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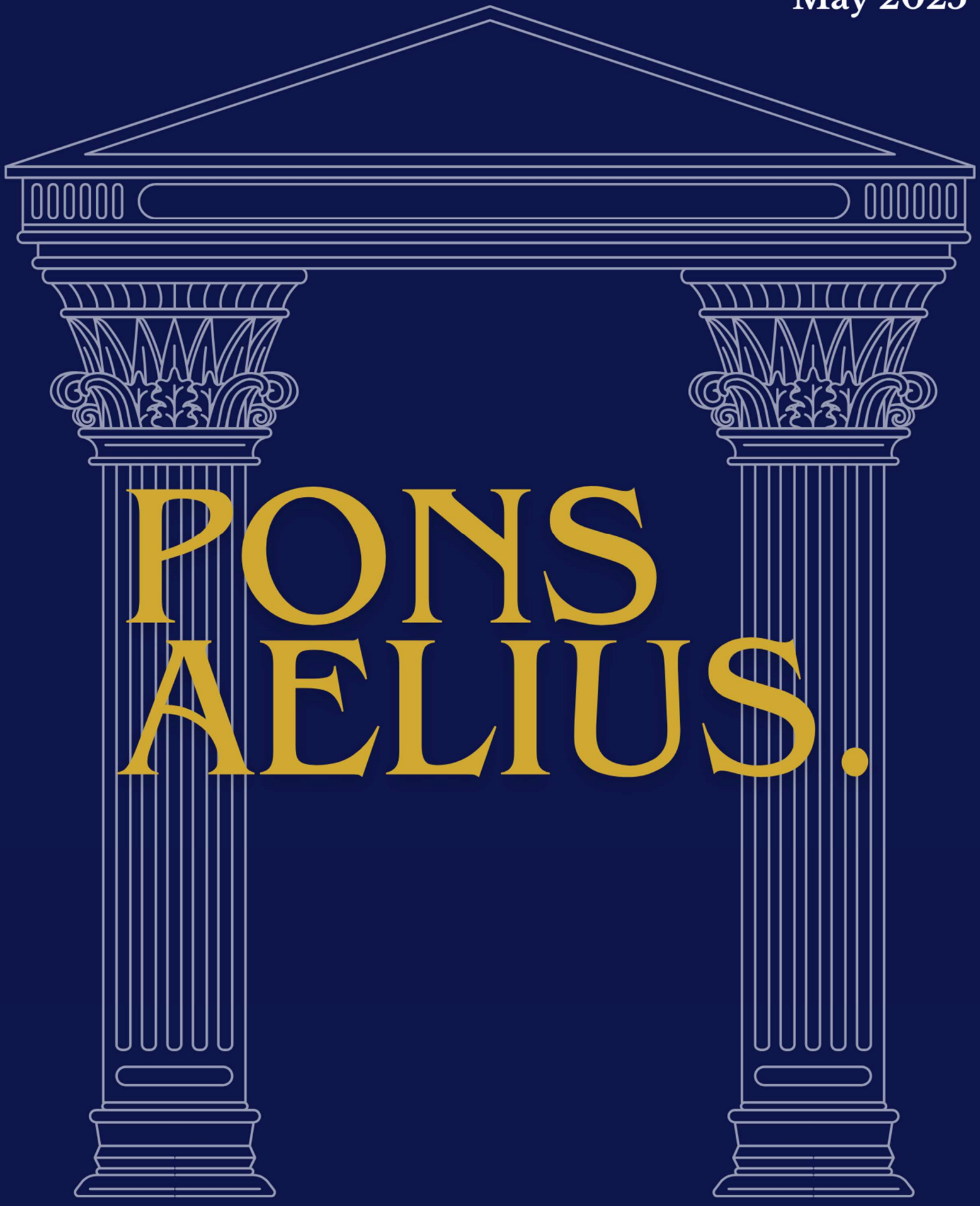

PONS AELIUS.

School of History, Classics and Archaeology
Postgraduate Forum, Newcastle University

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Introduction

"All is not lost – the unconquerable will, and study of revenge, immortal hate, and courage never to submit or yield".[1]

It does not take a reading of John Milton's epic poem to realise that we are drawn to resplendent colours of rebellion, mischief, and disobedience. Where human society has existed, there have always been oppressed people in altercation with the ruling power. Moral entrepreneurs, attempting to preserve the power hierarchies, diminishes the value of rebels. Imprisonment, censorship, realignment training, may have retreated in the Western Hemisphere; what remains, however, are tools of that oppression. "Woke". "Leftism". "Snowflake". All these nouns are accusations levelled at those who seek to undermine the current status quo. Opposition to rebels often label activists as nonsensical quangos, but those who know them understand their deep-seated rancour; they are communities who are hurting, workers who fear job losses, artists trying to critique the powers that be.

Much like Satan in *Paradise Lost,* rebellious actions drive our publication. Such a journal is quite timely, with mischief, rebellion, and disobedience standing on the precipice of its own global renaissance. In Britain, there is abjuration from disabled communities in relation to Rachel Reeves budget; Reeves herself is a rebellious figure, the first woman to deliver a budget in the United Kingdom. Donald Trump is attempting to mollify rebellion within his own party about the nature, and extent, of trade wars - that's before addressing the outcry from the public for a myriad of social changes. On the continent of Europe, the populist right is backsliding; the people having genuine concerns

[1] John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Digireads Publishing, 2005), 4

towards the demagoguery of extremists. *Pons Aelius* is perhaps a panacea, offering forthright discussions on the history of rebellion, mischief, and disobedience.

We hope that our readers enjoy the volume of work in this edition. Our historical timeline spans from ancient history to the most recent film banned in the United Kingdom. We explore contemporary law, deindustrialisation on television, and disability rights. Our creative writing pieces offers a unique take on the themes that we discussed at our last conference: "rebellion, mischief, and disobedience" (June 2024); ensuring that our publication celebrates work from across the humanities.

We begin our journal with the creative writing of Steve Kendall. Kendall spoke at our conference last year and I find myself sat in a verklempt state as I recount his storytelling abilities. His prose is no different. When editing Kendall's work, I found myself underlining words, phrases, and entire paragraphs, all having an unmistakable ability to move me. I could continue in this laudatory manner, but it is probably best for the reader to discover for themselves what I mean. Kendall combines a historical artifact – the Franks Casket – with his own unique voice. He details his personal discovery of the material, how he translates each segment, and how it inspired his own poetry (which has thankfully been published in this edition). We begin this copy of *Pons Aelius* with Kendall's work as it is an inspiring piece of creative writing.

The work of Zenia Duell caused similar cavorting around the *Pons Aelius* office. Duell examines the use of Classics within a North-East prison, representing how the prisoners might benefit from an education in the subject. It is a duty of all within a society to keep our eyes upon those who are most vulnerable. Duell's work is a particular method of conforming to this unwritten social contract, showcasing how learning Classics and Philosophy may increase communication skills within an environment where conflict is

rife. Duell reminds us that the creative industry is a necessary concomitant of a peaceful society.

Nina Büchner's work is a delight for all our readers. The nexus of Büchner's work is undoubtedly the discipline of Classics, yet the writing is where it truly shines. Historians, archaeologists, poets, artists, and filmmakers should read this text for cognisance on the craft of inscribing. Büchner is a brilliant docent, leading readers through the creation story within The Bible and Pandora's Box. The reasoning for comparing the two pieces is to ascertain where some of our gender norms originate.

Within the field of history there has been a range of research relating to witches and witchcraft. Sophie Norman, by utilising a literary analysis, offers new and insightful ways of considering witches. Fictional voices are used to give agency to women who may not be present within the archives.

Tom Gibson's work on the 1996 film *Brassed Off,* is an inimitable interpretation of deindustrialisation. Gibson analyses the film in detail and exhibits how each of the components highlights an aspect of Contemporary British History. Gibson provides a poignant reminder of the importance of culture, and its implications on how we study society. With the recent success of the stage play, it is important that we continue to re-evaluate how we use cultural interpretations to discuss British history.

Ally Keane's work puts voice, performance, and experience under the proverbial microscope, changing the way oral historians view these methodological components. I am pleased to have Keane back for a subsequent edition, with a worthy companion for her first publication with *Pons Aelius.*[2]

[2] Ally Keane, "Experiences of High-Technology Voices by Augmentative and Alternative Communication Users, c. 1980 to 2020", *Pons Aelius* 16 (2024): 47-59.

Pons Aelius welcomes the work of law student Bernardo Carvalho De Mello to our publication. Readers who might be put off by jargon need not fear, as De Mello has provided an accessible example of a complex issue. His work fits into our publication as a piece of history. A multifaceted chronicle has been laid bare allowing historians in Latin American studies to learn something new.

