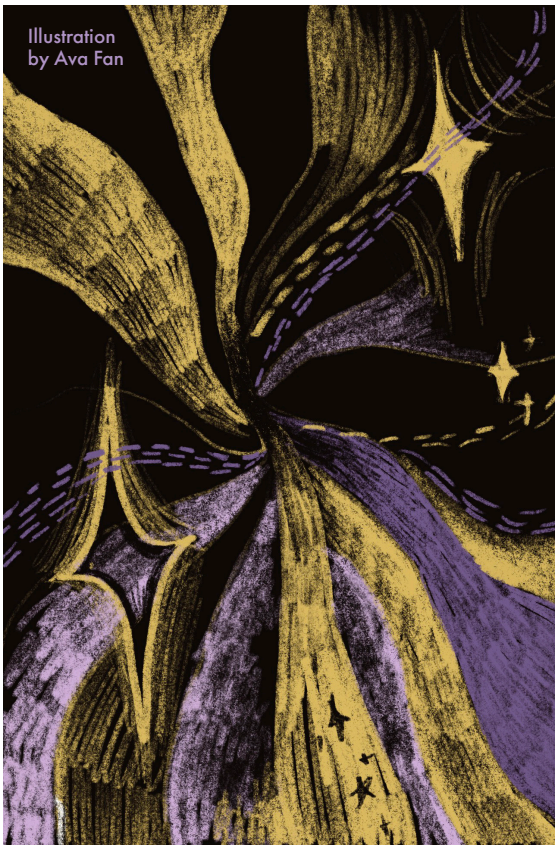
Keywords: Comparative Religious Studies, Orphic Cosmogony, Orphism, Theogony and Cosmology

Abstract:

*Orphism is a somewhat obscure Greek religious movement from the Hellenic world of antiquity which existed somewhat concretely from the fifth century BC to at least the third century AD. Within the Orphic cosmogony, the birth of the universe radically alters from the typical Greek creation story, often involving a cosmic egg and god of creation, Phanes or Protogonus, instead of the ambiguous genesis in Hesiod's Theogony. Having been a mystery cult, Orphism's exact doctrines and practices remain elusive, and there is scholarly debate about whether it should even be classed as a separate religion. However, with the survival of a number of texts, it is somewhat less grasping for primary sources than the Eleusinian Mysteries. Through the interpretation surrounding several hymns, poems, and the Derveni papyrus, death and rebirth's connection with the Orphic cosmology and theogony is clearly purposeful, as well as intersecting with typically Christian narratives to a great extent. At the same time, many of the comparisons with Christianity beyond the superficial are frankly overwrought, and one must be careful not to conflate the two as independently influencing one another in a significant sense of either doctrine or content.*



## *Introduction*

With any aspect of Orphism or the Orphic religious movement, the primary concern is a startling lack of consensus on essentially any point of data and even whether scholars find Orphism to be a separate religious identity or rather a religious current. While there is much specific theological material in comparison to other Greco-Roman mystery religions, a large portion of this information conflicts with other portions in the extreme. In one instance, Larry Alderink finds no less than 8 different cosmogonies within a variety of sources identified as Orphic, from poets, playwrights, philosophers, all traditional forms of theology, and the famous Derveni papyrus (30; 36-39). Of particular interest is this papyrus; discovered in 1962 and dating from the fourth century BCE, it is the oldest surviving manuscript from Europe, yet also contains some of the first genuine Orphic theology, interpreting a poem attributed to Orpheus by allegory (Alderink 26).[1] Genuine discrepancies occur between which gods created the universe and how they did so, in all being labelled "Orphic" there are commonalities which unite them and allow scholars to draw meaning from collating them. Accordingly, one of these prevalent themes is death and rebirth, *metempsychosis* in the case of mortals, the transmigration of the soul after death into a new being but also with ultimate highest god of Orphism, Dionysus, himself reincarnated from the previous Zagreus. This name, Zagreus, is itself a point of contention, as it does not appear in any Orphic fragments, the hymns, or references by Neoplatonists (West 153). In any case, some sources which contain Orphic content do contain the name, such as Nonnus of Panopolis' *Dionysiaca*.[2] The absence of a name in fragments does not preclude it from use, and for simplicity's sake the firstborn Dionysus, crucial to Orphic theology, will be referred to as Zagreus. Through this particular myth runs the central conceit or Orphism, the framework of its world, the basis of its existence, and, important on a comparative measure, the most elemental connection to Christianity. In general, the influence of mystery religions on Christianity as an idea gained ascendance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by mainly German scholars, and quickly lost traction afterward. However, the impact of each religion on the other is salient in terms of a formalizing aspect for each. Superficially, Orphism and Christianity share the same overarching story, the Son/son of God/a god dies and returns from death, thereby securing salvation for humanity in the afterlife for all those who believe and participate in the sacred sacraments or rites. Paralleling most comparisons of ancient religions to Christianity, such as Mohism in China, these complementary characteristics dwindle after initial juxtaposition.[3] This thread of death and rebirth purposefully suffuses the various cosmologies in Orphism, along with its doctrinal structure, and annexes for itself space in the formation of Christianity through this mutually interrelated belief.

## *Cosmogony/Theogony*

Generally, one discovers a few separate themes within the Orphic cosmogony, namely the kingship of the gods and the cycle of death and rebirth as it relates both to the gods and humanity. Central to the Orphic cosmology/theogony is the Orphic Egg. At least, this is what the Neoplatonists, who relate many Orphic beliefs in their writings, perceive as important to their creation story (Guthrie 93). Despite this, only three of the eight aforementioned cosmogonies that Alderink assesses contain any sort of egg, including the Derveni cosmology and

[1] For a similar and more complete text written roughly 600 years later, see Porphyry's *De Antro Nympharum*, allegorizing a seemingly trivial scene in the *Odyssey* to contain information about the soul.

[2] Nonnus is quite an enigmatic figure in regard to his religious beliefs, having written both a major Christian work, his paraphrase of the *Gospel of John*, and a major pagan work, his *Dionysiaca*. The second, in my opinion, provides clear evidence Nonnus was at the very least an Orphic initiate, as it contains scattered details of what should be secret Orphic rites, however one should not state it to be an Orphic *work*, simply that it includes Orphic *content*.

[3] The relevance of Orphism and Mohism in relation to Christianity is an excellent resemblance; Mozi, the eponymous founder of Mohism, was supposedly a poor carpenter who preached universal love and peace. Beyond this the similarities diminish, but both religious movements occupy the same space regarding Christianity.

Rhapsodic Theogony the latter of which is certainly the most studied of these cosmologies. In this version, Chronos, the embodiment of time, and Ananke generate Aither and Chasm who in turn spawn the cosmic egg from which Protogonos emerges, creating the gods and subsequently ruling the world (West 70-1). Contrasting the typical presentation of the Hesiodic Greek theogony marked by various seizures of power, Protogonos, or Phanes, Dionysus, Metis, Eros, Bromios, Zeus, Ērikepaios, as sources variously name him, peacefully abdicates kingship to Night who abdicates for her son Uranos, which then picks up the thread of the familiar Grecian cosmology of godly sons castrating divine fathers (West 71-72).

Afterward, Zeus devours Protogonos and makes the world anew before begetting Zagreus, who is the first point in the world for rebirth, being torn apart by the Titans and then reconstituted as Dionysus (West 72-74). Thus, Zeus assigns this new Dionysus the role of teaching humans sacred rites in order that their souls may reach a better afterlife and cease *metempsychosis*, the cycle of reincarnation (West 75). Two deliberate themes emerge: the transfer of power and the death and rebirth of various gods, before transitioning to the mortal aspect of reincarnation and its proposed end through the application of pure living and the appropriate rites. There is a clear line in this version of the Orphic cosmogony and the succession of power, four in total before the ultimate ascendancy of Zeus. Interestingly, Zeus had appointed Zagreus as his own successor before the dismemberment, but after the *sparagmos* Dionysus finds himself demoted only to the propagation of rites as the high priest of Orphism.

