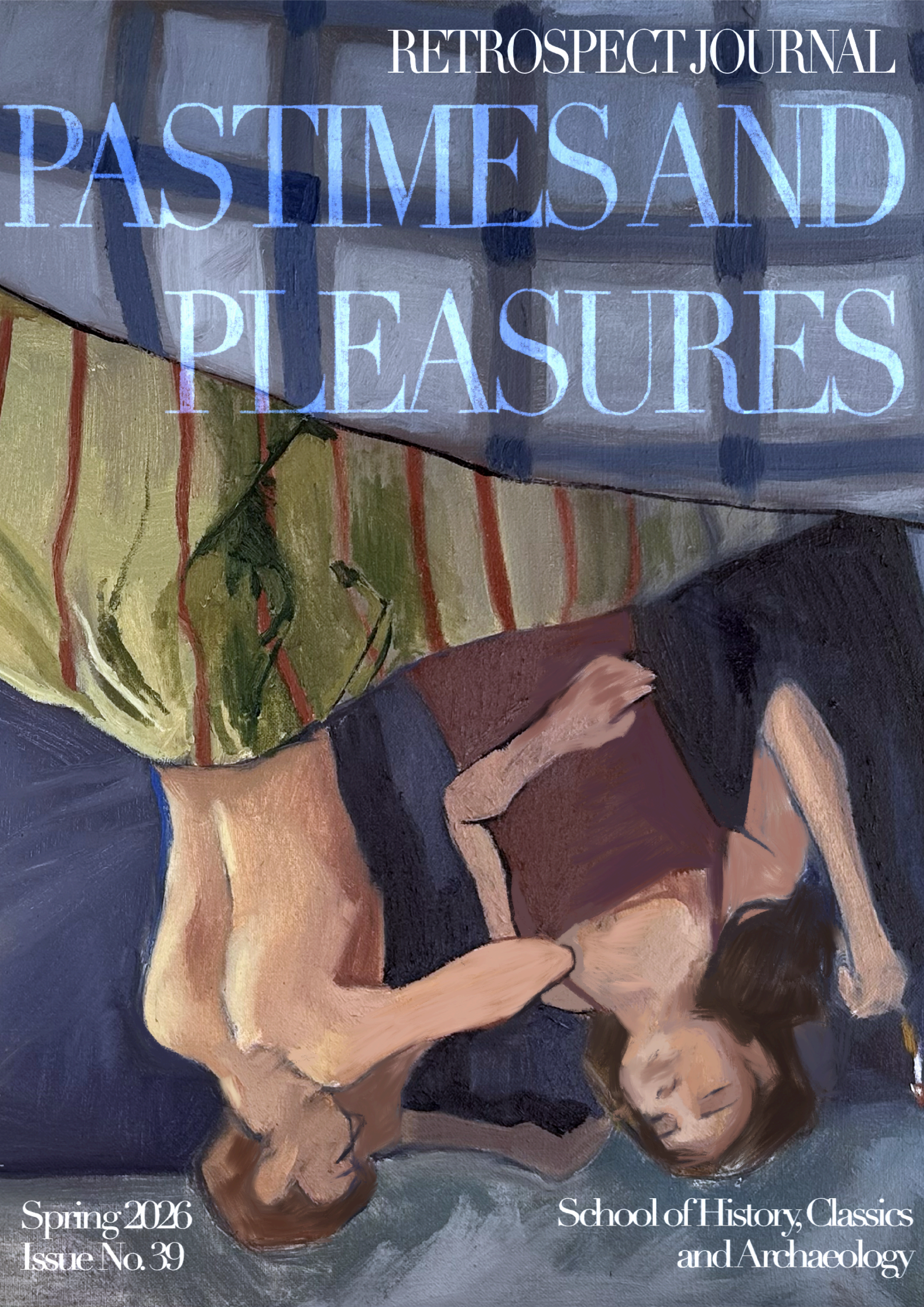
RETROSPECT JOURNAL

PASTIMES AND PLEASURES



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PASTIMES & PLEASURES SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

WANT TO SET THE MOOD?

TAP THE CAMERA ICON IN YOUR SPOTIFY SEARCH BAR AND PAIR YOUR READ WITH OUR 'PLEASUREABLE' PLAYLIST

Editor's Note

In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* and later Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp*, both wrote, "I adore simple pleasures. They are the last refuge of the complex." Pleasure might refer to what comes from sexual experiences, but it is also a sensation that sits at the centre of everything everyday and intellectual. It is equally a precursor to sex, regularly constituting and constraining our desires before entering the act itself. Sex, by this nature, is both everywhere and nowhere: it is constantly in the driving seat of our pastimes but never the brand we publicise.

Being a matter of releasing the private into the public, this final edition of Retrospect under my guardianship is not a resolution to pleasure, but another space through which aspiring writers can think about what they want, and what history tells us about what we can and cannot have. During a historical time where our expression of intimacy is becoming more policed and politically charged, projects such as these remind us about the complexities of what may seem like "simple pleasure." See for yourself: contemplate our cover illustration by Vitto Ginevri, and flick through each chapter's designs by Arianna North Castell; the latter inspired by a range of the British Online Archives' visual sources.

Beginning, as always, by ourselves, this edition moves through communities. It then enters thoughts that on first glance appear undisguised, but let's face it, is anything about pleasure ever reducible to just our naked eye? Sometimes we may need to be a bit more hands-on, but other times, we need to let pleasure be. Let us take you through a series of pastimes. We will read about a few shocking pleasures, but what is the past without timeless surprise? We have then brought you, or pleasure, through "Going Solo", "Two's Company, Three's a Crowd", "Double Entendre", and "Hands On, Hands Off."

I cannot dream of closing my editorial finale without a special token of thanks. It was only last year that Naomi Wallace, our former Editor, showed me designs from an unfinished journal under this one's name: *what a killer title,* I thought. After speaking to Georgia Smith, Deputy Editor from the same year, I realised that this title was not a copycat, as pleasure really does belong to everyone. Naomi and Georgia, my dearest academics, are those to whom I owe my life at Retrospect Journal. Alongside this publication and those who came before me, my time at Edinburgh would never have been the same without my close friends, many of whom sit with me as Senior Editors on this journal.

I will always say thank you to Imaan Shamsi, Secretary/Deputy Editor, Jake Beecroft, Treasurer/Deputy Editor, Lauren Hood, Head of Copyediting, and Dalma Roman, Social Media and Graphics Manager. Your efforts on this journal have meant everything to me — may our creative pastimes, projects, and time together be the start to more worlds of joy — as one we share Retrospect's 39th edition for Spring.

So, open this pleasure, and take all it has to offer.

With, of course, all my love,

Harry Alexander Fry
Editor-in-Chief



Featured Artist Note

Two figures lay on a bed. He sleeps face down; she smokes a cigarette and looks absently at the ceiling. The ash falls silently on the floor around them. While they have not been caught in a sexual act, the room feels recently disturbed. The suggestion of sexual pleasure comes from all around: unidentified items, plates, and glasses are strewn carelessly across the room, and the deliberate shrouding of the character's midsections breeds a strange modesty. We see them from above, as if we are not meant to be there.

On the cover of *Pastimes and Pleasures,* we thus enter the private domain. Here, I wanted to foreground a quiet intimacy to contrast with the inherently public nature of the front cover itself. The painting wraps around the spine and onto the back, where metaphorical breadcrumbs allude to the pair's sexual encounter. I encourage you, as the viewer, to piece together what I have kept partially concealed.

The inspiration for this piece came from Nan Goldin's *Ballad of Sexual Dependency*, a photographic reflection on gender, intimacy, and power. Within this body of work, the artist documents relationships in private and public domains, rendering visible what is often hidden in the private sphere. Goldin provokes and teases. She photographs characters in their life as they revel, through drug use and sex, while they are dancing in clubs, and in their homes, with their children and lovers. The boundaries between public and private are shattered; we, the audience, become voyeurs.

Similarly, my artwork for *Pastimes and Pleasures* is about the tensions between exposure and concealment. Behind closed doors exist spaces where we freely explore pleasure, whether conforming or queer, in the absence of the public gaze. Yet the public realm often acts as a constant threat to these spaces, imposing rules on how pleasure should be experienced. In this way, shame is constructed, and it is perpetuated through unceasing social surveillance. Through the painting, I hope to subvert that gaze. I want you to see what we have rendered invisible.

Vittoria Ginevri
Cover Artist



@rchivginevri

Society Update

EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY HISTORY SOCIETY

This semester has been one of our busiest yet, with an incredible range of events across the whole society. Our Academic Secretaries have balanced the serious and the light-hearted, running a trip to Historic Environment Scotland while also continuing the ever-popular Drunk History nights. Building on that momentum, our Social Secretaries delivered a fantastic calendar of activities, including our popular Pub Quiz, a Horrible Histories-themed Halloween social, and our Winter Ceilidh in support of Health in Mind, raising £150.

Our regular events continued to thrive throughout the semester. Drunk History remained a staple of our calendar, alongside our fortnightly coffee mornings and First Year and Postgraduate socials. We were also pleased to reintroduce the annual HCA student-staff pub quiz. In addition, we hosted one of our most well-attended academic talks in recent years, welcoming over 150 attendees to hear from Dr Stephen Rainbird on the relationship between history and fiction.

We were delighted to be shortlisted at the EUSA Awards for Collaboration of the Year, in recognition of our Teviot Archiveathon held last semester. We also look forward to the final submissions and publication of *Copycats or Breakaways?*, our student research forum hosted in partnership with Retrospect.

Our sports teams have continued to excel, both competitively and through their charitable efforts. Across the year, they have taken part in a range of fundraising initiatives, including a football tournament in support of the Isle of Man Hospice and Rugby's Doddie Day, raising over £5,000 for charity. Both Netball and Rugby were shortlisted for Intramural Team of the Year, with Rugby going on to win the award.

I am especially grateful to our committee - Jane, Kate, Jennie, Raahan, Daniel, Olivia, James, Sarah, Niamh, Ella, Oli, Dan, Kate, Ruairi, Emilie, Yash, Keira and Sofia - for their dedication and hard work in making this such a successful year for the society. In particular, I would like to extend thanks to our Treasurer and Secretary, Kate and Jane, whose organisation and commitment have been invaluable in ensuring the smooth running of the society.

We would like to thank all our members for their continued support throughout the year. Following our AGM, it is shaping up to be another exciting year for the History Society as we continue to build on our successes. I wish the next committee all the very best for the year ahead.

Kirsty Ross-Oliver
President of History Society

Society Update

THE EDINBURGH ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

It has been a privilege to serve as the Archaeology Society President for the 2025-2026 academic year, and I'd like to take a moment to reflect on this last semester.

We kicked off the semester with a programme of events in honour of 'Give It A Go Week', and continued our regular programming, including our Monday dig in collaboration with the Edinburgh Archaeology Field Society, coffee mornings, and our Thursday evening lecture series, jointly with the Archaeology Department! Semester 2 included some of ArchSoc's biggest and most fun-filled events, beginning with our trip to Stirling Castle and our participation in HCA's Student Society Pub Quiz hosted by HistorySoc! ArchSoc took a weekend trip to Aberdeen to participate in the Scottish Student Archaeology Conference, where committee and our members presented their research, and we hosted our charity raffle, raising over £200 for Shelter Scotland. In late February, we held our Queering Archaeology event, which included a pub crawl through Edinburgh's pink triangle bars and clubs. March was a particularly exciting month for ArchSoc, as we kicked the month off with hosting our annual Fieldwork and Career's Fair in the Playfair Library! This event was particularly exciting as many of our members got the opportunity to network with industry professionals and organise summer fieldwork and internship opportunities. For the second year, we hosted a Ceilidh joint with the department to celebrate the end of the semester and many 4th-year dissertation submissions! In honour of Women's History Month, our Equality and Inclusion Officer Charlie and PG Rep Marta co-planned ArchSoc's annual Women in Heritage Panel, wrapping up this semester.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a generous 'thank-you' to everyone who has contributed to ArchSoc this semester. Firstly, thank you to all our members; your participation and enthusiasm at events make ArchSoc a fantastic community! Thank you to the ArchSoc Committee: Fenn, Oswyn, Freya, Eva, Peter, Sofia, Naomi, Laura, Charlie, Marta, Kemian and Amelia. Thank you to the Archaeology department at the University of Edinburgh for all their help organising the Fieldwork Fair and Ceilidh, and to all of our external organisations and contacts who collaborated with us this semester.

I feel fortunate to be part of such an enthusiastic society, and I'm looking forward to seeing you all once again!

Emily Rutter
President of Archaeology Society

Society Update

EDINBURGH ARCHAEOLOGY OUTREACH PROJECT

This semester, we ran five outreach sessions, reaching around 150 young people across Edinburgh. These sessions ranged from brownies and guides to primary school groups. It has been brilliant to see so many young people engaging with archaeology through our activities – I am always impressed with the creativity shown by the Roman face pots and cave paintings, and the engagement with the dig pit and finds station! Additionally, in February, we ran our annual Family Fun Day event which had an attendance of over 300 people – a new record! The feedback from this event has been overwhelmingly positive, and it was great to hear that many families had attended in previous years as well. Thank you to our hardworking committee and everyone who volunteered their time with EAOP this academic year for making all of this possible. I wish next year's committee the best of luck, and can't wait to hear what they get up to!

Becks Whittaker
President of Edinburgh Archaeology Outreach Project

Foreword

At the end of my foreword to the "Home Fronts" journal edition last year, I hoped the connection between Retrospect and the *British Online Archives (BOA)* would remain strong – and I am very pleased to say that "Pastimes and Pleasures" highlights this continuing link between us. BOA have been thrilled once again this academic year to sponsor the journal. It is really encouraging to see constant strong usage of our primary source databases across the student body at Edinburgh. The Retrospect editorial team have not only done a sterling job in pulling together this collection but also championed further access and trials to more BOA collections than the university library currently subscribes to, all to help submissions and article writing. This includes trial access to some of our periodical collections, which can be used for primary source assignment analysis alongside creative art interpretations. I want to thank Jake and Harry personally for their work on this in particular, and for making this another year of constructive sponsorship with BOA.

As this journal edition highlights, magazine periodicals like *The Bystander, The Sketch, Britannia and Eve*, and *The Tatler* all offer researchers a glimpse into the cultural pastimes and pleasures of Victorian and Edwardian Britain through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like several of the BOA collections Edinburgh has access to through the library, these are all rich resources for interdisciplinary study, and it is really great to see Retrospect promote access to these collections, showcasing fascinating research ideas across historical and humanities disciplines. As a former HCA doctoral student, I know how vital a role the library plays in facilitating access to key primary source databases such as BOA. The help of student advocacy and groups like Retrospect are also critical to championing archive access. So I'll end on another hopeful note that this connection continues in future years for the benefit of all students, the library and the journal as you explore more about the past through source engagement, critical analysis articles, and creative ways of exploring historical documents and images to offer up new interpretations for engaged readers!

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GOING
SOLO

'MY OWN VINEYARD I DID NOT GUARD': FEMALE DESIRE IN THE SONG OF SONGS

ARIANNA NORTH CASTELL

Fragrant vines wrap the gardens of Jerusalem, where a girl longs for the kisses of her lover — a desire tantamount to that of the divine. Her and her lover will meet, touch, and have sex for their pleasure and desire for one another. Though this story, *The Song of Songs*, is biblical, it does not chastise this sexual expression. Instead, it preserves it, most notably from the woman's perspective. This narrative envelops us — the readers. We inhale the scent of myrrh, we touch soft hair, taste apples and raisins, and gaze upon the wafting fig trees.

The poem itself unfolds not as a single narrative, but as a series of fragmented encounters — longing, dream-like searches through the night-time city, moments of absence and reunion, and exchanges of praise between two lovers. Often understood to be unmarried, they meet in secret and in passing, their desire slipping beyond the structures meant to contain it.

The Song begins thus:

"Oh, give me the kisses of your mouth, for your love is sweeter than wine"

This line is spoken by the unnamed woman whose perspective opens *The Song*. It does not open with the man's gaze, nor his desires, but with her request. She is direct, she names her desire and directs their intimacy. Biblical texts are not famed for their sexual liberty, nor for gynocentrism, but the opening lines of *The Song of Songs* provides us with both.

Not only does she set the terms of desire, but she focuses herself in the narrative and speaks directly to the audience of herself:

"I am dark, but comely [...] do not stare at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has gazed upon me"

This woman is far from a silhouette sketched by masculine desires. This is a woman who regards herself objectively and frames herself for the reader. She is sun-darkened, not a marmoreal woman of the elite.

This is the woman's introduction to herself — we see clearly the woman she presents before us. *The Song of Songs* does not merely call through the woman's voice but also calls through her pleasure. The intimacy described is not purely male-driven, reproductive or duty-bound, it is driven by longing. Descriptions of their intimacy are replete with natural imagery:

"My lover is mine and I am his, he who grazes among the lotuses"

Here we see reciprocal desire, and at first glance, a pastoral metaphor. M. L. Case's scholarship on this line (cleverly titled *Cunning Linguists*) points to a "lotus-grazer" as a man who performs oral sex on a woman. The lotus flower itself is one flower in a garden — a garden which, throughout *The Song*, is synonymous with the woman's body. A woman's vulva is often aligned with lettuce or other natural imagery in Ancient Near Eastern texts, and it is not far-reaching to imagine that a lotus flower is suggestive of the same. Not only is the vulva floral and beautiful, but Near Eastern poetry aligns it with sweetness (sensual sweetness already being prominent in *The Song* itself). It is a debated reading, but with revealing implications. In this small line, *The Song* not only centres female pleasure narratively, but also recounts a form of sexual pleasure oriented toward the female body, independent of reproduction or penetration. Pleasure here is female-directed, and female-received.

Whether or not we read into the imagery quite so closely, the emphasis on the nature-driven embodied pleasure extends beyond isolated fragments and bleeds into the wider physical descriptions given.

There is a shift to the male perspective in *The Song*, which provides us with rich natural imagery about the woman and her appearance. He speaks directly to her, centring her:

"Your brow behind your veil [Gleams] like a pomegranate split open"

To a modern reader, this may seem an absurd comparison. If anything, slightly violent — a brow, split open, like a red, bloody pomegranate. However, it is easier to understand colour in the ancient world as it is more sensory and texture-based. In the Greek Epic, the sea is described as "wine-dark." This does not mean that the sea is purple, but that texturally, it moves and appears as wine does. The same applies here: she has a richly textured brow, it shines like the red pearls of a

pomegranate: rich, decadent, but also delicate. These ideas extended to, perhaps, even more bizarre comparisons to our modern perception:

"Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes climbing up from the washing pool; All of them bear twins, And not one loses her young"

Likewise, the comparison of hair to a flock of goats streaming down Mount Gilead is less about likeness than movement. The image captures flow, density, and motion — hair as something alive, cascading rather than static. Even the teeth, likened to ewes bearing twins, speak not only to whiteness but to symmetry, fullness, and health.

These metaphors act not to isolate her body into static parts, but animate it into rich, flowing and textual visuals. He shows his affection to his beloved by seeing beyond her parts and into the natural world — she is not a body or an object, but a landscape in motion, to be admired and engaged with. What emerges from these descriptions is not merely an admiration from lover to lover, but a particular philosophy of the body. The body of this woman, entwined with reciprocal sexual desire, is something best encapsulated by the sensations of the natural world.

The Song of Songs is a text that vehemently resists reduction: of the body to an object, of sex to reproduction, of desire to something fleeting or shameful. For a biblical text, it is remarkably uninterested in restraint. It does not apologise for its lovers, nor does it discipline them. Instead, it allows for the woman, later named the Shulammite, to let us see beyond her words and visualise what she describes — an image of herself. Her external self, and her rich inner world full of uncensored desires. Through her own voice, and through the gaze of her lover, she emerges not as an object of admiration, but as something lived and felt — a form of longing that is felt fully, before our eyes, and made tangible in a language that refuses to separate body from desire.



TO WHAT EXTENT DID THE PERSONAL INTERESTS OF KING DENIS I OF PORTUGAL (1279-1325), PRECIPITATE A 'FLOWERING OF PORTUGUESE NATIONAL CULTURE'?

HARRY CHILD

Before I begin, I wish to dedicate this article to my grandad, Denis Batty, who on the publication of this journal will have seen his eighty-third birthday. He has had an enormous influence on my life, playing a notable role in the development of my interest in the past, through the stories he tells of his and his family's lives. It was an investigation into whether any monarch shared my grandad's name that I first came across King Denis of Portugal.

My aim with this article is twofold. At one level, I am seeking to respond to a claim made by Malyn Newitt in his erudite and engaging book, *The Braganzas*, in which he argues that Denis was one of two Portuguese monarchs (along with King Manuel I in the fifteenth century) who created a Portuguese culture. He seems to argue that the other monarchs were more interested in bringing more kingdoms under the dominion of their dynasty, rather than being really interested in establishing any form of Portuguese identity. I simply do not have the space here to contend with the second part of this, however, what I am keen to do is understand whether Denis was indeed this major character in forming something that was distinctly Portuguese, or whether Newitt is making too much of his efforts. My conclusion is that I agree with Newitt: Denis was important to establishing a Portuguese culture, distinct from other territories. Secondly, I am keen to understand if this making of a distinct culture in Portugal, under Denis, was largely motivated by his personal interests, or whether there was something more political at play. My view is that there was something more political at play with Denis' efforts, and whilst we cannot disregard his personal interests having some influence on the choices he makes, the most convincing way I have found of interpreting much of the evidence is through a political lens.

Firstly, a brief introduction to Denis: he was born in 1261 to the reigning king of Portugal, Alfonso III. In his youth, he was educated at a highly cultured court, with influences from both Castile (a neighbouring kingdom in the Iberian peninsula) and France, and it was in this setting that he learnt the art of troubadour poetry, which would become a beloved pastime of his, as it had for his grandfather, Alfonso X of Castile, with Denis composing 138 poems over the course of his life. Denis would succeed to the kingdom of Portugal in 1279 and would go on to reign for a colossal forty-six years, dying in 1325 aged sixty-three to sixty-four.

The historian Anthony Disney suggests that Denis' father Alfonso was the stabiliser, setting the preconditions for Denis to oversee a reign of national and cultural development, with Alfonso seeking to improve the economy of Portugal, as well as improving the Portuguese crown's relationship with the Church. He also made certain domestic reforms, like the introduction of the 'cortes', which brought nobles, gentry and town representatives together into the royal court and government, establishing greater royal control over the kingdom and acting as an almost proto-nationalising force on which Denis could build. It would be misguided, though, to suggest that with this stabilisation by Alfonso, Denis' reign was peaceful. Whilst international matters might have been better—and the domestic situation too, compared to what it had been—fundamentally, many nobles were not exactly happy about the growing control of the Crown, and as such, the King did face substantial domestic turbulence, with his reign seeing multiple rebellions. This is the backdrop to which we need to understand the following decisions, which in my view, are central to Denis creating a national Portuguese culture.

The first decision worthy of exploration is Denis' creation of specifically Portuguese Christian military orders. For example, following the dissolution of the Templars in the early fourteenth century, unlike his contemporary, Philip IV, King of France, Denis decided to take the members of this order that existed in his realm and turn them into a specifically Portuguese military order called the 'Knights of Christ', in 1319. Now, it could be interpreted that this was an example of Denis' piety, his interest in Christianity and desire to establish a

Portuguese Christian identity, something perhaps validated by the general importance of the Christian religion to European rulers at this time. This interpretation would convey that it was Denis' passion for Christianity that motivated this decision. However, with the context explored above, it might work in Denis' political interest to show grace to the ex-Templars. Fundamentally, these were trained warriors who could pose a threat to Denis if they were to get behind a rebellion against him. By treating them well, they were bound not to get involved in such activity and more likely to support him. Therefore, it seems more convincing to see this as a political action rather than one motivated by his passions. What this is an example of, though, is Denis creating a national identity in Portugal, through the creation of specifically Portuguese institutions: in this case, religious ones.

We might also want to question the extent of Denis' passion for religion, especially considering that his wife, Elizabeth, would go on to be canonized because of her deeply pious efforts against the backdrop of a 'corrupt' court run by her husband, with her even acting as this pious intermediary between her son and husband during the former's revolt against the latter. Critically, Denis does not come off as a particularly zealous Christian when compared to his wife. This reinforces the political undertone of Denis' decision to create nationalised Christian military orders.

A second decision worth mentioning is his choice to make Galician-Portuguese the official language of his kingdom, with this becoming the language of his chancery. It is tempting perhaps to think this was motivated by his pastime as a troubadour, interested in song and poem writing, many of which also happen to be in Galician-Portuguese: for example, the seven discovered by Sharrer in 1990. However, it could equally be seen as an attempt to simply distinguish Portugal as a political entity, especially since in 1297, when he agreed to the Treaty of Alcanizes with Castile, which created a definitive border between the two realms. It seems logical, if you have been building up to this for some time, to try and formalise a set language in your territory.

Denis also founded a university in Lisbon, which could be seen as exemplary of his interest in education. Whilst I am not going to dispute this, it may also be worth considering that this may be motivated by wanting to increase the cultural prestige of his kingdom, and hence his political clout, which might aid him in international situations, especially given the somewhat fractious relationship his ancestors endured with the church.

Fundamentally, whatever interpretation we might consider for Denis' motivations in this and the previous decision, they are examples of his reign seeing this flowering of Portuguese national culture.

In conclusion, therefore, I agree with Newitt. Denis is certainly of central importance when we consider the development of a Portuguese national culture: he made substantial and noteworthy changes to the kingdom which fundamentally helped generate not only a stronger national identity, even if this concept of nationalism might be a bit anachronistic in the context of the Middle Ages, but also a distinctly Portuguese experience. Saying this, I do think Newitt is a bit too heavy handed in giving all the credit to Denis and Manuel for paving this path. Disney's argument about Denis' father, Alfonso III, being the stabiliser which facilitated Denis to move in the way he did needs, in my view, to be considered, as he too made some administrative changes which furthered the idea of a Portuguese unit and identity. Nevertheless, Denis was fundamentally his own man whilst on the throne.

However, in answer to the second aim, my view of the evidence is that Denis' personal interests, certainly music and probably Christianity, were only at best secondary to his efforts in forming a Portuguese national culture. Fundamentally, when we consider Denis' choices, we can see that there is a distinctly political ambition behind them, be that making Galician-Portuguese the national language, or establishing national warrior-monk orders following the dissolution of the Templars. Critically, he wanted to retain his throne and authority, and what better way to achieve this than by purporting a sense of Portuguese national culture, with himself at the head.