Finally, it is a great pleasure to introduce the work of film student Barnaby Falck. As a film fanatic it was a surprise to see *The Bunny Games* being discussed in an academic context. Falck, like all great filmmakers, is *avant-garde* in their analysis, critiquing the rebellious filmmaking style of Adam Rehmeier. Falck is interdisciplinary in their approach, being both a celluloid historian and a commentator on the art of filmmaking.

Ryan Jay Fallon (Senior Editor).

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Talking to a Whalebone Box about Poetry: The Franks Casket and the Creative Process.

Steve Kendall

This is a story about writing a poem and finding a box. It recounts how the poem was received, and how the encounter with the box led me into a dialogue which changed the way I think and work.

The poem in question was arguably ill-advised. It was mischievous, greedy, and insubordinate; poems are meant to behave themselves. This is of course a generalisation. but it is the expectation from which we tend to start. Workshop culture, through which so many draft poems pass, reinforces this. Poems should be small, concise, pithy, controlled and focused – so that all elements reinforce all others and make a coherent whole, often with a discoverable, if not immediately evident, narrative. They are miniature fictions.

That is the expectation of the poetic parental authority. Yet poems are often on the verge of becoming unruly, of bursting forth in a riot of allusions and associations. There is a struggle going on between the measured and the mischievous. We dream of wildness but insist on neatness.

It all started when I went for a walk, led by the poet Cahal Dallat, along the Thames at Chiswick Mall. This entailed, in the space of a few hundred metres, a welter of connected and contrasting encounters. I was shown the house where William Morris, fabric designer, writer, and socialist had lived. I initially took it for the 'house by the Thames to which the people of the story went' in Morris' *News from Nowhere*, an engraving of which forms the frontispiece to the novel.[3] I later realised that the house in

[3] William Morris, *News from Nowhere: Or, An Epoch of Rest, Being Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance*. (London: Reeves & Turner, 1891).

the engraving is Kelmscott Manor whereas the Chiswick dwelling is Kelmscott House. Morris renamed the latter, formerly called The Retreat, thereby forging an imaginative association, a doorway in a memory palace, between these two Thames-side houses.

I learnt that, nearly a century later, the house was occupied by the actress Faye Dunaway, who played the Great Depression bank robber, Bonnie Parker, in the 1967 film, *Bonnie and Clyde*.[4] Near there, the poet W.B. Yeats, family friend of the Morris', composed *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* while gazing at a little island, an eyot (pronounced 'ait') in the river, using it as a placeholder for his remembered Sligo.[5] Further down the river we came to the spot where T.J. Cobden-Sanderson, following a dispute with his business partner, destroyed the beautiful Doves Roman typeface (named after The Dove pub in Hammersmith) rather than let it fall into his partner's hands. Cobden-Sanderson threw the punches and the matrices for the typeface off Hammersmith Bridge into the Thames. Remarkably, this act of destruction did not succeed, since, a century later, enough pieces were recovered from the river to allow the font to be digitally reconstructed from the original metal type.

I went home and I wrote a rather ambitious poem about these things and about how, on the day I joined that walking tour, the river had flooded, and the police had closed several of the riverside roads. It was a poem which explored my interest in how place can connect events, people, and objects, back and forth through time. This interest seemed to validate my decision to throw in a section in which I speculated that the white horses carved into the hillside chalk of the English landscape formed a network of interconnected portals, which, together with all the eponymous public houses, could be used to travel

[4] Arthur Penn, *Bonnie and Clyde*. (Warner Bros. - Seven Arts, Inc. 1967). 1hr., 51 min.

[5] W.B. Yeats, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree'. *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems*. (London: Kagan, Paul, Trench and Co, 1899).

instantaneously from Uffington to Westbury, or from my town to yours. The poem also included a very short speculative section in which Faye Dunaway, reflecting ironically on her stay in the Morris house, expressed her foul-mouthed dislike of the wallpaper. It was a lot to ask of a single poem, but, since I had encountered all these elements in one place on one day, I wanted to keep them together. The White Horse portals provided the means of interconnection, I hoped, between the various elements. When I workshopped the poem, one participant was beside himself, incensed by its untidy eclecticism. "No organising principle!", he boomed. This outburst, which no amount of explanation and contextualisation could pacify, left me foursquare in the centre of the mischief-measure conundrum.

Then, I had an encounter with a whalebone box, emblazoned with a set of wildly heterogeneous images, which seemed to contain the answer. Mischief! The box was an inherently mischievous endeavour, involving a more disparate compendium of themes and images than I could ever have managed, and displaying that mischievous Germanic hero, Wayland the Smith -that 'dangerous mage' as the artist Anselm Kiefer has described him- on its front panel.[6]

However, while my initial 'reading' of the box seemed wholeheartedly to validate my impulse towards boundary-breaking and mischief, it eventually suggested a more tempered view, bringing me back to earth, to the value of discipline and structure. It partly did this by means of a little-known form, which it seemed to embody, and which I could only see once I had begun to retreat from my initial 'anything goes' presumptions.

The box took a characteristic and understandably circuitous route to reach me, coming, as it did, from the millennium before last. Early on in my PhD, and a few weeks

[6] Wim Wenders, *Anselm: Das Rauschen Der Zeit*.

after the workshop incident, I signed up to a student offer on the film streaming service, MUBI. I selected a film called *The Whalebone Box*, a pyschogeographic fantasia in which the protagonists go on a pilgrimage to carry a whalebone box back to its place of origin on a Scottish island.[7] Curious to discover whether that box really existed, a point on which the film is playfully obscure, I googled 'whalebone box' and couldn't *quite* find that box. I discovered, instead, the Franks Casket – an actually-existing and venerable object, made from whalebone, decorated with a set of carved scenes, exhibiting no initially perceptible organising principle, which seemed to have the capacity to transport itself from here, to there, and back again.

This was the first in a series of encounters. There is a photograph of its front panel on the staircase of the Percy Building at Newcastle University, home to the school in which my research is based. There is a replica of the whole thing a few hundred metres further away, in the Great North Museum. The original is in the British Museum in London, apart from the right panel, which is a replica, the original of that panel being housed in the Bargello Museum in Florence.

The Franks Casket is a small thing, about the size of a six-pack of beer (23cm x 19 cm x 13cm) – a whalebone box, carved, probably at Monkwearmouth-Jarrow monastery, in AD c. 700. It then disappeared for more than a thousand years.

The most exhaustive and authoritative account of the Casket's adventures is given by Leslie Webster, formerly Keeper, Prehistory and Europe at the British Museum. According to Webster, it was found in the mid-19th century in Auzon, in the Auvergne region of France, being used as a sewing box.[8] The casket is also known as the Auzon Casket and French tourism publicity suggests that it 'is believed to have once been in the

[7] Andrew Kotting, *The Whalebone Box*. 2020. 89 min.

[8] Leslie Webster, 2012. *The Franks Casket*. London: British Museum.

possession of St Laurent Collegiate Church in Auzon'.[9] It was purchased from a middle-class family in Auzon by a Professor Matthieu from Clermont-Ferrand, and subsequently obtained by an antiquarian from Paris, from whom it was acquired in 1857 by Augustus Wollaston Franks, then a junior curator at the British Museum, whose surname it has taken. It may have been kept before that in the Basilica of St Julien at Brioude nearby and it may have held relics of that saint, perhaps a tooth.

It is small, but it contains multitudes, and in the expansive heterogeneity of its iconography it seems strikingly modern. Indeed, it somehow resembles a modern poem, or at least it resembles the kind of expansive, allusive, overcrowded modern poem to which, it seems, I am especially attracted. There are six scenes–the front panel has two–and there is, as we shall see, a seventh element. These scenes are wildly divergent and if there is an underlying order or system it is not immediately evident.

The Casket is empty, at least in the sense that, presently, there are not any objects inside it. No doubt there once were and the purpose of the box, in part at least, was to contain them, but we have no idea what was in the box, beyond the knowledge that it was in use as a sewing box when it was found, in Auzon, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The lid (fig.1) is broken, as a result of the removal of the hinges, and its dimensions are now out of true with the rest of the box. The damage to the box, for the contemporary viewer, is part of the box. The frame that was added later to hold the box together is likewise part of what we see and integral to the structure. The box is no longer the thing that was made, which was likely to have been brightly painted. So, it has new

[9] Travel France Online. 2024. 'St Laurent Collegiate Church in Auzon'. 28 March 2024. https://www.travelfranceonline.com/st-laurent-collegiate-church-in-auzon/.

things to say, about itself, and there is, no doubt, more it might have said which was lost along the way.

The lid shows the archer Aegil, brother of Wayland the Smith, defending a sanctuary or fortification. The name Aegil is picked out in runes to the right of the panel, inside the space of the defended fortress. Warriors with shields and spears advance, over the bodies of their dead. The circular device at its centre is not part of the image but belonged to the assembly for the now absent clasp or closure.