Spread throughout this cosmogony is the interweaving of power and death, starting with the line of succession and how the current monarch uses their power for the rebirth of the world after its death. Each time a god hands on the sceptre of governance the world is remade in their own image, excluding Night who does almost nothing and subsequently spends her time meddling in the succession of every god afterward through her gift of prophecy. There is something to be said about the causality of the situation; Night prophesies to Uranos his children shall overthrow him, and therefore he acts cruelly toward them, causing his overthrow, and later she will instruct Zeus how to overthrow his father, who in turn overthrew his father. Much of this follows the regular Hesiodic theogony, however the newly embedded Orphic elements hold greater significance. First, each god remakes the world in their own image, excluding Night, and the world seems to get worse, but there is "no suggestion of a fall or a defect in the world" and "birth and death, […] are integral to the constitution of the world" (Alderink 50). Zeus consumes Phanes as a method to gain knowledge on how to govern the world, the world becomes one within him, and ultimately he reconstitutes the world in his own image. Following in the ambiguity of identity featured in this cosmogony, with its two Aphrodites, multiple Eros and so on, Zeus to an extent becomes Phanes reborn, similar to Dionysus' dismemberment, consumption, and rebirth (West 71, 73-74). Secondly, from the Titans, whom Zeus blasts to soot via thunderbolt, comes a new race of mortals, returning to the typical Hesiodic cosmogony of the replacement of gold and silver humans with the modern iteration of lesser beings (West 75). Nothing of a god in Greek mythologies ever goes to waste, and in a sense the Titans find themselves dispersed and also reborn, however having consumed the flesh of Zagreus this spark of divinity exists in humanity as well. Lastly, and most obviously, is the death of Zagreus and rebirth of Dionysus, though in reality by the end point of Dionysus, he is "thrice-born", born first as Phanes, then Zagreus, and finally Dionysus (*Orphic Hymns* 27; Guthrie 82). Essentially, through the performance of certain rites, humans may increase the levels of the purely good and divine spark within them by making clean and expelling the evil Titan portion. Therefore, there is no fall from which humans must recover or pay penance, rather it is the impure condition attached to their fundamental soul which Zeus requires Dionysus to attend, with Dionysus himself existing in a part of each person as the inherent purifying aspect.

Second to the Rhapsodic Theogony in scholarly prominence is the Derveni papyrus, significant not only for its content featuring a separate Orphic cosmogony, but also the exegesis of this cosmogony. With ancient Greece's lack of theologians, other writers such as poets provided religious material, and the material here is no exception. It is the treatment of religious content in close analysis which distinguishes the papyrus from others. Though not the first to interpret poetry in this philosophical manner to explain away inconsistencies and find new avenues of meaning, the commentator's focus on, and systematic interpretation of, a poem attributed to Orpheus is "something out of the ordinary" (West 80). In terms of the Derveni theogony and commentator themselves, philosophic influence is clear, Anaxagoras' idea of nous or the otherworldly Mind replaces Chronos as the progenitor of the universe's order, and the commentator weaves in other pre-Socratic philosophy, even quoting Heraclitus, in an "idiosyncratic and not [...] coherent fashion" (West 81). Other Greek religious movements, especially the Pythagoreans in aspects of purification ceasing the transmigration of the soul, hold syncretic views with Orphism, yet here the emphasis is on adapting the latest philosophic thought of the day into the cosmogonical substance of the world. With the Rhapsodic Theogony's concentration on a core Hesiodic theogony saturated in Orphic influence and theme, this alternate theogony couples philosophy to its religious matter, also reinforcing the continual refrain of philosophers sharing space as theologians in ancient Greece. In the mythology presented by the papyrus Protogonos "sprang into the aither", but Uranos was "the first to exercise kingly power" (West 86). An interlude following the Rhapsodic Theogony, occurs, peppered in with a persistent sexual element "as sexuality [...] afforded the means for speaking of cosmic processes" (Alderink 29). This is not to say that the standard Greek mythology is devoid of non-normative sexuality — castration and incest are regular standards among the gods — rather the language used to convey the creation of the universe has a specially sexual tinge that colours the whole cosmogony. Something different occurs again at the point in which Zeus consumes Phanes; not only does Zeus remake the world, he actually "became one with him" (West 88). The world is not so much made anew. Rather, Zeus instead literally becomes one with the entire universe as well, "and with him all [...] became one [...] and everything else that then existed: he became the only one" (Derveni papyrus, qtd. in West 88). Like the ideal creator god, Zeus' conception is a "deliberation intelligence", his will is absolute, he is omnipotent, and he is the universe (West 92). After this point, and another briefly unfinished narrative, the scroll ends rather abruptly, without the birth of Dionysus, without the creation of humanity, and lacking many of the other points of analysis from the Rhapsodic Theogony. Obviously, this piques the scholar's interest. Finding such a treasured source only for it to be cut short begets speculation, yet both Alderink and West provide somewhat unconvincing and contradicting suppositions to supplement it. The Derveni papyrus is without doubt an invaluable resource and a great find, in spite of the abrupt end hindering a fuller evaluation of the text. Despite all differences, the theme of death and rebirth persists as one would expect it to in just another version of the Orphic theogony.

Discrepancies between the two major theogonies appear to be the result of the Heraclitean aspect. This monistic thread of cosmic unity pervades and overcomes the typical Orphic element. To an extent, the content of this papyrus is an attempt at modernization, in mythology and commentary, although the commentary itself is somewhat grasping in the typical manner of allegorical interpretation. Some linguistic analysis is also taking place on the part of the commentator, but there is contention: Alderink, in general, finds it to be sound analysis and based on the methods employed by other allegorists of his day, and at the same time West finds them to be the "least trustworthy of guides" and to have done some deeply shoddy examination of the work (28; 88). Overall, the same motifs of death and rebirth are present in the Derveni cosmogony, just in a separate configuration regarding the Rhapsodic Theogony and also due to the incomplete nature of the papyrus itself. Most important, and different, from the Rhapsodic Theogony is this new conception of Zeus which stems from the injection of pre-

Socratic philosophy into this theogony. There is always an ambiguous facet of names in any Orphic cosmogony, Phanes is Protogonos is Zeus is Dionysus is Eros and so on, while at once mystically maintaining separate identities. Instead, here the Derveni papyrus directly states that everything becomes one in the almighty Zeus, mirroring the Mind at the beginning. Zeus acts as a new Mind, *Nous*, and after ending the world by consuming it he must rebirth everything, even the other gods. To an extent this parallels the action of Kronos, who consumes his children and then vomits them forth with the world receiving a new order in that the Olympians succeed the Titans, however in the typical Hesiodic theogony the world itself is not entirely remade by them, they simply rule it. Ergo, the Orphic content layered onto the Hesiodic is clear. The writer of poem analyzed in the Derveni papyrus takes the base level of typical Greek mythology and adds onto it their own religious content, simultaneously approaching the birth of the world from a philosophical perspective. Particularly, this last feature, the inclusion of material philosophy, forms the underlying basis of worldview for the poem's writer, indicating that the specific mythology of Orphism may not have been as important as the rites which must be performed. In effect, the fluidity of cosmogonical doctrine may not be conducive to viewing Orphism as a united religion, though this may place emphasis on the common elements of the theogonies, death and rebirth, along with the actual practices of Orphic adherents.

## *Death and Rebirth with Regards to Salvation*

Naturally, sources for these ancient Greek "religions" are fragmentary at best, and ancient Greek religious thought does not comprise a monolith, Orphism included. Similarly, most ancient Greek religious thought has different conceptions of the afterlife and that which it entails. According to the most mainstream sources, the *Iliad and Odyssey*, the Greek afterlife is incredibly dreary, without any ability for better and alternate possibilities besides the whims of the gods in allowing