Figure 1. Depiction of Denis from the Compendium of the Chronicles of Kings, a fourteenth-century manuscript currently held in the National Library of Spain, it charts the history of rulers from Old Testament times to King Denis' reign in Portugal and King Alfonso XI's reign in Castile. As such, it is a near contemporary depiction of Denis.

MEDIEVAL INTIMACY AND MODERN INTERPRETATION: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMIC BETWEEN PIERS GAVESTON AND KING EDWARD II

OWEN JAMES



Figure 1. Edward II. and his Favourite, Piers Gaveston

On 25 February 1308, King Edward II, alongside his Queen Isabella of France, made their way towards Westminster Abbey for their coronation ceremony. Immediately preceding the pair walked a man draped in a purple silk, encrusted with jewels, carrying the royal crown. Contemporaneous accounts said this man was more magnificently dressed than the king himself. At the ceremony Edward sat next to the man, laughing and joking with him, ignoring most in attendance, including his wife. Although observers attempted to conceal their fury towards both men, the king did not care, for this was his favourite, Piers Gaveston, and he deserved all the attention in the world.

Edward II was King of England from 7 July 1307 until his deposition on 21 January 1327. Edward's pleasures were unconventional in the sense that they did not align with the stereotypical archetype of medieval kingship. He preferred rowing, building, and thatching to jousting, fighting, and hunting. He socialised with the occupational class, such as singers, craftsmen, and actors. He loved music, dancing, romances, and watching plays. However, such predilections unfortunately meant that Edward was frowned upon by his barons and contemporaries. His reign has been subject to sustained criticism in both medieval chronicles and modern historiography, often characterised by political instability, reluctancy, and perceived deficiencies in kingship. In popular culture, it is said that he died after being impaled by a red-hot poker, yet this sensational story remains apocryphal; the true time and place of his death stays shrouded in mystery. Edward is also famously known for his intense devotion to his male favourites, such as Piers Gaveston, and Hugh Despenser the Younger, the former of which is the focus of our essay.

A knight of Gascon origin, Gaveston first met Edward during the reign of Edward's father, Edward I, where from c.1300 Gaveston resided in the future king's household. The two quickly established a very close bond. However, Edward's souring relationship with his father culminated in Gaveston's exile in February 1307. Edward I, as a hardline markedly pragmatic king, was likely concerned with the nature of the relationship his son had built with Gaveston. The precise nature of their bond has been the subject of sustained historiographical debate; whilst some scholars have posited a sexual dimension, such claims remain inconclusive.

Nonetheless, the relationship offers a valuable lens through which to examine the construction, perception, and expression of same-sex intimacy in the medieval period.

Following Edward I's death in 1307, Edward II immediately had Gaveston recalled from the continent, elevated him to the Earldom of Cornwall, and arranged his marriage to his own niece, Margaret de Clare. When the king sailed to France to collect his bride, he even left Gaveston as regent of England, a remarkable act that drew many criticisms from the nobility. It is worth noting that many contemporary sources also comment on the affection that existed between Edward and Gaveston. Perhaps the most notable example comes from the anonymous chronicler of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi,* who states:

"I do not remember to have heard that one man so loved another. Jonathan cherished David, Achilles loved Patroclus. But we do not read that they were immoderate. Our King, however, was incapable of moderate favour."

Of course, this quote has its respective biblical and classical connotations, but both relationships mentioned in the *Vita* have long been debated to have homosexual elements. The lack of moderation supposedly exhibited by Edward only further adds to the charm that he bestowed upon Gaveston. Edward II loved Piers Gaveston. Whether this love was romantic or platonic remains unsolved, yet we evidently know Edward showered Gaveston with an unfalteringly emotional and material attachment.

In December 1307, Gaveston held a jousting tournament at Wallingford with the approval of the king, in which he humiliatingly and provocatively defeated the Earls of Arundel, Surrey, and Hereford, albeit accompanied by two hundred knights instead of the agreed sixty. Baronial dislike towards Gaveston manifested itself through a combination of factors: the fact he was raised from the dust, that he was of Gascon origin, that he was arrogant, and that he monopolised Edward's attention. *The Vita* records that he assigned mocking nicknames to leading earls, a practice that further alienated the nobility and contributed to the consolidation of opposition against both Gaveston and the king. These were not the actions of a man who feared consequences; they were actions of someone who felt untouchable in the comfort of the unrelenting patronage that Edward bestowed upon him.

Unsurprisingly, the English baronage moved against Gaveston with collective determination. Following his first exile in the reign of Edward I, Gaveston was inexorably exiled twice more, once in 1308 and again in 1311. His second exile, in 1308, saw him appointed as Edward's Lieutenant in Ireland seeing him govern the territory, by all accounts, competently. In 1309, Edward had Gaveston recalled and later in the same year, the political climate within the kingdom had become very tense. Many high-ranking earls refused to attend the parliament which Edward had summoned for early the following year if Gaveston was present. In 1311, the Lords Ordainers (a council of reform-minded barons) issued the Ordinances, a raft of restrictions on royal power that included the banishment of Gaveston. Edward agreed, then immediately undermined the agreement by recalling his favourite once more. Evidently, this pattern of exile and recall exemplified that Edward was constitutionally incapable of accepting Gaveston's absence.

The crisis reached its zenith in 1312, accompanied by a looming threat of civil war that lurked in the shadows. Gaveston had been alienated by most of the nobility, and a private army led by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, almost captured Gaveston and the king in Newcastle. Edward managed to flee successfully, but Gaveston was later besieged and captured at Scarborough Castle by the Earls of Pembroke and Warwick. What followed was a travesty of even medieval justice. Gaveston was condemned as an enemy of the realm, and on the 19th of June 1312, he was taken to Blacklow Hill, not far from Warwick, and was mercilessly run through with a sword, then decapitated. His mutilated body was then left to rot.

The following quotes from the *Vita* recounts the King's own reaction following the death, and the chronicler's own thoughts:

"By God's soul, he acted as a fool. If he had taken my advice he would never have fallen into the hands of the earls [. . .] I knew for certain that if the earl [Warwick] caught him, Piers would never escape from his hands."

"But I am certain the king grieved for Piers as a father grieves for his son. For the greater the love, the greater the sorrow."

Edward's reaction is one of anger mixed with profound sorrow and grief. The comparison of love between father and son is particularly instructive, as it denotes a love that would be universally legible during the medieval period, understood through the framework of hierarchical affection. It would have been outlandish for the chronicler to suggest the love was homosexual in nature.

The contemporary metanarrative of sexuality is certainly more nuanced and interpretative than it was in the medieval period. Superimposing concepts of homosexuality, bisexuality, and polyamory onto an

individual in the Middle Ages risks anachronism. Nevertheless, the story of Edward and Gaveston's relationship did not end in the fourteenth century. Christopher Marlowe's 1592 play *Edward II* cemented the romanticisation of Edward and Gaveston's homoeroticism. Subsequent centuries continued to return to the pair. Even the University of Oxford is home to the Piers Gaveston Society, which is perhaps known more for scandal and substance use, rather than celebrating the life of Edward's favourite. Nonetheless, Edward and Gaveston's respective legacies remain evident in many echelons of modern-day life.

What remains from this tumultuous story of intimacy still is up for interpretation, especially as the voices of both Edward and Gaveston themselves remain mute. Both men had children with their respective wives, yet I do not believe this conforms them strictly to any sexual orientation, especially considering the extent of heteronormativity that existed in the fourteenth century. The consequences of their intimacy at the time are apparent, leading to political instability, revolt and the eventual execution of Gaveston. It is plausible that if Edward were a more competent king who conformed to the quintessential expectations of medieval kingship, his relationship with Gaveston may have amounted in less controversy, but this was not the case, evidenced by Edward's own deposition in 1327.

We live in a period of time that affords a broader spectrum of recognised sexual identities and expressions than ever before in history. The story of Edward and Gaveston, however, may suggest that these forms of intimate attachment that challenge rigid categorisation may have their roots in history further back than perhaps we had originally postulated.

'TAKE AND EAT; THIS IS MY BODY': WOMEN'S SENSUAL DEVOTION IN LATE MEDIEVAL CHRISTENDOM

ROSE BINGHAM

Both *The Book of Margery Kempe* (c.1430s) and *British Library MS Egerton 1821* (c.1480-1490) display a distinctly gendered intimacy with the divine. Medieval Christianity saw a rise in physical devotion as Christ's humanity was consistently emphasised through the doctrine of transubstantiation, the veneration of bodily relics, and severe physical penance. Women, who were similarly defined by their physical bodies in a patriarchal society, used such developments to their spiritual advantage. Pious women traced parallels between the physical suffering inherent to the female experience, such as menstruation and childbirth, and that of Christ's Passion and Crucifixion. They also responded to this emphasis on Christ's humanity by claiming a physical, even sensual intimacy with him that was inaccessible to men in a heteronormative social model. Ultimately, both sources represent a wider women's devotional movement that exploited their disempowered social position to claim an exclusive and transcendent divinity.

In her *Book*, Kempe exploits the contemporary turn towards embodied devotion by drawing parallels between the physical experiences of women and Christ. Karma Lochrie states that medieval women were "identified not with the body, but with the flesh." Where a "body" implies individuality and agency, "flesh" refers to the very base, corruptible material. Although socially disempowering, women's conspicuous and often traumatic physicality aligned them with Christ. After a dangerous pregnancy and birth, Kempe "roof her skin on hir body agen hir hertwith her nayles." It is at this time of post-partum suffering that Christ first appears to her "in lyknesse of a man", seeming to acknowledge their shared physical agony. Her wounds produced by "nayles" echo Christ's stigmata produced by nails driven into his hands and feet. A further parallel can be drawn between Christ

who suffered on the cross for the salvation of humanity, and Christian women who suffered childbirth for the begetting of new life. Elaine Scarry observes that, for Christians, the true horror of the cross lies in the fact that the "hurt of the body does not occur in one explosive moment of contact; it is not there and gone but there against the body for a long time." Christ's suffering is extended like that of the female body, which bleeds and hurts in a constant cycle. Evoking this distinct physical empathy between women and Christ on her pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Kempe "sea verily and freschly how owr Lord was crucified." The use of "how" suggests she sees the very process unfolding before her in a present, embodied experience. She responds by "spredyng hir armys abrode", mimicking his crucified form. In this moment, she confirms Susan Morgan's statement that their physical suffering gave women "an unsurpassable ability to absorb" Christ's death "into their own bodily being" as their forms become united. That this experience is "unsurpassable" evokes the exclusivity of this distinctly female manner of devotion.

Similarly, *Egerton 1821* reflects the specific blood fanaticism of the late Middle Ages which united the bodily experience of Christ and women. Nancy Thebaut recognises that the manuscript was "possibly intended for the use of a laywoman in Kent" and there are several female saints included in the book, but ultimately, whether or not owned by a woman, its contents reveal a distinctly gendered Christian devotion. The opening pages, folios 1v-2r, as well as the later folios 6v-7r, depict hundreds of organised red painted blood droplets. This meticulous rendering of blood reflects the contemporary Christian preoccupation with the Holy Blood. Caroline Walker Bynum summarises the contradiction that lies at the heart of this religious movement, that "[b]lood is life and death", representing both Christ's horrific suffering but also the "life-giving" and even "fertile" elements of his salvation. Christ's blood and body were feminised by this supposed fertility, prompting comparisons between his suffering and that of women during the various bloody stages of reproduction. Parallels can also be drawn between the nourishing, salvific quality of Christ's blood and that of breast milk; indeed, *Egerton 1821* includes an image of the Virgin breast-feeding Christ on folio 2v. She holds him in a *pietà* pose, foreshadowing his death and thus visually uniting the fertile and agonising aspects of his body in a feminine composition. Bodily fluids flow and mingle throughout the manuscript, collapsing the distinct sexual and gendered binaries that dictated medieval women's lives. Thebaut argues that "[i]n suffering like Christ, women's biology enabled them to be intercessory figures to Christ", suggesting that women exploited their physical bodies to ultimately transcend them to claim a divine status.

Kempe's *Book* also serves to forge a distinctly feminine devotion through her sensual intimacy with the Christian divinity. Although feminising Christ, Kempe also retains his distinctly masculine character to maintain a sexual intimacy with him in a heteronormative culture. As she discovers her piety, Kempe chooses a chaste relationship with her husband yet, as identified by Tara Williams, this is "not an end to sexual intimacy", but "a redirection of it" as her earthly relationships provide ground for her relationship with the divine. In chapter thirty-five, she marries the Godhead, who declares, "I take thee, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe." Kempe directly takes language from the Liturgy of Marriage to illustrate that, although this is a transcendent divine encounter, it is rooted in real physical human intimacy. She begins an explicitly sexual relationship with the Godhead, who asks her to "kyssen myn mowth, myn hed and myn fete." Kempe's repetition of "myn" creates a sense of rhythm and pattern, suggestive of a regular and familiar intimate encounter. Where sexuality usually forecloses the possibility of female mysticism in medieval Christianity, Kempe uses her sexual experience to claim a closer relationship with the divine. However, she describes herself as not only "wyfe" to the Godhead, but also his "dowtyr" and "modir." These fluxional roles in her new holy family transcend biological law to achieve an intimacy impossible in the generational and patriarchal hierarchy of the human family. Kempe uses her own earthly sexual female body as basis for a transcendent, divine parallel.

Similarly, *Egerton* 1821 encourages an embodied viewing experience that establishes a gendered and sensual intimacy with the divine. Susan Groag Bell identifies that due to the exclusive "hierarchical male establishment" of the Christian church, women became increasingly interested in the "privacy" of personal religious books. Such private devotion offered women an opportunity for a closer, personal intimacy with the divine. The manuscript, most evident on folio 2r, shows marks left by the owner kissing, touching, and scratching its surface. The viewer, most likely female, sought to achieve a physical and even sensual union with Christ through the tactile handling of his body. However, the manuscript goes beyond the simple depiction of Christ to achieve a sense of real embodiment that collapses the boundary between the signifier and signified. Removed from any wider

pictorial context, the blood in folios 1v-2r and 6v-7r seem to sit on the page as though real. Where the first pair of pages show larger droplets on a black background, the second pair show smaller droplets on a red background, as though they are soaking into and colouring the manuscript itself. Furthermore, the body of Christ was often directly compared to the vellum of manuscripts. English mystic Richard Rolle (c.1300-1349) declared, "thy body is like a book written in red ink; so is thy body all written with red wounds," pleading "grant me to read upon thy book, and somewhat to understand the sweetness of that writing." Therefore, by engaging with the manuscript, the viewer would have been enacting a real physical intimacy with



Figure 1. British Library MS Egerton 1821

Christ akin to a Eucharistic consumption of his body. Within a heteronormative framework of sexuality, this sensual experience of religious devotion privileged a female viewer.

To conclude, both *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *British Library MS Egerton 1821* evidence the emergence of perhaps the first distinct women's devotional movement in Christian Europe. Recognising the increasingly physical character of Christian devotion, women exploited the imposed physical character of their social existence to craft a personal connection with the divine. They feminised Christ to draw parallels between their bodies but also paradoxically formed intimate, even sexual, relationships with his human masculinity. Although both sources are English, they can be placed within a wider trajectory of European history. Indeed, this woman-led religious movement pre-empts the crucial role women played in the seismic shift that was the Protestant Reformation of the following century. Educated women were not typically taught Latin as like men and this led to a desire among them for religious texts in their vernacular languages. This became a founding principle of Protestant thought and many women emerged as religious leaders during this uncertain time of both religious and political change. Both out of a real pleasure in Christian piety but also as a valuable means of improving their disempowered social position, women crafted their own place in medieval Christendom.

THE REVOLUTION WILL BE SEXUALISED: ENGAGING WITH ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI'S FICTION

RUBY MARTYN

1936 was a year of significant change in the Soviet Union. A new constitution was announced, a wave of state-sanctioned terror was unleashed on the population, and Stalin's "Great Retreat" was heralded by new laws which criminalised abortion and made divorce harder to obtain. These measures highlight the state's programme to break from the social freedoms of the 1920s. One champion of liberalisation in this period was Alexandra Kollontai, who served as the Commissar for Welfare in the first Soviet Government and co-founded the Zhenotdel: a section of the party exclusively concerned with the lives of Soviet women. In 1923, she published a controversial, explicit collection of short stories entitled *Love of Worker Bees*, in which she explored the particular challenges Soviet socialism posed to women. As works of fiction, these stories each offer important insights into post-revolutionary optimism for the future of women's lives regarding their relationships with work, sex, and the state. This essay will focus on Vasilisa Malygina, the volume's central story, which follows a woman's navigation of the

competing sets of social expectations she encountered in her everyday life. In line with Kollontai's personal politics, socialism emerges as the means by which liberation can be achieved for women in this work, but her hope that the revolution will ultimately allow women to live freer, happier lives speaks to and reflects the ambitions of all modern feminist movements.

Vasilisa Malygina is introduced to the reader as a model party member, seeking to serve the regime and keep her unstable relationship with her husband Vladimir alive. Vasilisa is not one of Corner's "wage-packet fascists", but a true believer in communism, unlike her husband whose allegiances are never clear. They are happily living and working apart at the beginning of the story, and it is only when Vasilisa visits him that she discovers his greed and corruption, contradicting her image of him as partner and a comrade. His affair with an enemy of the state complicates their relationship further and she finally dissolves their marriage and accepts a new job. Shortly after making this decision, she discovers she is pregnant and plans to continue working and use state communal creches to raise her child on her own. While Vasilisa, as a representative of the state, embodies progressive values, her husband appears to be trapped in the past and expects her to conform to three crucial archetypes: the virgin, the housewife and the trophy wife. Her struggles to live up to these models and eventual rejection of them signal her communist-fuelled enlightenment to the reader.

When Vasilisa travels to visit Vladimir, she reflects on the early days of their relationship and the evening in which he revealed his perspective on the significance of a woman's virginity over tea. He stated, "I have been keeping my heart and my love pure. The girl I fall in love with will have to be pure too", and categorised the women he had met in America as "nothing but whores." His announcement clashed with Vasilisa's own view of sex as a normal part of life and romantic relationships, and she recalls being distressed to think that her previous love affairs disqualified her as a potential partner. Whilst Vladimir is shown to believe sex makes women impure, his justification of his affair with a nurse illustrates that he does not apply the same reasoning to men. When Vasilisa discovers his infidelity, Vladimir not only frames her sexual history as a problem he has had to overcome, but describes himself in a letter he sends after he is arrested as a helpless victim surrounded by "brazen whores and clinging sluts" who have manipulated him. His efforts to paralyse Vasilisa's anger and to guilt her into helping him get out of trouble reveal his hidden resentment of her past and that he conceives of it as a transgression equal to his betrayal of her trust. When Vasilisa finally challenges his "conservative" thinking just before she leaves him, he tries to convince her he does not set any importance on a woman's virginity, unlike his non-communist mistress Nina. Vladimir's lie here reinforces the lack of integrity he has shown elsewhere, particularly with regards to politics, but also separates him and Nina from Vasilisa, whose embrace of communism Kollontai shows us has allowed her to break free from regressive ideas concerning women and sex, which limit women's sexual freedom and tie them to marriage and to men.

Vasilisa also reflects on Vladimir's last visit, when he suddenly appeared at her door, expecting her to put aside her work and become a model housewife. When Vladimir arrives, he asks Vasilisa to try on the new pair of shoes he hadbought her. She obliges, not wanting to hurt his feelings but knowing that she would be late for a meeting. When she returns from work, she finds him in the company of neighbours she detests and is met with snarky comments about not making enough time for him. Vladimir is also critical of Vasilisa's food and praises her neighbour for hers. To Vladimir, cooking is a woman's responsibility and Vasilisa's makeshift meals represent a dereliction of her duties as his wife. This process is so inextricably bound up in gender roles for him that he cannot see that he is perfectly placed to do the various processes involved in preparing a meal as he, unlike his wife, is not working. In her efforts to appease him, Vasilisa hires a local girl to cook and clean for him, a glaringly anti-communist act, because she feels like she has failed him and needs to care for him like a child. Similarly to her hesitancy in articulating her views on sex, she refrains from challenging Vladimir's demands until the end of their relationship, when she tells him to take some responsibility for his shirt collars and not to hold her accountable for them. Unsurprisingly, after experiencing her husband's efforts to shame her into being "a little housewife", Kollontai's heroine rejects the traditional family model when she discovers she is pregnant. In fact, returning to her husband does not even occur to her and she makes plans to raise a child within a collective to escape the bourgeois trappings of the nuclear family and the demands it places on women.

When Vasilisa arrives at Vladimir's, she discovers that his position as a director has changed what he wants from their relationship and that he expects her to become a trophy wife to boost his public image. He becomes preoccupied with her appearance and sets about correcting

it. Vladimir is enraged when he sees a dress she had made with material he sent her and forbids her from wearing it. After this, he buys her a silk dress which is not in keeping with anything she likes or wears, for which she dutifully thanks him. When they lived apart, Vasilisa's clothing was practical and functional, suited to the demands of her environment and work, but when they are reunited, Vladimir uses her clothes to control her and make her the epitome of a "director's wife." The insults he levels at her concerning her clothes, that she has become a "peasant" and a "frump", operate alongside his commands for how she should address his housekeeper as concerted efforts to make her fit his image of an ideal wife and to use her to create a reputable front for his personal life whilst maintaining a secret relationship. His success in shaping her behaviour is demonstrated by her efforts to dress up for him to try and earn some affection from him. However, Vasilisa realises that, unlike Nina, she cannot fulfil his demands and dissolves their common-law marriage in a letter to Nina in which she gives them her blessing to marry. When Vasilisa returns to her communal house at the end of the story, she is immediately plunged into resolving conflicts and acting as a mediator in disputes. Her roommate's clunky reminder to reserve her love and wisdom for the people of Russia who need her reveals Kollontai's emphasis on the trophy wife as an outdated and hollow social role for women which limits their potential.

Kollontai presents the source of Vasilisa Malygina's problems as the contrasting demands of the state and her husband. They expect her to emulate different qualities and to harness particular skills to become a valued contributor to their respective institutions. Vasilisa receives advice from several characters telling her how to live, but she ultimately createsa course of action for herself and her future child. Her abandonment of her husband, and the archaic ideas he wants her to conform to, allows her to fully commit herself once more to the communist cause, reflecting Kollontai's hope for women to be able to free themselves from relationships which confine them and to live on their own terms. Therefore, Kollontai's writing reveals her own political outlook, but also the optimism at the core of modern feminism.

NAZI NUDISM: HOW NAKED SUNBATHING BECAME AN EXERCISE IN EUGENICS

EVIE PARNHAM

For leisure-seekers in 1930s Germany, *Freikörperkultur* (FKK) was all the rage. Seen as the ultimate holistic pastime, sunbathing, swimming, and even hiking in the nude was the most utopian way to spend the weekend. Translated literally as "free body culture", the practice of relaxing or exercising without the constraints of clothing reached the height of popularity in the early twentieth century across many parts of Europe and North America, despite criticism of indecency from the conservative media. As a return to the fundamental idealism of natural living, the shedding of one's clothes became the fashion, shrugging off the trappings of industrialisation to wrap oneself in the sun's rays. However, the movement was quickly co-opted by Nazi leaders who turned the cultural pastime into a regimen for "perfecting the Aryan form." Tracking the practice of naturalism from the olympian athleticism of Ancient Greece to the anti-materialist resistance of the Industrial Period, its perversion into Nazi racial-puritanism, and finally to its post-war return to nature, the evolution of this harmless pastime has become a rebellious statement against the restrictions of modern society.

The origins of naturism are deeply connected to the practice of naked athleticism displayed at the original Olympic games of Ancient Greece that can be traced back to as early as 776 BC. The naked athletic form became the ultimate display of health and, aside from the practicality of minimal clothing during exercise in a hot climate, this veneration of nudism established a worship-like relationship between the body and the sun. Heliotherapy,

as the ancient beginnings of sunbathing, was first seen as a medicinal practice to cure illnesses now recognised as rickets, vitamin D deficiency, and lethargy. The correlation between nudism and the sun was evident in early civilisation, and so with the added health benefits of exercise, the leisure activity of naturism found momentum again in the modern period, as an attempt to reconnect with the basic health tenements of the sun.

As industrialisation took hold of Europe in the nineteenth century, the capitalistic obsession with material production and its ecological impacts of pollution and mass-consumption became a growing concern for the public health, and the escapism of naturism as a leisure activity gradually gained popularity in the early twentieth century. Some leisure-seekers indulged in nudism as a way to get back to nature, resisting their claustrophobic industrial lives, and by 1930, nudist country clubs and hotels had sprung up across Europe. Similarly, in the USA, resort culture was on the rise as a weekend getaway, and so the new trend of baring one's body to the sun now encompassed tennis playing, dining, and socialising within designated "no clothes" zones. These clubs, of course, had to be heavily regulated in order to prevent prosecution (nudity was technically illegal if classed as "indecent exposure") and memberships were strictly enforced. With an almost cult-like following, the popularity of the pastime prompted magazines and advertisements to extoll the virtues of the naturist lifestyle. Publications such as the *Health & Efficiency* magazine, publishing in the UK in the 1930s, were exclusively dedicated to promoting the benefits of naked leisure and even suggested ways in which one could use clothing strategically to combat the unpredictability of the Northern European climate. For famous FKK advocates such as Adolf Koch, the interwar years were so focused on rehabilitation, both in physical health and social liberation, that in any way that they could, the general public was attempting to reconnect with the natural world and holistic practices they had so recently been forced to abandon.

Naturism was most commonly seen on European beaches, with German nudists being key purports of the health benefits of FKK; however, as it reached its height of popularity in the early 1930s, the European perception of the pastime became increasingly political. On 3 March 1933, Hermann Göring declared the practice "one of the greatest dangers for German culture and morality." For the best part of the decade, the naturist community in Germany experienced a liminal period in which their leisure activities were not quite illegal but strongly discouraged, yet without any serious measures taken to prevent participation. As Matthew Jefferies' research demonstrates, there were three key organizations through which membership allowed for the regulated participation in what was commonly referred to as "Free Physical Culture." These groups transformed the pastime into a bourgeois practice of sensual liberty, yet naturism was still widely participated in by the unaffiliated public who simply enjoyed leisure in the nude.