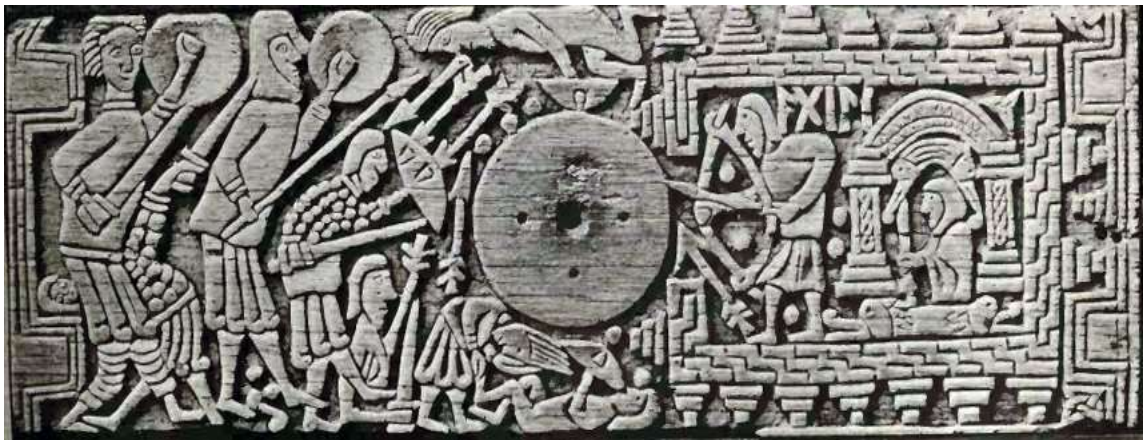

Figure 1. Wilhelm Viëtor, *The Franks Casket*, 1901, British Museum, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franks_Casket_-_Lid.jpg.

The left panel (fig. 2) shows the legend of Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, who were raised by wolves. There is a split along the upper part of the box, cutting across the start of the runic inscription. The text runs around the rim of the box, across its splits and tears, starting and ending in its top left corner. To accomplish this, it has been allowed to run upside down, in relation to the scene, along the bottom edge.

It is a beautifully carved scene which visually establishes a theme of 'twinning' through the placement of two figures with spears at the left and at the right, and of a wolf

above and a wolf below. This symmetry seems to reflect the relationship between the twin brothers. I tend to worry about the fate of the wolves, whose nurturing involvement seems likely to have been misunderstood by the advancing soldiers.

Figure 2. Claire H, *The Franks Casket*, n.d., *Flickr*, n.d., https://www.flickr.com/photos/unforth/2686727711/

The panel on the right, (fig. 3) holds a Germanic scene, showing figures who have not been identified. This panel is in the Bargello Museum, in Florence, and is the only original panel to be separated from the otherwise complete original instance of the Casket, in the British Museum. My friend and colleague, the poet Mary-Jane Holmes, took the photograph in the course of a visit to Florence. This is perhaps the least explicable but most divergently explained panel, which has potential connections with Hengist and

Horsa, (founders of England), the Welsh legend of Rhiannon, the Germanic tales of Sigurd, or Siegfried, King Nebuchadnezzar, the Norse God Balder, even Satan.

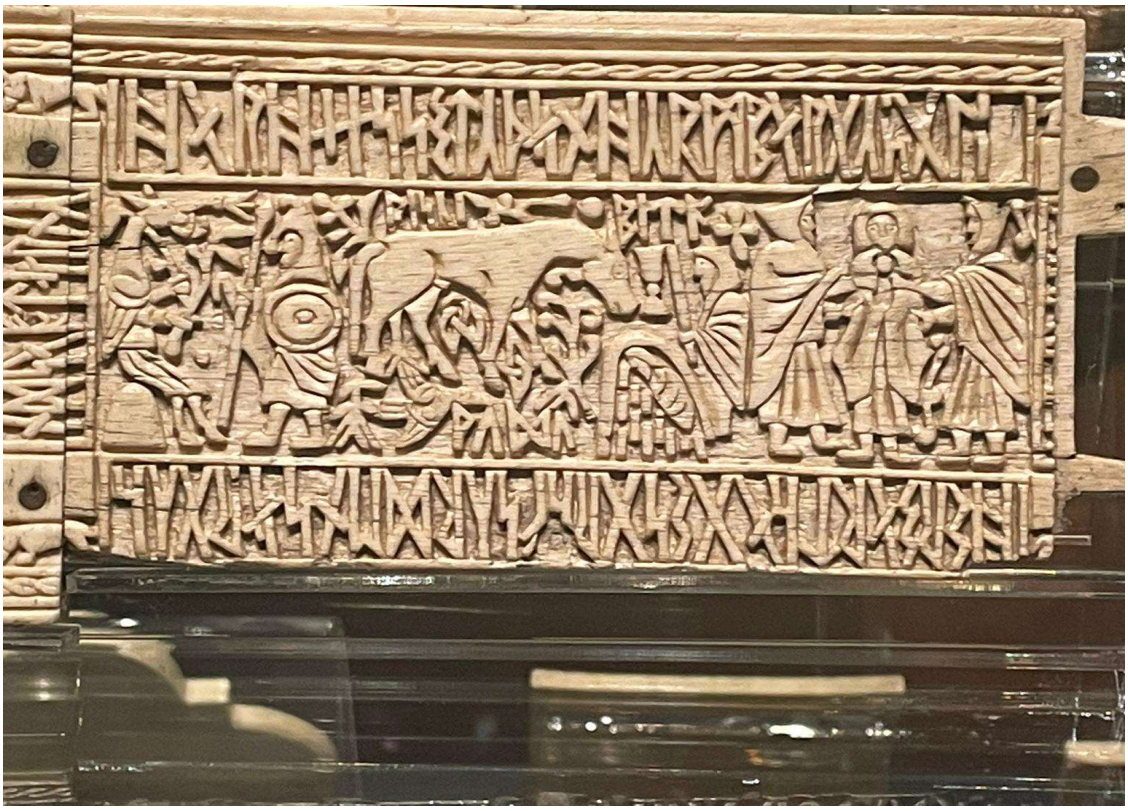

Figure 3. Author unknown, *Runic Text on the Franks Casket,* n.d., https://www.babelstone.co.uk/Fonts/FranksCasket.html

The rear panel (fig. 4) depicts the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the sacking of that city, by Emperor Titus in AD 70.

Figure 4. John W. Schulze, *The Franks Casket Rear,* October 2006, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franks_Casket_rear.jpg

Figure 5. John W. Schulze, *Franks Casket Front,* October 2006 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Franks_Casket_front.jpg

There is a dark absence on the front panel (fig. 5), from which the lock has been torn, presumably at the same time as, allegedly, a son of the Auzon family in whose possession it was found, used the silver hinges to buy a signet ring.

The panel itself juxtaposes the arrival of the Magi at the cradle of the infant Jesus with a scene from a tale of Wayland in which he murders the sons of King Nithad, makes jewelled cups from their skulls, and drugs and rapes their sister, before flying away on wings made from the feathers of strangled birds.

The presence of Wayland, at least for the contemporary viewer, gives a sense of disruption and dislocation, especially when placed next to the image of the infant Jesus, entangled as that is for this writer with recollections of singing the carol 'Away in a Manger' at infant school, with its sleeping baby, doting mother, lowing cattle, and adoring Kings under the benign gaze of the stars. Clearly my own appetite for 'untidy eclecticism', for the struggle between the measured and the mischievous, has significant and long-standing precedents.

Around the rim of the front panel there is a riddle**,** the answer to which is the box itself, or at least the material from which it is made. The Anglo-Saxon text reads:

fisc flodu ahof on fergenberig
warþ ga:sric grorn þær he on greot giswom
hronæsban

which translates as something like:
The flood cast up the fish –
mountain-high the beach.
The king of terror swims
on shingle, saddening.

Whale's-bone.

Ongoing study of, and increasing familiarity with, the Casket has eroded my initial sense of its incoherence. It is certainly elusive. There is no reliable account of its history until it is found in Central France in the mid-nineteenth century, and its purpose and meaning remain uncertain. The juxtaposition of images is extra-ordinary and unexpected, mischievous even.

Yet, it is unlikely that the maker of the Franks Casket was driven chiefly by a desire for the merely shocking or whimsical. Similarly, my gathering together, in my poem, of a compendium of associations and allusions, was not intended to be merely capricious, nor simply to shock the reader by its avoidance of a straightforward narrative.

My purpose was to celebrate the interconnection of a range of apparently disparate or discordant references.

The Casket was clearly made to show and to speak, and a close 'reading' of its images, texts, and form can guide our own reflection on the nature of the creative process — our efforts to understand the processes of its creation, can shed light on our contemporary creative endeavours. Indeed, one of the strangest qualities of the Franks Casket, is how strikingly modern it seems, how like, in fact, a modern poem.

It began to dawn on me that my sense of recognition of the Franks Casket, my embrace of its divergent themes, my sense of some kind of resemblance between its expression and my (massively inferior) poem involved the inescapable conclusion that there was some underlying connection between these two very different and temporally distant artefacts. If, as it seemed, I was attracted to the box partly because of its resonance with my poem, then it followed that neither was as unstructured and heterogeneous as I had at first supposed, at least to the extent that it was possible to establish some correspondence between the two works.