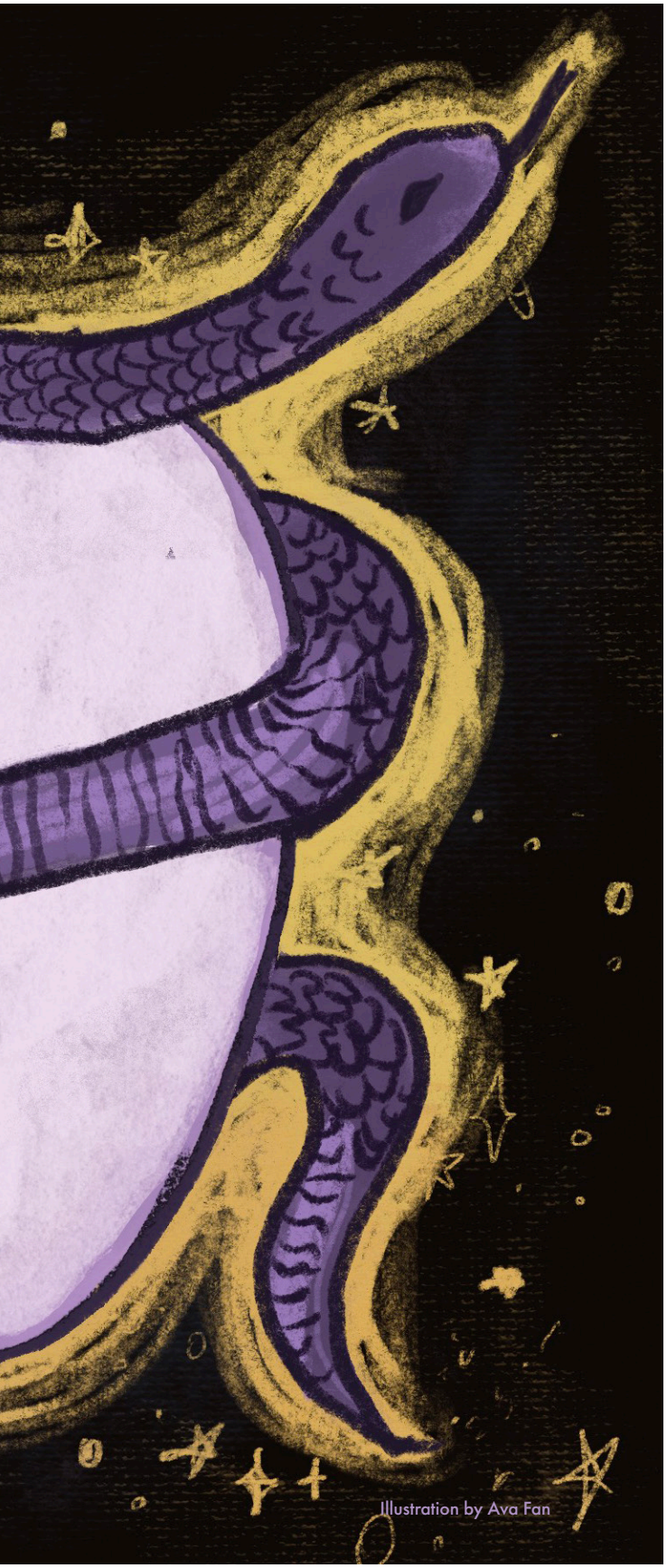


Illustration by Ava Fan

few to the Elysium and later the Isles of the Blessed. Even Achilles, the greatest hero of his generation, laments to Odysseus about his fate, all the glory he won in life being useless in the afterlife where souls largely forget their deeds in life. Essentially, for Homer death is the "negation of all the attributes that make life worth living" (Guthrie 149). Other religious groups, philosophers, and poets conceived of death in lighter terms. As previously mentioned, Orphism embraced *metempsychosis*, reincarnation, in a system which is almost Buddhist.[4] Simply put, the aim of the Orphic system is to engage in purifying rites, to cleanse the portion of the soul engendered by the Titans and leave only the influence of Zagreus, and doing so will cause the soul to leave the cycle of reincarnation (Guthrie 164). Otherwise, the soul will spend its allotted time in the Underworld. The cycle continues once more, until the individual fulfills the proper observances and a life of purity. Connected to the Eleusinian Mysteries, Dionysus is really a god of the underworld and the afterlife when viewed through the Orphic lens, also exemplified by the fact his second incarnation, Zagreus, was born from Persephone. Additionally, the famous golden "Orphic" tablets present another means of analysis, despite their disputed attribution. Again, this returns to the debate which overshadows every detail of Orphism, whether it actually is a distinct religious identity, or merely a decentralized religious movement that does not meet the qualifications of a coherent belief system with adequately congruent doctrines. Edmonds in particular views these tablets without reservation as completely non-Orphic, finding them instead to have ignited the modern scholarly predilection of treating Orphism as a singular entity, the "catalyst for a redefinition" (55). Instead of being genuine Orphica, these tablets served the purpose of defining Orphism as a counter to early Christianity,

[4] Some interesting unions of thought have come from Buddhist influence in Greece, particularly the exponents of Pyrrhonian scepticism, which evolved after Alexander's conquests in India. While Orphism clearly did not evolve from Buddhist doctrine, the similarities are worth remarking.

principally as the latter gained prominence in Roman society, and therefore these tablets are important in the "role of institutional religion in the modern nation state" (Edmonds 56). Regardless of their role, these golden tablets, as Edmonds would agree, have greatly shaped perceptions regarding the Orphic conception of the afterlife, especially as a physical guide. Multiple tablets give directions on where to go, what to do, what to not do, and what to say to the appropriate authorities. Again, by participating in sacred rites and receiving sacred knowledge in life, adherents may leverage these in the afterlife to break the cycle of reincarnation. Specifically, the tablets tell the reader to not drink from the River Lethe, rather the Lake of Memory, and after speaking the correct phrases they shall attain "lordship" next "among the heroes" (Qtd. In Guthrie 173). To accomplish this, they must say to the guardians of the Lake "I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven; / But my race is of Heaven (alone)", reminding the guardians that humanity's dual nature is overcome (Qtd. in Guthrie 173). From Ge, Earth, came the Titans, and the soul must speak of their spark of divinity originating in Zagreus. This also does appear to correlate with the hymn to Mnemosyne, owner of the Lake of Memory, in which she "gives coherence / to the mind and souls of mortals" and "for the initiates stirs the memory / of the sacred rite, / [and] ward off oblivion from them" (*Orphic Hymns* 61). Edmonds does present an exceptionally strong attack on the unified conception of Orphism, however one can equally perceive how many other scholars understand there to exist a doctrinally sound religion from a variety of Orphic fragments and other materials.

## *Orphism and Christianity*

In the most unambiguous terms, Orphic doctrines resemble Christian dogma with such similarity even ancient writers commented on it, and some modern scholars focus on the formative effect this similarity had on Christianity and the modern conception of Orphism. A saviour who dies and is reborn for the salvation of humanity, which has both intrinsic good and inherent evil within for which they must spiritually purify themselves, is surely reminiscent of the Christian narrative involving Christ. Even a sort of trinity exists in the previously stated triple nature of Dionysus, the creator/Father Dionysus-Protogonos, the Dionysus-Zagreus which resides in all of us as a Holy Ghost, and the last Dionysus who comes back to life in order to save the collective soul of humanity. Many Christians of the time recognized these aspects, with a large amount of surviving Christian art containing Orpheus as Christ, or otherwise in a Christian context in a positive depiction (Herrero de Jáuregui 118). At the same time early Christian apologists viewed Orphism with ambivalence, some using Orpheus as "representative of the whole Greek religious tradition" to attack paganism[5], while others such as Clement of Alexandria both "produces a blend of condemnation and co-optation" (Edmonds 30). These characteristics are similar, yet the underlying principles of each religion's cosmogony are quite different. There is no motif of death and rebirth in the Christian creation of the world; one may think of the Flood as a sort of death and its repopulation as rebirth, however this is certainly already after God created the world, whereas most Orphic cosmologies have a longer period of creation. Precisely because of this superficial affinity, early Christians were able to employ Orphism as a whole to the propagation of their own religious beliefs and Orpheus as a symbol of their own ascendance over paganism.

More important than this appropriation itself in its own time is the effect it had on modern scholars' perception of Orphism as a religious movement. Undergirding every discussion of Orphism is a current on whether it constitutes a genuine religion or rather a religious movement without sufficient coherence to represent a belief system. In the views of the anti-Orphic scholars, the same Christian

[5] "Pagan" and "paganism" certainly have negative connotations in their use as any religion which is not Abrahamic in a Christian context, though it is an excellent catch-all for the various strands of Greco-Roman religion. In general, the word is so useful that a writer must regret its inclusion and incorporate it all the same, despite the derogatory aspect

apologists who used Orpheus as symbolic of all Grecian paganism helped to crystalize Orphism and elevate it from the status of purely a mystery cult. By way of example, the Eleusinian Mysteries are a set of rites and a cult site at which pagans performed a number of rituals, layering onto their own religious beliefs. Therefore, it is not a religion in that it includes doctrines which are incompatible with the main Greek *polis* religion, whereas Orphism directly contradicts many of the diffuse Greco-Roman religious teachings. Upon elevating it to a faith, questions about Orphic doctrine and hierarchy emerge which seem incompatible to existing evidence (Edmonds 71-72). With a lack of publicly "Orphic" writers who openly explain their doctrine, owing the nature of a mystery religion, Neoplatonist and Christian apologists form the basis of modern knowledge of Orphic content, each side in this dichotomy seeking to "manipulate the authority of Orpheus and the prestige of his name for their own agenda" (Edmonds 27-28). Much of the written content considered Orphic from this perspective can then be called "things labeled with the name of Orpheus" rather than genuine "Orphic" material (Herrero De Jáuregui 130). In sum, because Orphism's theogony so greatly resembled the central conceit of Christianity in terms of death and rebirth, even though it lacked much of the cosmogonical significance in Christianity, and Orpheus held such weight among the Greeks as their earliest poet, it became a lightning rod each group to advance their own beliefs and gained prominence in the formation of early Christianity.

## *Conclusion*

Conceptually, Orphism's ambiguous religious identity changes with prevailing scholarly attitudes, however the main themes and cosmogonical motif of death and rebirth remain consistent throughout any interpretation, particularly in the salvatory purpose of the Orphics, and it was this facet of belief which influenced early Christian apologists to write on the Orphic doctrines. Enough Orphic cosmogonies survive to prove a constantly fluctuating worldview, though the tenets of Dionysus as the high priest who must teach humanity specific doctrines and rites for their own salvation stayed fixed. Some cosmogonies reflect the trends of the time in which their author wrote them. The Derveni papyrus holds an evidently Heraclitean/monistic shape, which radically alters it from other established cosmogonies such as the Rhapsodic Theogony, but each maintain the equivalent salvatory feature. This salvation somewhat resembles original sin, the inherent evil inside humanity requiring purification through ritual ceremonies, perhaps in Christianity baptism and the eucharist. In the case of Orphism, practitioners combined various performances of these in life with knowledge of the passcodes of the afterlife. Concurrently, goodness and evil in the Orphic system were not the result of any singular Luciferian figure, and humanity itself had no part in a grand Fall of man. Similarities are abundant between the two to such an extent that ancient writers noticed and adopted Orphism for their own usage in the "culture wars" displayed by Christians and pagans, principally Neoplatonist, as Christianity prospered, and adherents of the Greco-Roman religious systems felt the necessity of defending themselves (Edmonds 56). Such theological debates preserved enough material so as to make Orphism the most well-documented mystery religion, while also enshrining its ambiguity as a religion.