Figure 1. Sun worship

The messaging coming from the National Socialist party during the early days of Hitler's Chancellorship in 1933 was, in fact, quite contradictory on this particular subject: although the pastime of naturism was viewed with general disdain within the party, the sentiment of Himmler's SS indicated that the movement could potentially be used to advance racial purity policies. Jefferies' article highlights how the lack of a coherent direction from the highest-ranking officials within the Nazi party meant that attitudes towards the naturist practice became more subjective to personal preference and individual ideologies. Hitler, for example, was against the sexual associations with the pastime yet supported other ideals, such as vegetarianism and physical fitness, that were so closely linked with the movement. What occurred was an evolution through which naturism became a way to promote the health and vitality of the idealised Aryan German. The League for Body Cultivation, for example, became a "community for a

natural and racially focused lifestyle." The realisation that Nazi leaders couldn't legitimately tell the public to cover up their bodies whilst aggressively pushing for a "perfected" racialised form led to regulated institutions that excluded groups considered outside of their strict racial or ableist parameters. The focus of these organisations placed the emphasis on the sporting side of naturist leisure as a way to promote strength and racially motivated body aesthetics. Activities such as gymnastics, shooting and swimming were extolled as ways to enhance the "racial, physical, moral, spiritual and soulful renewal of the German people."

In the post-war period, due to the obvious associations with the authoritarian regime, the stress on the naturist lifestyle became less of an organised movement that supported vegetarianism, anti-materialism, and industrialisation, and reverted to a simplistic form of private leisure. In England, the pastime dwindled significantly as its socialist associations and restrictions became significant or controversial boundaries. And yet, the hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s set the groundwork for a nudist revival, exploring bodily freedom as a complete return to a oneness with nature. Unlike their 1920s and 1930s predecessors, this naturist revival was unbound by the regulations of organised clubs and celebrated the freedom spirit of the age.

Curiously, in the modern era, according to an article in *The Week*, Germany has experienced a decline in the nudist pastime along their coastlines in recent decades, as demonstrated by their increasing number of regulations that attempt to keep their nude beaches sacredly in the buff. At the same time, naturism in the UK has been on the rise consistently since the 1960s, "despite its historically-buttoned up reputation": with the removal of any political movements, the pastime of naked leisure has become a "family-friendly" experience that strongly emphasises the practice as a non-sexual, wholesome weekend activity.

Today, events still take place that incorporate the practice of naturism in order to bring awareness to charitable causes, using the non-sexualised but slightly shocking and amusing spectacle of mass nudism to highlight various themes or campaigns. For example, the World Naked Bike Ride will take place in London, as it has done annually since 2004, on 14 June this year, exploring its aims of promoting safety for cyclists and celebrating body freedom, using the entertainment of the event to draw attention from the media. Reminding the nation to shrug off the prudish stereotypes, events like these, though not associated with naturist groups, bring the pastime back into the mainstream of summertime leisure activities.

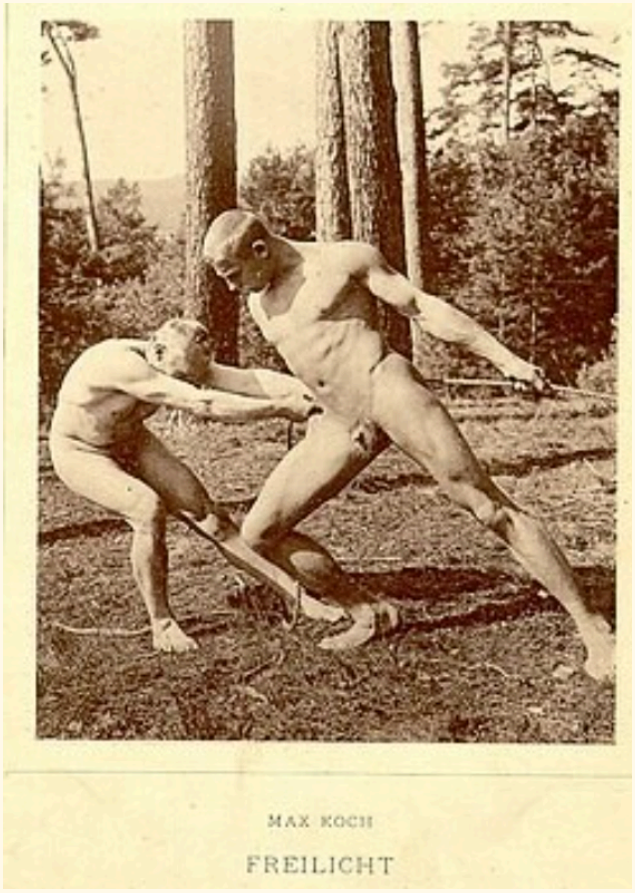


Figure 2. Freilicht (Open-Air)

For a pastime that has historically been a simple way to exercise freely and enjoy nature without the constraints of modernity and materialism, its progression since the beginning of the twentieth century is steeped in politicisation and stigmas. With the Nazi's weaponisation of naturist culture as a regime for promoting racial aesthetic ideals, the naked leisure-seeking practice dwindled significantly in popularity and remains a fringe activity that distances itself as much as possible from the corrupt regimens of its past. Of course, there are still stigmas that exist around naturism as a public activity, however its associations with charity events, experiencing nature in the sunshine, and its strongemphasis on the de-sexualised freedom of body expression and positivity, suggest a clear redirection from the restrictive, exclusive, and blatantly racist manifesto of Nazi decrees. Though distanced from the political movements of the twentieth century, naturism remains a politically conscious pastime that resists stigma and oppression in order to once again promote the freedom of body expression, demonstrating its inclusivity and the utopian unity of nudity.


TWO'S COMPANY, THREE'S A CROWD.

FEMALE SACRIFICE AS THE BRACKETS OF MALE CONTROL: EURIPIDES' IPHIGENIA AND POLYXENA

BETHANY HICKS-GRAVENER

In his Epitome, the ancient Greek scholar Apollodorus states that the sea nymph Thetis warned her son Achilles not to be the first Greek to land on the shores of Troy. This was because of a prophecy that stated the first to land would be the first to die: Protesilaus, king of the Phylaceans, ends up being the first to walk on Trojan soil and his early death at the sword of Hector fulfils the prophecy. Despite this, Protesilaus is not the first Greek casualty of the Trojan War. In fact, the first death does not take place at the hands of the Trojans but by the Greeks themselves: the sacrifice of Agamemnon's eldest daughter Iphigenia. Iphigenia marks the start of the bloodshed that can be attributed to the decade long conflict, and the sacrifice of the Trojan princess Polyxena marks the close.

The death of Iphigenia is called for as a sacrifice to the goddess Artemis, in exchange for fair wind for the Grecian troops to sail to Troy. At the time in which Euripides' Iphigenia at Aulis opens, the Greek army had been stranded at Aulis for some time. Agamemnon had consulted the priest Calchas who stated that the only way for them to be able to sail to Troy was to appease the goddess, and to do so they must sacrifice Iphigenia. Agamemnon opens Euripides' tragedy lamenting his choice to send for his daughter, regretting his actions and tries to stop Iphigenia from travelling to Aulis but his efforts are half-hearted and unsuccessful. Iphigenia, her mother Clytemnestra, and her infant brother Orestes arrive in Aulis some six-hundred lines into the text, under the pretence that Iphigenia is there to be wed to Achilles. She believes that she is being given to the Greek hero in marriage, therefore symbolising women being seen as objects of exchange, however, her 'marriage' is actually to that of Artemis. As is pointed out by Helene Foley, according to the prophecy of Calchas, Iphigenia is only to be sacrificed to Artemis if the expedition to Troy is to take place. It is made explicitly clear then that the decision to sacrifice Iphigenia is made by the Greek army, but more specifically by the Greek kings. Were they to choose not to sacrifice Iphigenia and to instead go home then Artemis would still be appeased. But instead, they decide to prioritise their own interests and quest for glory over that of the life of the Greek princess.

IIphigenia eventually agrees to her role as a sacrifice operating under the pretence that by going to her death easily, she is going nobly. She states, "but allow me to save Hellas if I can", invoking the idea that there is no other option than that of her death, that her death is a necessity to protect her homeland, but we know that not to be true. The Trojans are not the ones travelling to make war, that role falls to the Greeks. Iphigenia submits to her duty as a human sacrifice, therefore showing her lack of control over both her body but also her destiny. She is instead, in her final moments, no different from that of a sacrificial bull as she has no agency of consent.

In Euripides' Hecuba, Hecuba's youngest daughter Polyxena is sacrificed by the Greeks to necessitate the request of the ghost of the Achilles. Much like Iphigenia, Polyxena goes willingly to her grave despite having no actual control as to whether she dies or not. Instead, that power lays in the hands of the men around her. Where Iphigenia dies believing that she is doing what is right and what is needed to aid the Greeks on their journey to Troy and to help protect them, Polyxena dies believing that it is the only way for her to remain honourable. Euripides' Hecuba takes place after the Greeks have won the war, as a princess of Troy, Polyxena's fate is to be that of a slave and concubine to a Grecian king. She sees this as the biggest insult to her former position and therefore does not cower before the idea of her death but instead embraces it. In death she sees herself as belonging to no one, therefore allowing her to retain her noble social position in her mind.



Figure 1. The Anger of Achilles

The announcement that she has been chosen to die at the grave of Achilles allows her to view herself not as a slave (which is what she actually is in Hecuba), but as a fallen princess. In this mindset, Polyxena is able to reflect on her fate, and not only is able to come to peace with it but perceives it as something that is her free choice alone to make.

Despite their allegiances being to different sides, Iphigenia and Polyxena hold a lot of similarities to one another. They go to their respective sacrificial altars as virgin princesses, and as a result their deaths are sexualised. The death of both girls invokes, in a unique way, the concept of kalos thanatos. In its simplest understanding, the ancient Greek concept of kalos thanatos is the idea that there is such a thing as a 'fine death'. Usually, the term is reserved exclusively to describe the death of a heroic, young warrior on the battlefield whose death allows him to access elite glory and epithets. However, when looking at both sacrifices in Euripides' texts it does not feel out of place to utilise the term. The concepts of both moral and physical beauty are vital elements of kalos thanatos. Both Iphigenia and Polyxena willingly go to their deaths, carrying themselves with dignity and bravery. Neither girl fears their fate, nor do they display any moments of weakness or doubt in their resolve at the situation before them. Their stoic, unwavering bravery allows them to be compared to that of their male, warrior counterparts. They exemplify great levels of moral beauty that extend themselves so easily to their deaths being defined as kalos thanatos. Regardless of the fact that socially speaking they are effectively 'powerless virgins', both Iphigenia and Polyxena make a conscious choice to inform their murderers that they are not just accepting the fact that they are going to die, but that they are also making the choice to die. Their personal priorities lie in preserving their own honour, and through such preservation, they allow themselves to be showered in the glory of their noble deaths.

As previously stated, it is not just moral beauty that is important to the concept of kalos thanatos but also physical beauty. Both Clytemnestra and Hecuba are informed of their daughter's deaths after they happen by a messenger who describes the events. Both messengers describe the beauty and the loveliness of each princess as she is dying, almost making it seem that each girl becomes more beautiful as she dies such a poignant death. For Iphigenia, when Calchas is preparing to kill her, he asks Zeus to receive "the pure blood from her lovely neck," highlighting both her purity, due to her virginity, and her beauty. In the case of Polyxena, she is described as tearing her robe partially off to expose her breasts, which the messenger cannot help but comment that they were as "lovely as a goddess' statue." He also states that "though her life was ebbing out, [she] still took great care to fall in seemly fashion to the ground, concealing from male eyes what should be concealed." Therefore, stating that to the Greek army, Polyxena's death was not a symbolic act of honouring the ghost of Achilles, but rather an aesthetic lustful scene for them to behold.

The aesthetics of sacrificial virgin death, play into Weiner's argument that both Iphigenia and Polyxena are sacrificed because of male fantasies that need to be sated. As has been previously noted, both girls go to their death willingly, which is a quality that is noted in each of Euripides' texts as being admired. However, in ancient Greek society, female sexuality was something feared by men. They saw it as dangerous, and therefore their job to control it. Iphigenia and Polyxena's deaths are symbolic because they are effectively being punished for their purity and virginity. Neither girl would die had it not been for Paris taking Helen to Troy. Therefore, technically speaking they both become the victims of male anger: Menelaus was not able to control his wife's sexuality (as she left his bed and married Paris), so instead the Greeks need to assert their authority and control over feminine sexuality again, so they choose two young virgins – Helen's direct opposite. Each death satiates the male need for control over female sexuality.



Figure 2. The Sacrifice of Polyxena

All ancient texts follow the Loeb Classical Library Translations (LCL 122, 495, and 484)

OPEN WIDE: FEMALE SEXUALITY AND THE SHEELA-NA-GIG

AMY CARR

Sheela-na-gigs are stone carvings found on medieval churches, castles and walls across the British Isles. These typically bald, naked female figures are characterised by a distinctive gesture: pointing towards or pulling open their enlarged vulvas (Fig. 1). The meaning of this pose, seemingly incongruous with the often-ecclesiastical setting, remains the subject of much debate. In recent scholarship, the carvings have been cast as symbols of fertility, sexuality, and female empowerment. However, they have historically been understood as warnings against lust or apotropaic devices intended to ward off evil. Rather than investigating the purpose of the Sheela-na-gig, this essay explores how their shifting interpretations correspond with attitudes towards female sexuality. Their perceived meanings reflect evolving societal views of the female body and its sexual expression, framed as sacred, sinful, or a complex mixture of both.



Figure 1. Sheela-na-Gig

Sheela-na-gigs have been found throughout England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. They range in size from nine to ninety centimetres and were likely produced by amateur craftsmen. Most scholars agree that they were created between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, though exact dating is difficult due to the damage surviving examples have faced. Many were removed from their original contexts, destroyed, hidden or vandalised, while others remain in place but are so worn they can only be recognised by the emphasised vulva. Seventeenth-century church statutes required priests to conceal or burn them, implying that wooden versions once existed.

This suppression continued in secular institutional environments. According to Georgia Rhoades, a Victorian curator at the National Museum of Ireland used aprons to conceal the Sheela-na-gigs' genitalia and protect "impressionable young women" from their influence. Similarly, at Rothe House in County Kilkenny the figures were removed from display for having "attracted undesirable attention." When exhibited, descriptions of Sheela-na-gigs vary: Kendall Museum calls them naked acrobats, while the National Museum of Scotland lists one as "a woman giving birth", despite absence of pain or an infant. This concealment and misidentification highlights a longstanding aversion to explicit female sexuality, which has complicated analysis of the carvings. Like their date and function, the etymology of "Sheela-na-gig" remains uncertain. Some have suggested it derives from the Gaelic Síle na gcíoch, possibly meaning "Sheela of the breasts", yet this is unlikely given the lack of emphasis on the chest. Alternatively, it has been translated as "Sheela on her hunkers", referring to the squatting position, or as meaning 'old' or 'immodest' woman. Ultimately, the contempt surrounding the carvings has caused uncertainty over their origin and purpose, fuelling a diverse range of scholarly interpretations.

Recent studies have positioned the figures as "pagan" fertility symbols or representations of a pre-Christian goddess. Barbara Freitag, for example, describes the Sheela-na-gig as a "powerful manifestation of continuity with the past", highlighting the Catholic Church's tendency to appropriate "pagan" imagery. Alongside other scholars such as Edith Guest, Freitag argues that Sheela-na-gigs are icons of fertility, reflecting the medieval tendency to define women by their reproductive ability. The enlarged vulva, in this view, represents the state of dilation that women aimed to achieve. This interpretation builds upon the early twentieth-century work of Margaret Murray, the first to draw parallels between these carvings and mythological figures such as Greek crone Baubo, who bared her genitalia as an act of humour (Fig. 2), and Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar, associated with female power and fertility. Thus, Murray identified the Sheela-na-gig as part of a pre-Christian "mother-goddess" typology, intended as the focus of reverence.



Figure 2. Baubo figurine from Priene

This understanding of the carvings is complicated by their evocation of the archetypal crone. The figures lack hair associated with fecundity in the Middle Ages and exhibit wrinkles suggesting age. Their skeletal upper bodies, indicative of deterioration, contrast with the exaggerated vulva. As such, scholars including Freitag and Mercier have identified them as representations of a "pagan" goddess associated with birth and death. This reading is popular in feminist art and writing, which seeks to reclaim the Sheela-na-gig as an embodiment of pre-Christian female empowerment. Namely, in 1988, Cathleen O'Neil created a poster to commemorate Dublin Women, decorated by an interwoven border of these figures. The Sheela-na-gig, here, becomes an image of sexual autonomy – a woman in control over the display of her body, outside the oppressive norms of patriarchal society. Associated with a goddess, the displayed vulva is framed as a site of sacred, creative and destructive power.

However, this interpretation is hard to sustain when the context is more closely considered. Most extant examples appear on Romanesque buildings from the Anglo-Norman period, placing them firmly within a system of Catholic authority. Rather than representing the survival of 'pagan' tradition, it is plausible Sheela-na-gigs were created within or subsumed into a dominant Christian culture. Churches, on which they often appear, were centres of patriarchal authority in the medieval period. Rhoades argues that the Christian tradition aligned all women with Eve, responsible for the fall of man. Femininity was thus framed as inherently sinful rather than sacred or celebratory. The masons that produced the carvings were, presumably, working in accordance with these ideologies, instead of promoting "pagan" deities or explicitly feminist meanings.

It has therefore been suggested that, rather than presenting the vulva as a site of power, Sheela-na-gigs were intended to condemn the female body and its sexual activity. This idea was particularly prominent in the Victorian period, when the Royal Irish Academy described them as "fetishes" and "repulsive" female figures. For modern art historians Antony Weir and James Jerman, the carvings were part of "the medieval Church's campaign against immorality"; their crude style, exaggerated vulva and crone-like appearance were designed to allay the erotic desires of the viewer. This was influenced by Jørgen Anderson's proposal that the carvings drew on grotesque sculptures decorating French Romanesque churches, which functioned as warnings against sin. The Sheela-na-gig at Kilpeck Church is the strongest evidence of this interpretation (Fig. 1). It is part of a programme of grotesques surrounding the roof, including a monster devouring a man's head. Collectively, these figures appear to represent the evils opposed by the church. Often placed over portals, the carvings may have warned against allowing evil to enter at openings, implying sexual transgression. Therefore, Sheela-na-gigs can be viewed as an expression of the patriarchal Christian culture that envisaged evil in the female body and its association with temptation and sin.

Contradictions are, however, evident within this reading of the Sheela-na-gig. If they were intended to be spiritually didactic, it is unclear why they were later removed and concealed by clergymen. Furthermore, the placement of the carvings at the entrance of sacred spaces is difficult to reconcile with the aim of moral warning – why would the church urge followers against sin through such sexually explicit imagery? This function is also questionable due to the small size and obscure placement of most carvings. For instance, an Iona example is high above a window where it would likely go unnoticed (Fig. 3). The building it decorates originally functioned as a nunnery, meaning its female audience would have sworn an oath of celibacy. Thus, the displayed vulva would likely have had little influence on their attitude towards sexual sin.

Rosemary Power stresses that the carvings' grotesque nature does not invite sexual activity, or emphasise its harmful consequences, but instead frightens the onlooker. She, amongst others, has suggested that Sheela-na-gigs served an apotropaic function, intended to scare away adversaries – either mortal, spiritual, or both. Throughout many periods and cultures, there exist tales of women

displaying their genitalia to ward off foe. For instance, in Irish folklore, Queen Medb went to battle and, realising she was outnumbered, raised her skirts to scare the enemy. Moreover, the Sheela-na-gig's evil-averting power may have been rooted in "pagan" religious belief, like the female goddess interpretation. As sacred fertility symbols, they may have the power to defend against the Evil Eye. This function corresponds with their placement around thresholds, which were often protected by charms such as crosses and horseshoes in the Middle Ages. Additionally, it explains their inclusion in a variety of spatial contexts – religious and secular, public, and domestic – and in places unseen by passersby, where they can ward off invisible, evil forces. In this context, the display of the vulva constitutes an act of female agency, combining disgust around the female body with a sense of power and sanctity.

These contrasting interpretations of Sheela-na-gigs reveals little about their true origin, but help elucidate the frameworks through which they, as symbols of the female body and sexuality, have been understood. In feminist readings, the carvings are icons of a lost female autonomy, rooted in pre-Christian reverence for the vulva's creative power. Conversely, in a Christian moral structure, they represent the sin inherent in women. Taken as monstrous, the exaggerated genitalia warn against



Figure 3. Iona's Sheela-na-gig

lust as an opportunity for the entrance of evil. In the apotropaic interpretation, the display of the female body is not sinful, but a protective action invoking both fear and power. Hence, rather than revealing a clear, simple meaning, the Sheela-na-gig can be understood as a complex symbol of evolving ideologies around gender, sexuality, and power.

RADICALISM, RAUNCHINESS, AND REVELRY: THE RANTERS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

HATTIE FILMORE

Characterised by morals and self-discipline, the Commonwealth Era sought to instil a Protestant ethic in the population. However, following a tumultuous period of revolution, some refused to settle down. The dissenting sects of the revolutionary period morphed, with some dissolving and some starting afresh. Unlike the better-known Levellers or Quakers who were founded during the Civil War, the Ranters did not emerge until after the execution of Charles I in 1649.

It is difficult to determine precisely what the Ranters believed in because they had no recognised leader and no formal organisation. Despite this, historians have turned to contemporary pamphlets written by self-defined Ranters, as well as tracts written by their critics of the Ranters, in order to piece together an ideology valuing pleasure. Their message was particularly attractive to young people and migratory craftsmen, who were inexperienced in religion nor devoted to tradition.

Antinomianism was taken to the extreme by the Ranters; that is, the belief that obeying the moral law, as delineated by the Ten Commandments, is not necessary. They placed little importance on the external written word or action,



Figure 1. Woodcut illustration in The Ranters Religion

believing God was only concerned with the faith and purity of heart within a person. Combined with their pantheistic worldview, that nothing in the universe exists outside of God, the Ranters rejected the concept of sin: if God is inside everyone, then every act is from God; if someone commits sin, it is still an act of God, and therefore good.

An anonymous anti-Ranter tract printed in 1650, The Ranters Religion, conveys this on two accounts. The first:

"they affirms that God is so far from being offended at the crying sins of drunkenness, swearing, blaspheming, adultery, &c. that he is well pleased therewith, and that (O strange and horrid impiety!) it is the only way of serving him aright"

And the second:

"these licentious Sciolists affirme, that each whimsey, each motion, whether to sweare, to whore, yea to commit incest or buggery, is of God, and proceeds from him, hee being the Author, Orderer, and Origen of it"

The belief that God is found in everything from the demonic to the divine manifested itself in the Ranters' scandalous behaviour. One influential Ranter, Abiezer Coppe, was reported to have spent a full hour in the pulpit swearing. The Ranters were frequently criticised for using obscene words and singing bawdy songs, sometimes to the tune of psalms. Eminent historian Christopher Hill has portrayed the Ranters' swearing and blaspheming as an expression of the "simple pleasures of the poor", claiming that such language was an act of defiance against the middle-class Puritan ethic trying to discipline the lower classes.

Ranter gatherings often happened in taverns and ale houses because it was believed that intoxication through tobacco and alcohol heightened one's spiritual vision. Amid reports condemning their dancing and singing, one particularly blasphemous incident is detailed: a group of Ranters parodied the Last Supper, jokingly throwing a cup of ale into the fire and declaring it the blood of Christ.

One of the Ranters' most incendiary and controversial pastimes was sexual indulgence. It was common practice for the title page of hostile pamphlets to reflect this. For example, The Ranters Religion depicts aroused men dancing with women, all nude and being flogged while a demonic figure sits nearby. Similar lecherous imagery can be found in The Ranters Roving and The Ranters Declaration. Contrary to their pantheistic belief that God is in everyone, some Ranters held the view that all women are one, and all men are one. As a result of this unity, it was reasonable for any man and woman to lie together, regardless of marital status, as everybody was husband and wife. Advocating for free love, one slogan believed to be used by Ranters is the parallelistic, "there's no heaven but women, nor no hell save marriage." Being tied to just one person was conceived of as a curse, meaning sexual liberty was encouraged instead. This view was maintained by Coppe, the foul-mouthed preacher, who declared: "I can kiss and hug ladies and love my neighbour's wife as myself without sin." Coppe was frequently accused of lying in bed with two women at a time.



Figure 2. Woodcut illustration in The Ranters Declaration

In a January 1650 round-up of the leading Ranters, Coppe was imprisoned on the charge of blasphemy and treason, and all his pamphlets were ordered to be burnt. That year in May, the Cromwellian Parliament issued the Adultery Act, imposing the death penalty for adultery. In August, they issued the Blasphemy Act, which meant anyone equalising themselves with God or refuting the concept of

sin was liable to six months' imprisonment for a first offence and banishment for a second offence, with the death penalty if they returned. Coppe was convinced that he and other Ranters were the target of these acts. His 1651 remonstrance overtly claimed that "the two Acts of May 10 and August 9, 1650, were put out because of me." Although these acts suggest strong action was taken by the Cromwellian regime against the Ranters' behaviour, in reality they were rarely enforced by judges.

In fact, the Ranters posed no real threat to the established order. Though expressing radical views of absolving all sin and prioritising pleasure, the movement fragmented not long after it emerged. Even at its peak, it is likely that the reported gatherings were only attended by ten or a dozen members at a time. Though there is evidence of Ranter ideology in small pockets across England, they were too scattered to coordinate into any substantial group, even in London.

Historian J.C. Davis has questioned whether the Ranters ever even existed, or if they were simply the fabrication of a sensationalist press during the pamphlet wars. It is certainly true that most of the evidence used to identify Ranters' aims and behaviours comes from critical sources; for example, A.L. Morton's influential study uses John Holland's The Smoke of the Bottomless Pit to pinpoint the Ranters' central doctrine, "God is essentially in every creature." Though Morton acknowledges that Holland's writing is condemnatory, he does not explore the implications of this. In response to Davis, historians have qualified their accounts of the Ranters, conceding that there might not be enough evidence to refer to them as a distinct sect, but maintaining that there is evidence of individuals following this hedonistic lifestyle.

However influential the Ranters were or were not, and whether they even existed as a coherent group, is not necessarily important. There is still an abundance of evidence proving a horrified conservative reaction to the licentious, irreligious pastimes they represent. In the mid-seventeenth century, under a Puritanical regime, pleasure was associated with the immoral. The acts the Ranters were accused of in this period are too crucial to ignore because they illustrate what the new regime deemed unacceptable behaviour. Where conservative condemnation was done in the name of control and power, Ranter resistance was in the name of freedom and pleasure.