What might the features of such a connection be, when the two artefacts initially seemed to share no other characteristic than their apparent refusal of narrative? To attempt an answer, the Casket engages us playfully, seeming both profoundly serious and utterly mischievous. Never more so perhaps than in its juxtapositions, but also in the use of motifs, such as birds and arches, that run from panel to panel, in the way that text in different languages, and alphabets borders the box, so that words run backwards or are turned upside down, and in the use of myths and symbols from different traditions.

There are traces of such things in my poem, and, if in mine, then it is possible that such correspondences are widespread. Bearing in mind that I wrote the poem before I found the box, my use of the mirrored letters of the Doves Press typeface (see poem

below) offers an interesting point of connection, as does my subsequent realisation that the White Horse of Uffington and Wayland's Smithy are neighbours.

My sense of this isomorphism between the Franks Casket and other works in other media at other times, was strengthened by an article by Katherine Cross, in which she sets out the case for its underlying structure and coherence and offers an account of that structure.[10] There are many other interpretations, and I am poorly placed to judge between them by reason of my being neither an archaeologist nor a historian. Cross' interpretation is attractive to me because of its clarity and simplicity and because it seems to proceed from a 'close reading' of the box itself and to avoid the superimposition of pre-existing theoretical positions. It tells us plainly what we see. It also has the great merit of having pointed me towards a further correspondence between the Casket and contemporary poetry.

Cross' assertion, put briefly and perhaps too simply, is that the Casket is organised into three contrasting pairs of scenes, each of which shares a theme, so that the lid and the rear panel depict sieges, the right and left panels deal with peril in the wildwood and two front panels deal with, I suggest, the flight from captivity.

Each such pair contains a Germanic scene and a scene of Mediterranean origin, establishing a dialogue between these different traditions, and bringing together the Christian and the Pagan.

The further correspondence between contemporary poetry and the Casket derives from the presence of the seventh element, which is the riddle. Here the similarity between the Casket and contemporary poetry resurfaces, in a surprising manner. The recognition of the seventh key feature suggests that the Franks Casket is isomorphic with the

[10] Katherine Cross, 'The Mediterranean Scenes on the Franks Casket: Narrative and Exegesis'. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 78:1 (2015)

Sevenling, a 20th century poetic form, invented by the late poet and teacher, Roddy Lumsden. The distances (spatial, cultural, temporal) between them are so great that any such claimed association must be tenuous, if not impossible. Certainly, there is no suggestion, of which I am aware, that the Franks Casket influenced the structure of the Sevenling, and it could not have happened the other way round. Yet, the rules for the construction of the Sevenling make such a resemblance difficult to overlook. The rules (which I have taken from a handout I was given at the Poetry School, London) state that:

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- The first three lines contain three connected or contrasting elements, be they objects, names, situations, details, possibilities etc.
- The next three lines similarly contain three elements in the same way, connected directly or indirectly or not at all to the preceding group.
- The final single line should act as a narrative summary, punchline, or unusual juxtaposition. ('9. Experiments II: Specular Poems, Sevenlings and Beyond ...', n.d.)

Thus, the Franks Casket, if we read 'panels' for 'lines', has such a strong resemblance to a Sevenling, in its structure and in the relationships between its constituent parts, that it can be seen to have the structure of a contemporary poem. I am not arguing that the Casket *is* a poem, nor that the Sevenling's rules somehow act as the blueprint for a whalebone box, but that there is between these two objects, what the philosopher Michel Serres would have regarded as a 'structural, procedural affinity'.[11]

[11] Christopher Watkin, 2020. *Michel Serres: Figures of Thought*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Such affinities offer the contemporary poet structural and procedural opportunities, occasions for dialogue with objects otherwise beyond their reach. For example, it is not known what the Franks Casket contained. It is perhaps the last mystery. I use the Sevenling form to offer an answer to that question.

Sevenling (Whalebone Box)

I keep things. Cities they built,
fled from, lost. Wolves, birds, children.
Adoration, flight, exile.

They sold my silver hinges
for a silver ring. That girl
was sent away sorrowful.

I am making my way home.

As the Sun Sets Over Turnham Green

'The worst thing was that fucking wallpaper.'
Faye Dunaway, review of Kelmscott House, TripAdvisor.

I

The jets have had their wheels down for a while,
clipping the rooftops, lopping the heads
off the late windsurfers, pulling on

down to Brentford. St Michael gathers

his Angels by the Starbucks on the corner.

They ride the hidden hallways, all night,

from Hammersmith to Harrow. *Listen* —

II

Good Friday's a good day for a sacrifice

so, he lobbed the keys, matrices, and punches,

the whole kit-and-caboodle, from the bridge

above the river-wall beside The Dove.

It didn't work. The future came anyway,

worked out where they went into the water,

dredged for them, dragged them ashore,

reassembled their rusted mirror-letters.

a I L x y a I c Y a

The crook of the Y was filled with flame

or counter-flame, as if it still knew,

a century later, its arc as it left his hand,

could show you exactly where he stood,

how he half-turned, stumbled as he threw.

III

A straight line to the Lough shore

passes no sacred, ancient place.

No tower, cromlech, fairy ring.

Yet he still made Innisfree

out of the Eyot, its long teardrop,

the malt smell of the brewery.

The last time I saw him,

breathing the froth off his beer,

in the Black Lion, one June evening,

two glasses on a damp table –

he told me he read it to his sisters,

and their dark-eyed friend.

Lolly was painting,

Lily was sewing.

Helen wasn't listening.

He should have seen then, he said,

how it would go, the trouble he was in.

IV

Listen — the river's lapping

at the front steps. *Hush.*

There’s a secret door

in the White Horse. Open it.

It goes to Cherhill, Tan Hill,

Milk Hill, Hackpen, Broad Town,

Pewsey, Uffington, Osmington,

Litlington, Westbury, and Woolbury,

Your father had a pint in Enfield,

no doubt another pint in Kilburn.

Don’t cry.

He knows the way by heart,

even while you’re sleeping,

even when the police close the roads,

even while the river rises.

Hush.

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Classics in Prison

Zenia Duell

Imprisonment is society's most explicit mechanism for managing disobedience. A place of confinement, control, and consequence. Where liberty is denied to those who have abused it. It is where society draws its hardest lines – a system designed for punishment, protection, and, in theory, rehabilitation.

In such an environment, could there be a role for a classical education? This was a question that Sarah Hartley, National Lead for Creative Strategies at the prison education organisation Novus, wanted to explore. She enlisted the help of Edith Hall, an eminent classicist who has dedicated her career to democratising classical knowledge. Edith is no stranger to challenging institutional boundaries. As co-founder of Advocating Classics Education (ACE) and author of a seminal work exploring the intersection of classics and social class, she was the ideal collaborator for a project that promised to interrogate the intersection of an educational programme associated with the establishment, and those who have transgressed established legal boundaries. Edith and her ACE co-founder, Arlene Holmes-Henderson, designed a course specifically for prison learners, and delivered it, together with some of their colleagues from Durham University, over eight weeks at a high-security male prison in the Northeast of England.

This is the story of what happened in that prison.

Edith and Arlene had invited me to the feedback session of the prison education programme. I produce a podcast called *Against the Lore,* which aims to make Classics accessible to people who didn't have the opportunity to study it at school. Together with my three co-hosts, I had been making the podcast for four years, amassing a content library of over 80 episodes – one of which had featured an interview with Edith about her

lifelong work pushing the boundaries of assumptions around Classics and class. I arrived with my podcast team at the prison, our recording equipment carefully prepared and vetted, ready to interview several of the prison learners about their experience of the course.

The Durham team had prepared a diverse curriculum, including sessions on the material culture of Hadrian's wall, Aristotelian ethics, Greek art and architecture, philosophy and rhetoric. The prison learners had also performed a play-in-a-day: after spending two weeks studying a version of *Philoctetes,* adapted by Edith, they performed a rehearsed reading to a group of their peers and prison staff.

When we first designed our interview questions, we had assumed the participants would gravitate towards the most tangible historical content – Hadrian's Wall. This was a piece of Roman history that was local to them, that had played a formative role in the development of the region they lived in, and that had its own story of boundary-setting and surveillance with which the prisoners might be able to relate. Some participants did indeed connect with the Roman history they learned: several highlighted their interest in ancient judicial systems, an obvious parallel to their lived experience. But to our surprise, it was the abstract realm of philosophy and ethics that truly captured their imagination.

Sally, one of the prison staff, had an astute observation about why philosophy resonated so deeply with the participants. "A lot of the learners that we have are big believers in self-help," she explained, "and I guess philosophy fits in nicely there." Her insights went deeper: "When you're in prison, the one thing you don't want to lose is your head." One learner highlighted the impact of the philosophy sessions on his mental health, sharing that he had drawn lessons from the ancient world and applied them to his own experiences in prison.