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# The Fourth Eye

## *Why Indigenous Representations in Horror Cinema Need to Change*

**Author: Sasza Hinton**

Keywords: Blood Quantum, Colonial Narratives, Horror Cinema, Indigenous Filmmaking, Scalps, Stereotypes in Media

***Trigger Warnings: Discussions of colonial violence***

Abstract:

*Indigenous representation in horror cinema is often rooted in harmful stereotypes, with films from the 1980s and 1990s, such as Scalps (1983), depicting Indigenous figures as vengeful and monstrous. These portrayals lack cultural specificity and historical context, reinforcing colonial narratives that position Indigenous peoples as threats while ignoring the trauma caused by colonial violence. In contrast, contemporary films like Blood Quantum (2019) use the horror genre to critique colonialism, integrating Indigenous history, aesthetics, and storytelling traditions to offer a more authentic and nuanced perspective. By incorporating oral traditions and cultural practices, these films empower Indigenous filmmakers to reclaim the genre, shifting away from dehumanizing depictions and highlighting the ongoing struggle of Indigenous communities against colonial oppression.*

Horror films continually draw on collective anxieties to spark fear from the audience's subconscious. While blood, guts, and other forms of gore can create discomfort or disgust within the viewer, it is the relation to ongoing concerns that truly shakes them to their core. *The Fly* (1986), for example, became horrific to many audience members because it seemed to graphically depict the AIDS virus, which was making its way through the United States at the time, even though the director contested this interpretation. Zombie films, in particular, have represented various societal concerns over the last few decades—disease, capitalist consumerism, and government control. However, one particularly interesting association is that of the racialized Other, specifically those of Indigenous descent. While there have been contemporary efforts to use the zombie film as a "form for interrogating and denouncing colonialism" (Truscello and Watchman, 2), it is important to investigate earlier zombie films, such as Frank

Olen Ray's *Scalps* (1983), which "focused on the elimination of [the Indigenous] Other" (Truscello and Watchman, 2), to fully understand why there is such a need for Fourth Eye cinema. While there have been contemporary efforts to use the zombie film as a "form for interrogating and denouncing colonialism" (Truscello and Watchman, 2), it is important to investigate earlier zombie films, such as Frank Olen Ray's Scalps (1983), which "focused on the elimination of [the Indigenous] Other" (Truscello and Watchman, 2), to fully understand why there is such a need for Fourth Eye cinema.
In Michael Truscello and Renae Watchman's article "*Blood Quantum and Fourth Cinema: Post- and Paracolonial Zombies*," it is noted that the post-apocalyptic settings in films like *Blood Quantum* (2019) allow directors to incorporate elements of Indigenous history and the long-lasting effects of colonialism (3). The horror thus becomes "indigenized" as the director makes specific references to settler colonial violence, which has become deeply ingrained in their history. In Jeff Barnaby's *Blood Quantum*, for example, there are continual references to the violence that the Mi'kmaq have endured at the hands of white settlers, as well as to the broader violence that Indigenous tribes worldwide have undergone for centuries. The 1981 raid of the Restigouche Reserve, for instance, becomes a direct reference in the film not only through the narrative timeline but also through the removal of fish—a source of food and income for Indigenous tribes—which has become tainted with the same disease that zombifies the white settlers. By making these links, Barnaby not only criticizes the past actions of white settlers but also offers "a political commentary on ongoing colonialism" (Truscello and Watchman, 4).

By contrast, earlier films did not position the Indigenous Other within a historical context, likely for fear it would create sympathy for this Other. One of the most overt references to a specific tribe comes from the 1989 adaptation of *Pet Sematary*, which mentions that the evil ancient burial ground once belonged to the Mi'kmaq people. However, any violence that occurred against this tribe is removed, with the claim that they left on their own accord. Similarly, Fred Olen Ray's incredibly low-budget film *Scalps* (1983) features an ancient burial ground filled with angry, vengeful Indigenous souls. The film attempts to promote a violent image of Indigenous people to evoke Westernized fear that the Other would rise against them. It refuses to bring any specificity to the tribe or the land, so that all Indigenous people are portrayed as a threat. While we know the film takes place in California generally, the exact coordinates of the map are hidden from the audience. Most land directions are given as visual cues, such as black trees marking the burial ground, but without naming the land, viewers cannot pinpoint which tribe this massive graveyard belongs to. While one might argue that this generalization is done in hopes of avoiding villainizing one specific tribe, I contest that generalizing the threat to all Indigenous people ensures audiences do not make real-life connections to the trauma this tribe underwent due to colonial rule, thus making the violence against the white teenagers feel less unjustifiable. Without addressing what caused this massive burial ground or why these spirits died with so much anger, the film allows the white protagonists to be the victims of misplaced vengeance. Rather than creating an open dialogue about the suffering and pain this tribe experienced, the film suggests that the violence is not the fault of the colonizer—whether old or new—but rather stems from something inherently violent within the spirit.

Indigenous aesthetics, such as language and practices, allow Indigenous filmmakers to distinguish themselves from their Western counterparts (Truscello and Watchman, 9). Many rely on their upbringing to influence what cultural aspects are brought into their films, creating a more authentic look into Indigenous experiences. Returning to Barnaby, *Blood Quantum* (2019) features traditional art forms that connect to Indigenous literary arts, including oral and visual storytelling (Truscello and Watchman, 3). One will notice certain parts of the film are animated. These sections represent aspects of stories that the characters may not have seen firsthand but recount as part of their oral tradition. Reminiscent of art depicted on totem poles and Woodland paintings, these animations rely on visual storytelling to fully

convey their meaning. The film's soundtrack is also deeply rooted in Indigenous culture. Mi'kmaq drummers, as well as Cree and Salish singers, were hired to bring native tongues to the screen, even when no dialogue was being spoken (Truscello and Watchman, 10). When combined with an Indigenous director, these elements allow the perspective of the colonized to be the central focus of the film, without being watered down for the colonizer.

While these aesthetics have allowed numerous Indigenous filmmakers to represent themselves and their cultures more authentically, *Scalps* (1983) uses Indigenous aesthetics to make the spirits more monstrous. Drumming is reserved for when the vengeful spirit is near the white teenagers who occupy the burial grounds. The drumming is played when the group is chased, attacked, or, in one of the earliest scenes, when DJ listens to the ground and claims the sound is coming from hell. Instead of being a beautiful storytelling art form, the rhythmic beat becomes a threat. However, this is not the only danger. The spirit also uses traditional hunting and gathering tools, such as arrows and hatchets, to incite violence against the group. Furthermore, the film features little to no representation of Indigenous actors, directors, or producers. As a result, the film loses any connection to Indigenous authenticity, instead making a mockery of the Other by casting several white actors to represent the Native spirits. The makeup used to transform these actors into Indigenous spirits includes exaggerated features like large noses and prominent bumps, turning the Indigenous Other into a monstrous figure. In summary, *Scalps* (1983) creates disingenuous representations of Native practices, art, and even physical qualities to make Indigeneity frightening to white audiences.

Horror films throughout the 1980s and 1990s depicted Indigenous characters, lands, and practices as sources of evil—forces that would specifically ruin the lives of white settlers. These films villainized Indigenous people for being upset about the colonization their nations had undergone and suggested that white audiences should fear these groups revolting against their oppression. Fourth Eye Cinema has provided Indigenous creators with a chance to show audiences the true effects that colonial rule has had on their people, presenting these experiences through the familiar horror form as a way of conveying what it feels like to be a continual victim of violence. These narratives are more sincere, drawing on historical events and Indigenous aesthetics to provide a post- and paracolonial world where colonialism no longer places blame on Natives for things they did not do or subjects them to violence they do not deserve.