POLITICS AND PLEASURE: MISTRESSES IN THE FRENCH ROYAL COURT

SOMMER BIANCHI

Throughout history, historians have focused on the political values and actions of men, as many sources focused on men as political leaders. However, this does not mean women were absent from these affairs, especially within royal courts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Women have created and impacted political change through many different means, including mistresses. While previous historians have claimed that mistresses had no direct influence over politics, I will demonstrate how this is not the case, as what begins as a relationship based around pleasure can become a gateway into incredible political influence. I will focus on two famous French mistresses, Madame de Montespan and Madame de Pompadour, and how they were able to access political power through their status and their influence over their lovers.

Madame de Montespan was born in 1640. After becoming a lady-in-waiting to Queen Maria-Theresa in 1664, Montespan became King Louis XIV's mistress in 1666. Beautiful and from a well-off family, Montespan fit well into court and was able to catch Louis's eye. But to be a successful mistress was more than being beautiful. While beauty itself provided power, through favour, intelligence and wit were needed to keep the king's interest. Montespan's intelligence can also be seen in how she was able to attract Louis.



Figure 1. Madame de Pompadour

She was friends with the King's brother, and by working to become a lady-in-waiting, she was able to put herself in a position where she would see the King daily, increasing her chances of attracting notice. Montespan's ambitions heavily contribute to her achievement of the position of the King's favourite mistress. With Louis becoming obsessed with her, Montespan soon became centre of court life in the 1660s and 1670s, a position secured through her intellect, social station, and sexual appeal.

A woman's beauty was a powerful political tool within the French court. Beautiful women were often sent as intermediaries, brokers, and mediators, often settling family disputes. The power of beauty, however, was not just seen in court, but throughout France, as those who were more beautiful were able to achieve higher positions. Beauty was then used by both the possessors and those around them for promotion. This can be clearly seen in Montespan's activities at court: her charm and beauty were used as a political asset by the King to win over foreign ambassadors. Beauty is not a neutral asset, as its power to attract became very useful in political interactions. This adds a layer of politics to the role of mistress, as being a beautiful woman, especially one who was sexually involved with the King, allowed Montespan to have heightened political power.

Women in court, including mistresses, had political power and goals. Both men and women have similar political motives when it comes to bettering their families, including maintaining social positions and creating advantageous marriages. As Christine Adams argues, assuming women's actions in court were apolitical demonstrates a lack of knowledge about how the court operated. For example, through arranging marriages, women were able to increase their own family's social standing and subsequent power. Madame de Montespan's prestigious marriages for her own children should then not be overlooked. Montespan had seven children with Louis, and by linking her children to powerful families, Montespan secured her place within royal society, even if she lost favour with the King. Montespan was then able to gain social security and political advantages because of her position as Louis's mistress, blending a relationship of pleasure with one of political power.

Another famous French royal mistress was Madame de Pompadour. Born in 1721, Pompadour's ascension to the side of King Louis XV was always political. Pompadour was from a wealthy merchant family, and through her theatrical talents and charm, was able to gain access to many prestigious French salons. She was supported by multiple figures within and outside of court to become Louis's next mistress and was able to achieve this in 1745. Pompadour, like Montespan, was very intelligent. Aware of previous mistresses' mistakes, Pompadour avoided going to war with Louis, as this caused previous upset with the court and weakened the image of the king. Mistresses held an insecure position at court as they could be dismissed at any moment, so Pompadour needed to maintain her favour for as long as possible. While she was publicly unpopular, she kept Louis' attention until her death in 1761, a testament to her charm.



Figure 2. Portrait of an Unknown Woman as Iris, formerly identified as Madame de Montespan

Montespan and Pompadour were both directly and indirectly involved in political sectors associated with men. Montespan played a large role in arranging political marriages for court women and in establishing pensions and patronages for artists and friends. However, she was also involved in military affairs. She was able to secure a regiment for a friend and asked Louis for better military supplies such as rations. As well, ambassadors had met with Louis in her room to discuss military plans. While she used the King's power for her own political motives, she was also able to work without him, allowing her brother to have a stronger military force than Louis wanted. Pompadour also influenced political policy; although it was not well received, she was seen as behind the high turnover of government ministers. The role of mistress, created for the pleasure of the king, becomes an avenue for women to get involved in male-dominated politics, further defying the claim that women were apolitical in court.

A source of power for mistresses beyond station was wealth, which they used to gain further status at court. Montespan and Pompadour received large amounts of money and patronage from their royal lovers, allowing them to participate in more court activities. Montespan refused to allow Louis to give her money directly as it made her a target within the court, so he financed her through other means such as gifts. He even financed the building of her private residence, the château of Clagny. Pompadour, with a love of the performing arts, created her own theatre run by the women of the court, which became a political tool for noble families to further gain the King's favour. Both women used their wealth to create patronages for their friends and family, giving others another basis of power through their wealth. Being friends with these women was, then, most advantageous as Montespan and Pompadour were both in close connection with their king and had their own power and influence. Being friends with Pompadour, for example, would allow access to one of her plays, and therefore, to the King's favour. Wealth through their court positions was an added benefit to the role and was a further benefit and political tool to both the mistresses and the people around them.

However, the mistresses' role in politics was both noticed and disapproved of. Both Montespan and Pompadour faced heavy political criticism from those within and outside the court. Both were married, as were the kings who were their lovers, leading to cases of double adultery. This was seen as condemnable, especially to the church, which attempted to persuade both Louis XIV and Louis XV to dismiss Montespan and Pompadour. Both women were also viewed as too ambitious and were deeply unpopular in court. Pompadour was specifically viewed as responsible for many poorly received policies, whether she was involved or not. The influence of mistresses was seen to effeminise kings by controlling them and manipulating their decisions, turning a role meant to please the king into a more vicious one in the public eye.

While sexual relations and pleasure created the role of mistress, Montespan and Pompadour retained their power after ending their relationships with the king, demonstrating how the power they created no longer depended on sex. Montespan began to lose favour in 1682 after being suspected during the Affair of the Poisons, with some members of the court also citing her weight and lessening sexual skill as the reason for her demotion from Louis's favourite. However, Montespan remained in court until she willingly left in 1691, as she received both party invitations and money from Louis despite the end of their relationship. Her personality and charm had secured her place when she was first instated, and then continued to support her after her pleasure-focused role in the King's life was over. The same happened with Pompadour. When her health began to decline, Pompadour and Louis ended their sexual relationship, yet they remained friends, and he continued to visit her bedroom daily. She became a form of advisor for Louis, remaining at his side until her death in 1764. Pompadour's charm and intellect supported her even after she was unable to be sexual with Louis, allowing her to maintain her status and power. For French mistresses, specifically Montespan and Pompadour, politics was inherently tied to the position through beauty and wealth. It was the ambition and intellect of Montespan and Pompadour that allowed them to further expand and secure their political positions within the court, blending a legacy of sex, pleasure, and politics.



"I LOVE AND ONLY LOVE THE FAIRER SEX": A BIOGRAPHY OF ANNE LISTER

CHLOE ROSS

Historians and queer theorists have long been looking for "proof" of pleasure and sex between two women before the nineteenth century, having relied on accounts of romantic friends and homosocial relationships. The discovery of Anne Lister's diaries revealed an array of explicit sexual acts between Anne and a multitude of women. There were in total twenty-six diaries recovered from 1816 to 1840, as well as loose pages and letters from earlier years, adding up to around four million words. Around fifteen percent was written in code or what she dubbed "crypt-hand", where she recounted in detail her sexual exploits. Anne Lister's life and diaries demonstrate same-sex desire and relations, clearly showing that, historically, pleasure was an important part of living.

Anne Lister was born on 3 April 1791 to Captain Jeremy Lister and Rebecca Battle in Halifax, West Yorkshire, where she grew up and spent most of her life. Her brothers all died, leaving her and her sister Marian as heiresses to their family's wealth. The Lister family were affluent, her parents owning the Skelfler estate and her aunt and uncle owning Shibden Hall. This is reflected in Anne's upbringing; she was highly educated, being able to read and write in English, Latin, and Greek. Additionally, she had the ability to assist in the running of the estate, and eventually the total takeover of her land. This may be due to the lack of male supervision or the family's wealth and access to resources, but nonetheless Anne was an intelligent woman. Furthermore, her wealth allowed for a range of hobbies including travel, horse-riding, and shooting. These activities were usually associated with affluent men, and participating in these rougher pursuits would have been uncommon for women, particularly of the gentile class. This shows the beginning of Anne's complex relationship with gender, demonstrating her inability to be confined to what a woman should do and her early defiance of the category of gender.

Anne moved out of her family estate to live with her aunt and uncle in Shibden Hall in 1815, where she began assisting with the managing of the estate. This is around the time her diaries began listing in excruciating detail every aspect of her day and therefore her life. She listed the weather, the timings of her day, her eating and reading habits, and many more daily activities in a comprehensive account of her routine. This in-depth journal was broken up by elements of coded writing, a mix of Greek, numbers, and symbols written in shorthand. These detailed her sexual encounters with other women. The code was devised with a schoolmate in boarding school, Eliza Raine, who is known as her first love. The two shared an attic room in boarding school, giving them a private space to begin and maintain their passionate love affair. Eliza was one of many girls that Anne tried to and succeeded in seducing and these raunchy encounters were written about just as meticulously as the weather in crypt-hand.

From there, Anne had a number of romantic trysts exclusively with women, stating "I love and only love the fairer sex." The ones who left the biggest impact include Isabella Norcliffe and Ann Walker, the latter of whom Anne would eventually settle down with. However, Marianna Lawton was the biggest love of her life. The pair met in 1812, and Anne developed intense feelings for Marianna rapidly. For four years, Anne and Marianna, or M- in crypt-hand, had a fulfilling relationship. Entries such as, "M- gave me a good kiss," and "She herself suggested our having a kiss […] I took off my pelisse & drawer, got into bed & had a very good kiss, she was showing all due inclination & in less than seven minutes the door was bolted & we were all right", demonstrate their passion. "Kiss" for Anne usually meant orgasm, showing that the women were partaking in sexual acts. This emphasises the detail that Anne was writing with in her diaries. Additionally, the range of different types of sexual encounters highlights the lack of shame felt in her actions; while there were rushed encounters influenced by passion, sex between the women was not laced with shame and they could take the time to find pleasure.

Unfortunately, Marianna Lawton had to marry a man, Charles Belcombe, as unlike Anne she could not financially support herself. So, while Anne inherited Shibden Hall after the death of her father and uncle, Marianna married Charles and became supported. The pair's relationship continued long after Marianna's wedding, conducting an affair and creating plans to be



Figure 1. Watercolour sketch of Anne Lister

united once Charles died to live together as wives; the only missing element being the documentation. However, Marianna settled into married life and Anne "felt that [her] happiness depended on having some female companion whom [she] could love & depend upon." She wanted a courtship like any other and had to let Marianna go. Instead, she found partnership in Ann Walker. Her diary detailed many of the erotic fantasies she had for Ann before they began courting: "incurred a cross last night thinking of Miss Walker." Once again, the details of Anne's diaries are demonstrating that women found pleasure together and singularly. Ann Walker could offer money and land into the partnership, which would have been an incentive to be with her. The two eventually became lovers: "she sat on my knee and I did not spare kissing and pressing, she returning it." The pair became official partners, exchanging rings and inhabiting the roles of wife and wife, as Ann "made no objection to what I proposed, that is her declaring it on the Bible & taking the sacrament with me at Shibden or Lightcliff church." The two got as close as they could to being married for two women in the nineteenth century. Sexual intercourse became normalised in their routine, in the same way it would in a heterosexual marriage. They both had a consistent partner who knew how to please them and whom they did not have to hide from.

In addition to Anne's sexual orientation, her expression of gender emphasises her search for pleasure within her life. From running the estate to taking an active role in the seduction of woman, it is clear that Anne aligns herself with more masculine ideas. This is continued in her aesthetics. All discussion of clothes is also written in crypt-hand, disguising her opinion on feminine dress for her own and showing she was deliberately resisting gender norms by feeling the need to hide the details. She decided that "I have almost made up my mind to always wear black", not identifying with feminine colours, but instead with a sombre, gentlemanly black. This can be seen further in the items she dressed in: "Began this morning to sit before breakfast in my drawers out on with gentleman's braces […] & my old black waistcoat and dressing gown." She is not only dressing in gentlemanly colours but also in style. It is said that people in the street would be confused coming upon her if she were a man or a woman, leading to her nickname, "Gentleman Jack", which was often used cruelly towards her. Anne's gender orientation did not align with the contemporary ideas of femininity, and can be viewed as fracturing the rigid gender norms of the period for Anne to experience pleasure in her own identity. Indeed, this essay has refrained from using the modern label of lesbian for Anne, as there are many conflicting ideas evoked from using a label that surrounds contemporary ideas of sexuality and gender.

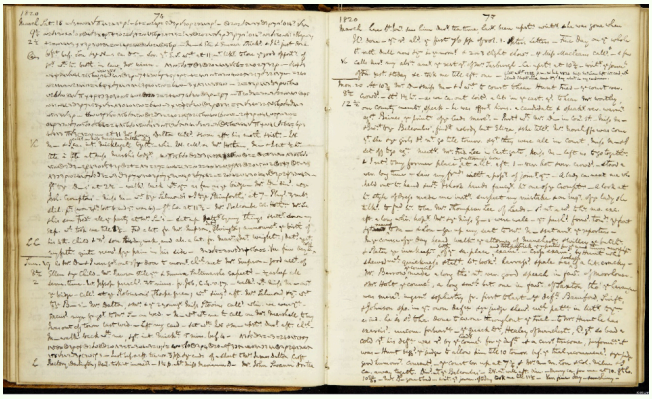


Figure 2. Example of crypt-hand

Anne and Ann continued to live in relative harmony. Anne was involved in the community around her as a landowner. Her diaries show her involvement in coal, politics, and travel, and she was even the first woman to be on the Halifax committee of the Literary and Philosophical Society. Anne Lister died from a fever obtained from an insect bite in 1840 at age forty-nine whilst travelling in Russia. Her body, accompanied by her wife, was returned to Halifax. Her diaries were hidden away in Shibden Hall to be found by John Lister, a descendant, in 1887.

Having discovered their content, he re-hid the diaries to avoid attention on him and his family and obstruct the truth of their homosexuality from the public. John buried them in the panels of Shibden Hall to be found much later and taken to the archive in Halifax, where they can be found today.

As well as inspiring numerous books and the television show Gentleman Jack, Anne Lister's diaries have shown to researchers that there were women having sexual intercourse with other women before contemporary ideas of lesbianism formed. Anne was writing in detail about her gender and sexual identity without the constraint of following societal rules of the time. Her diaries were not only proof of her seeking pleasure, but also showed that her partners were also. By looking at one woman's diaries, it is clear that there was a host of women seeking pleasure from other women in the past.

THE HIGH LIVES (AND HARD FALLS) OF KENYA'S HAPPY VALLEY SOCIALITES

LEAH ANDRADE

Nestled among the valleys and peaks of Kenya's highlands, a debaucherous group of British socialites lived lives of conspicuous luxury and scandal. In the Wanjohi valley, the 'Happy Valley set' escaped Britain's metropolitan social scrutiny, leading scandal-hungry lives that merged pleasure with addiction and secrecy. Far from home and flush with land and money, these expatriate elites cultivated much more than just cash crop estates, creating an environment where gin-soaked parties and moonlit affairs flourished against a backdrop of elitism and hierarchy. With no formal membership or moment of initiation, the set nevertheless solidified their image in setting, excess and whispered scandals that became almost legendary. Yet, behind headlines and gossip lurked instability among common occurrences of serial marriage, affairs, substance abuse, and even death. Figures like Alice Janzé, known as the 'Wicked Madonna', and Josslyn Hay, whose 1941 murder shocked the colony, demonstrate that steep indulgence had a price to match it. Peering into this champagne-fuelled microcosm, this piece explores gossip and glamour, alongside the shadows and contradictions of empire itself, where freedom for some rested squarely on inequality for others. Examining the stories of select Happy Valley individuals, a complex world of social insecurity, colonial excess and indulgence is revealed, exposing the valley's 'happiness' as a false label that ultimately came at the expense of African communities.

Sir Josslyn Hay, the twenty-second Earl of Erroll, stands among the most infamous figures of the Valley set – a Scottish nobleman notorious for his liberal lifestyle, and sensational murder. His elopement with then-married Lady Idina Sackville in 1923 scandalised British society, bringing the couple to Kenya where their home became the centre of extravagance and salacious gathering, generating gossip among colonial and British circles. Idina remains a central figure in Happy Valley lore, rumoured to be the muse of many contemporary filmmakers and songwriters. Daughter of the eighth Earl de la Warr, she rose to infamy through her serial marriages, affairs and lascivious antics, earning her a reputation as the ultimate rebel against convention. Her first divorce in 1919 cost her custody of two sons, and her subsequent marriage offered her little satisfaction. Seeking freedom, she eloped to Kenya with Josslyn in 1923 and quickly became notorious for raucous parties, spouse swapping and wild revelry. Rumours went as far as claiming she would greet guests naked in an onyx-green bathtub filled with champagne, dressing suggestively in front of them with fearless abandon. Though Idina was more than just her indulgences, she was described as kind, hardworking, deeply fulfilled by home design and the natural beauty of the world surrounding her. By the time she died in 1955, she had married her fifth husband, leaving a legacy that combined scandal and glamour with

the intoxicating freedom and hope that defined life in the valley.



Figure 1. Alice and Frederic Janzé

The marriage between Josslyn and Indina ended in divorce in 1929, when Hay embarked on an affair with Molly Ramsay Hill, another married woman whom he later wed in 1930, though she died in 1939 from a lethal cocktail of alcohol, morphine, and heroin. In the years following her death, he continued various affairs, his last one proving fatal to himself. Hay became involved with Lady Diana Broughton (née Caldwell), in a liaison that ended when he was found shot dead in his car, just outside Nairobi in January 1941. John "Jock" Delves Broughton arrived in Kenya in the late 1930s with his young wife, but their marital bliss was cut short once her affair with Hay began. Despite his personal humiliation, Broughton had agreed to a prenuptial clause that allowed Diana to annul the marriage if she fell in love with another man, clearing the way for her union with Hay. Even still, following the murder, Broughton became the prime suspect. He was quickly arrested and tried but eventually acquitted due to a lack of evidence and ballistic proof. Nevertheless, rumours persisted in society, fuelled by the claims of young Juanita Carberry, who alleged that Broughton had confessed the murder to her when she discovered him burning evidence linking him to the crime. Diana later divorced Broughton and married two of the most prominent settler landowners of the colony, Gilbert Coville in 1943 and Thomas Cholmondeley (Lord Delamere) in 1955. Into the 1960s and 1970s, Diana maintained a complex three-way relationship between her husband and lover (Lady Patricia Fairweather) until her death in 1987.



Figure 2. From left, Sackville, Raymond de Trafford, Alice de Janzé and Hay in Kenya

Another peculiar pair of the Happy Valley set were Alice and Frédéric de Janzé. Their association began following a meeting (and invitation) from Josslyn and Idina in Paris, leading to a deep friendship and several hunting expeditions in the mid 1920s. Residing in close proximity to the Hays, romantic entanglement ensued, with Frédéric beginning an affair with Idina, and Alice with Josslyn. It was, however, Alice's later affair with Raymond de Trafford which changed the lives of the pair for good. De Trafford himself was an Irish aristocrat with a love for gambling, women and alcohol, involved in a multitude of dalliances across the valley set, and a failed attempt to seduce the Duchess of Gloucester. The eventual strain of the de Janzés' repeated affairs proved insurmountable, leading to the dissolution of their marriage in 1927, after Alice shot De Trafford in a Paris railway station after he rejected her proposal of marriage. While both survived the ordeal (despite Alice turning the gun on herself) the pair continued to be the subject of scandal. Alice did achieve a brief marriage to De Trafford in 1932, followed by an immediate separation after De Trafford deserted her for Australia; meanwhile Frédéric's life was cut short at age 37 in 1933, dying from sepsis. Finding herself drawn back to Happy Valley, Alice was plagued by depression, alcoholism, and a morphine addiction. Ultimately, she

chose to die by her own hand in 1941. In retrospect, Happy Valley sparks infamy as much as nostalgia, immortalised in the novel White Mischief by James Fox. Based on the events surrounding Josslyn's murder, the novel is saturated with the scandal that was an everyday feature of valley life, later being adapted into a film in 1987 starring Charles Dance and Greta Scacchi, the intricacies of the expatriate community became known globally. In the same year, the BBC dramatized the story of Juanita Carberry in Happy Valley, providing a heavy commentary on the social fabric of expatriate life.

Such portrayals reveal a society steeped in leisure and privilege, yet what remains obscured is the deeper connections of this to the broader framework of imperial rule. The temperate climate and cultivable soils were positioned as well-suited to settler dispositions which, combined with the allure of wealth and big game hunting, drew aristocrats eager to establish status and control. Thus, the fertile highlands in which the set experienced and propagated their illicit activities were appropriated from the indigenous Kikuyu, Meru, and Embu people, who became confined to reserves, where taxes and labour requirements often forced men to work on European estates for very little return. The social separation between settlers and African communities became further reinforced through racial exclusion in country club life, where circles like the set flourished and connected. Such clubs therefore doubled as centres of informal governance that shaped the political and cultural life of the colony, demonstrating the impact of Happy Valley exclusivity beyond pleasure.

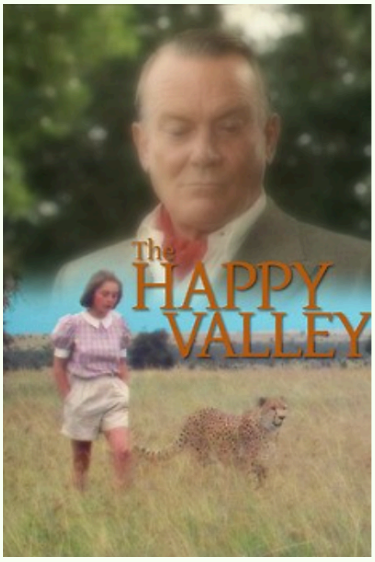


Figure 3. BBC 'The Happy Valley' Movie Poster

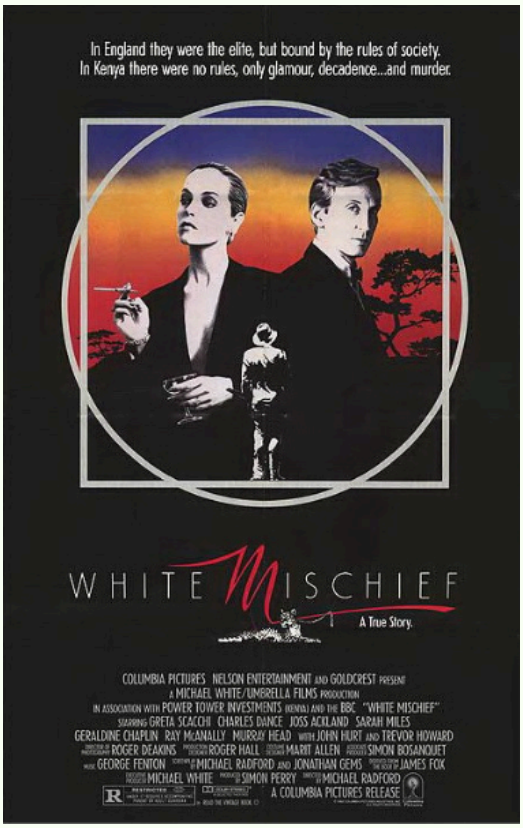


Figure 4. White Mischief Movie Poster

By the late 1940s, this separatism and alienation intensified animosity that was already growing among African communities marginalised by such groups. In 1952, the Mau Mau uprising prompted a state of emergency, marking the beginning of an armed conflict that lasted until 1956. During this time, Mau Mau attacks targeted European settlers emblematic of racialised systems of land control and privilege, leading many families to depart. By the time of Kenyan independence in 1963, the insular world of the highlands that had once upheld settler society became a decimal of what it once was, leaving a historical record that reflected both opulence and dislocation. What once seemed so permanent was gone in a blink of a generation. While the 'Happy Valley' label evokes contentment and ease, the historical reality was far more complex. Addiction, adultery, suicide, death, and public scandal were truly the tensions that marred the lives of several members of the set. Equally important, however, was the society's reliance on land dispossession and racialised hierarchies, which allowed it to flourish in the certainty of empire but could not endure its collapse. Today, Happy Valley represents more than decadence, offering a lens through which to examine dynamics of colonial power and privilege – a stark reminder that no society is exempt from the weight of consequence.

"A UTOPIA OF DANGEROUS" AND "UNKNOWN PLEASURES": COLONIAL LEISURE IN THE TANGIER INTERNATIONAL ZONE, 1923-1956

JAKE BEECROFT

In the 1950s, American writer William S. Burroughs wrote to his close friend Allen Ginsberg from his residence in Tangier, describing the city as a "utopia of dangerous, unknown pleasures." Burroughs described Tangier as a place where he could visit a Turkish bath with one "Arab in native dress", wondering if he was "bedding the same person in different clothes or a succession of increasingly respectful young men." Burroughs goes on to say that for a small price, he could indulge in a "limitless supply" of local cannabis and sex, far from the repressive, postwar conservative atmosphere of the United States. This was the Tangier International Zone, a unique political state that existed between 1923 and 1956, where the "pleasure" of Western men existed at the expense of the poverty and desperation of the cities' native population.

The unique atmosphere of Tangier was rooted in its complex legal status as a city state caught between competing colonial spheres. Established by the Statute of Tangier in 1923, the city was carved out as an 'international zone' separate from the French and Spanish protectorates that between them governed the rest of Morocco. The territory was governed jointly by several European powers and the United States, leading Tangier to become an economic and political safe haven characterised by a lack of taxation, a free currency market, relaxed social laws, and a series of legal systems riddled with loopholes. Scholars called this unique situation the "Tangier Exception." Without a rigid rule of law, the city was effectively owned by no one community, where status was determined entirely by a person's individual wealth. For Westerners, it was a paradise, a place where one could live a highly affordable and politically free life, compared to the more socially conservative European and American administrations. The city's urban space was a diverse melting pot, divided between the old medina. Given that it was inhabited by Moroccans, being also a new city designed in a European style to accommodate its diverse foreign residents, it reflected a hybridity. Billboards featured a mix of Spanish, Arabic, French, and English, while new boulevards were constructed to facilitate the arrival of European cars and a unique blend of European architecture, combining elements of French and Spanish styles.