Edith had commissioned Professor Phillip Horky, a specialist in Greek philosophy, to deliver a session on ethics. Instead of lecturing, he launched the session with a provocative, existential challenge: "Is there any point trying to be good? Is there any point trying to be a good person? Will it make you happier?" The response was unlike anything Phillip – or Edith – had anticipated. To a man, the participants responded with a raw, unfiltered honesty. "No one's ever asked me that before," they said.

As she recounted this response to the ethics session, Edith was visibly moved. "You could see that they were really, really thinking hard about this," she recalled. The context was uniquely powerful. Most of these men were in prison either because they had committed terrible actions or because they had been unjustly accused: a moral complexity that demanded deep, uncomfortable self-examination.

Afterwards, they shared that they had spent hours in their cells, reviewing their lives, thinking about the choices that had led them to that place of incarceration and wrestling with that fundamental question: was there any point in trying to be a good person?

One of the most unexpected outcomes of the programme was the remarkable transformation in communication skills. The learners received formal training in listening and speaking through session led by Arlene, a specialist in rhetoric and oracy. Sally described a nuanced shift in their interactions. "There's a layer of respect," she explained, "where they're listening and challenging at the same time. But it stays there. It doesn't escalate into anything more, which I think is quite a big skill to have in this kind of disagreement without conflict."

Initially, the participants themselves were unsure this method would work. One learner candidly admitted his doubts: "I was quite sceptical about it. I just thought, I don't

think this will work. People disagreeing with each other in a place like this. But it does. It does."

The impact was more than just theoretical. This was a fundamental rewiring of group dynamics in an environment where any kind of conflict could easily turn violent. As the same participant elaborated, "We were able to have really good, structured debates with each other without it getting out of hand in a place where a simple remark or a simple comment in here can erupt into something quite negative." The camaraderie extended beyond the classroom – participants described encountering each other in the gym, asking if they were looking forward to the next session. “Yeah, can’t wait”.

Among all the participants, one individual's story particularly resonated with us. During a group feedback session, his quiet nature meant he didn't command much airtime in the boisterous group discussion. Yet, one comment he made lingered in our minds. He said that performing in the Greek play had made him feel like he'd had “a light shone” on him.

Intrigued, we requested a one-on-one interview. In the more intimate setting, he opened up about his experience. "Empowering," he called it, "like you have a voice. Being in prison takes it away." His simple turn of phrase drove right to the heart of this core tenet of imprisonment: the deprivation of liberties, and the opportunity to express himself that the creative and intellectual outlet of the play had offered him.

For Sarah Hartley, the pilot project had decisively proven the transformative potential of a classical education in prisons. The next step was clear: expansion. Novus plans to scale up the programme across its prison estates in 2025-2026, carefully incorporating insights from this initial experience. Each iteration of the programme across Novus’s three types of estates: youth, male and female, will bring with it unique challenges and nuances, demanding an adaptive approach to the educational model.

Of course, a classical education is by no means a glib solution to civil disobedience. The Greeks and Romans themselves were hardly paragons of moral virtue by contemporary standards. Their civilisations were built on slavery, conquest, and hierarchies we would now find deeply problematic.

Yet the value of this educational experiment lies not in historical glorification, but in something far more fundamental. Improved communication skills, the ability to self-regulate, the capacity to reason critically – these are essential life skills. And of all demographics, it is the incarcerated population who need these skills the most urgently.

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A full podcast episode featuring the above interviews and more is available here: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6OSGyxVVITxs5PyBVbpsZR?si=be3d94e3e3fd4637

Pandora and Eve: Women as the Origin of Evil in Creation Mythology

Nina Büchner

> 'For most of history, Anonymous was a woman.'
>
> – Virginia Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own'[12]

With this statement, Woolf aptly summarises the lack of voice and agency women have held throughout history. They have generally been ignored, and what attention they have received ranges from unflattering to outright misogynistic. It is, of course, impossible to determine a specific origin for this disparaging outlook on the female sex, and it would be futile to try. However, it is possible to pinpoint certain pivotal events that have shaped the way women are viewed by society. One such instance is the origin of evil in creation mythology, specifically linked to the creation of woman. The two most well-known examples of this principle in Western culture are, naturally, Pandora of Greek mythology and Eve of Judeo-Christian tradition. A closer look at these infamous women, with a focus on Pandora, will reveal how these myths not only reflect the beliefs of their time, but were used to reinforce those beliefs, creating a lasting cultural perception of women as the source of evil that influences societal attitudes towards gender and morality to this day. The term 'myth' is used broadly here for the purposes of this discussion, and the content is treated as purely fictional, though one may choose to define one or both these stories differently based on personal belief.

[12] Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. (London: Penguin, 2004.)

The myth of Pandora first appears in the works of Hesiod around 700 BC, initially in his *Theogony*, and then in more detail in *Works and Days*.[13] In this narrative, Pandora is the first woman in existence, created by the gods on the orders of Zeus. To understand the significance of this moment, we must first examine the actions that lead to Pandora's conception, for they determine the entire course of events that follows. Before Pandora, men lived in a golden age under the gods, free from strife and toil. However, this harmonious balance was eventually upset when the titan Prometheus, while dividing the portions received in a sacrifice between man and gods, tricked Zeus into selecting the worse share. Upon realising this deception, Zeus kept fire away from humans in retaliation. Not to be outdone, Prometheus then stole some of this fire back from the gods and returned it to mankind.[14] As punishment, Prometheus was chained to a mountain and sentenced to have his liver eaten by Zeus' eagles each day, only for it to grow back and be repeated the next day. Yet man, who was never more than a pawn in this divine feud, does not escape unscathed either.

Thus, Pandora is born. Or, more accurately, created. Enraged that mankind possesses something as important as fire, Zeus decides to restore balance by giving to them an evil that they will embrace with open arms even as it destroys them.[15] This evil is woman. Hesiod makes his disdain of women clear in several other instances of his work, and Pandora is the catalyst that seals the fate of her entire sex. Zeus gives specific orders to the gods regarding Pandora's conception. She is to be made as beautiful on the outside as she is deceitful on the inside, and she is given 'a dog's mind and a thievish character'.[16] Zeus then presents her to Prometheus' brother Epimetheus as a bride, who

[13] Phipps, 'Eve and Pandora Contrasted', 37
[14] Hesiod, 'Theogony', 541ff
[15] Alcoloumbre, 'Eve and Pandora: Myths in Dialogue', 59
[16] Hesiod, 'Works and Days', 68f

accepts this gift despite his brother's warnings. Pandora eventually goes on to open a storage jar, or *pithos*, that contains all manner of evil, releasing them into the world to plague mankind forever. Only hope remains trapped in the jar. Consequently, men are now cursed to work for their livelihood, and they are reliant on women to produce children that can care for them in old age.[17]

The story of Eve, whom one might consider the Judeo-Christian equivalent of Pandora, is widely known in Western culture, and is first told in the Book of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament, roughly a century before the appearance of the Pandora myth.[18]

In the Genesis Creation Narrative, God created the first man, Adam, in his own image and allowed him to live in the Garden of Eden, immortal and untroubled. Yet when Adam grew lonely, God created the first woman Eve from one of his ribs, to serve as Adam's companion. There was no malice in the creation of Eve. In fact, she is born of completely the opposite intention as Pandora, as a figure meant to help mankind: 'The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him".[19] Adam and Eve initially exist in harmony, with their only rule being to not eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge.

Yet eventually, the serpent in the garden persuades Eve to take a bite of one of the apples, and she in turn persuades Adam. Upon discovering this disobedience, God casts them out of the Garden of Eden and strips them of their immortality. While man is forced to toil for survival, Eve and all women descending from her are punished with the pain of childbirth and menstruation, as well as subservience to men.[20]

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[17] Brown, 'Aphrodite and the Pandora Complex', 28
[18] Phipps 37, Genesis 2.4-3.24 NIV
[19] Alcoloumbre 60, Genesis 2.18 NIV
[20] Alcoloumbre 61, Shemesh 111

Having examined both myths, it is hard not to draw parallels between the story of Pandora and that of Eve. Immediately, there are several common themes that stand out in both narratives; they both follow the general pattern that is the creation of woman, the temptation and corruption, and finally the downfall of humankind.[21] In both cases, man exists first in some form of paradise, and woman is created for a purpose expressly related to man. Of the motifs that these two myths share, curiosity and disobedience are at the forefront.