Illustration by Hillary Vuong

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# The Linen-Clad Body

## *Changing Meanings in the Broader Narratives of Health, Cleanliness, and Identity in Early Modern Europe and Later Colonial Contexts*

**Author: Caitlin Persaud**

Keywords: Colonialism, Early Modern Europe, Linen and Textiles, Race and Identity

***Trigger Warnings: Discussions of colonialism and the Atlantic Slave Trade***

Abstract:

*This thesis explores the evolving significance of linen in Early Modern Europe and its later role in colonial settings, examining how the fabric was intertwined with narratives of health, cleanliness, and identity. In the late 15th-century and 16th-century, linen undergarments served as indicators of social status, tied to both the labour of working women and the principles of humoural theory, which influenced elite hygiene practices. As European expansion into colonial regions progressed, the meanings of linen shifted, from a symbol of status and purity to a marker of racial hierarchy, particularly in the clothing of enslaved individuals. This study investigates the trajectory of linen, from its intimate connection with the body and identity in the beginnings of Early Modern Europe to its role in colonial trade and exploitation. Through analysis of historical records, textile artifacts, and scholarly works, this research reveals the intersections of linen with socio-economic structures, labour, and the changing conceptions of health and racial identity in the European and Atlantic worlds.*

Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

## Introduction

Linen undergarments in the early modern world operated as an extension of the self through the textile's profound connection to the human body. Linen, beyond its practical function, served as a visual indicator of social status and cleanliness and played a pivotal role in shaping the construct of whiteness. Moreover, the value of white linen, as a textile of significance during this era, was not merely a passive artifact but a direct result of working women's labour. Women were predominantly involved in the intricate processes of linen production and were the main workforce in the European laundry industry. Therefore, linen emerged as a symbol not only of personal identity, but also as a testament to the industrious and essential role played by women in the socio-economic fabric of the early modern world. The later importance of linen in the context of colonial industrialization highlights its integral role in the burgeoning Atlantic commerce connections. The status of linen, still valued for its adaptability and hygienic qualities, began to shift in colonial contexts as its role in clothing demographics evolved. In the 19th century, the demand for linen was fueled by expanding trade networks and economic forces, including a new market for lower-quality linen to clothe the enslaved. The labour-intensive processes involved in the linen market intersected with the realities of the Atlantic slave trade, which illuminates the entwined histories of linen, commerce, and exploitation. This study contends that the changing meanings of linen, influenced by the principles of the humoral theory in elite discourses, contributed to the broader narratives of health, cleanliness, and identity in Europe and in a colonial context.

## Mythodology

Through my research into the early modern shirt and shift, I utilized the scholarly work of Kathleen Brown as a foundational source to explore the changing meanings of linen in early modern Europe and the textile's vital connection to colonial settlements. To add context to the humoral beliefs surrounding linen, supporting evidence from medieval and early modern ways of thinking was utilized, as well as texts examining textile markets in 19th-century colonial environments. Through the study of historical records, works by scholars, and an object analysis of a linen shirt belonging to Christian IV of Denmark from 1648 and a woman's linen chemise from 1700, this thesis aims to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of linen, tracing its trajectory from a symbol of individual identity to a key player in the global dynamics of trade, labour, and health during this transformative period in history.

The end of the War of Roses (1455-1487) ushered in the early modern period and medieval conceptions of dress adapted to the Tutor regime. Elite sartorial expressions began to emphasize the visibility of undergarments as the exposure of the linen shirt and shift were a way to show off the fineness of the material and assert one's social status. Fine linen was for the elite. Others had to settle for coarser, rougher linens. At first, men's shirts and women's shifts did not differ much. They both featured a knee-length boxy cut made of fine linen called cambric or holland. They had high collars tied with drawstrings, and bands at the cuff and collar with ruffles to accentuate the material.[1] The edge of the collar was ruffled to draw attention to the undergarment which developed into a separate accessory called the ruff.[2] The most noticeable difference was that the women's shift did not have the same side vents as the men's shirt did.[3] By the mid-15th century, the division of male and female underclothes became more distinct. The shift's neckline became low cut with a "V" opening with ties meant to be shown under the bodice, and large balloon sleeves reaching just below the elbows, while the shirt remained largely unchanged. Figure 1. depicts a man's shirt from c. 1648 that belonged to Christian IV of Denmark, while Figure 2. shows a woman's shift from

[1] Cecil Willet and Phillis Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (Dover, 1992), 36.
[2] Willet and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 34.
[3] Willet and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes*, 45.

1700. Comparing these clothes demonstrates the differences between male and female undergarments that occurred during the beginning of the early modern period. The male shirt has little shape to it, long sleeves, and a high neck with ornamentation around the band and down the opening in the front for more elite garments. The woman's shift looks vastly different from the man's shirt. The sleeves are much shorter and fuller, and the neckline is slighter lower. While made in the mid-17th century, the shirt would have probably looked relatively similar if it was made in the 15th century, but the 15th-century shift bears much more resemblance to a male shirt than an 18th-century shift. The comparative analysis of male and female undergarments from the early modern period unveils significant stylistic divergences reflective of evolving social norms and fashion trends.

*Figure 1*. Shirt belonging to Christian IV of Denmark, c. 1648, left. Previously published in Cunnington and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (London, 1951).

*Figure 2*. Woman's linen chemise, c. 1700, right. Gallery of Costume, Manchester City Galleries Previously published in Cunnington and Cunnington, *The History of Underclothes* (London, 1951).

## Early Modern Health and Cleanliness: Humoral Theory and Elite Understandings of Skin

Humoral theory informed early modern perspectives on skin functionality—a key factor in the emergence of linen as a health maintenance system for the elite. This theory proposed that an individual's health and temperament were dependent on the balance of four humours—yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm—which composed the human body.[4] According to this

[4] Craig Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe, c. 1450–1750," History Compass 12, no. 10 (October 2014): 794, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12195, 797.

framework, the skin functioned as a layer of protection between the external and internal and was important for the excretion of waste that the body produced.

There was a lack of standardization of health theory before 1750. The humoral theory states there is no concept of a standardized medical body, only specific body types and constitutions. The desirable equilibrium varied for each person depending on their individualized balance of humours. 17th-century medical professionals lacked a modern conception of the "medical body," but determined that the pores were essential to the skin's ability to absorb and excrete. According to Cartesian philosophy, this semi-permeable barrier existed as its own entity.[5] The body was understood as mechanical and functioned as the amalgamation of separate parts and had to be managed to maintain an individual's health and humoral balance.[6] The porosity of the skin made it imperative to remove the toxins which were excreted through it. As Kathleen Brown's research notes, it was believed that if the impurities were not properly removed from the skin, they would seep back into the body.[7] The solution taken up by the upper echelons of society was rubbing linen over the skin. This innovation for the early modern world was propelled into popularity through a mass rejection of bathing.[8] Before this innovation in the late medieval and early modern period, cleansing the body had prominent spiritual connotations.[9] Water immersion was common as a purification ritual at important times during one's life such as birth and marriage. Catholicism provided a structure for many Europeans to grasp the concept of hygiene as linked to spiritual virtue and impurity as synonymous with sin. Visual representations of contrasting afterlives testified to the suitable atmospheres for the purified adherents and the condemned souls, with the pleasant aroma of heaven juxtaposed against the unpleasant odour of hell.[10] However, the proper way to address personal hygiene was contested amongst Christians as cleanliness was walking the line between vanity and sin.[11] This shift from water immersion to the use of linen as a method of cleansing not only reflected changing attitudes toward health and hygiene, but also underscored the evolving relationship between spiritual purity, bodily care, and social status.

The idea that sweating out toxins is a throughline in cleanliness appeared in discourses even before linen became the preferred method of cleansing the body for the elite. Bathing traditions left over from ancient Rome incorporated ideas about the porosity of skin before water was seen as dangerous.[12] Public bathhouses were available in England after travellers returned from the East and local businesses adopted the "Turkish bath" model which tended to be brothels that also provided steam baths to promote sweating before water immersion took place.[13] Yet, water was seen by some as a conduit to exacerbating disease transmission. Moisture and heat would open the pores, allowing for the infiltration of external toxins from other people. This fear caused public bathhouses and steam rooms to be shut down to limit this contact with others in such a dangerous milieu. Beginning with informal warnings, by the 16th century regulations and laws prohibited these establishments in the name of public health, especially during plague times.[14] The body was seen by some as too fragile to handle these environments because of the porosity of the skin and several orifices which could let in the plague. Elite early modern people reassessed their hygiene routines as water immersion was firmly out of the question, and the body was in desperate need of constant protection. The solution was a tightly woven fabric that would be tightly tailored to the body so that infected air could not penetrate the body: the linen shirt or shift.[15] Since the humoral body was

[5] Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe," 795.
[6] Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe," 799.
[7] Kathleen M. Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," in *Foul Bodies Cleanliness in Early America*, Society and the Sexes in the Modern World (Yale University Press, 2009): 26.
[8] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 13.
[9] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 15.
[10] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 15.
[11] Susan North, *Sweet and Clean?: Bodies and Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2020): 30, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198856139.001.0001.
[12] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 19.
[13] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 19.
[14] Georges Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France since the Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge University Press, 1988): 8.
[15] Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness*, 10.

deeply individualized, water was sometimes still used to treat some conditions such as kidney stones, jaundice, and congestion. However, generally this was seen as a technique to realign bodily equilibrium only for those with very unbalanced humours.[16] Cleanliness discourses were very attached to early modern conceptions of how the body functioned spiritually and then as scientific developments occurred, medically. The contrast between elite discourse and common practice is significant. North illustrates that common folk often bathed in streams and ponds, using water as a simple means to get clean. Evidence of this practice appears in criminal archives, where cases of stolen clothing during such communal washing sessions are recorded, leaving behind an archival trail.[17] These records reveal the everyday realities of hygiene practices that differed from elite customs, offering a glimpse into the lived experiences of ordinary people.