The 1940s and 1950s were decades of profound disillusionment in the West, described often as an 'Age of Doubt.' Post-war Americans and Europeans, still recovering from economic depression and the political instability created following the Second World War, looked to Tangier as an escape. To the Beat Generation, a literary community that rebelled against postwar conformity, like William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, Tangier was an "Interzone", a space suspended between nations and cultures, outside the standard cultural shackles of Western nations. Travel writer John Hopkins noted that many American and European men were simply "after boys and drugs", as he described the local Moroccan population as "charming, attractive, and tolerant." The massive wealth difference between foreigners and locals created a market for prostitution and exploitation, as locals engaged in sexual acts of favour with wealthy tourists. While some celebrated the freedom Tangier afforded to them, many native residents found the city's reputation – a space of freedom for sexual acts between men – disagreeable, noting that many Europeans arrived with the offensive assumption that "every Moroccan they see is for sale."



Figure 1. Peter Orlovsky, left; Jack Kerouac, and William S Burroughs (fully clothed) in Tangier

While the Europeans saw Tangier as an exotic playground, a space with relaxed social laws, the

Moroccans experienced Tangier as a site of symbolic and sexual colonisation. Oral stories of native writers like Larbi Layachi, Mohamed Mrabet, and Mohammed Choukrimany offer a starkly different reality to the accounts of Western writers. For young, uneducated Moroccan males from impoverished backgrounds, the International Zone was not a place of survival nor a space for economic opportunity. Mrabet, who often worked as a servant at foreign parties, described the city as being full of "sexually disturbed" foreigners. In Mrabet's own written works, the protagonists are often trapped in relationships with Western men, who would cover their expenses in exchange for absolute sexual compliance. Mrabet's novel Love with a Few Hairs (1967) depicts the eighteen-year-old Mohamed leading a double life, in which he is coerced into a sexual relationship with a British resident named David, who threatens to end financial support should he marry a girl he actually loves. Larbi Layachi's A Life Full of Holes (1964) presents an even bleaker view of the Tangier underworld. His work focuses on poverty and social inequality, recounting the experiences of young boys who faced beatings and racist treatment at the hands of Europeans while working as housekeepers for what he called "European perverts." To these writers, the pleasure of the International Zone was defined by predatory behaviour that exploited the native male body.

The result of the constant cultural encounters was a state of hybridity for everyone involved. Burroughs claimed that Tangier helped him ascertain his "true self", leading to religious hybridity where the lines between Christianity and Islam blurred. This in-between state allowed Westerners to detach themselves from their national identities, yet they remained beneficiaries of a political system that benefited from widespread colonial exploitation of the native population. Bowles's own writing style was significantly altered by his work with Moroccan storytellers. He admitted to a kind of cooperation taking place, learning from Mrabet to tell stories with simple nouns and verbs, stripped of adjectives and adverbs. This linguistic layering produced a literature that existed only through the collaboration of languages, forcing the reader to confront the untranslatable and the othered nature of the Moroccan experience.

The International Zone as a separate city state ended in 1956 when Tangier was absorbed in to the newly independent Morocco. Yet, the image of Tangier as a city of sin, a place of indulgence afforded to those who travelled from Europe and America, persists in the global imagination.

This image is of a hybrid space, constructed from the memoirs of the Beat Generation and the translated voices of the subaltern native population. The pleasure of the colonial era was a complex, asymmetrical negotiation. For the Westerner, it was the freedom to do whatever a person desired, provided it was not considered antisocial behaviour. For the Moroccan, it was a struggle against social injustice and sexual abuse, a period where their culture and bodies were treated as exotic commodities for sale at affordable prices.

The Tangier International Zone, over nearly three decades of existence, was a unique space where colonial wealth met local poverty to create a landscape of bohemian freedom, available only for some. The colonial pleasure of the era was never a simple indulgence: it was a political act that reshaped the city's urban design, its social fabric, and its literature. A legacy still remains in the literary works and architecture of the city, though no longer as a space of social freedom away from the repressive laws of the period. The literature produced by the group that later became known as the "Tangier circle", where writers like Burroughs and Bowles immortalised the city as a site of excess and dangerous pleasure, and the works they translated from Choukri, Mrabet, and Layachi ensure that the silenced parts of Moroccan culture and the bitter reality of the exploitation are not forgotten. Tangier remains a symbol of a time when fact merged into dream, though for the native population, that dream was often a nightmare of exploitation, rooted in desperation. Ultimately, the International Zone was a space of ambiguity where identities were confused, negotiated, and transformed by the relentless pursuit of pleasure in a lawless world.

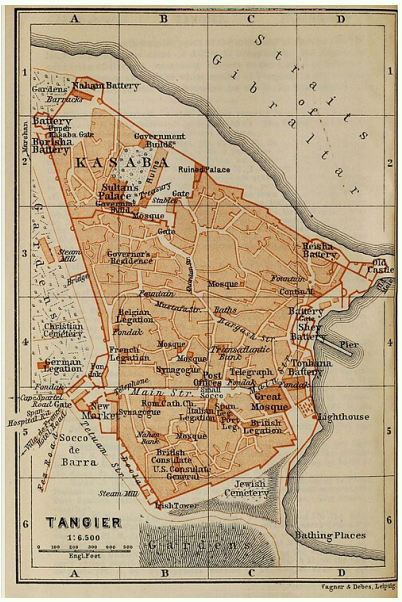


Figure 2. Map of Tangier 1901


Double Entendre

VULGAR VIRGINS, HOLY HARLOTS: FEMININITY AND SEXUALITY IN CHRISTIANISING LATE ANTIQUITY, 200-500 CE

ELISA SMIRNOVA

In early Late Antiquity, sensual pleasure became a problem. Western sexual culture stood at the intersection of two worlds: Classical and Christian. From one side, Christianity introduced the idea of a meritocratic afterlife into mainstream cosmology, infusing the acts of flesh with unprecedented significance and giving rise to asceticism. From the other side, classical sexual culture continued to coexist with Christian sexual morality for several centuries. These factors pitted people's contemporary habits against theological ideal types. For early Christian women, the rift between sin and holiness ran even deeper than for men. Two opposing templates – the curse of Eve and the ideal of Mary – polarised the relationship between women's sexuality, body, and identity to produce a dichotomous view of women as either harlots or saints.



Figure 1. Melania the Younger, icon of a veiled woman flanked by columns

Although marriage was the trodden path, the early Christian church encouraged sexual renunciation. Christianity rooted the mythos of "female nature" in Eve: both the first woman and the architect of the first sin. Consequently, church fathers identified womanhood with reproduction and the corporeal. According to Gregory of Nyssa, for example, God was unsexed and, in his image, so was the first human. Theologically, God only provided for human sexual differentiation in anticipation of the original sin and the resulting command for reproduction. While conceding women's souls were created in *imago dei*, or God's image, churchmen depicted the female body as weak. Suffering of childbirth and child loss were presented as punishment for heterosexual desire, which subjugated women to men. Femininity, therefore, became synonymous with sexuality, and sexuality became synonymous with divine punishment.



Figure 2. Mary of Egypt, main image surrounded by smaller narrative frames

Late Antiquity also saw a transition from praise to mockery of marriage and motherhood. In his *Letter 108*, St Jerome accentuates that the saintly Paula never longed for children herself but was obliged to birth a male heir for her husband's sake. Overall, the "femininity equals weakness" equation rendered the Christian "female nature" undesirable and uncomfortable for pious women themselves. Thus, these women embraced sexual renunciation as the most direct pathway to God. If Christianity invoked women's heritage in Eve to tinge women's sexuality, then sexual renunciation was an attempt to alienate oneself from Eve's sin. If sexuality was something that corrupted, then celibacy was something that prevented this corruption.

However, women vowed celibacy not to improve their "female nature", but to transcend it in favour of approximating the male body and the unsexed soul. In the

same letter of Jerome, children are seen as unwelcome ties to the material world, and Paula eventually "overcomes her love for her children by her love for God." In leaving her children, which, according to Jerome, was "against the laws of nature", Paula transcends her femaleness to dedicate herself to holy chastity. Where, ontologically, does this transcendence take her? Seemingly towards manhood and angelhood, the distinction between which is sometimes vague.



Figure 3. Virgin and Child with angels and Saints George and Theodore, encaustic icon on panel

There is a wealth of evidence of women identifying their moments of strength (in Greek, *andreia*) with manhood (also *andreia*). In her dreamwork encounter with a beast on the gladiator arena, the Christian martyr Perpetua is stripped of her clothes and "finds she is a man." In this assumed body, she confidently defeats the beast (an allegorical devil). In her Vitae, another woman ascetic, Olympias is praised in traditionally masculine terms. Among her virtues are "face without adornment", "immeasurable self-control" and "rectitude of thought." Olympias also possesses an "immaterial body", separating her from irresolute feminine sexuality and bringing her closer to sexless divinity. Thus, the outcome of righteous celibacy for women lays in dematerialising, at least in spirit, their biological sex markers, in favour of acquiring male and superhuman attributes and thus approaching sanctity.

Indeed, the early Christian line between human, divine, and male was blurry. Despite arguing for the "quality of spirit" regardless of physiological sex and for an unsexed Godhead, Jerome normatively refers to Christ as "he." In fact, while representing God in a male body was the norm, claiming God held any female elements was pushed into the domain of heresy. Some Gnostic beliefs endowed God with female attributes, added a "Mother" to the Holy Trinity, and expanded the roles of Christ's female disciples in the Scriptures, much to the dismay of orthodox church fathers. Thus, identification of the male with the human (first "person" Adam but "helper" Eve) and of the male with the divine (male-presenting God) was common, ambiguous, and debated enough to obfuscate the ideal for a woman ascetic. Femininity, on the other hand, was clearly not the standard nor the ideal.

Importantly, though, by embracing sexual renunciation, women could not entirely overcome womanhood. Despite meagre textual evidence left by women themselves, they too likely viewed womanhood as inferior to manhood, since they operated with the same conceptual tools as men. The idea of inescapable femininity regularly emerged in primary accounts. For instance, Mary of Egypt, though profoundly spiritually transformed by living as a desert hermit, recognised the confines of her mortal body as ever-female and ever-weak. To safeguard herself and others from temptation, the abbess Susan always covered her head and lowered her gaze in male company. Thus, in a Roman and Christian context, it was hardly conceivable for a woman to be regarded as a human or saint, rather than a female human and a saint despite femaleness.

Furthermore, renouncing the sexual act was not, in and of itself, the ascetic ideal. The framework of male virtue and female wantonness created requisites beyond physical virginity for women ascetics to fulfil their devotional obligations. In the spiritual realm, Augustine envisioned several steps for a virgin to wholly fulfil her vow: compliance with the main commandments, compliance with all advisory tenets, and preparedness for martyrdom. In the practical realm, chaste women's modesty followed a strict standard, visible, for instance, in women's dress. For example, Melania the Younger covered herself with a tattered tunic "to deprive herself of her youthful beauty by means of the unflattering condition of her clothes." Thus, women ascetics concealed their sexuality through concealing their body, confirming the inherent identification of femininity with corporeality. As a result,

women adopted bodily dematerialisation as another mandate of chastity. In late antique Christian discourse, prescriptions for women ascetics were numerous and their path to salvation narrow and strenuous due to perceived innate flaws of femininity.



Figure 4. Thessaloniki, Rotunde des Galerius

Despite theological encouragement, women's celibacy went against the grain of wider society. This friction sometimes resulted in women ascetics paradoxically adopting motherly or wifely roles. When the family insisted on marrying an ascetic daughter, the latter could claim a pre-existing social model to avoid matrimony. After her fiancé's death, Macrina the Younger resolved to consecrate herself to virginity, in opposition to the wishes of her paterfamilias. In response to the family's resistance, Macrina styled herself as a widow despite having never been married. Thus, where an appeal to godly lifestyle for its own sake did not suffice, Macrina resorted to a rhetorical risk of digamy to remain unwed, legitimising her decision through an established social role: the widow. Similarly, according to the fourth century account The Martyrdom of St Theodotus of Ancyra and the Seven Virgins with Him, the elder Tekousa held an authoritative position in the local Christian community. Interestingly, this authority found expression in maternal terms: she addressed Theodotus as "child", while her own name translated as "Mother." In these instances, women ascetics adopted antithetical roles of unmarried widows or virginal mothers.

Church fathers also dispensed ambiguous ideas about the desirability of virginity. St Augustine, for one, offered an apology of marriage and fertility. In a letter to the Anicii women, two of whom had been married with children, Augustine explained that, where a woman did not remain a virgin herself, chastity may still have been born through her if she consecrated her daughter to virginity. Where the daughter determined to renounce her sexuality upon coming of age, Augustine attributed the success of her education to the diligence and devotion of her older female relatives. Taken together, these ideas reveal a curious paradox. Sexual renunciation seemingly exempted women from the established social order (marriage and childbirth) yet simultaneously pressured them to reconcile celibacy with familial roles. While the degree to which this pressure was external or internal is up for debate, these dynamics reaffirm the gendered nature of renouncing sexuality in the twilight of antiquity.

Ultimately, being discursively constructed, femininity and sexuality rest on public discourse. In Late Antiquity, this discourse was conflicting. On the one hand, a vow of virginity signalled remarkable will. On the other hand, women's libidinous sexuality rendered femininity vulgar and burdensome. By embracing chastity, women did not try to rupture the identification of their femaleness with weakness or sin. This identification would not have been questioned. Rather, sexual renunciation served to reject femininity itself. In other words, women renounced sexuality not to claim agency outside of patriarchal epistemology (as women) but rather within it (as men or unsexed beings). As such, pious women could achieve spiritual fulfilment through celibacy, but the early Christian view of femininity continuously placed the holy virgin precariously close to the vulgar harlot.



NOTHING'S GONNA HURT YOU BABY (EXCEPT ME): MASOCHISM AND MASCULINITY IN ACHILLES TACTIUS' LEUKIPPE AND KLEITOPHON

MARIA MAGDALENA

Content Warning: Sexual Violence

Literature has always been obsessed with blending violence and pleasure. Fanny Hill, Venus in Furs, Lady Chatterley's Lover, Fifty Shades of Grey, 365 Days, and now Emerald Fennel's "Wuthering Heights", are all narratives which find pain when in the throes of sexual pleasure. These narratives almost always negatively affect the women of the stories, as men use women's suffering to exacerbate their own sexual fantasies. Leukippe and Kleitophon is a Roman-era Greek novel from the second century CE written by Achilles Tatius, detailing a love story that is not dissimilar to the ones mentioned above. It is one of the ideal Greek novels which feature youthful, elite, and heterosexual protagonists who experience adventures throughout the Mediterranean, facing obstacles of separation, which ultimately end in their reunion. Kleitophon finds his pleasure in viewing the suffering of his beloved, making pain a spectacle and a pleasure, nothing more than torture coated in honey.

Kleitophon associates love with pain, describing it as a wound that can penetrate the physical body. Erôs is also constructed as a violent enemy, though Achilles Tatius centres the wound of Love around the idea of consumption and gaze, using the eyes as the penetrative force. Kleitophon explains that the act of seeing is bound in pleasure, as it "flows in through the eyes and occupies the breasts", imprinting the image of the beloved onto the soul. The gaze of the lover is able to bypass the physical boundaries of the body, letting them see into the soul and map the form of the beloved into the onlooker. This is further emphasised by the portrayal of violence throughout the novel, as Leukippe becomes a victim through Kleitophon's gaze, the one who loves and desires her. The points of her body which are constantly under threat line up with the rhetoric debate between Kleitophon and Menelaus on who makes the best lover. Pleasure is found in the mouth, vagina, breasts, and the stomach of the female body. The softness of the female body makes it pleasing but also extremely vulnerable to the penetration of a knife. Her stomach is cut open, her vagina is split, and her head is decapitated from her body. The gaze is part of the lived fiction of Leukippe who must endure her own developing sexuality.



Figure 1. Apollo Chasing Daphne

Looking at the text through the lens of masochism clarifies the construction of male identity in the experience of suffering. Masochism as a literary form morphs the violence of the suppression of religious and political systems onto the desires and fantasies of the individual. It reinvents the contract of domination and submission to be an experience of pleasure as the masochist embraces their part in the social contract of docility. This is significant especially when the submissive partner is the masculine-presenting one, contradicting the contemporary notions of manhood. Achilles Tatius invents a masochistic gaze for his male protagonist, forcing him to watch his lover in extreme situations of sexual violence and torture. Philosophical discourse throughout the novel configures an eroticised and violent view of the world which Kleitophon enthusiastically embraces and submits to, whether he admits it or not. Deleuze relates the foundation of masochism to Plato as it is expressed in the dialectical imagination of the masochist, who ascends to the realm of the forms and plays in the disguise and

reduplication of the erotic world. The world of Leukippe and Kleitophon is warped and distorted through paintings that mimic/inform a romanticised and performed reality. We must remember that Kleitophon narrates his tragic love story to an onlooker of a painting of Europa, making his masochistic gaze and his professions of suffering a performance and pandering to a receiving audience that will be wanting a salacious story. Leukippe is the object of this.

Internal desires are mediated through sight, allowing Kleitophon to construct an image of himself through a masochistic lens. The limits of the body are explored by opening up the internal organs through violence and visual contact. The gaze is illusionary, mediating fantasy with reality and combining sexual rhetoric with observation. He describes in excruciating detail how Leukippe is captured by the boukoloi to be cannibalised, how they plunge the dagger into her heart, sawing down to her abdomen, pulling out her entrails and eating them. Later, Kleitophon watches as Leukippe is beheaded. In these scenes, Kleitophon recalls how paralysed he was in watching the acts of violence, unable to do anything to stop the death of his beloved, comparing his sorrow to the petrifying grief of Niobe. However, Kleitophon betrays his complete devastation precisely through his inaction in preventing Leukippe's capture. The narrative is gruesome, though intrinsically tied to Kleitophon's obsession with appearances and the gaze through which he views Leukippe. As the reader, we are viewing Leukippe through Kleitophon's eyes and his fascination with the mutilated female body is part of his desire. As mentioned previously, his narration is important as he wants to be able to create a pleasurable tale for the man admiring the Europa painting and the reader. Kleitophon must make the suffering of Leukippe a point of vicarious sadism, sexualising her body to create an eroticism out of violence so that it might be pleasing to the receiver. The spectatorship of violence is a source of both suffering and pleasure as Kleitophon prolongs it.

Through the exploration of the body being vulnerable to violence and destruction in the context of the pursuit of desire, the novel formulates a male socially approved identity by refracting the female physical body through violent methods. Violence is the main mode of separation between the two lovers, starting with Leukippe's mothers dream in which she sees her daughter being dragged by a bandit, "[slicing] her in two all the way up from her belly, making his first insertion at her private parts." Her sexuality is linked to violence, emphasising the tangible link between the body and the self. Kleitophon aims his "love shafts" at her and succeeds in conquering love. These metaphors become her reality. König argues that the awareness of the body and its vulnerabilities require coping mechanisms such as the creation of narrative, making pain a sign of triumph and a defining feature of the creative self. The male perspective of the violence and the pleasure in watching offer an avenue through which to understand and create the self, making violence against females an integral part of manhood through the indirect experience of pain. Of course, Leukippe is left stranded and her fate is never confirmed (other than through a vague comment on Kleitophon's burns of love) and Kleitophon is able to travel the world and grow into a well-respected man.

Achilles Tatius uses heroism playfully by making Kleitophon's masculinity a public performance. He exhibits his masculinity ostentatiously to his male peers after a failed attempt at conflict, cavaliering on his horse or showing off his thigh wound. In this way, he cannot experience heroic endurance and so must find another avenue through which to claim manliness. Instead, Kleitophon experiences violence and endurance of suffering through the perspective of the viewer, using Leukippe's pain as part of his own fashioned tale of masculine survival. Jones notes that the lack of protection by Kleitophon is odd, given his position as the narrator of the tale. In his acknowledgement of his own inadequacy in preventing the female from suffering, he must quickly establish to his male peers that he is in fact heroic through his displays of pain. His reasoning with himself is a form of violence, demonstrating to his peers that he is on the side of violent action. However, this pain is solely experienced by Leukippe herself, who is subjected to extreme methods of torture and self-destruction.

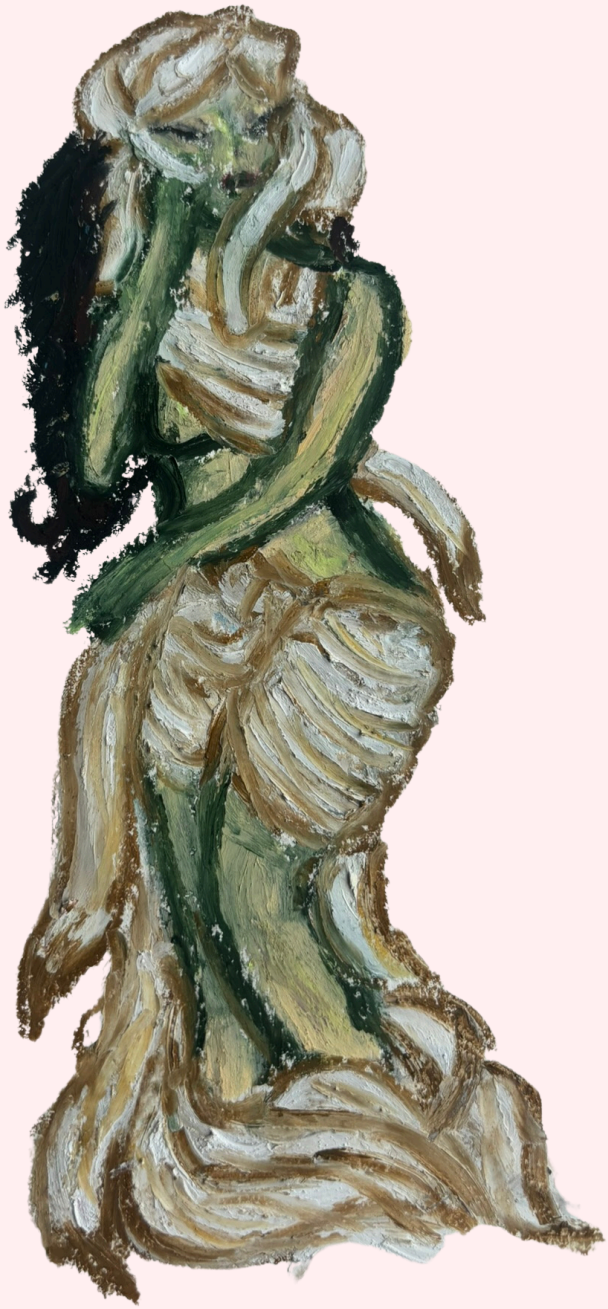
Following post-structuralist theories of language signification, Kleitophon's male identity is built against the feminine, using her pain to create his own form of male self-knowledge. Erôs dominates his action, so much so that he cannot help but use the grotesque mutilation of the female body as an opportunity for pleasure. To Kleitophon, pain is pleasurable as it enables him to create a masculine identity in watching female mutilations; the gaze with which a man looks upon a woman reflects himself, and his heroism is formed through her suffering. He explores the possibility in which pleasure is produced through hope and fear. His masochistic tendencies are less about letting Leukippe do whatever she wants to him and more the case that Kleitophon allows life and risk to pass

him by and finds this view pleasurable. It is certainly interesting how socially approved projections of masculinity are satirized to refract them into a new language of suffering. More so, it is frightening how easy it is to find pleasure (readerly or otherwise) in a woman's suffering.



"MUMMY ROMANCES" WITHIN LATE NINETEENTH-CENTURY IMPERIAL GOTHIC FICTION

MANAHIL MASOOD



When Egyptologist Vansittart Smith watches a female mummy unwrapped in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Ring of Thoth* (1890), his eyes "grew larger and larger as he gazed" and he "chirruped in his throat with satisfaction." This reaction, part scientific excitement, part unmistakable physical arousal, distils the central argument of this article: that the eroticisation of the female Egyptian mummy in late Victorian Gothic fiction cannot be disentangled from the popular public spectacle of mummy unrolling. Drawing on a sub-genre of the Egyptianised Gothic that might be termed the 'mummy romance', this essay examines how the theatrical unveiling of ancient female bodies in Britain's learned institutions and theatres generated an imperial voyeurism that Gothic authors subsequently immortalised on the page.

The gradual, sequential removal of mummy wrappings constituted what contemporaries and scholars have recognised as a form of passive striptease. By reading Doyle's *The Ring of Thoth*, Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of the Seven Stars* (1903), and newspaper accounts of celebrated unrollings alongside one another, this article argues that both practices were animated by the same fetishist imperial voyeurism that ultimately exposed, rather than resolved, the psychosexual anxieties it sought to manage.

PERFORMANCE

By the mid-nineteenth century, the unrolling of commodified mummies had become a popular form of entertainment in Britain, performed privately in homes and learned institutions, and publicly in theatres.

As Angela Stienne has argued, the theatrical unrollings performed in mid-nineteenth century Britain "fundamentally transformed public interactions" with Egyptian mummies, reconfiguring them from curious commodities into bodies positioned for public entertainment. Within a Victorian culture already saturated with so-called 'freak shows' that exhibited 'Other' bodies (non-white, disabled, or otherwise classified as deviant), the mummy occupied a similarly charged position displayed to entertain.

The social composition of these events underscores their cultural significance. Whilst some unrollings were reserved for London's elites, celebrity unroller Dr Thomas 'Mummy' Pettigrew eventually opened his sessions to the public for a fee. Conservator William Clift recorded that Pettigrew's January 1834 demonstration at the Royal College of Surgeons was attended by "a Prince, several Peers, Bishops, Statesmen, Diplomats, Members of Parliament, as well as all the leading physicians and surgeons of the day, and many artists, authors, military and naval officers." The inclusion of artists and authors is particularly telling. As Susannah Clinker has noted, unwrapping parties were closely linked to conversaziones, popular social events at which guests gathered to discuss art, meaning that middle-class Gothic authors and their readers were regularly present at these spectacles. Whilst a physical mummy could only be unwrapped once, a text offered readers the capacity for endless re-revelation. The prolific mummy-stripping trope in Victorian Gothic fiction therefore allowed authors to immortalise these spectacles for their readership's continuous entertainment.