There is some disagreement among scholars as to the reason Pandora opens the *pithos*. We know from Hesiod that she was gifted 'the mind of a bitch' and a 'deceitful nature' by Hermes. This is often taken to mean that she is inappropriately curious, and her cunning and dishonest nature allows her to indulge this.[22] However, Wolkow suggests that she opens the jar not out of curiosity but greed, thinking it contained valuables. He points out that dogs are often associated with greed and theft, and that if Pandora opened the jar with the intention to steal, then Prometheus' theft of fire is given a punishment befitting the crime.[23] Hesiod himself is never clear on Pandora's intentions.[24]

Personally, the reason appears irrelevant. Zeus wanted mankind punished, and Pandora was the instrument to execute his divine judgement. Whether she was motivated by greed or curiosity, the trait itself was planted within her by the gods. Furthermore, the cautionary aspect of the myth remains the same: greedy women with desires and ambitions, and curious women who may wish to learn things, are not to be tolerated and pose a threat to men as they currently exist.

[21] Phipps, 34
[22] Wolkow, 'The Mind of A Bitch: Pandora's Motive and the Intent in the Erga', 248ff
[23] ibid
[24] ibid

The origin of the *pithos* itself is unclear. Perhaps Pandora was sent to Epimetheus with the jar as part of her dowry, or perhaps it was already in his possession.[25] In the latter case, we might question what Epimetheus was doing with a jar that contained all the evils in the world, but the providence is unimportant. The outcome is the same – Pandora opens the jar, and mankind is cursed forever.

The punishment, if one is to believe the ancient scholars, is twofold. The most obvious is of course that Pandora opens the jar containing all the evils to exist, thus releasing them forever into the world. Only hope remains in the jar, though whether this is meant to be a good thing has long been the cause of confusion among scholars.[26] This is the penalty that is usually focused on, and in popular culture Pandora is almost always mentioned in relation with Pandora's box (mistranslation has led to this common term, though the item in question was in fact a *pithos*). However, Hesiod makes it very clear in his account that Pandora herself is an evil and is designed as such by Zeus, not just for opening the jar, but by merely existing.[27] She unleashes evil through her lack of self-control, but only after Epimetheus accepts her as his wife, proving that he is equally helpless in the face of temptation.[28] The atrocities contained in the jar are matched by the horror that is, apparently, a woman.

The curiosity and choices of women commonly have negative results in Greek myth. The most obvious example is Helen of Troy. Though the level of her choice in the matter is debateable, there can be no question that her mere existence has catastrophic consequences that last for centuries. The concepts of disobedience and curiosity can also be found in the story of Eros and Psyche. Psyche is married to Eros without knowing what he looks like, and she is warned by her husband that the one thing she must never do is

[25] Brown, 30
[26] Bremmer, 'Greek Religion and Culture, the Bible, and the Near East', 28
[27] Alcoloumbre, 58f
[28] Brown, 30

attempt to see his face. However, with some prompting from her jealous sisters, she disobeys his order and is cast out. To prove her love and win Eros back, she is charged with several tasks by Aphrodite, one of which is to retrieve a box containing a piece of the goddess Persephone's beauty. Once again, Psyche is warned not to look inside, but she clearly has not learned her lesson from the previous incident. Opening the box once again almost costs Psyche her marriage and her life.[29] Evidently, her curiosity is doing her no favours, and one cannot help but notice the similar themes and underlying message in both myths.

One might consider the sheer power ascribed to women in these myths almost flattering. That the actions of a single woman can bring an entire race to its knees is of course absurd, yet is not an uncommon theme. One need only look as far as Helen of Troy for confirmation that society feared what damage women might be capable of with even a modicum of power.[30] But does this perspective empower or weaken women? While it does grant women agency and power, it also emphasises precisely why they should not be allowed to exercise these rights.[31]

One aspect that is not examined often enough is the role the husbands play in these events. We have already established that in the Greek myth, Epimetheus the first catalyst. By accepting Pandora as a gift from the gods, he unwittingly ushers in the doom of mankind. Furthermore, he cannot claim total ignorance, as his brother Prometheus warns him to be wary of accepting gifts from Zeus.[32] As the titan of forethought, Prometheus would have been the more reliable advisor of the two, though as the titan of afterthought, it is hardly surprising that Epimetheus only realises this in hindsight.

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[29] Wolkow, 249
[30] Marina Warner, 'Alone of all her Sex' 58
[31] Shemesh 'Eve, the First Woman: On Choice and Responsibility', 107
Zajko, 'Women and Greek Myth', 5
[32] Bremmer, 28

Adam's role in consuming the forbidden fruit is also not entirely ignorant. While it is widely accepted that Eve seduced or otherwise persuaded Adam to eat the fruit with her, the account in Genesis portrays Adam as present at the moment the snake convinces Eve to eat the fruit, and fully aware of the nature and ramifications of the act, making him at least partially if not equally complicit.[33]

So why is it that the women are the ones more often remembered by society as the harbingers of evil? There is enough evidence to suggest that the men in these myths are at best foolish and ignorant, at worst guilty and unwilling to accept any blame. Through Pandora, all women became associated with trickery and lies. But it was Hermes who gave to Pandora the very attributes she is condemned for. In many cultures, gods of trickery and deceit tend to be male – Hermes for the Greeks, Loki for the Norse, Tezcatlipoca for the Aztecs – and yet in humans it is viewed as a feminine trait.

It seems illogical that the ancient scholars were quick to blame women for an event that by their own accounts was engineered by the gods, and largely male gods at that.

Having discussed these similarities, it is also important to note the differences in these two creation myths. The most notable is that in the original Judeo-Christian tradition, woman was created as a companion rather than punishment. While she is still inferior to man, having been made literally to help him, she is not inherently malevolent. Pandora, on the other hand, is sent to humans with the intention of causing strife. It is only later that a tradition emerges of Eve being transformed to be more like Pandora, deliberately malicious in her actions.[34]

[33] Shemesh, 112
[34] Phipps 34, 41f

Pandora was made by the gods for the purpose of opening that jar and was given deceitful and wicked traits accordingly. In this case, Pandora is more of an object than a woman.[35] Though Zeus never explicitly orders the *pithos* opened, clearly this or some equally disastrous action was the intended result. In that sense it is a tragic story; the outcome predetermined, , and man could not have done anything to prevent his doom. [36]

In contrast, Adam and Eve are both created as humans with free will. While this does mean that Eve is accorded more respect than Pandora by being treated as a human being, it also ascribes her more blame. Both Eve and then Adam freely chose to eat the forbidden fruit despite God's warning. It was a fate they could each have prevented through self-control.[37]

In Greek myth, the fall of man is tragic but inevitable. In Judeo-Christian lore, the tragedy lies precisely in the evitability of the act.

It is also necessary to consider that the authors of these stories would have been influenced by their own social realities.[38]

It is easy to see that Hesiod's views on women were not at all unusual for his time. His work was taught widely in ancient Greece, so it is no surprise to find similar sentiments in other texts. There are plenty of examples from poetry and prose that display the type of casual misogyny that would have been commonplace in the ancient world.[39]

When referring to the creation of Pandora, Semonides recounts, 'Zeus made this the greatest pain of all: woman'.[40] Hipponax notes that 'there are two days on which a woman is most pleasing – when someone marries her and when he carries out her dead

[35] Kenaan, 'Pandora's Senses: The Feminine Character of the Ancient Text', 49
[36] Alcoloumbre, 63ff
[37] Alcoloumbre 65, This point takes a simplified view of free will in Judeo-Christian tradition. Theologically it presents a far more complex issue which would divert from the topic at hand.
[38] Sly, 'Traditional Views of Women', 13
[39] Phipps, 38f
[40] Semonides, 7

body'.[41] In his *Oeconomicus*, Xenophon declares that when a man takes a wife, he must 'train her to be the right sort'.[42] Even Pericles in his funeral oration emphasises the notion that a woman's primary duty in life is to marry and provide offspring.[43]

Semonides also famously compares the different types of women to various animals, each focused on a different undesirable trait. The only acceptable woman is one who is like a bee, meaning she is hard-working and devoted to her husband, and even then, opinions on the value of a woman varied greatly.[44] A man was considered incredibly lucky to have an obedient and efficient wife. The bee analogy is a reoccurring description of women first used by Hesiod, proving that his works were the blueprint for women and their relationship with men.[45]

Works like these paint a vivid picture of the position women held within society in ancient Greece. They were generally viewed as inferior, were valued for what they could give to men, that is keeping their house and bearing their offspring, and were expected to stay inside and be obedient to their husbands. When women were disparaged in Greek literature, it was usually for not being docile and submissive.[46] Traits that were valued were self-restraint and virtue, qualities that Pandora and Eve do not demonstrate in these instances.

The authors do make it clear that men and women need each other to an extent, however, man knows better and therefore has the authority. This is perhaps more similar to the original depiction on Eve, who is an essential part of Adam, but wrought havoc when she attempted to act outside of subservient role.[47]

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[41] Hipponax, 68
[42] Xenophon *Oeconomicus,* 7.4f
[43] Thucydides, 2.45
[44] Semonides, 7
Sly 21
[45] MacLachlan, 'Women in Hesiod', *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook,* 5
[46] Richter, 'The Position of Women in Classical Athens', 5
[47] Pomeroy, 'Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity', 74

It must be acknowledged that we are building this picture based off fragments that may not tell the full story. We have very little in the way of literary evidence from women, but given that it was a patriarchal society, we can assume that the male opinion was predominant.[48] It is also important to note that Hesiod was using the Pandora myth in a conversation with his brother warning him about the dangers of accepting things that appear good on the surface, and may therefore have adapted it somewhat to suit his own needs.[49] These aspects must be considered in any critical reading of the Pandora myth.