Expulsing waste through the skin's pores remained an important concept in personal hygiene as bathing fell out of favour in elite circles. Instead of water immersion, rubbing the skin became the favoured technique to remove dirt as the human body was seen as too fragile to handle full underwater submersion. The shift from "wet" to "dry" cleaning was achieved by deliberately rubbing the skin with cloth or by simply wearing linen undergarments which would create enough friction to remove the impurities of the skin. The woman's linen shift and the man's shirt became central garments to the sartorial repertoire of body care of the upper strata. These underclothes could be washed and bleached which differed from other materials that kept the toxins removed from the body stuck in their fibres, and so by extension, the materials would become infected themselves.[18] This evolution in hygiene practices reflects the cultural and practical considerations that shaped historical notions of cleanliness and the garments integral to maintaining bodily purity.

## Linen Production and Women's Labour

The linen industry was upheld through the labour of working women who were part of the intercontinental laundry network. Their laborious laundering practices allowed for new arguments about whiteness to take hold in the elite European culture. The work of these women was intense and physically exhausting and as Brown states about laundering "there was nothing genteel about it".[19] Women were an essential part of linen production and maintenance. Their many roles included beetling, scutching, and hackling the flax fibres, plus spinning the fibres and upkeeping the linen by bleaching the material with buttermilk and lye.[20] The bleaching process consisted of leaving the textile in lye, leaving it to dry and whiten in the sun, and then washing the material for a final time. Buttermilk was used as a neutralizer in domestic Ireland and Scotland but is absent from industrial laundering records.[21] Bleaching was not the only task that the laundresses took part in. The time-consuming process was made up of many different parts including washing, drying, mangling, ironing, and spot removal.[22] This invisible labour of women was crucial in upholding convictions about cleanliness. The wearer's identity hinged on the laundress, whose own identity relied on the work she undertook and the skills she mastered.

The figure of the washerwoman was part of most households from the 16th century onward but is often overlooked in the historical record. The pay for domestic laundresses was low, as was their status if they were simple scrubbers, but they were able to improve their status as they gained new skills like ruff starching.[23] The identity of the independent female textile workers was later elevated by their technological innovations and lowered through the rhetorical sexualization of their tasks. Natasha Korda argues that the demeaning of washerwomen is related to the increasing threat these women posed, as they were

[16] Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness*, 10-11.
[17] North, *Sweet and Clean?*, 103.
[18] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 26.
[19] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 4.
[20] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 28.
[21] North, Sweet and Clean?, 212.
[22] North, Sweet and Clean?, 213.
[23] North, Sweet and Clean?, 232.

often unmarried or widowed women who were active in the marketplace and were living or working in groups of other women called "spinster clusters".[24] These women existed as independent earners and opposed dominant societal norms and expectations of women by taking domestic work and industrializing it.

The sexualization of female labour in general was common during this era and textile workers were no exception. Particularly, their tools were a source of humiliation for the women. Suggestions of the women "poking" and "pricking" with needles and hot sticks used to press collar ruffs led to innuendos about the phallic tools, and since these women worked in close proximity to such eroticized tools, they soon became associated with the erotic as well.[25] It is important to note that these women inhabited all-female spaces and the insertion of phallic innuendo by male authors was an effort to insert the intimidated male into a space where they were not welcome and felt threatened—asserting their male dominance. Independent washing services often operated in cities where there were large numbers of unmarried bachelors which contributed to the intense occupation and insecurity some men felt towards these unmarried women.[26] These distinctly female spaces were rare and there were often attempts to intrude into these places, often with sexually intimidating techniques. Male critics were perhaps intimidated because the women could satisfy their own needs with the hot sticks, but also because they were economically sophisticated people who were highly skilled in their crafts.[27] The attempts at overshadowing the identities of female textile workers as sexually promiscuous women aimed to mask their finesse and business know-how. Such discourse made the labour of these women invisible for a long time. However, as Brown's research into the importance of linen maintenance in transatlantic trade and colonial activity, the labour behind the textile is also elevated. The tools Dutch working women used dignified the status of the laundress over that of other manual labourers and allowed women to have an avenue to financial stability independently.

## Conceptions of Whiteness and the Development of Colonial Industrialization

The understanding of skin developed in conjunction with European expansion into Atlantic environments and the rise of scientific racism.[28] Linen did not exist as a neutral object but functioned as a visual indicator of social status and civility. As mentioned, a vital part of female textile work was the bleaching of linen. Unlike other valued materials like silk, linen was able to be laundered and soon the whiteness of the textile became a reflection of the rank and whiteness of the body wearing it. Linen was maintained through rigorous laundering, but also through the craftsmanship of the textile including the fineness of the weave and the ornamentation of the material at the neck and wrists.[29] The importance of showing yourself to others as the ideal of whiteness grew as colonial activity increased and Europeans became interested in ethnographic and scientific explanations for different skin colours, and in doing so, placed themselves at the top of the hierarchy. Humoral theory colours–red, white, yellow/brown, and black–were adapted into skin colours with distinct boundaries. European Christians were white and everyone else was perceived as "dark" and simply othered.[30] Humoral theory heavily relied on outward appearances to infer personality and temperament, so these distinct skin colour categories instantly were attributed to what kind of person they were; the complexion became a reflection of the whole person.[31] One way to assert this hierarchical difference was through wearing linen shirts. Europeans viewed the undergarment as a marker for markers of "membership in the civilized world".[32] When Europe was making efforts to

[24] Natasha Korda, "Sex, Starch-Houses, and Poking Sticks: Alien Women's Work and the Technologies of Material Culture," *Early Modern Women* 5 (2010): 202; Olwen Hufton, "Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 361.
[25] Korda, "Sex, Starch-Houses, and Poking Sticks," 203.
[26] North, *Sweet and Clean?*, 235.
[27] Korda, "Sex, Starch-Houses, and Poking Sticks," 206.
[28] Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe," 795.
[29] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 27.
[30] Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe," 798.
[31] Koslofsky, "Knowing Skin in Early Modern Europe," 798.
[32] Brown, "Atlantic Crossings," 6.

differentiate itself from Atlantic peoples, their status grew dependent on their proximity to whiteness, a category that was constantly changing and with new criteria.

As Europeans negotiated a new colonial environment, their conceptions of cleanliness adapted and strayed from earlier values. By the end of the 19th century, there began a devaluation of white linen, although their preoccupation with preserving white bodies was kept intact. European notions of health interacted with colonial environments through the adaption of tropical kits. Concerns regarding the tropical heat and sunrays were taken care of with much care due to the enduring anxiety about preserving white bodies. There had to be a distinction between colonized and uncolonized bodies, or the arguments made about the superiority of Europeans had no visual evidence. To manage the white body, Europeans developed clothing for the tropical outdoors that, instead of mimicking their own skin colour, imitated the black body.[33] It is still debated if linen was completely replaced as the most desirable fabric of choice and what that replacement was. It is generally accepted that mainly wool with a mix of various other textiles such as cotton and silk were the most favourable, but the local variation in climate across the colonized tropics probably meant that fabric preferences varied by region.[34] Where previously sweating was encouraged to excrete waste through the skin, the excessive perspiration brought on by the tropical heat was seen as the cause of health problems in the digestive and respiratory systems and disrupted internal temperature regulation.[35] By the late 19th century, humoral theory had fallen out of fashion as more scientific discoveries revealed the reality of germ theory. Still, humoral conceptions of skin were sustained to establish racial hierarchy but did not apply to general health concerns anymore.

Linen remained a major textile throughout the colonial regions, alongside the popular cotton fabrics—which were washed and assessed in similar ways. While other materials and textiles became more prominent over time, linen continued to be widely used, particularly to clothe enslaved individuals in chattel environments. The most prominent fabric for slave clothing was osnaburg, a rough and unfinished German linen. Unlike the fine white linen of early modern Europe, this was cheap to make and physically uncomfortable to wear.[36] The transition in the use of linen from a symbol of high social status to a tool for visually marking enslaved individuals is a poignant reflection of the dehumanizing practices embedded in the institution of slavery. Linen, both a luxurious fabric associated with prestige, also underwent a radical transformation. As well as a marker of privilege, it became a means of enforcing the subordinate status of the enslaved by making them easily identifiable.[37] Unlike earlier uses for linen, osnaburg was used as an outer garment for enslaved peoples. The fabric was made into loose shirts that permitted a free range of motion for physical labour.[38] The osnaburg shirt was similar in silhouette and cut to the earlier European men's shirt which was only seen before underneath other garments but was now transformed into the outer garment. The intimacy revealed by the metamorphosis of a private and intimate piece of clothing to one made for public spaces and enforced labour underscores the exploitative nature of the work these enslaved peoples had to endure. Using linen to clothe enslaved peoples expanded the linen market to colonial settings and transformed the local linen production industry and laundry network from a regional and local system to an international complex. In the southern colonies of North America, clothing theft between fellow slaves occurred, and they sometimes stole from white Europeans. But even more commonly, they were offered old garments from whomever owned them which was illegal under the South Caroline Negro Act of

[33] Ryan Johnson, "European Cloth and 'Tropical' Skin: Clothing Material and British Ideas of Health and Hygiene in Tropical Climates," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83, no. 3 (2009): 532.
[34] Johnson, "European Cloth and 'Tropical' Skin," 537.
[35] Johnson, "European Cloth and 'Tropical' Skin," 538.
[36] Eulanda Sanders, "The Politics of Textiles Used in African American Slave Clothing," *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, (September 1, 2012): 6, https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/740.
[37] Sanders, "The Politics of Textiles Used in African American Slave Clothing," 6.
[38] Graham White and Shane White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteen and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past & Present* 148, no. 1 (August 1, 1995): 153, https://doi.org/10.1093/past/148.1.149.