EROTICISATION

It was through their eroticisation, however, that unrollings became something more than theatrical curiosity. Dominic Montserrat has noted that rather than quickly drawing back a sheet as was the norm in medical autopsies, huge emphasis was placed on the gradual revelation of the mummy's body: its external wrappings were slowly removed, and linens were "intimately and fetishistically described as they were peeled off like layers of alluring underwear." The mummy performed what Montserrat terms a "passive striptease", transforming it from artefact to sexually charged entity, to seduce an audience that were very much aware of this inherent promise of titillation. Notably, although The Literary Gazette reported in 1837 that unrollings "were well attended by persons of both sexes", these pseudo-scientific demonstrations had originated as events conducted by men for all-male audiences.

Film critic Laura Mulvey's formulation of the male gaze: "a socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking, and spectacle" suggests that even as the audience diversified, the structure of its voyeurism remained resolutely masculine.



Figure 1. Ayesha Unveils

Doyle's *The Ring of Thoth* makes this striptease framing explicit in popular fiction. When Smith observes the unwrapping of a female mummy in the Louvre's back rooms, Doyle structures the revelation of her features with the same pacing of a gradual undressing: "First, a cascade of long, black, glossy tresses poured over the workman's hands and arms. A second turn of the bandage revealed a low, white forehead, with a pair of delicately arched eyebrows. A third uncovered a pair of bright, deeply fringed eyes, and a straight, well-cut nose, while a fourth and last showed a sweet, full, sensitive mouth." The numbered sequential structure means that each turn of the bandage yields a fresh feature for contemplation and directly mirrors the piece-by-piece exposure enacted at Pettigrew's demonstrations. Smith's physical arousal is unambiguous; his chirruping satisfaction stems transparently from his voyeurism over the powerless corpse. Later in the story, when the ancient Egyptian attendant Sosra ecstatically kisses the denuded mummy and moans over her head, the link between unrolling

spectacle and libidinous desire is rendered fully and disturbingly explicit.

PSYCHOSEXUAL ANXIETIES

However, the unrolling spectacle did not simply fulfil desire, but simultaneously exposed the psychosexual anxieties that the stripped mummy's uncanny liminality generated. Eleanor Dobson has argued that if sexualised mummies can be fictionally reanimated, necrophiliac desire for the corpse is rendered "defensible rather than perverse." The eroticisation of real contemporary unrollings, however, also produced a moral discomfort that the anxiety-obsessed Gothic was quick to register. After archaeologist Giovanni D'Athanasi commissioned Pettigrew to unroll a mummy at Exeter Hall, the magazine Figaro in London published a vicious attack on Pettigrew and the "filthy" practice of unrollings, condemning the "nasty beasts" who attended, and Pettigrew's "fervour" as he "indulged" in "fiddling about over the dried-up carcase, and picking a bit of the bandages here, and a bit off the skin there." The language of obscenity and indulgence reveals a deep contemporary anxiety about libidinous moral violation. As Dobson and Jasmine Day have both observed, there was "more than a hint" of sexual violence in these performances, a quality that Gothic literature amplified into an explicit narrative of assault. The Victorian moral outrage that condemned the mummy's nudity, rather than the horror of the exposed corpse, suggests that Gothic terror was rooted in displaced sexual anxiety, and that the attempt to expose and possess the female Egyptian body only served to exacerbate the tensions it sought to resolve.

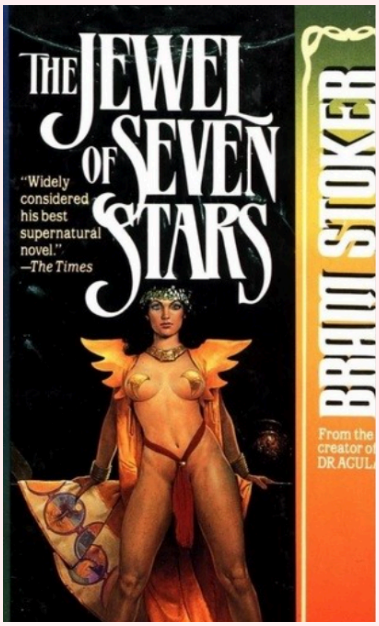


Figure 2. Carroll and Graf Paperback Reprint of The Jewel of Seven Stars

No text makes this psychosexual anxiety more legible than Stoker's *The Jewel of the Seven Stars*. The unwrapping of Queen Tera, undertaken in preparation for her supernatural resurrection, is constructed with unmistakable attention to the erotic nature of gradual undressing. As the bandages are removed, narrator Malcolm Ross grows increasingly excited, lingering over the sounds the linens produce as they tear from her body. The language of violence and arousal converge; his mounting 'scientific' excitement is saturated with a blatantly lecherous charge that mirrors the real contemporary fetishisation by academics studying mummies. The scene climaxes as Tera is fully exposed: "the beauty of the figure which, save for the face cloth, now lay completely nude before us."

It is Stoker's insertion of Tera's living British doppelganger, Margaret Trelawny, into this scene that most sharply illuminates its unsettling libidinousness. Margaret protests in the mummy's defence that it is "cruel, cruel!" for her father and the assembled male scientists to unswathe a woman before "all of you men! And in the glare of light!" Her father's dismissive reply that "she's not a woman, dear, a mummy!" enacts the reclassification of the female mummy as sexual object, and the withdrawal of moral censure that accompanies her objectification. Yet his own use of the feminine pronoun throughout this dismissal betrays his awareness of her humanity; his language paradoxically reinstates Tera as a violated woman even as it denies her personhood. This double movement, possessing the body while disavowing its humanity, reflects the moral crisis that accompanied mummy unrolling in practice. The collector insists on mummy objecthood, but his language and his mounting desire paradoxically reinstate her as a violated woman. Here, it in this unresolvable tension that the Gothic's investment in the unrolling spectacle is most evident.

CONCLUSION

Beginning in the theatrical unrolling ceremonies of Pettigrew and replicated in the Gothic romances of the late-nineteenth century, the exposure of the female mummy was never merely a scientific act. Rather, it was a fantasy of total possession that played out both in public venues and in print. The spectacle of unrolling transformed the ancient Egyptian body into a commodity of visual consumption; the Gothic mummy romance immortalised that transformation, offering readers the capacity for endless re-revelation that real unrollings could not provide.

Yet close examination of the fiction reveals that stripping fantasies were as much steeped in anxiety as in pleasure. The female mummy was simultaneously desired and disturbing: exotic enough to be coveted as an imperial fetish, uncanny enough to resist neat classification about her proximity to humanity. The Figaro's condemnation of immoral unrolling, the shame that suffuses Ross's narration in *The Jewel of the Seven* Stars, and the desperate reclassification of Queen Tera as "not a woman, dear, a mummy", all testify to the same underlying tension: that the power-play of stripping generated as much anxiety as it promised to relieve. In this sense, the mummy romance was less a literature of conquest than one of perpetual, pleasurable, and profoundly anxious deferral.



'OH-OH' ROCOCO': THE ART OF SUGGESTION, PLEASURE, AND PLAY

DALMA ROMAN

"If necessary, I would even paint with my bottom."
Jean-Honoré Fragonard

Art history has long used the appeal of aesthetics and humor to mask society's most scandalous behaviors. In the eighteenth century, European aristocrats perfected this through the Rococo art movement, deliberately hiding eroticism and elite privilege through playful symbolism and domestic scenes. This frivolousness, however, was only made possible because Rococo was a reaction to the past. Therefore, to understand how Europe's most flirtatious art style became the new ideal, we must acknowledge the rise of the Southern Baroque Movement. Born in seventeenth-century Italy, but quickly spreading to France and Spain, Baroque art, too, rejected its past. It challenged the Renaissance's idealization of human form and linear perspective by instead aiming to capture emotional intensity and movement. Whether it was a religious piece reflecting agony or a royal commission, Baroque artists across Europe used diagonal lines and chiaroscuro, the contrast of shadow and light, to turn static figures into vibrant and life-like individuals. These features were a direct response to the deeply rooted political and religious tensions that the Protestant Reformation and Counter-Reformation brought forth. Yet, with the rise of the Enlightenment and the death of Louis XIV just a century later, Baroque's serious subject matter was soon challenged by the resurgence of the aristocratic class, who brought forth the rise and popularity of the Rococo movement.

Originating from the French word *rocaille*, the decorative arrangements of embroidered shells and curves, Rococo was exclusively limited to the upper class, who had a deep desire for a romanticized depiction of domestic life. Visually, Rococo followed Baroque's features of diagonal lines and intimate captured moments but moved beyond its imagery of religion and moral grandeur. Instead, it depicted scenes of unadulterated wit and playfulness through settings such as nature or leisure, using rapid and feathery brushwork alongside a palette of powdery pinks, soft blues, and creamy whites. At first glance, these moments seem like nothing more than harmless delight. But, upon closer inspection, every strategically placed feature reveals Rococo's most striking feature: its symbolism of the erotic. This allowed artists to hide desire through symbols of innocence, making scandal not only acceptable but the new norm.



Figure 1. The Swing

Nowhere is this double-meaning of suggestion clearer than in Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Swing.* Originally commissioned by a member of the French Royal Court as a private reflection of his erotic fantasy, The Swing now sits in The Wallace Collection in London, England, open to public pleasure. This painting is a direct embodiment of the Rococo movement, as at first glance, the painting seems like nothing more than a young woman sitting on a velvet-cushioned swing in a lush forest. Her skin, as white as puff pastry, blushes, while her pastel silk frock and satin slipper are flying carelessly into the air. She is smiling, delighted, looking down with not a thought on her mind. However, viewing this painting as a purely innocent piece would be an illusion, as The Swing has become eighteenth-century Europe's most eloquent 'dirty joke.' Its background strays far from just another depiction of idyllic nature, as what appears to be a dreamy woodland scene is clearly an aristocratic garden scattered with symbols of fertility and eroticism throughout. On the left-hand side of the greenery stands Étieene Maurice Falconet's statue of *The Menacing Cupid*, with his fingers raised to his lips, shushing the audience to keep a secret. This mythological god of desire stands on a stone pedestal decorated with maenads, female followers of the god Dionysus, known for intoxicated erotic dancing. Under this lies the painting's secret, a man leaning back, angling himself perfectly to look up the woman's skirt. These two figures, the man in the bush and the woman on the swing, are the painting's commissioner and his mistress playing a flirtatious game of seduction, as the woman flings her shoe into the air, captivating her lover's gaze. On the right-hand side stands a bishop, who pushes the woman higher and higher, gifting the commissioner below with a better look under her skirt, only deepening the painting's sexual tension. Beside him stands a sculpture of a pair of cherubs — winged guardians known to represent innocence — riding on a dolphin. Together, these symbols reveal the tension between purity and desire, reinforcing the Rococo movement's emphasis on the erotic.

Yet, The Swing's symbolism extends far beyond just its canvas, as Nigerian-British artist Yinka Shonibare's *The Swing (After Fragonard)* transformed this Eurocentric painting into a three-dimensional installation that features a headless female mannequin, draped in a vibrantly patterned cloth. This piece draws directly from Fragonard's original work but adds a cross-cultural twist as Shonibare chooses to dress the women in a fabric typically associated with West African identity. However, in creating this installation, Shonibare learned that while this textile was often connected to Africa, it was actually an Indonesian Batik, a dyeing technique used to imprint traditional motifs and patterns on clothing. This, in turn, reveals the ongoing colonial trade networks that were funded by the aristocratic class during the eighteenth century. Additionally, Shonibare deliberately chose to make his installation three-dimensional, meaning the audience can physically move around the figure. Incorporating this interactive element allows the visitor to place themselves in the position of the commissioner, the bishop, or even Cupid himself, which reveals the Rococo message that eroticism is an all-encompassing feature present in symbols and even the audience itself. However, the most unsettling feature of the installation is that the woman is headless. This missing head is a dark play on the French Revolution's use of the guillotine, where the very aristocratic class that commissioned and collected paintings like *The Swing* was quite literally 'swung off.' Shonibare's decision to remove the head in his installation acts as a direct reminder to the audience that the world of pleasure and privilege shown in Rococo art was merely a fantasy constructed by the elite's desire for indulgence without consequences.





Figure 2. The Swing (After Fragonard)

However, even after Rococo's decline following the French Revolution, its aesthetic continues to shape modern culture today. In fashion, this is seen through high luxury brands such as Vivienne Westwood, which take direct inspiration from Rococo, popularizing trends such as billowing sleeves, blushed pink bows on everything, and silk skirts and dresses. On screen, Rococo is best represented through the Netflix series *Bridgerton*, where lavish pastel interiors, elaborate costuming, and the aristocratic thrill of 'who-is-watching-whom' have revived Rococo's appeal amongst audiences in the twenty-first century. Even in music, this influence is unmistakable, as Olivia Rodrigo's cover for her newest album, *You Seem So Sad for a Girl So in Love*, is a modern depiction of her as the woman in The Swing. Overall, Rococo's appeal to hide one's desires through playful aesthetics and innocent symbols has never fully faded with history. Instead, it has only become more heightened, as Rococo continues to inspire all forms of creative art today, proving that society will always remain captivated by the use of eroticism and scandal hidden in plain sight.

WALK THE LAYOUT, ROUTINES IN THE NIGHT(WOOD): LESBIAN FLÂNERIE AND PUBLICISING DOMESTIC SPHERES IN FEMALE MODERNISM

MUSKAAN SAHA

"*[T]he lesbian subject is always a doubled subject caught up in the doubling of being a woman and a lesbian. She is at once an instance in the doubling of spaces and an instigator of the production, the folding of one kind of space upon another.*"

Probyn, Gender, Place and Culture, Vol 2. No. 1, 81.

Drawing on Baudelaire, Dianne Chisholm aptly situates Paris as the flâneur's historical terrain; the flâneur typically defined as a male street-wanderer and urban observer of day-to-day life. Her assertion that Djuna Barnes' novel *Nightwood* articulates the distance between "flâneur realism" and what can be read as a "lesbian realism" is crucial to our understanding of how Barnes inverts the role of the gentleman flâneur, locating women in the space between the city's surrealist revolution and the state of lesbian exile. The novel is predominantly situated in 1920s–1930s expatriate Paris; the birthplace of the lesbian flâneuse. Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant argue that queer spaces in urban areas have historically developed as sites of counter-public sexual culture, where a critical mass develops. In proper sequence, the street "becomes queer," and the area develops "a dense, publicly accessible sexual culture." Reading Paris through this frame, the city becomes a prototype of a queer counter-public, where the lesbian flâneuse moves between public manoeuvrability and domestic enclosure, orientating herself around this expatriate, avant-garde, bohemian world.

To understand the othering of urban space, it is imperative to analyse its counterpart in the domestic. In our novel, domestic spaces are portrayed as suffocating for queer and lesbian existence due to their consistent propagation of normative heterosexuality. Barnes exposes the dominance of the heteronormative paradigm through the relationship

between Nora Flood and Robin Vote, presenting it as a hegemonic power which pervades their home and stunts their mobility within space altogether. Upon meeting Robin, Nora abandons her former life and living arrangements, yet this prior domesticity is, notably, not represented as suffocating, in that it is less of a private landscape and more accurately described as a salon. As historians of sexuality such as Stephen Garton observe, a key factor in the emergence of sexology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the increasing visibility of "sexual subcultures." Since antiquity, large urban centres had functioned as havens for sexual underworlds; Enlightenment London, for example, sustained a rich underground culture of brothels, gin palaces, music halls, and "molly" clubs, spaces where homosexual sociability could assemble under the cover of commerce and spectacle. The unprecedented growth of large cities in nineteenth-century Europe and America thus provided the infrastructural and social conditions for the proliferation of these subcultures, making queer life more visible and socially identifiable. By the time Nightwood was published in the early twentieth century, these urban environments shaped how same-sex desire could be lived, narrated, and pathologised. Nora's home can be read, then, as based on that history.

The term "salon" suggests connotations of bourgeois decorum and sociability, a selective gathering of writers and intellectuals, but the qualifier "paupers'" both vulgarises and democratizes that tradition, turning the house into a space of radical social and symbolic excess. Inside, the oak table before the "huge fire" functions as a kind of improvised altar, around which gather "poets, radicals, beggars, artists, and people in love; Catholics, Protestants, Brahmins, dabblers in black magic and medicine." The list's sheer heterogeneity insists on the locale as a site of border-crossing, where conventional distinctions between respectability and deviance, belief and enchantment, are held in unstable suspension. This domestic interior thus emerges not as a private, sheltered refuge from the world, but as a densely social and erotically charged crossroads where marginal figures, religious residues, and wayward intimacies converge. In Foucauldian terms, this spatial configuration fulfils the third principle of heterotopic classification: Nora's house "is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." The salon synthesises the charitable salon, the religious chapel, the occult "black magic" circle, and the nuanced urban underworld into one compressed interior, staging within the domestic frame a convergence of things that would normally be kept socially and symbolically apart.

Nora then becomes enamoured with Robin Vote, who catalyses the former's withdrawal from the salon and into a shared domestic space. Nora is Robin's second lover, and their relationship follows a trajectory already shaped by Robin's prior union with Felix, her former Baron husband. Barnes thus stages what Judith Butler prominently refers to as the repetitive performance of hegemonic and asymmetrical gender. In tracing matrimony, conception, and childbirth, the novel exposes the institutionalised acts through which heterosexual marriage is naturalised as the only intelligible future for a woman's life. However, Robin's abandoning of Felix is her first act of flânerie whereby she attempts to rebuke heteronormative conventions and structures.

Nonetheless, the dissolution of the wider heterosexual matrix is not easily attained, as can be seen when Robin sings the same tune when her and Nora move in together. David Bell notes that housing in nineteenth-and-twentieth-century Britain has been and is "primarily designed, built, financed and intended for nuclear families, reinforcing a cultural norm of family life with heterosexuality and patriarchy high on the agenda." Within this framework, women also make more conscious efforts to produce a space within which they feel "at home." While Bell's analysis is rooted in British context, this logic may be extended to the broader Western urban milieu, including Paris, where socio-cultural conventions underpinned domestic life. In this way, the act of 'making a home' becomes a counter-intuitive gesture which Robin and Nora perform, trying to construct a lesbian home space within the spatial architecture that is meant to exclude them. Their flat in the "rue du Cherche-Midi," is, at first, a site where the normative roles of a heterosexual matrix are subverted, as the couple assemble a domestic environment that reflects their own affinities. However, the narrative soon reveals the precarity of this attempted subversion as they begin to enact heterosexuality through citational acts.

Susana Martins observes this in how Nora assumes the "active" position of lover while Robin is cast in the "passive" position of the beloved, a dynamic that tends to collapse queer relations into recognizable heterosexual paradigms. This is vividly illustrated in the recurring trope of one lover waiting up for the other. Here, Nora's vigil for Robin's return reactivates the classic domestic scene of

the wife awaiting the husband's late arrival home. The excerpt "Dawn, of course, dawn! That's when she came back frightened. At that hour the citizen of the night balances on a thread that is running thin", epitomises this displacement: Robin's nocturnal wandering and Nora's anxious, diurnal waiting reinscribe their relation along familiar temporal and gendered lines, even as the somnambule is figured as precarious. The image of the thinning thread thus suggests the fragility of Robin's nocturnal self; moreover, the very structure of waiting and returning, of retreating and homecoming, pulls their queer bond back into the isolating, gravitational field of the domestic. Near their relationship's beginning, Robin gives Nora a doll upon which Nora reflects: "We give death to a child when we give it a doll—it's the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is their life they cannot have." The object of this doll is rife with symbolism, signifying a substitute and a loss, condensing the impossibility of a child that same-sex partners would have been culturally barred from raising. In this light, Robin's gift of the doll is an attempt to model their lives after the heterosexual nuclear family structure that does not accommodate them.

In contrast, non-domestic spaces, such as cafés, bars, all that nightlife encompasses, function as heterotopias in that they perpetuate the movement of the lesbian flâneur through public space. The street relieves the entrapment of women in domestic institutions, functioning instead as non-heteronormative sites that invert the logic of the home by placing queerness and collective belonging in the foreground, within the anonymity of plain sight. This flâneurism especially appeals to Robin and can be understood as a mode of contestation against these gendered and sexual norms. Robin's nightly navigation of cafés and bars positions her as a proto-lesbian flâneuse, traversing the nocturnal city in ways that prefigure the idea of the lesbian bar-goer before such a formation had fully cohered as a cultural type. In this context, Rooke's account of "the erotic promise of disappearing into a city with space for sexual exiles, a city of anonymity and invisibility, where sexual difference is, at least, no longer remarkable" resonates strongly with Robin's movements. The anonymity of bars and cafes enables one to simultaneously live a gay and straight life, moving "in and out of queerness and queer space", where her identity is not as exposed as it would be under the scrutiny of daylight.

To conclude, the coarticulation of queer flânerie with the street as heterotopia enables lesbian women to assume fleeting spatio-temporal configurations of agency within the heterosexual matrix. As Sally Munt observes, the lesbian flâneur "signifies a mobilised female sexuality in control, not out of control", a formulation that captures the empowerment of movement: although Robin's nocturnal excursions leave Nora waiting in the dark, they also figure the woman on the outside as implicitly sexually mobile, her sexuality no longer tethered to or controlled by the house.



"THE GIRL IN THE GILDED CAGE" (1942): SELF-ORIENTALISING DRAG AS SEXUALITY'S 'PLEASURE' IN JACKIE MEI LING'S BODY

HARRY FRY

"cause nobody ever loved me like you do
I'd love to see me from your point of view"
Ariana Grande, *pov* (*Positions)* (2020)

"Sex is not that part of the body which the bourgeoisie was forced to disqualify or nullify in order to put those whom it dominated to work. It is that aspect of itself which troubled and preoccupied it more than any other"
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* (1976)



Figure 1. Jackie Mei Ling

Of many performances, two emblematise subversive culture in early mid-twentieth-century America: the drag queen and the oriental dancer. Coalesce them and out dazzles Jackie Mei Ling, an oriental drag performer at San Francisco's Asian American-driven cabaret nightclub, the Forbidden City. As noted in Anthony Lee's *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco*, Ling's performance on stage winks at both racial and sexual boundaries. Foremost, their exotic dress and movements are an act of self-orientalism, intentionally donning exotic stereotypes to entertain white viewers, like the manner of the female Asian American performer. In tandem, Ling was a biological male, performing under the guise of socially feminine theatrics during an illegal period for homosexuality and a technical legality of drag only within the performance space. Put melodically in Grande's album *Positions*, a performer's body in unexpected motion could grant one allegorical flexibility. Ling's masquerade of being at once Asian and 'Oriental', and male and feminine, is evocative. It signifies their body as a double, double entendre of self-orientalised Asian and male cross-dresser. Using Ling's morphological identity on stage, their performance offers a way of understanding how drag entered Chinatown's otherwise female oriental dancing space.

Akin to many concerns within the broadly defined history of sexuality, a case for Ling's subversive identity requires theoretical backing. On Ling's racial background and orientalising, referring to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, there are obstacles when interpreting how Ling's race remoulds itself on stage. This racial performance has been connected by Lee to Susan Sontag's effervescent *Playing-As-Being-A-Role*, a 1964 essay of *Notes on 'Camp'* which deliberates how acts of artifice produce their own embodied role. This idea relates to self-orientalism as it suggests that even putting on a stereotype of one's race constitutes something real. By relating orientalism to drag, Ling's sexuality is in question. As with most drag performers, their narrative encompasses a question of courage and survival. Using gender theories on drag, including gender performativity from Judith Butler, I will show how Ling pays homage to ongoing traction points in the history of pleasure, functioning between domestic and institutional, public and private, and solo versus homogenous spheres. It is this study on Ling that makes them a prime site of inquiry and an exemplar for the intellectual history of sex. This intellectual pursuit, mobilised by Michel Foucault's 1976 reorientation of sex thinking, remains challenged on how to preserve subjective experiences while constructing precise sexual histories, alongside whether race can be integrated into Foucault's ever-present genealogy. The latter contention, admirably focalised within Ann Laura Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire*, can be

grounded here with Ling's story at the crossroads of drag and orientalism.



Figure 2. Forbidden City Souvenir Program

Ling moves in tune with Oriental female dancers on the Forbidden City stage. These typically female dancers appeared in stereotypical Chinese dress, likely for the sole need of entertaining their white audience (Fig. 2). Following Celine Parrenas Shimizu's provocative account of Asian American women on stage and screen, there has always been a certain jouissance for all parties in viewing these types of performances—between loving and feeling disgusted by Asian women's pathologically hypersexual representation. Forbidden City women moved their bodies in a stylistic form akin to Anna May Wong's dance in the film Piccadilly (1929), all appearing to mesmerizingly seduce Western eyes on purpose. Wong, occupying broader tropes identified by Karen Leong like the "Butterfly", a passive lady requiring white saving, but also "Dragon Lady", a hyper-sexualised Asian villain, makes her role a doubled figure embodying the exotic binaries of orientalist narratives. These roles are consequently divisive but not transient, representing actions and behaviours that (re)constitute what it means to be stereotypically Chinese in the Western psyche. Alongside these women, Ling was not Chinese as such on stage, but a re-rehearsing of the 'Orient'. Figuratively playing on what white American viewers expected of feminine Chinese dancing against their own identity as American Chinese people who likely did not feel 'other' to white Americans, their performance becomes race. In performing the Chinese race to Western minds, the idea of actually being Chinese-American becomes obscure. Not only does Ling therefore instate the matter of culture versus ethnicity, but they also emblematise a racial perspective on Sontag's *Playing-As-Being-A-Role*. Ling, reinventing female performers on the nightclub stage, played on their race until it became a recasting and act of self-orientalising.