Ultimately, it comes down to interpretation. Myths never have one correct reading, and the same can be said of the role of women within those myths.

Shemesh suggests that it is all about choice; not only Pandora and Eve's choices or even Epimetheus and Adam's, but the audience's choice of how to interpret, how much agency to ascribe, and where to place the blame.[50] When it comes to the origin of sin, both Pandora and Eve are seen to be the instigators. This does raise the issue of agency versus blame: if we hold them responsible, we have to admit that they had agency and to some extent power.[51]

The most obvious interpretation of these two stories is a cautionary one. They emphasise the dangers of women making decisions. They reinforce the notion that women cannot be trusted. They confirm once and for all that men ought to be in charge.

Both myths are used to explain the human condition and the presence of evil and suffering in the world, as well as to justify the status quo. In this case the truth did not matter, only the dominant cultural perception, which happened to be male.[52]

[48] Zajko, 2
[49] Brown, 27, 37
[50] Shemesh, 107
[51] Blondell, 'Helen of Troy: Beauty, Myth, Devastation', 60
[52] Alcoloumbre, 57; Brown, 39

While it is clear that Pandora and Eve are products of separate cultures and values with their own unique characters, it would be foolish to dismiss the overarching themes of their stories as mere coincidence. Both women were created after man, and for a purpose directly related to him. Both were given access to knowledge or power beyond their station, and encouraged through various means to explore this. And both through their decisions brought suffering not only to themselves and their husbands, but all generations of mankind to come.

As the first women in creation in their respective myths, their actions set a dangerous precedent for the behaviour of all women in the minds of society. They reinforce the notion that women are devious and untrustworthy, should not be allowed to make decisions, and given the opportunity will undermine their husbands to the detriment of all. To a certain extent these beliefs can be explained as a product of their time. The role of women in ancient Greece, as in most societies, was a subservient one, and their inferiority to men was considered more fact than opinion. Obviously, knowing this affects how we view these myths even now. The concept of the disobedient and deceitful woman that Pandora and Eve represent is deeply ingrained within Western civilisation.

However, the recent rise of feminist-focused scholarship has shown that our interpretations need not be limited by outdated values. If myths serve to reflect the society of their time, then perhaps in the 21st century we can finally begin to separate the perception of women based on the stories of these two women from the context within which they were created.

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Vocalising Female Rebellion in Early Modern Finnmark's Witch Trials

Sophie Norman

Introduction

Today it is well established that witch-hunts are gendered: as historian Stephen A. Mitchell states, 'In recent decades, the early modern witch-hunts as a war on women has become a standard component of scholarly discussions'.[53] In this vein, this paper isolates the island of Vardø, East Finnmark, Norway, in the years 1617 to 1626, for analysis of its witch trials in history and literature.

Witchcraft accusations were initially formulated upon imposing Lutheran hegemony upon indigenous Sami, consolidating imperial power to the far north of Christian IV's kingdom, then known as Denmark-Norway. The foremost historian of the Finnmark witch trials is Liv Helene Willumsen, who notes, 'Around 1620 a change is seen. From now on, the majority of accused persons were Norwegian women'.[54] This is partly due to Christian IV publishing the Witchcraft Act of 1617, which merged patriarchal religious doctrine with state law, and partly due to the installation of a new district governor, John Cunningham, on whom more will be later detailed.[55]

The Finnmark trials are now notorious for the use of torture and the rate of executions; in the panic beginning in 1620, thirteen women were found guilty and twelve were executed.[56] Gunnar W. Knutsen writes that, 'the trials in Finnmark were also much

[53] Stephen Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*. (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011) 175.
[54] Liv Helene Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark Northern Norway,* trans. Katjana Edwardsen. (Skald and Varanger Museum, 2010), 14.
[55] Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Exporting the Devil Across the North Sea: John Cunningham and the Finnmark Witch-Hunt'. In *Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters*, ed Julian Goodare (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 54.
[56] Ibid, 56.

more cruel than those in any other part of the country' and 'female defendants were more likely to be executed than males: 66 per cent of those executed in these years [the decade following the 1617 decree] were women'.[57] This paper will interrogate how contemporary literature gives voices to these women, and I have chosen the 2020 novel *The Mercies* by Kiran Millwood Hargrave as an excellent representative of contemporary women's historical fiction due to its structure.[58] As historical documents are not rich with women's voices it is significant for women's voices that the witch-hunt does not begin until the final quarter of the novel. This structuring allows women's lives, not their deaths, to be remembered, and significant to this interdisciplinary mode, fills in the gap left in the historical record which only logs the trials themselves. Through *The Mercies*, the reader experiences life before the witchcraft panics, (termed 'chains' by Willumsen). Hargrave thus highlights that women's voices are only heard in very particular circumstances within historical sources, namely while under the full weight of the church-state. In her afterword Hargrave notes that the novel is 'concerned not with the trials themselves, but with the conditions that make such things possible…This story is about people, and how they lived; before why and how they died became what defined them'.[59] In this respect the structure of *The Mercies* is unusual amongst the influx of recent feminist historical fiction whose authors have endeavoured to creatively carve out space for women's voices within historical patriarchal systems.

Historical Fiction

Defining the term 'historical fiction' is prudent here. It has typically been viewed as building a narrative upon a bedrock of historical fact. Jerome De Groot argues that the

[57] Gunnar W Knutsen, 'Norwegian Witchcraft Trials: A Reassessment'. *Continuity and Change* 18:2 (2003), 188, 196.
[58] See also *The Witches of Vardø* by Anya Bergman. This is a similar contemporary feminist historical novel focusing on the 1662 trials, recreating real figures such as Anna Rhodius.
[59] Kiran Millwood Hargrave, *The Mercies*. (Picador, 2020), 339.

disparate parts of historical fiction should instead be received within a paradigm of equal value, so 'historical fact' and 'fiction' may combine to form a holistic experience of history.[60] In other words, in terms of literary theory, this paper examines past events via a shift in the form to inform the content, meaning that a literary approach reveals a different aspect of the witch-hunts: women's voices before and in-between persecution. The existing interdisciplinary scholarship, in history and literature, show there is further scope for analysis of this chronotope (time and place as represented by language). Therefore this paper illustrates that contemporary fiction is a counter-narrative to the extant records of women's voices in their trials, and through a shift in the form from historical document to historical fiction, allows a feminist analysis of the period.

Katherine Cooper and Emma Short state:

> These texts [contemporary novels] seek to add to and build on existing understandings of the historical female figure, re-distributing narrative power and providing detailed and complex portrayals of her, at odds with accustomed place as a one-dimensional, supporting character in *his*tory.[61]

As Cooper and Short suggest, history is biased by its predominantly male writers. The case of Vardø is particularly useful in highlighting that historical accuracy, or its cousin objectivity, is not an appropriate framework with which to evaluate historical fiction. To explain, de Groot states that 'historical fiction' is 'a tautology, insofar as all history is fiction', which, as shall be shown in this paper, is made particularly clear by the confessions in the witchcraft trials.[62] One consideration is that history does not acknowledge the artifice; the writer interposed between what is called reality and representation. The court records from 1620 to 1692 have been translated by Katjana Edwardsen and collected by Willumsen in *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark Northern Norway.* The documents for the chain beginning in 1620 are sourced from the National

[60] Jerome De Groot, *Remaking History: The Past in Contemporary Historical Fictions*. (Routledge 2016), 2

[61] Katherine Cooper, and Emma Short. 'Introduction: Histories and Heroines: The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction'. In *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction.* eds Katherine Cooper and Emma Short, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 14.

[62] De Groot, *Remaking History,* 3.

Archives of Norway and the Regional State Archives of Tromsø, and record the accused's confessions as factual, that they were 'in the shapes of goats, others as cats' and 'many of them were in the shapes of wolves or creatures she did not know'.[63] It is thus clear to the contemporary reader that the subjective beliefs of the writer (and thereby the period) are erroneously presented as objective reality in these historical documents. As Diana Wallace observes:

> The recognition that history, if it is not precisely 'fiction', is a form of narrative which has much in common with fiction, has been extremely liberating for women and postcolonial writers.[64]

In literature, the contemporary reader can only hear women's voices through the author's imagination. In these historical records, the contemporary reader can only hear women's voices filtered through the pen of the court scribe. While this will be generally accurate, it is not direct discourse, and the scribe retains monologic authority over the reported speech. Edwardsen also notes that 'there are relatively few' direct quotes, meaning that the voices of women are often lost to the scribe's preference for relating their discourse in the third person.[65] However, at this juncture, contemporary literature intervenes to provide a window into the women's inner thoughts – an impossibility in court records. Contemporary historical fiction therefore introduces a female counter-narrative to male-authored historical records.