1735.[39] An underground garment market was established to provide a place for slaves to sell barter and trade clothing.[40]

In tracing the journey of linen in the context of slavery, from its expansion into colonial markets to the establishment of an illicit economy, it becomes evident that the fabric not only clothed the enslaved but also wove a complex web of economic and social dynamics, transcending regional boundaries and transforming the very nature of the clothing trade in the colonial environments.

## Conclusion

The exploration of linen's multifaceted role in the early modern world reveals a profound journey from a symbol of individual identity relating to the body and working women as essential contributors to the global dynamics of trade and labour. Perceptions of cleanliness were reliant on the whiteness of the textile which reflected the social status of the wearer and was only accomplished through the rigorous and time-consuming labour of the washerwoman. The identity of the wearer was dependent on the laundress and the laundress's identity was dependent on the work she received and the skills she had acquired. As cosmopolitan cities grew, a need for more laundering services grew also, which provided working women financial and social freedom from the androcentric market and societal constraints of matrimony. Later colonial developments expanded upon the established meanings of linen, transforming it from a symbol of social status in continental Europe into a tool for enforcing racial hierarchies and advancing imperial ambitions to grow the global linen trade. Notions of cleanliness and health shifted to service a new tropical environment that reinvented the cultural meanings of white linens but still perpetuated the need for pristine white bodies.

The journey of linen from a symbol of individual identity closely tied to the labour of women and personal hygiene practices in early modern Europe, to its role in shaping racial hierarchies and imperial aspirations in colonial contexts, underscores the dynamic intersections of trade, labour, and identity. The evolution of linen's meanings, influenced by humoral theory and shifting perceptions of cleanliness, illuminates the entwined histories of this textile with broader narratives of health and identity in both European and colonial spheres. The intimate relationship between linen and the body, as well as the often-overlooked labour of working women, reveals a complex tapestry that reflects the socio-economic fabric of its time. Linen's trajectory highlights how material culture can serve as a lens to examine and understand the intricate layers of history and societal transformations.

Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

[39] White and White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteen and Nineteenth Centuries," 159.
[40] White and White, "Slave Clothing and African-American Culture in the Eighteen and Nineteenth Centuries," 40.

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## List of Figures

# "The Love that Dare Not Speak its Name"
## *Pederasty Through a Victorian Lens*

**Author: Katie Teeling**

Keywords: Greco-Roman Antiquity, Oscar Wilde, Pederasty, Plato, Victorian Sexuality

Abstract:

*Aspects of Greco-Roman culture have faced periods of romanticization throughout history, particularly in the Victorian era, in which popular social figures and authors shaped social practices from antiquity to counter Victorian ideals and to fit in with their view of the world, largely based on misunderstandings. One such victim was the ancient practice of pederasty, in which an older man would mentor a young boy, in order to prepare him to enter society and serve his state. To the Victorians, and author Oscar Wilde in particular, pederasty was conflated with homosexuality, and Ancient Greece and Rome labelled as homosexual utopias, as a result.*

Ancient social practices and concepts that do not conform with contemporary thinking can occasionally be misrepresented by contemporary thinkers applying their own cultural values and understandings to those of the past. The result is a warped understanding and an imperfect picture of what life was like in antiquity. Such is the case for pederasty, an educational relationship through which older men guided young men into adulthood, focusing on intellectual and moral development. Two of the most well-known dialogues from antiquity, Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, emphasize the non-sexual nature of pederasty, with an emphasis on the importance of this relationship serving as intellectual and ethical guidance. In the Victorian era, however, figures like Oscar Wilde romanticized pederasty, seeing it through an extremely narrow view, largely based on select texts from specific time periods. As well, by focusing on spiritual and physical intimacy based on mutual reciprocity and physical beauty, pederasty was often conflated with homosexuality. Specifically, Wilde's 1888 fairy tale *The Happy Prince* highlights these differences by centering itself on sensual experiences. Wilde's understanding and subsequent portrayal of pederasty was shaped by his classical education, a need to challenge Victorian ideals, and the belief that the Greco-Roman world was a utopia for homosexuals. By comparing the importance of sex and reciprocity within pederastic relationships, and the role pederasty plays within society, in Wilde's *The Happy Prince* and Plato's the *Symposium* and Phaedrus, a clearer understanding is developed of how both the perceptions of and pederasty itself have changed throughout history, as well as how our own beliefs play a role.

Jennifer Larson describes pederasty as both an attraction for young men by older men, but also the sharing of societal beliefs through a mentorship.[1] Characterized as a "relationship between two unequal ... partners," pederasty served to prepare young boys for when they became citizens.[2] Over time, pederastic relationships evolved, both in what was expected of those within the relationships and the relationships themselves, a shift that is exemplified through the surviving art, poetry, and writing created throughout ancient history. As a result, how academics, researchers, and historians have come to understand pederasty largely depends on

[1] Jennifer Larson, "Pederasty and Male Homoerotic Relations," in *Greek and Roman Sexualities*, 2012, 107.
[2] Larson, "Pederasty and Male Homoerotic Relations," in Greek and Roman Sexualities, 2012, 108.

the sources they have consulted and chosen to study. Commonly, Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* have been labelled as gospel truths for how ancient Greeks approached and viewed sex, an issue labelled "a Problem in Greek Ethics" by Victorian classicist John Addington Symonds.[3] As well, many have acknowledged modern researchers' tendencies to view ancient concepts, belief systems, and social practices through the eyes of their own cultures and time periods, applying meaning and values applicable to their own lives, but not to the culture they are studying. In his article, "The Politics of Spartan Pederasty," Paul Cartledge points out that researchers view pederasty as synonymous with homosexuality, despite the fact that pederasty does not align with our modern view of homosexuality.[4] The same is true for classicists in the Victorian era, who were researching and studying ancient Greece during a heightened period of romanticization. Wilde—often regarded as one of the most famous classicists and proponents of the aesthetic movement—wrote several texts that include a homosexual "aesthete."[5]

In the Victorian era, there was no distinction between homosexuality and pederasty.[6] Instead, many Victorian writers believed that the sequence of loving a boy after teaching them was a "both intuitive and natural" progression.[7] Wood notes that famous writers of the time, including Symonds, advocated and assumed that love between two males "transcended age as well as gender taboos."[8]

Pederasty, as a result, was promoted as the "truest expression of the classical heritage" by both Symonds and Walter Pater, a professor of Classics and Philosophy at Oxford University, who would later teach and heavily influence Wilde.[9] Wilde and his academic compatriots viewed antiquity as a utopia where sexual and romantic relationships were not policed by the state. As a result, pederasty was heralded as a form of "spiritual procreation" that transcended heterosexual procreation. To Wilde, pederasty was not just about educating and mentoring a young boy. Instead, it was the culmination of love that arose out of "mutual enjoyment of philosophy and physical beauty" between the student and his teacher.[10] For example, *The Happy Prince*'s Swallow is initially in love with a "most beautiful Reed," whom he wants to love but eventually tires of, for she "has no conversation."[11] Although Reed is exceptionally beautiful, without conversation, their relationship is not fulfilling to the Swallow. However, when all of the Swallow's friends migrate to Africa, the Happy Prince's finery catches his eye, and their conversations about the world entice the Swallow to stay. Although the Swallow needs to migrate to Africa before the winter sets in, he stays with the Happy Prince. In this way, *The Happy Prince* "valorizes male-male friendship, impossible loves, and nobility that expresses itself by working against the grain of social expectation," writes Wood.[12] Mirrored in *The Happy Prince*, such themes glorify pederasty and emphasize sensual experiences and beauty. One such experience, heralded by Wilde and other aesthetes of the time as being a key part of pederasty, was physical intimacy and love, exchanged and reciprocated between the two partners of the pederastic relationship.