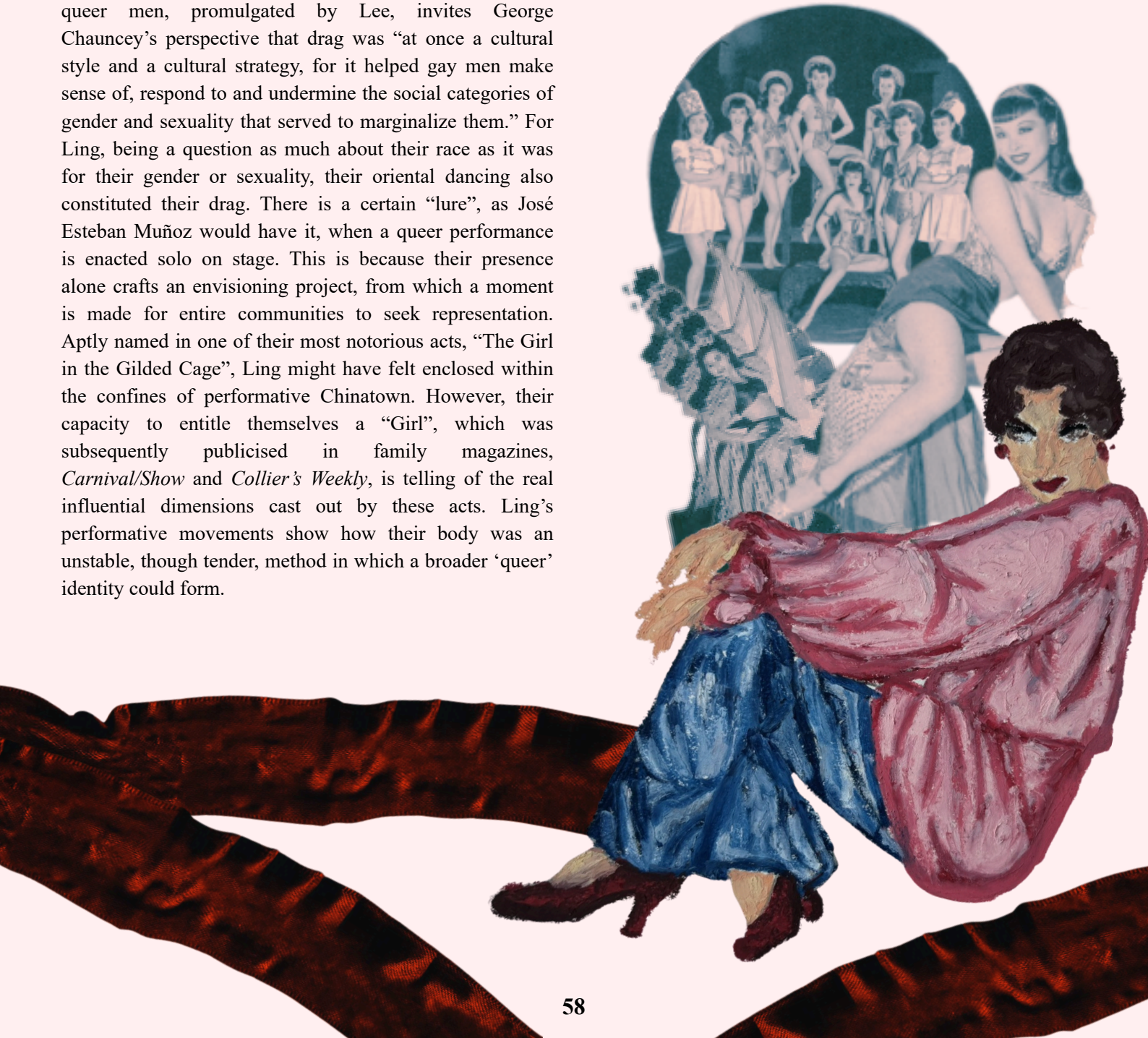


Figure 3. Andy Wong's Scandals

Most famously enacting drag, one of Ling's performances came out within an act titled the "World's Greatest Female Impersonator", positioned to the left of Fig. 3. In this pose, Ling wears a long dark wig, appears to have breasts, and wears a dress that is aptly oversized enough to confuse where their legs begin or end. The likely stretched morphology of their limbs represents a modelling performance, akin to the sensual movements of other women in this "Haven of Paradise" advertisement and on stage. Admittedly, Ling's female peers are visibly different in style but not necessarily in how they position, and make spectacle of, their bodies. This is where gender theory must come in. Apart from their unveiling by the title "Impersonator" and the potential revelation of the masquerade, nothing about Ling's visual identity reveals them to be in drag. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler contends that "the performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed." Drag exists as a conceptual play on and literal imitation of gender, querying what it means to actually be one's gender. If gender only becomes what it is upon its development of certain recognisable forms in society, then drag is no different in its constitutive performativity from everyday women off stage. As compared in Katrin Sieg's *Ethnic Drag*, there is no recognisable terminology for "racial masquerade" like Ling's as there is for blackface minstrelsy. Obviously, the contexts are ideologically unalike, yet these ideas of counterculture by dressing up represent a simulacrum of what race and gender truly mean. If only ever relevant for and validated by socially constructed realities, then Ling's dual playing—of race and gender—questions the actual substance of these allegedly natural terms.

Politically, these terms are as important to us now as they were to Ling and their wider community in Chinatown. Drag has often been, and remains, a means to survive through performance. No matter how fragile our binaries between male and female, or even migrant versus white American's identities, these binaries have always caused historical damage. While drag then identifies what Katrin Sieg terms as "traumatic holes in the social fabric, […] historical denial and collective mourning", it also reveals the shallowness of what we understand gender to be, and the persistent inability to appreciate a hybrid presentation of gender and race. Using Butler's instruction that we become our gender, Ling felt socially compelled within their performative, staged space to (re)produce themself as a subversive gendered figure. Returning to *Playing-As-Being-A-Role*, there is a confirmation of one's own identity in pretending to be someone else. This interpretation for queer men, promulgated by Lee, invites George Chauncey's perspective that drag was "at once a cultural style and a cultural strategy, for it helped gay men make sense of, respond to and undermine the social categories of gender and sexuality that served to marginalize them." For Ling, being a question as much about their race as it was for their gender or sexuality, their oriental dancing also constituted their drag. There is a certain "lure", as José Esteban Muñoz would have it, when a queer performance is enacted solo on stage. This is because their presence alone crafts an envisioning project, from which a moment is made for entire communities to seek representation. Aptly named in one of their most notorious acts, "The Girl in the Gilded Cage", Ling might have felt enclosed within the confines of performative Chinatown. However, their capacity to entitle themselves a "Girl", which was subsequently publicised in family magazines, *Carnival/Show* and *Collier's Weekly*, is telling of the real influential dimensions cast out by these acts. Ling's performative movements show how their body was an unstable, though tender, method in which a broader 'queer' identity could form.

Unique for their time and to history, Ling used established orientalist tropes to dance in drag, occupying both a racial and gendered masquerade. Automatically raising eyes in sex's intellectual history, Ling's performance via their gendered body and simultaneously racialised body, fills gaps on how race can move within sex's conceptual frameworks on nature/construction, body/dress, and stage/reality. Their body exists as a site of concealment, costume, dance, stereotypes, drag, and ultimate exposition, becoming an exemplar for doing what feels natural because nature is a social construct itself for the body. Ling's body, then, carries a morphological awareness, layering masquerade upon artifice, and embodying a moving testament to our world's repressive and ongoing social constriction.




HANDS ON,
HANDS OFF.

THE COMMODIFICATION OF HAIR-BRUSHING: THE BELLE ÉPOQUE IN FRANCE

BELLA CRIPWELL

Throughout the age of the Belle Époque in France (1870-1914), the act of hair-brushing was both commodified and fetishised. Inherited from the seventeenth-century Rococo tradition of *la toilette,* the fantasy of women in private spaces was a theme that was consistently appropriated. It was under this medium that private moments of intimacy were divulged for public consumption. Precisely because men were unlikely to inhabit or frequent *la toilette*, this space was sexualised and its privacy transformed into a tool of seduction. In this way, the act of brushing hair embodied this era's obsession with elaborate artifice. Artists like Degas and Morisot, amongst others, repeatedly painted these women from behind with long flowing hair in a multiplicity of states. This resulted in sexualised and anonymous images where the subject appears seemingly unaware that they are the sitter. Moreover, it detaches the real function of the act and instead exchanges and reconstructs it to embrace the voyeuristic vision that so enraptured the Belle Époque and highlighted the vulnerability of the feminine.

Whilst the exact date of its commencement is contentious, the beginning of the Belle Époque is usually credited to the end of the Franco-Prussian war in 1871, while its end is associated with the outbreak of World War One in 1914. This era is largely characterised by optimism and cultural revolution, marked with a new economic prosperity. The rise of the *femme nouvelle* brought with it new possibilities and increased women's access to education, public space, and paid work. Yet the dominant visual culture of the period continued to frame women primarily through the lens of domesticity and display.

While some emancipation was visible in public life, women remained excluded from production modes in art and advertising. The *toilette* tradition has long been present in French culture, initially gaining prominence in the seventeenth century as a site of aristocratic daily ritual. Most famous was Madame de Pompadour, the official mistress of Louis XV, who conducted her business meetings in such a setting. By the late nineteenth century, this tradition was taken up and transformed by Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. This style moved away from idealised nudes and towards intimate and naturalistic scenes of women bathing, dressing, and styling hair. Excluded from public modes of self-expression and authorship, the female body itself became the primary surface onto which social, erotic, and class-based codes were inscribed.

By the nineteenth century, novels equated the act of loosening the hair to an act of sex itself. Hair was simultaneously an erotic, social, and economic signifier. Hair left unpinned was a marker of sexual maturity, and a signifier of sexual availability. As a consequence of such phenomena, it was observed that upon turning eighteen, girls no longer wore their hair down. It was believed into the nineteenth century that women's hair grew longer than men's did, making it a secondary sexual characteristic and resulting in the idea that the longer a woman's hair, the more emphatically feminine she was considered to be. During the nineteenth century, married women of the bourgeoisie kept their hair up even within the bounds of their own home; it only came down when a woman was undressed. There is much historical precedent for the erotic charge of loose hair. In mid-nineteenth century paintings, Venus is depicted nude with lavishly dishevelled hair, and Eve – who is often considered synonymous with sexual torment – has been pictured with long, blonde, curly hair since the Renaissance. Art historians have furthered this idea to suggest that extravagant displays of hair may stand in for what was impossible to represent in much European art of the time: female pubic hair.

Yet hair was not only a vehicle of eroticism. It was also a commodity in the most literal sense. The human-hair market was resilient and was in fact expanding towards the second half of the nineteenth century. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the human hair market was still in full swing: in 1898 the *San Francisco Call* reported that in the lower Pyrenees, every Friday, hundreds of hair traders would walk up and down the village streets inspecting the hair of peasant girls, for which it is noted that rural women were offered future crops as payment.

This was to supply the twelve thousand pounds of human hair annually required to supply European and American markets. This market made visible a stark class division: the elaborate, pinned coiffures celebrated in bourgeois painting were, in many cases, literally built from the shorn hair of working-class women who could not afford to keep it. As such, hair-brushing was not merely a private act but part of a broader historical moment in which women's bodies were aestheticised and commodified, and social conventions were softened. The bourgeois fantasy of natural, flowing femininity was materially constructed from the bodies of women who had no choice but to sell it. This highlights the contradictory logic of the period, whereby women's bodies were both exploited and romanticised.



Figure 1. Woman at her Toilette

Potentially emblematic of the depiction of women, between 1860 and 1900, Edgar Degas returned obsessively to the theme of women in private spaces. His treatment of hair-brushing is inseparable from his broader politics of looking. Comparing his own practice to peering through a keyhole, he constructed a mode of spectatorship built on the subject's unawareness. In Degas' work that presents women in all states, they are rarely depicted as individuals, but rather as anonymous figures caught in awkward, unguarded poses that hide their faces from view. Thus, anonymity is not incidental but structural.

Yet, Degas complicates this further in La Coiffure (1896), where a uniformed maid combs the long hair of her seated, youthful mistress, who is bracing her hand against the force of the strokes to relieve pressure from her scalp. The act of preparing oneself is rendered painful and uncomfortable, the very converse of the seductive fantasy expected by the male viewer. Here the class hierarchy of grooming is made literally visible within the frame; one woman's femininity is being constructed through the labour of another. Degas himself claimed his women were "simple, honest creatures" concerned only with their physical occupations. As part of this naturality, the subject's innocence is dependent on their unawareness of being viewed and objectified. The subject's vivid red hair is symbolic of survival, sex, and strong emotion. In his painting entitled *Femme à sa toilette* (1901), the theme of red hair is extended to take on the realities of modern urban life. The recurring choice of red-haired models was not incidental, as red hair carried a deep iconographic charge in Western art, being long associated with Mary Magdalene, sensuality, and moral transgression. This provided the act of hair brushing an erotic symbolism that reinforced the voyeuristic framing of the scene.

In contrast, Berthe Morisot's *Femme à sa toilette* (1875-1880) depicts her subject from behind, lifting her arms to either fix her hair or take it down. She highlights a moment of personal and solitary contemplation, in contrast to the often-exploitative works of male contemporaries that present hair brushing as an erotic performative act that is intended to be viewed. For Morisot, the viewer is a confidant rather than a voyeur distancing itself from the male perspective. The somewhat respectful female gaze places a mirror — often symbolic of woman's vanity — behind the subject to obscure the



subject's face, rather than its usual use of revelation. The blurred reflection deflects from the woman's beauty and instead concentrates on the intimate act of grooming. It is here that the intimacy is shared, becoming public and external. The *toilette* was a space where women fashioned themselves and altered their appearance to become desirable for men, and thus Morisot's position as confidante is rendered clear. The tension in this work between the space of voyeurism and that of intimate daily practice is contested and discussed between scholars, but perhaps this is Morisot's aim to question the role of the *toilette*, and explicitly its role in female identity over male fantasy.

In its representations, the act of hair-brushing has never been a private ritual. The act is either performed for the male viewer, or in preparation to adhere to the male gaze. Throughout the Belle Époque it acquired layers of erotic, social, and economic meaning that revealed the period's outstanding contradictions around femininity and power. Grooming was aestheticised through anonymity and a voyeurism that transformed private moments of intimacy into consumable phenomena. It follows that the *toilette* was a site where femininity was simultaneously made, watched, and sold, and the act of brushing the hair was its most revealing and incriminating evidence.

"JUST ANOTHER CLAPTRAP": CONCERNS OVER FEMALE SEXUALITY DURING SECOND WORLD WAR BRITAIN

LAUREN HOOD



Figure 1. Auxiliary Territorial Service members during training in 1941

During the Second World War, the sexuality of women caused great anxiety throughout Britain. The needs of the British war effort led to over 1.5 million women working in traditionally male industries, such as engineering, transport, and shipbuilding. Additionally, 125,000 women were conscripted into women's military forces such as the Auxiliary Territorial Service (A.T.S.), Women's Auxiliary Air Force (W.A.A.F.) and Women's Royal Navy Service (W.R.N.S.). The sexuality and sexual behaviour of British women, whether real or rumoured, had profound consequences on both the morale and the health of British servicemen, leading to discourse within Britain which presented women as detrimental to the nation's war effort.

During the Second World War, sexuality was used to villainise women seen as posing a threat to the British war effort. Sonya O. Rose argues that British wartime national identity was created around "enemies within" who presented a threat to the war effort through characteristics of "self-interestedness or selfishness." Furthermore, Gillian Swanson argues that sexuality was given "a central place in definitions of national character", connecting fears over sexual behaviour with fears over the nation's future and postwar reconstruction. Women's sexual behaviour was paramount to the nation's war effort, which was motivated by a desire to protect the perceived superiority of British morality, leading to the villainisation of women who were perceived as sexually immoral.

The connection between Britain's war effort and women's sexual behaviour is furthered through discourse on 'khaki fever', a phrase coined by Angela Woollacoot, which refers to women and girls being attracted to and sexually pursuing uniformed servicemen. Lucy Bland argues that concerns over the dangers of 'khaki fever' created anxiety in Britain as "multitudes of young women were infesting military camps, preying upon soldiers, spreading nasty

diseases." The impact of 'khaki fever' upon the health of troops, and therefore their ability to participate in the war effort, concerned military officials as their sexual relationships with women were viewed as harmful to their service. Additionally, Angela Woollacoot argues that 'khaki fever' represented "a flagrant challenge to the belief that sexual chastity was integral to respectable femininity." In this respect, women's sexual behaviour represented a two-fold danger to the nation's war effort: harmful to the health of servicemen and harmful to perceptions of women's sexual morality.

The sexual behaviour of British women caused further anxiety through discussion of the 'amateur prostitute'. The term refers to a young woman who was more socially and sexually liberal than was expected within domestic ideals of British women. The 'amateur' aspect of the term highlights that the motivation of these women was not financial, marking a difference between them and professional prostitutes who were financially motivated. Susan Grayzel argues that the appearance of the 'amateur' "suggested the country could be felled by the seeds of moral decay eating away from the inside." Susan Grayzel's argument highlights the fear that women were straying from their wartime duties, implicitly threatening the stability of the nation and its domestic and familial ideals. It also shows that fears of the 'amateur' were inextricably linked to the war effort, as the sexual behaviour of women could undermine the sacrifices and work of deployed British troops. This anxiety over 'amateurs' was recorded in the minutes of the Regional Commissioners' Conference of December 1943, where Lieutenant-General Sir Hugh Elles stated that he "was concerned not so much with the problem of the professional prostitute as with the increasing demoralisation of young girls." The extent of anxiety expressed by Sir Hugh Elles signifies that the 'amateur' figure implied widespread sexual immorality amongst British women.

Social class played an imperative role in anxieties about the 'amateur'. Sonya O. Rose argues that these discussions "drew upon a long-standing implicit association between working-class women and promiscuity." Societal associations of working-class women with sexual immorality in pre-war Britain were essential in laying the foundations for the policing and commentary of women's sexualities during the Second World War. Despite this, that 'amateurs' were actually "drawn from all social classes" was indicative of the perceived scale of increased sexual immorality amongst young women. This was highlighted by Mass Observation investigators who recorded "the extent to which girls of the artisan and working class of 'respectable' appearance can be seen in central London with allied soldiers." That sexual immorality was now visible from 'respectable' young women caused anxiety by broadening the social class of women such behaviour was expected and seen from.

These concerns over female sexuality existed alongside the rise of venereal diseases in wartime Britain. Between the conflict's onset in September 1939 and February 1943, British venereal disease infection rates increased by seventy per cent. However, the importance of heterosexual sexual intercourse for the morale of British servicemen meant that their sexual behaviours were accepted by the government and military authorities, regardless of increasing rates of venereal diseases. Concern over the impact of these diseases on men's health is evident through a propaganda poster shown in Figure 2. This poster was aimed at Allied troops serving in Italy and published in 1943 or 1944, warning troops that venereal diseases caught through sexual relations with a "claptrap" can "ruin your future." Not only does this poster demonstrate how venereal diseases were viewed as a threat to the nation's servicemen, but it positions women as the cause of infections. Women being blamed for venereal disease infection rates amongst British servicemen is further evident with syphilis infections being blamed on "Phyllis" in the poster depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 2. Propaganda poster aimed at Allied troops



Figure 3. Propaganda poster aimed at Allied troops

Women being blamed for the spread of venereal diseases fuelled anxiety that infected women would not be able to fulfil expected domestic duties. This caused concern in the British government due to the significant role that women played in both war work and the domestic sphere, as well as their responsibility of raising future generations of citizens and troops. The dangers of venereal diseases for domestic duties were stressed through the 1945 poster Tomorrow's Citizen which was published by the Ministry of Health and the Central Council for Health Education. As shown in Figure 4, this poster urges parents to think about the health of their children and to avoid placing the shadow of venereal disease on their future. A similar focus on the domestic impact of venereal diseases was present in the Central Office of Information 1949 film The People at No. 19, during which the husband states "babies are born stupid, or crippled, or blind" when discussing the impact of syphilis on pregnancy after finding out his wife was diagnosed with the disease. Here, it is implied that his wife has failed in her domestic duties through contracting syphilis, as it could negatively affect their marriage and future children.

Concerns over the fulfilment of British women's domestic duties created anxiety over their interactions with non-British Allied troops. These interactions are evidenced by the four thousand marriages which occurred between British and Polish citizens during the Second World War. This negatively impacted the morale of British troops, who were worried over the "conduct of 'their' wife, 'their' girlfriend." The presence of Allied troops threatened the masculinity of British men who perceived British women as disloyal. This exacerbated fears that women were not effectively participating in the war effort, echoing the previously discussed ideas of women's sexuality representing an internal national threat. Wendy Webster agrees, arguing that British women in relationships with non-British men were seen as unpatriotic due to the "idea that British women belonged to British men", raising concerns over how this would damage the perception of domesticity which British servicemen were fighting for. These fears were also often fuelled by racism. Around two thousand children were born to white British mothers and Black servicemen in Britain during the Second World War. Displeasure over the presence of mixed-race children was vocalised by Home Secretary Herbert Morrison, who feared the "difficult social problem" created by "the pro-creation of half-caste children." This led to discourse over interracial relationships, evidenced socially through the presence of mixed-race children born by white British women, and the impact which these relationships would have on the morale of British servicemen.



Figure 4. Ministry of Health and Central Council for Health Education poster

To conclude, British anxieties over women's sexualities during the Second World War were motivated by a desire to protect the morale and health of British servicemen. Anxieties over the sexuality of British women were caused by a perception that women were contradicting national wartime values and, therefore, hindering Britain's war effort. Women interacting both socially and sexually with Allied troops, interracial relationships, the arrival of the 'amateur', 'khaki fever' and rising venereal disease infections all contradicted wartime expectations of women; at a time when changing gender relations meant women were increasingly finding themselves in traditionally masculine environments. Ultimately, all of these factors created rumours of women's sexually immoral behaviours and impacted the morale of British servicemen, posing a double-sided threat to the nation's war effort.

THE INCARCERATION AND REDEMPTION OF FALLEN WOMEN IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN

AVERI KURTH

Magdalene Laundry institutions, also called penitentiaries, asylums, or hospitals, provided so-called "redemption" for fallen women: prostitutes, women pregnant out of wedlock, or teenage girls without homes. From the mid-eighteenth century to the closure of the last Magdalene Laundry in 1996, it became acceptable across the British Isles to save the souls of fallen women through incarceration. In Ireland, the Magdalene Laundry institutions (from here referred to as penitentiaries) were run by Catholic nuns, and in Britain by women volunteers. In fact, in Britain, the penitentiaries were criticised for their resemblance to the Catholic convent; however, this implies the nuns of a convent were akin to the prostitutes and, thus, impure, deflowered women. This suggests a broader cultural disposition toward women: women, no matter their dedication to the church or Christ, are still, with Eve's original sin, inherently lustful creatures and playthings of the Devil. This essay aims to analyse the culture of sex work in Victorian Britain, the harsh conditions for sex workers and other women within penitentiaries, and the wider attitudes towards religion, sex, and women, no matter their fealty to God, comparing nun and whore, holy and unholy, redeemed and irredeemable.

Outside of the penitentiary, registered sex workers in Victorian Britain were heavily surveyed after the implementation of the Contagious Disease Acts, actively creating outcasts of working-class women from the greater working-class community. However, oftentimes prostitution was only used as a stepping stone through which a woman could earn money and upward mobility. Thus, the Contagious Disease Acts, while literally created to control the spread of venereal disease, also served to control upward mobility and maintain the rigid class structure of Victorian Britain. Through the surveillance of sex workers with marginal status within their communities, effectively, the full community could be under surveillance. Oftentimes, the women and girls who entered sex work were forced from their family home, rendering domestic service a viable option, at least at first. Typically, these women and girls were reported to have engaged in unregistered, "casual" sex work as domestic servants to working men, before fully committing to registered prostitution. An unexpected, illegitimate child was often the push, causing disgraced women to migrate, looking for work to support their child. If that woman decided to work as a seamstress or milliner, for example, she would earn half the wage of a male worker; this was not the case with sex work. If it was not a necessity to provide, perhaps it was the alleged independent, insubordinate, and aggressive demeanour attributable to sex workers that pushed them into the profession. Aside from their general promiscuity in terms of acts of sex, the transgression against strict Victorian gender roles was the primary crime sex workers committed against society. Not the spread of venereal disease, but the mobility and power afforded to women through sex work needed surveying. Independent, insubordinate, and aggressive women needed to be dealt with.

An instance of a food fight (particularly soup slinging) had occurred at a hospital in 1873, resulting in the arrival of an Inspector Sloggett in the following days. There, Sloggett found multiple instances of women confined in "dark rooms" for days on end, with one woman in a room with the floor littered in broken glass. Sloggett found the reason for the soup fight was quite reasonable in fact, for the resident doctor had refused to care for the women as he reported they had been "saucy" with him. This hospital, and others, were erected as confinement facilities for the containment of venereal disease, meaning they were mainly occupied (forcibly) by sex workers before they were turned out onto the street again. Perhaps Magdalene Laundry institutions may seem a more humane alternative, though they were initially established with the same goals as these hospitals: controlling both venereal disease and sex workers. The institutions were named after Mary Magdalene, a reformed prostitute redeemed for her penitence and love for Jesus. In retrospect, it is evident these women were not incarcerated for the collective good of Victorian society but as punishment for their transgression against women's gender roles; exemplified by the institutions' expansion from incarcerating only the prostitute to teenage girls showing sexual proclivities and single mothers. Still, possibly inspired by their namesake, Magdalene Laundries had expanded their services into the "redemption" of these fallen women, not just to hide them

away from greater society.

While the penitentiaries were meant to eventually reintroduce a new, penitent woman into society, many women stayed at them for the rest of their lives once admitted. In daily life, a woman would spend her time either in silence, in prayer, or performing hard labour, typically laundering the sheets of nearby businesses — hence the title 'Magdalene Laundry.' The woman should mirror her sisters and volunteers who aided in the righteous cause of the penitentiaries, who were paragons of the female sex, mimicking their chastity. However, should the woman be so lucky to marry if she were to leave the penitentiary, she was also taught to dutifully serve the sexual desires of her husband. This striking balance between wife and whore proved difficult for women both inside penitentiaries and across society, evidenced by the occasional married woman entering the penitentiaries. It was the mimicking of their sisters (called sisters both in nun-operated Irish penitentiaries and volunteer-operated British penitentiaries) that may allow these women to re-enter society as perfect models of womanhood and faith.

Despite the hard labour and the strict regulation of rules at these penitentiaries, it has been argued the very idea of redemption for fallen women was progressive for its time, and some have concluded the labour performed by these women was not atypical for the time, either. Some claim the sisterhood (and labour) present at the penitentiaries truly did have the spiritual power to redeem; matrons of the penitentiaries were staunchly against the male-led hierarchies of hospitals like the site of that fated food fight and believed the forcible labour on the washing board and iron corrected these women's former decision to become sex workers rather than performing pure, chaste work. It was the female-led prayer and penance-driven nature of the penitentiaries that attracted the criticism of Protestant Britain. The Catholic convent had been replaced in British society by the Protestant ideal of the domestic wife who follows the "right" faith at home, not in a sisterhood. Of course, the Protestant wife must also be sexual, but only to please her husband, and such behaviour was not taking place at the penitentiary. No, these women were learning to become much too chaste, much too like nuns. An air of religious tension had settled over Britain in the Victorian era due to the rise of the Tractarian Movement, followers of which, while officially Anglican, attempted to restore papal supremacy to Britain. Many of the women who volunteered at the penitentiaries were followers of the movement. Notable nineteenth-century poet Christina Rossetti, writer of *Goblin Market*, volunteered at a penitentiary in Highgate and was likely a member of the Tractarian Movement, though she did not expressly say this during her lifetime. To Protestant Britain, the sisterhood and chastity present in the penitentiaries would not restore a prostitute to the status of a righteous woman because a righteous woman was not a nun, but a wife. The earlier Reformation era distaste towards the convent had transformed into a Victorian era distaste for the Magdalene Laundry, thus, equating nun and whore.

While Magdalene Laundry institutions may have attempted to correct and redeem fallen women through labour and penance, it is evident Victorian society rejected the system as a whole. Fallen women could not be redeemed, made clear by their lifelong stays at the penitentiaries, and they certainly could not be redeemed in such a Catholic manner. To Victorian Britons, the nuns had it wrong, too. Women could not escape original sin, the promiscuity thrust upon them by Eve and that sneaky serpent. The correct course of action was the careful control of sex; the balance between nun and whore – an impossible balance.



LOTUS BLOSSUM AND DRAGON LADY: THE HYPERSEXUALISATION OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN

IMAAN SHAMSI & ELHAM KHOSRAVIPOUR

Content Warning: Sexual Violence

Asian women have been subject to hyper-sexualisation across time, often having their bodies reduced simply to sites for men's pleasure, particularly 'foreign' men. A critical and particularly harrowing instance of this was the rampant perpetration of sexual violence during the Vietnam War. This violence, and the dehumanisation of Vietnamese women upon whom it was inflicted, has been exacerbated by an intense racial Othering, which persists through to the present day. Subsequent depictions of the war, particularly in popular culture, perpetuate persistent tropes and stereotypes about Asian women, operating to hypersexualise, exploit, and romanticise the lives and bodies of Vietnamese women during the war and into the present day.

In the context of the Vietnam War, Elizabeth Anderson discusses how several American soldiers, when testifying about sexual abuse of Vietnamese women, described the normalcy with which the dehumanisation of these women took place:

"You don't even think of them as human beings, they're 'gooks.' And they're objects; they're not human, they're objects."

"...[the military personnel] might stick a rifle in a woman's head and say, 'Take your clothes off.' That's the way it's done over there. 'Cause they're not treated as human beings over there, they're treated as dirt."

Testimonies from the Winter Soldier Investigation, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, February 1971.

There is, therefore, an overt deference by American soldiers to the idea that Vietnamese women were justified or acceptable targets for such violence. According to Anderson, this deference was facilitated by the prevalence of the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese Army's use of guerrilla warfare, in order to counterbalance against the American and South Vietnamese armies' advanced capabilities. The possibility of unprecedented attack from any Vietnamese civilians supposedly left American forces perpetually distrustful of Vietnamese women, under the assumption that they could carry out surprise attacks, or that they were the partners of men who would. This distrust was weaponised to justify sexual abuse as an accepted, sometimes even warranted, tactic of the Vietnam War, particularly in dealing with women associated with the 'enemy'.

The extent of the dehumanisation evident in the testimonies above is compounded by American soldiers' racialised Othering of Vietnamese women. In his foundational work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues that Orientalist scholarship and perspectives position the so-called East and West – the Orient and the Occident – as binary opposites, portraying the East as exotic, "irrational, depraved", while the West is "rational, virtuous", superior. In doing so, the West justifies its own excellence and, indeed, its dominance over the East, constructing and reproducing an essentialised worldview of the entire, homogenous East that is supposedly in need of Western control and governance. This dichotomy between the East and the West is perpetuated in the above testimonies, which explicitly distinguish that such sexual violence is simply "the way it's done over there." In a separate testimony reported by historian Mark Baker, an American soldier differentiated between "round-eyed" (i.e. white) and Vietnamese women, specifying that "those women are of another culture, another colour, another society." The same testimony stated that in the Vietnamese context, "a gun is power" and that carrying a gun was "like having a permanent hard-on" – representing the conflation of masculinity in the Vietnam War with violence and aggression, specifically sexual violence, that enables the power in question and its exercise over Asian women. Read in conjunction with the American fear of Vietnamese guerrilla warfare, this Othering – in the context of a war dominated by Western male soldiers – points to an Orientalist justification of sexual violence as a method of suppressing the deviancy of the East.

However, along with a propensity for sexual violence against Vietnamese women, soldiers also had a sexual fascination with Vietnamese women. This is, in part, due to the Western fetishisation of Asian women enabled by popular culture, in particular through film, TV, and theatre. Puccini's 1904 opera, *Madame Butterfly*,

popularised the geisha fetish and perpetuated the reduction of Asian women as being reliant upon, and thereby subject to, the white man. Popular culture both enabled the fetishization of Vietnamese women during the war and perpetuated this fetishization after the war. *Madame Butterfly* and the subsequent 1989 modern musical adaptation, *Miss Saigon*, see the young, innocent Asian protagonist commit suicide because she cannot be with her white lover. In Miss Saigon, despite seemingly criticising American soldiers' use of Vietnamese women for pleasure during the Vietnam War, the heroine's storyline does not do much to dispel the fantasy of the geisha-esque archetype. In one of the most popular songs from the musical, *The Movie in My Mind*, the Vietnamese bargirls sing of the soldiers who "are not nice, they're mostly noise"; however, ultimately, they still dream of "a strong GI's embrace" – a soldier who will whisk them away from their misfortune and will "fight for [them] instead" and "keep [them] safe all day." While this may dismantle the idea that Asian women delight in prostitution – as was historically believed of the geisha – it does not dismantle the idea that Asian women delight in the dream of a white saviour and lover. In fact, it romanticises the trope of the Asian damsel in distress and the white knight in shining armour. The heroine, Kim, is also seen as the most desirable of all the bargirls because of her virginity. Thereby, the musical situates itself within the Freudian Madonna-Whore complex, in which men see women as dichotomously either pure or promiscuous and, in doing so, the fantasy of the innocent Asian girl is perpetuated.

Both the 'damsel in distress' trope and the Madonna-Whore complex come together in the Asian context to create the dichotomy of the Lotus Blossom and the Dragon Lady – the former being the exotic, delicate ideal type who needs to be saved and the latter being cunning, dangerous, and sexually manipulative. As such, *Miss Saigon* engages in Hortense Spillers' concept of "pornotroping", Asian women's suffering during the Vietnam War becomes a visual spectacle and their bodies become eroticized commodities. Kim's attractiveness comes from her youthful innocence, and this aspect of her character is compounded by the fact that the actress playing Kim is also often underage. In the original London production of *Miss Saigon*, Lea Salonga was only seventeen years old when she played Kim, while her counterpart Simon Bowman who plays Kim's American lover, Chris, was twenty-eight years old. Furthermore, in the 2014 West End revival, Eva Noblezada was also only seventeen when she made her debut as Kim, while her counterpart was twenty-six. As such, both the content and the production of the musical reinforce the fetishization of young, innocent Asian women and, as such, their bodies; perpetuating the harmful pornotroping of Asian women, constructing a hypersexualised stereotype for the pleasure and consumption of the man.

The hypersexualisation of Asian women persists past the Vietnam War era into the present-day. An exploitative sex-work culture continues to be incredibly profitable in Vietnam; estimates say that there are about two hundred thousand women working in the country as prostitutes. A section of this industry caters directly to white backpackers travelling through Vietnam. This sector, far more than those who cater to Vietnamese men, often leads to relationships and, in some cases, even marriages. In this sector, much like pornotroping in popular culture, Asian women's suffering becomes re-centered and commodified by the privileged Western backpacker passing through, wishing to both observe suffering in the Third World and satisfy his desire for pleasure at the same time.

Ultimately, sexual violence perpetuated by American male soldiers during the Vietnamese war represents a deeply destructive conflation of violent masculinity with racialised Othering, used to rationalise the subjugation and abuse of Vietnamese women. This rationalisation has become instrumentalised in the broader perception of Asian women, and related tropes have been popularised in popular culture and most notably in the award-winning musical, *Miss Saigon*. Tropes of the Asian Lotus Blossom or Dragon Lady work to reduce Asian women to either their manipulative promiscuity or damsel-in-distress-esque girlish innocence: both the former and latter are fetishized. The legacy of this is evident in Vietnam's – and many other Southeast Asian countries' – contemporary exploitative sex industry, which capitalises on Western men's continued fascination with Asian women, their suffering, their lives, and their bodies.



DANGEROUS DANCING: THE IRISH DANCE HALL AND THE POLICING OF PLEASURE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY IRELAND

ORLA MCLAUGHLIN

In twentieth-century Ireland, the dance hall became one of the most visible spaces in which people pursued pleasure. For many, it was part of everyday life: somewhere to go at the end of the week, to meet friends, to dance, and to socialise. Yet, at the same time, these spaces attracted a level of attention that suggests they were seen as something more than harmless entertainment. Dance halls were watched and, eventually, regulated in ways that reveal a deeper concern, not just with behaviour, but with pleasure itself.

This article argues that the Irish dance hall offers a useful way of thinking about how pleasure was understood and controlled in the twentieth century. Rather than treating dancing as a purely social activity, it considers how the visibility of pleasure shaped the response of both the Church and state authorities. In doing so, it draws on the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his argument that power operates not only by restricting behaviour, but by organising the conditions in which it takes place.

To understand why dance halls became such a focus of concern, it is important to place them within the wider context of Irish society at the time. Following independence in 1922, the Irish Free State placed a strong emphasis on moral order, shaped in large part by Catholic teaching. As Tom Inglis has argued, the Church exercised significant influence over ideas of respectability, particularly in relation to sexuality and behaviour. Within this framework, pleasure was not entirely discouraged, but it was expected to remain controlled and appropriate.

At the same time, dance halls were becoming increasingly popular, especially among the younger generation. They provided opportunities to meet others outside the immediate supervision of family and community, something that was not always easily available. As Diarmaid Ferriter notes, this period saw growing concern about youth culture and its perceived distance from traditional values. The dance hall sat at the centre of this tension. It was both an accepted part of social life and a space that seemed to allow for a degree of independence.



Figure 1. The Rainbow Ballroom in Glenfarne

The experience of the dance hall was shaped as much by anticipation as by the event itself. Preparing for the night, travelling to the venue, and arriving as a group all formed part of the occasion. Once inside, people met, partnered, and moved on, with brief conversations interrupted by the next set. This was a form of pleasure that depended on being seen. Unlike more private activities, dancing took place in a shared environment where behaviour was visible to others. This visibility meant that pleasure could be observed and judged, and clerical responses to dance halls often focused on this point. Dancing was described as an “occasion of sin”, not because it led to wrongdoing, but because it created the possibility of wrongdoing. Pleasure, in this sense, was treated as something that needed to be managed, rather than simply allowed to exist.

Concerns about dancing were also shaped by a moral panic about cultural change. Many of the music styles associated with dance halls were influenced by international trends, particularly from the United States. Jazz and other modern forms introduced new rhythms and styles of movement that were sometimes seen as incompatible with Irish moral values. As Terence Brown has argued, debates about popular culture in this period often reflected wider anxieties about modernity as Ireland went through a “rapid change” and “social change had dealt a fatal blow” to a traditional Ireland.

The introduction of the Dance Halls Act in 1935 marked a significant shift in the way these spaces were managed. By requiring public dances to be licensed, the state established a system through which dancing could be supervised and controlled. This was not just about maintaining order; it was about defining the conditions under which pleasure could take place. Licensed dance halls were permitted, but they were subject to strict regulations, and unlicensed dances, particularly those held in private homes or informal settings, were increasingly restricted.

The distinction between licensed and unlicensed dances is central to understanding the impact of the Act. It did not seek to outright ban dancing, but it did create categories of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" pleasure. The introduction of the Act meant that unlicensed dances could be fined, and these licences could only be granted by a District Court judge. Therefore, pleasure became something that could be authorised or denied depending on where it occurred and how it was organised. Records from local archives also show how closely these spaces were monitored in practice. Materials held by the Waterford County Archive indicate that dance halls were required to close during Lent, reinforcing the connection between leisure and religious observance. In some cases, restrictions were placed on who could attend, with entry limited to those living within a three-mile radius. This is particularly striking given that many dance halls were located on the outskirts of towns, often in rural areas, highlighting that regulation extended beyond the space itself, affecting who could access it and when.

Despite these efforts, the regulation of dance halls was never fully effective in controlling the experience of pleasure itself. As Barbara O'Connor shows in her study of rural dance halls, informal dances continued to operate as "some sections of the population resisted clerical demands, [. . .] others totally ignored them and [. . .] some were partially bound to their constraints." Even within licensed venues, the nature of dancing meant that not everything could be regulated, as it was not possible to control "the pleasurable feelings of gliding, as one is led by one's partner across the dance floor", as noted by O'Connor.

Gender played a key role in shaping these dynamics. Much of the concern surrounding dance halls focused on young women, whose behaviour was subject to particular scrutiny. O'Connor notes that "cheek-to-cheek dancing was acceptable whereas too tight a body hold merited some censure" in relation to the Church's teachings on "close dancing", and the rules dancers should abide by. In particular, women had to be careful about their reputation in society due to the imbalance of power between genders. It was up to the man to invite the woman to dance, and it was considered impolite to refuse, but on the other hand, if a woman invited a man to dance, she risked being labelled fast. At the same time, these dance halls offered women opportunities for social interaction that were otherwise limited. This created a unique tension between restriction and opportunity that shaped the experience of dancing.

By the mid-twentieth century, the place of the dance hall within Irish society began to change as new forms of entertainment emerged. The authority of the Church, while still significant, became less dominant, particularly from the 1960s onwards. As Ferriter suggests, attitudes towards morality and personal freedom gradually evolved during this period. The strict frameworks that had shaped earlier decades did not disappear entirely, but they became less central to everyday life. At the same time, the music associated with dance halls evolved as international styles like jazz gained influence. At its height, the showband era supported more than 450 ballrooms and many well-known musicians, including Rory Gallagher and Van Morrison, began their careers within this circuit. However, as the popularity of showbands decreased, so too did the prominence of dance halls. Today, only a few remain in operation, a decline that reflects wider changes in leisure culture, marking the end of a specific type of organised, collective pleasure that was once so central.



Figure 2. A dance hall scene in Ireland

The history of the Irish dance hall offers a clear example of how pleasure can become a subject of regulation. It shows that enjoyment is not just a private matter, but something that is shaped by social expectations and institutional frameworks. The Dance Halls Act of 1935 did not attempt to remove pleasure from Irish society, but it sought to organise it and to define the boundaries within which it could be expressed. At the same time, this history also demonstrates the persistence of pleasure in society.

Despite attempts to control it, people continued to seek out opportunities to socialise, to dance, and to enjoy themselves. The dance hall functioned as both a regulated space and a site of possibility where, despite the rules, pleasure could be found.

"Dangerous dancing" therefore reflects more than a set of moral concerns, as it points to a broader unease about the place of pleasure within society. To dance was not simply to pass the time, but to take part in an aspect of social life that carried both moral and cultural significance. The attention given to dance halls reveals how seriously these questions were taken. Ultimately, the Irish dance hall highlights the complex relationship between pleasure and control. It shows that while enjoyment can be shaped by external forces, it is not so easy to eliminate. Pleasure manages to persist, simply adapting to new conditions and continuing despite restrictive frameworks.

SOMATIC ENTHOUSIASMOS: THOUGHTS ON KORYBANTIC DANCING AND ITS RECEPTION

SOPHIA ROSS

Dance has independently evolved, in one form or another, all over the world. As a means of communication, physical movement is perhaps the most intuitive. Even before we had language, we had pointing and gesturing. Dance as an art form is then easily derived from dance as communication. Beyond these functions, or perhaps because of them, dance is also personally therapeutic – expression through movement simply feels good. These "healing properties" of dance were acknowledged in antiquity, although subsequent scholarship has often been neglectful of the practice altogether. This article will illuminate perhaps the most neglected genre of ancient Greek dancing, Korybantism, and then explore some parallels in modern media to demonstrate the pervasiveness of ritualized cathartic dance.

Mark Griffith's chapter offers a very complete discussion of Korybantic performance and why it should be afforded greater critical attention than it historically has been. The Korybantes are daimonic entities usually associated with initiatory or therapeutic rituals and ceremonies. Characterised by "loud and exciting music and strong emotional affect", Korybantic performance involved percussion instruments and *phōnē*, the use of the human voice as an instrument (think of the *oohs*, *aahs*, and *whoas* involved in singing, rather than traditional lyrics). It was associated with femininity and probably involved mostly female performers and observers, although men were not excluded. The aesthetics of the performance – dance style, musical style, costumes – had foreign influences and were considered irregular and deviant, *poikilos* ('variegated, multi-faceted') as opposed to the more socially ordered *orthos* ('upright, straight') styles. Indeed, much of what we know about Korybantic performance is contrary to what we usually encounter in choral or tragic performance, which is masculine, Greek, rational, and involves lyre music and verbal singing. The addressed divinities differ too. Traditional lyric is usually concerned with Zeus and Apollo, but the Korybantes traditionally worship Rhea and the Phrygian goddess Cybele, and sometimes Dionysus, whose Maenad cult bears resemblance to the type of performance we must imagine here.

It is not difficult to understand why historically male-dominated Eurocentric scholarship has paid less attention to this performance style. Social division of performance modes exist to this day: ballet is usually afforded a higher status than breakdancing, but that does not mean the ballet enthusiast cannot also enjoy hip hop, or vice versa. The lack of scholarship cannot be wholly attributed to bias, however. Due to Korybantism's nature as a less lyrical, less organized genre, there is limited primary evidence. Unlike tragedy or *dithyramb*, we do not have manuscripts of Korybantic text. Regardless, there is still some evidence, and there is no good reason why this evidence should not be afforded equal analytical enthusiasm to its more well-documented brother.

One of the most uncanny scenes in Aldous Huxley's sci-fi novel *Brave New World* is the Solidarity Service, a state-sanctioned sexual ritual designed to encourage social cohesion. Twelve participants imbibe the drug *soma*, which is also the Greek word for 'body', provoking euphoric bliss. They sing and chant verses that emphasize



Figure 1. Dance of the Hour



Figure 2. Harvest Episode in Andor

oneness with the group and the power of the deity they worship, Ford. The ritual finally reaches its enthusiastic climax, and the "circular procession of dancers" devolves into orgiastic sexual activity. In its context, the ritual is used by an authoritarian government to pacify a hedonistic population, but the very use of such a performance for this purpose proves its persuasive capabilities. As satire, it is a humorous scene: the participants chant "orgy-porgy" during their circular dance, and the protagonist is prevented from fully enjoying himself by a particularly offensive unibrow on the woman next to him. This parody of affective ritual behaviour illustrates its ability to promote social stability and the healthy release of emotion and stress, despite its use in the novel being morally dubious.

The release of emotion and stress is one purpose for dancing and affective ritual, but in visual media, it is also useful for the communication of emotion and stress. In Tony Gilroy's *Star Wars* TV show *Andor*, there is a particularly striking scene in which the character Mon Mothma dances at her daughter's wedding. Tensions are at an all-time high for her character: her daughter, although willing, is in an arranged marriage that Mon set up to secure financial aid for the Rebellion she is funding. As someone in an unhappy arranged marriage herself, Mon feels guilty for condemning her daughter to the same fate, even though it has helped secure the Rebellion's future. In a chaotic final sequence, Mon is shown drinking and dancing with increased fervor, releasing the poised elegance that usually defines her character. Like the structure of the Solidarity Service in *Brave New World*, the dance scene is initiated by a choreographed number by the bride and her bridesmaids, and soon disorganizes into a general rave. Upbeat music and flowing costumes add to the emotional intensity of the scene, where catharsis and dance intertwine. The dance serves as the only communication of Mon's emotional state, and it does so effectively – the viewer empathizes with her through her dance. Korybantic-style dancing is prevalent in modern as well as ancient contexts. Dance is a vehicle of dynamic meaning and is contingent on the agreed social context; it can have complex or simple messages, regardless of genre. Korybantism and related genres were enjoyed by the ancients alongside tragedy and comedy, just as "undisciplined" and orgiastic performance is enjoyed alongside ballet and opera today. As religious ritual, emotional communication, or any number of other functions, enthusiastic dance is diachronically relevant, even central, to human experience.



CAN YOU EVEN BE BOTHERED TO READ THIS?

LAETITIA SANAI

There are only two times in our lives that we don't think. When we sneeze, and when we orgasm.

At least, so says mother of performance art Marina Abramovic, someone whose hours clocked in states of self-ponderance far outweigh any of our own. Whether it be surrendering herself to weapon wielding members of the public in *Rhythm 0*, grittily staring individuals in the eye for 736 hours in *The Artist Is Present*, or committing a frenzied stabbing ritual in *Rhythm Ten*, the artist behind it all is not as outlandish as her art may seem. Personal, poignant, and beautifully blunt, performance for Abramovic is not performat-*ive* per se (in the Gen Z sense of the word) but self-exploratory and individualistic. The journeys her art takes her on are starkly turbulent, but the conclusions she draws about the human spirit are candid and universal. The message of an artist who has shaped and shocked the world for decades is more relevant now than ever, in a world where creativity is seemingly both omnipresent and nowhere to be found at all.

Much like her militaristic and overbearing mother, Abramovich learned from a young age to face her own human spirit straight in the eye. When her oppressive Yugoslavian parents began suffocating her spirit, she took matters into her own hands. Late one night in 1975, Abramovic constructed a five-point star on the ground at the Belgrade Student Cultural Centre, set it alight and laid herself at its centre. As the flames leeched oxygen from her body, it took onlookers to rescue her from a certain death in her pentangular coffin. *Rhythm Five*, as it was known, marked the moment she quite literally reclaimed agency over her spirit, free to suffocate it as she desired.

From this she embarked on a lifelong series of tests: how far could the body's limits go? What happens to pain when the connection between mind and body has been severed? Over the fifty years since, she has choreographed dozens of showcases, many of them self-performed, and most of them testing psychological and physical endurance to induce a level of eyes-wide-shut that makes watching an Ari Aster film for the first time feel like Dora the Explorer. In Naples in 1974, she placed herself before an audience armed with an array of tools – lipstick, a scalpel, a gun – and instructed them to treat her as they wished. Enduring six hours of 'performance', she left the room stripped, cut and verbally abused. Abramovic articulated her findings thirty-five years later – "if you leave decisions to the public, you can be killed."



Figure 1. Rhythm 0

While it may seem antithetical, Abramovic does not actually advocate for violence to consider the state of the human spirit. In fact, her philosophy, which she has codified The Abramovic Method, resides on a holy trinity of spirituality, balance, and connection to explore the self. What she most pressingly advocates for, however, is the return to a seemingly extinct human state: the state of boredom.

In an era where we thrive off instant, digitally induced dopamine drags, why would you want to be bored? Our meta-morphosis into a society whose online footprints far outlive our real ones renders boredom more and more a myth of the non-digital stone-age. iOS updates, search engines, newer, shinier LLMs (Claude takes the biscuit) all proclaim themselves as the bastion of efficiency and innovation. Such words only justify and rationalise our shrinking attention spans, which have fallen by nearly seventy percent in the past twelve years. From the TikTok boom spawned Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts to satisfy our increasingly gluttonous brains. Social media, though it can be an up-and-coming artist's saving grace,

can also be the agent of art's destruction. Boredom to Abramovic is not just important but crucial in the process of creation – 'you have to go beyond or behind' it to reach imaginative nirvana. With TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube streams as endless as they are, when do we have time to be bored? When, crucially, do we have time to create art?

An individual subsumed by digital media has no opportunity to indulge the wanderings of the creative mind and discover that they too can compose art. Abramovic's mantra is that new ideas come from life, not from the studio. It takes 'life', that is, staring out of the window on a train, headphone-less commutes, silent meals, to push us into the realm of self-exploration and ponderance which can culture real creativity. It might not even take opening and closing a door for three hours,



Figure 2. Rhythm Five

complaining to a tree or navigating nature blindfolded (all doctrines of The Abramovic Method). We can all create. We just need to make time for boredom – somewhere in between sneezing, scrolling, and orgasming.



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Somatic Enthousiasmos: Thoughts on Korybantic Dancing and its Reception | Sophia Ross

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It has been our greatest pleasure to write, edit, and produce a record number of four journals as one committee. This year, our senior committee is the most diverse it has ever been, to the benefit of Retrospect's community and accessibility. Edinburgh's HCA department has become a home to not only our studies but also to each and every one of us as individuals.

We are all incredibly proud to pass over the privilege of overseeing Retrospect to the 2026/2027 committee. Please welcome Poppy Williams and Kate Taylor, Co-Editors-in-Chief; Robbie Palmer, Secretary/Deputy Editor; Laetitia Sanai, Treasurer/Deputy Editor; and Darcie Rogers, Social Media and Graphics Manager. We cannot wait to see the direction you take our journal.

Farewell Retrospect. It has been an absolute pleasure.

Harry, Imaan, Jake, Lauren, and Dalma
The 2025/2026 Retrospect Committee





×

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Your Pastime, My Pleasure

Have you flipped to the back of this journal, hoping for a 'pleasure' that others may have missed?

Well, I thought it would be rude to let you close this page without hearing from its illustrator. A short history: Retrospect used to advertise for numerous illustrators every print journal cycle until this year, when they decided to let the writing take center stage; that was until I came along. I couldn't let all of our writers' bright ideas be left without artistic companions, nor could I leave each cheeky chapter title alone. So, here are the results of all my pastimes. They reflect not just my thoughts on the different themes covered by the journal and how I imagined them, but they also reflect the work of many days chasing the sunlight in my bedroom to view the colours in light, as well as many afternoons with Dalma and Harry in the HCA common room.

While I have been a writer for Retrospect for most of my career at this university, my time working on the print journals has been relatively brief. Nonetheless, I have managed to leave my mark on almost all of these pages. This emphasises the opportunities Retrospect offers and the role anyone can play in its ongoing work. I hope my ability to spearhead the illustrations shows how this journal was truly made for anyone and everyone. However, don't go saying goodbye to me too quickly, as you will surely see my paper in the upcoming final print of this academic year, *Copycats? & Breakaways?*, and even some more drawings. But for now, I let my pastels leave their mark around the HCA building, into all of your shelves, and beyond.

It is my great honour to close this fantastic print edition and say goodbye to its readers.

With all best wishes,

Arianna North Castell
Illustrator






Gave me his whole
heart then I gave him
head and then - SC