However, reciprocity is a feature of pederastic relationships that has not remained consistent. To Plato, for example, the older man or mentor received sexual gratification from the young man that was not reciprocated.[13] In a conventional Athenian pederastic relationship, the younger man was not expected or supposed to experience pleasure or desire, as the basis of the relationship was not sensuality or sexual gratification.[14] Contrary to the beliefs of Victorian scholars, for the ancient Greeks, sexuality was not considered to be a

[3] David M. Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *Classical Antiquity 5*, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 60–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/25010839, 61.
[4] Paul Cartledge, "The Politics of Spartan Pederasty," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 27 (1981): 17–36, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0068673500004296, 17.
[5] Naomi Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child: Paterian Aesthetics, Pederasty, and Oscar Wilde's Fairy Tales," *Marvels & Tales* 16, no. 2 (2002): 156–70, https://doi.org/10.1353/mat.2002.0029, 157.
[6] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 157.
[7] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 158.
[8] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 158.
[9] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 158-159.
[10] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 158.
[11] Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales Wilde* (The Floating Press, 2008), 6.
[12] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 166-167.
[13] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 163.
[14] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 163.

defining trait or characteristic of pederasty.[15] Instead, pederastic relationships—and sexual relationships, more broadly—were based on power dynamics between two partners. In the ancient world, the defining distinction between two sexual partners was placed on those who had control over their body and those who did not.[16] The person who had control over their body thus controlled their partner's as well, making them the dominant partner within that sexual relationship.[17] Described as "a monopoly of eros," the youth was expected to fully submit to their partner through penetration.[18] Because penetration was a form of dominance, if the youth wanted to be honourable, they were not meant to find enjoyment or gratification in any capacity. In Plato's Phaedrus, for example, Socrates discusses how two lovers hold influence over each other's souls, both positively and negatively. If the dominant partner showed good faith and kindness to his lover, the submissive partner was expected to act in kind. In his speech, Socrates explains how the younger partner is "naturally friendly" toward his attendant, and allows him to enter "into his company."[19] This demonstrates the belief that, out of gratitude and affection alone, the younger man was expected to fully submit to his partners' advances. As well, the idea of reciprocity extended to the notion that no man penetrates and is penetrated at the same stage in his life. As a result, there were limitations placed on pederastic relationships to prevent both partners from receiving and giving "pleasure ... at the same time and to the same degree."[20] However, to Victorian advocates of pederasty, mutual satisfaction and benefit was necessary and vital, through sensual, spiritual, and physical means. Emulated by Wilde in both his writings and his life, reciprocity was a necessary feature of pederastic relationships, differentiating his beliefs from that of Plato and other writers in antiquity. According to Wood, Wilde sought out both "sexual and literary tributes from troops of ardent youths" in pursuit of mutual pleasure.[21] Wilde's pursuit of mutual pleasure marks the most striking difference between his version of pederasty and that of Plato.

In *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that the beloved receives "every attention as one equal to the gods."[22] According to Wood, Victorian writers interpreted this literally, believing that a pederastic relationship, if involving a sexual component, "raises the youth to the level of a god."[23] To Symonds, Pater, and Wilde, this was a model meant to be physically emulated. However, Plato staunchly believed that there should be no sexual relations within pederasty. Socrates adds that there is a shame in having sex with an erastes, or the older partner.[24] However, Plato does not outright condemn the presence or addition of sex in pederastic relationships. While describing the two lovers, Socrates says that they both feel a sense of love and yearning for each other, but that they "[think] it to be not love, but friendship."[25] However, in the *Symposium*—written five years later—Plato says that "loving young boys" should be illegal.[26] To Plato, these relationships are wasteful, since there is no telling what a boy's character "in both soul and body" will be when he reaches adulthood.[27] Plato did not take issue with two males having sex with each other, but with having sex in a dishonourable way. In antiquity, pederastic relationships required there to be a mentorship component, where the older partner taught the youth the skills and beliefs necessary to enter society. Because love and sex were not required, many philosophers—including Plato—felt that these could hinder the success of the pederastic relationship.

[15] Sandra Boehringer and Stefano Caciagli, "The Age of Love: Gender and Erotic Reciprocity in Archaic Greece," *Clio*, no. 42 (December 31, 2015): 25, https://doi.org/10.4000/cliowgh.1021.
[16] Boehringer and Caciagli, "The Age of Love: Gender and Erotic Reciprocity in Archaic Greece," 26.
[17] Boehringer and Caciagli, "The Age of Love: Gender and Erotic Reciprocity in Archaic Greece," 27.
[18] Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *Classical Antiquity* 5, no. 1 (April 1, 1986): 66, https://doi.org/10.2307/25010839.
[19] Plato. *Phaedrus, in Lysis. Symposium. Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 483, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL166/2022/volume.xml.
[20] Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," 65.
[21] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 160.
[22] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 441.
[23] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 158.
[24] Larson, "Pederasty and Male Homoerotic Relations," 118.
[25] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 445.
[26] Plato. *Symposium, in Lysis. Symposium*. Phaedrus, ed. and trans. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, Loeb Classical Library 166 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 173, https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL166/2022/volume.xml.
[27] Plato, *Symposium*, 173.

Illustration by Madelaine Mae Dack

Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* are Socratic dialogues, meant to comment on philosophical and moral issues of the time. Wilde's children's literature was written in a similar way, meant to subtly convey Wilde's beliefs to his audience.[28] While Wilde maintained the mentorship component of pederastic relationships, *The Happy Prince* focuses on elements of love, adoration, and physical sensation, weaving in themes consistent with children's literature at the time. When Wilde was writing *The Happy Prince*, Victorian society was enamoured with childhood. Writers, artists, and philosophers romanticized adolescence, writing works encouraging children to stay away from adulthood as long as possible. As a result, these artists "produced a newly sensual romantic child through books directed toward children."[29] Wilde wrote literature that fulfilled the same purpose of classic pederasty—both sought to teach children

the values of the day. However, the values encouraged by Wilde were in direct violation of those held by society and mirrored in contemporary children's literature. Instead of showing children how to enter society and become model citizens, he wrote fairy tales that rejected societal values, and as a result, society altogether. At the time, fairy tales sought to teach children practical skills, like being rational, pious, and self-controlled—beliefs and ideals held up and taught through pederasty, and echoed throughout the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Instead, Wilde's literature encouraged children to reject adulthood, and embrace aspects of being a child that they would later lose, including playtime and "joyous anarchy." [30] The joyous anarchy perpetrated in his stories helped cement the exploration of forbidden objects of desire. To Wilde, these forbidden objects were other men and boys—things that society told him he could not have. As well, Wilde's stories and fairy tales end in destruction and devastation, a feature unique to his style of children's literature, since, at the time, fairy tales ended with happy endings. A hallmark of Wilde's writing is that tragedy befalls the main characters. In his fairy tales, however, these characters are typically those willing to sacrifice themselves for their beliefs. At the end of *The Happy Prince*, the Swallow realizes that he has stayed too long, but that he "would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well." He asks the Happy Prince if he can kiss him on the hand as a final goodbye. In response, the Happy Prince asks the Swallow to kiss him on the lips, because the love they both feel is so strong. As the Swallow kisses the Prince, he dies, falling to the Prince's feet. Simultaneously, the Happy Prince's "leaden heart [snaps] right in two." When Mayor walks past the Happy Prince the next day, he is disgusted by how "shabby" the Prince looks, and orders the statue to be melted down and re-used elsewhere. When they melt the statue, the Prince's heart refuses to disintegrate, so it is thrown in the garbage alongside the Swallow's body. This demonstrates the hard contrast between the adults and the Happy Prince, and what they value most—wealth or love. Wood writes that the "resonant characters are those who love and are willing to cut short their own lives and possibilities to remain true to that love." Wilde hoped to encourage children to maintain their adolescence and continue to move through life with a child's perspective, while simultaneously empowering them to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the forbidden things they desire. Wilde tells his readers that the goal of life is sensory experience, not morality—a key difference between his writing, and that of both his modern and ancient counterparts. Wilde embodied these beliefs in both his texts and his life, living as an ardent supporter of a forbidden act, and ultimately glorifying pederasty as a result. The inclusion of pederasty in his literature served as critique of society regulating the relationships that meant the most to him. However, this understanding fails to consider that Plato and other ancient writers upheld pederasty as a means to control and regulate incoming and current members of society.

Wilde's understanding and portrayal of pederasty was based on a combination of misunderstandings and romanticizations of ancient Greek culture, and the application of said misunderstandings into his own life, contemporary culture, and literary works. The result is a skewed depiction of pederasty that seeks to honour the ancient practice, while displaying a far-removed version that has more differences than similarities. By comparing Wilde's *The Happy Prince* and Plato's *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, focusing on key elements such as reciprocity, sex, and the purpose of these works, we can begin to understand why such a practice has evolved so frequently, both in actuality and in its portrayal in literature. As well, a clearer picture can be drawn as to how contemporary values can influence our study and understanding of ancient cultures.

[28] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 161.
[29] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 159.
[30] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 159.
[31] Wilde, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales Wilde* (The Floating Press, 2008), 18.
[32] Wilde, *The Happy Prince and Other Tales Wilde* (The Floating Press, 2008), 19.
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[34] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 164.
[35] Wood, "Creating the Sensual Child," 163.

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