Concerning the representation of the real women of Vardø, Cooper and Short suggest, 'Any consideration of the "real" historical female figure must acknowledge the contested nature of narratives surrounding her, as it is she who has been manipulated by

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[63] Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark,* 33.
[64] Diana Wallace, 'Difficulties, Discontinuities and Differences: Reading Women's Historical Fiction'. In *The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction,* eds Katherine Cooper and Emma Short. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 212
[65] Katjana Edwardsen, 'Translator's Preface'. In *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark, Northern Norway*, eds Liv Helene Willumsen. (Skald and Varanger Museum, 2010), 10.

male-authored and/or patriarchal accounts of history'.[66] Hargrave bypasses this conundrum by wholly inventing her female characters; as she explains in an interview with her publisher, 'I made the decision early on not to base my characters on exact real-life counterparts. The testimonies are all we have of them, and I didn't want to use names and assume narratives that might debase their memory'.[67] Therefore *The Mercies* does not conform to the prevailing form of historical novels which seek to recreate the voices of notable historical figures. To some extent this staves off comparisons of accuracy and authenticity, as Hargrave instead imagines how women as a group might retain agency in a microcosm of patriarchal regulation. As de Groot observes, 'It is uncommon still for scholarship to look seriously at the ways in which historical fictions might work, other than to analyse their representation of the past. Yet, as will become clear, what is presented in these fictions is not "history" but modes of knowing the past'[68] This paper therefore seeks to examine the possibilities for female rebellion within this mode of knowing.

Patriarchal Demonology and Powerful Men

The dominance of patriarchal ideology is demonstrated by the development of a witch-hunt against Norwegian women despite Christian IV's 1609 directive to focus on Sami men.[69] The witchcraft guides of the early modern period show specific rules women are held to, and therefore how far they deviate from the societal norms of seventeenth century Finnmark by allegedly engaging in witchcraft, as well as from typical witchcraft practises as understood at the time. The latter may be judged by how closely their confessions

[66] Cooper and Short, 'Histories and Heroines' 2012: 5.
[67] Kiran Millwood Hargrave, 'The Real Women of the Vardø Witch Trials', *Pan Macmillan,* July 2021: paras 7-8.
[68] De Groot 2016, *Remaking History,* 3.
[69] Arne Kruse and Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Magic Language: The Transmission of an Idea Over Geographical Distance and Linguistic Barriers'. *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 15: 1 (2020): 4.

skewed towards an established witchcraft ideology, of which there are two strands, explained by Arne Kruse and Willumsen:

> Two types of trial occurred during the European witch hunts… On the one hand, there were isolated trials, where one person at a time was brought before the court and accused of practicing traditional sorcery, known as *maleficium*… Accusations of this type of magic occur in the context of widespread beliefs that certain persons possess an inherent power to cause harm through magic on an *individual* level, often by the use of charms or enchanted objects.[70]

This type of magic is evident in *The Mercies*, where local customs include using protective Sami runes and poppets. The second type of trial is of *diabolism* or demonology (devil worship):

> The doctrine of demonology introduced the concept of collective witchcraft and resulted in a fear among legal and clerical officials of an ungodly, hidden army of the Devil's accomplices on Earth.[71]

Kruse and Willumsen link the prevalence of women accused of witchcraft to this demonological ideology, which monopolised trials from 1620 onwards. Hargrave transposes the cause for the singular trials in Finnmark, that of Sami sorcery misinterpreted as *maleficium*, to become the spark for a demonological chain. Women are accused of engaging in the most audacious rebellion against mankind, against civilisation, and against God. The contemporary reader of the court records understands the charges cannot be true, and this is reflected in Hargrave's writing back to the past. However, I wish to draw attention to the assumed power dynamics within this act of

[70] Ibid, 14.
[71] Ibid, 15.

rebellion, 'By entering such a pact, she or he agreed to become the Devil's secret servant… There was understood to be a ritual connected to the entering of the pact, where the witch renounced his or her Christian baptism and promised to serve the Evil One'.[72] Although men are mentioned here, demonological accusations disproportionately targeted women and girls. Willumsen's research agrees that in these confessions, 'In her relations with the Devil, woman always plays the subordinate part'.[73] Even when women are perceived as rebelling by engaging in witchcraft they are not the leaders of their rebellion, therefore the accused women are disobedient only in so far as patriarchal norms will allow. Thus, in their (forced) confessions of the wildest rule-breaking (flying across the sky to Lyderhorn, sinking ships, stealing milk from distant livestock etc.), in their own words they remain 'subordinate' to the devil who has appeared to them.[74] They therefore tread a fine line in their confessions between admitting to the gravest affronts against God, and refraining from portraying themselves as powerful. Patriarchal demonology demands this specific narrative from all the accused, and accordingly a framework of female subservience to the male devil is evident in several of the confessions, for example on 9th August 1621 Lisebet Nielsdaater confessed her 'promise to serve Satan'.[75] As Willumsen states, 'Traditional Sami sorcery was seen as an individual skill, displaying inherent magical power. Contrary to this was witchcraft *learned from* a pact with the Devil'.[76] (Emphasis my own.) In this latter form, the witch derives power from the devil rather than possessing her own as the male Sami noaidis (shaman) do. Thus, a gendered power imbalance is written into the doctrine of demonology itself.

[72] Ibid, 15.
[73] Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Witches of the High North'. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 22: 3 (1997): 209.
[74] Ibid, 209.
[75] Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark,* 32.
[76] Willumsen, 'Exporting the Devil', 53.

Kruse and Willumsen explain that the shift from persecuting mainly Sami men to Norwegian women occurred after the 1617 decree 'Om troldfolk og deres medvidere' ('About Witches and their Accomplices'), 'when demonological ideas were incorporated into the legal definition of witches. It also had to do with the installation of the Scotsman John Cunningham (c. 1575–1651)'.[77] Cunningham figureheads patriarchal power both historically and in *The Mercies*. Significantly, he is the only character in the novel based upon a real person – as previously stated, Hargrave has said she did not base her female characters on the real women out of respect. Hargrave writes that in early 1619 under 'direct orders from King Christian', Vardøhus Festning (Fortress) is utilised as both a home for the incoming Lensmann (district governor) John Cunningham and site of the trials for the remainder of the century.[78] The voice and character of Cunningham is perhaps the most documented by historians within this chronotope. Christian IV first employed Cunningham as a naval captain in 1603.[79] There, he built a reputation for cruelty, once shooting a captive man on a 1605 expedition 'to make an example of him'.[80] 'His voice is full of relish' in the hands of Hargrave when he discusses persecuting witches.[81] His position as a powerful man is cemented by his friends - Willumsen states that, 'When John Cunningham entered the service of King Christian IV, it was on King James's "request and recommendation"'.[82] Cunningham had the backing of both rulers, therefore the women of Vardø are pitted against the power of not only the new district governor, but of two kings.

The fear of female power - control of the weather - characterises the 1620 chain and is key to both the formation of the trials and the plot of *The Mercies.* On Christmas

[77] Kruse and Willumsen, 'Magic Language', 5.
[78] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 39.
[79] Willumsen, 'Exporting the Devil', 50.
[80] Ibid, 52.
[81] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 236.
[82] Willumsen, 'Exporting the Devil', 50.

Eve in 1617 there was a sudden and terrible storm which killed forty men from Vardø and the surrounding fishing villages.[83] However, *The Mercies* makes clear that the wrath of the church-state turns upon the women of Vardø for daring to live independently of able-bodied men *since* the storm, not *because* of the storm – indicated by the interval of three years between the storm and the persecution. It is known from court records that the first accusation surfaced in Omgang, over a hundred miles north-west of Vardø, but Hargrave opts to bring the reader closer to the site of the trials held at Vardøhus Fortress by focusing on only accusations in Vardø itself.[84] Hargrave details how the Vardø women have been nothing but pious and pragmatic during their months of isolation, therefore it is ironic that the incoming Commissioner Cornet views the island as corrupted by female disobedience of gender roles. His wife Ursa reveals, 'The plan… to make witches here in the North. He thinks the whole place corrupted'.[85] As Willumsen notes, 'The policy of the kingdom had as its aim cleansing the country of ungodly persons'.[86] In protest against these views, Hargrave's Vardø survives as 'a place of women' for three years, following conventions of early feminist utopias which offer alternative ideas about the arrangement of society.[87] As Hargrave notes, 'they were left alone by the outside world, could fish and develop a matriarchy of sorts'.[88] However, as a separatist (female-only) utopia, the mechanisation of disruption to their tough, but peaceful, lives has to be from within. Hargrave thus shows the impact of internalised misogyny in depicting the horrific deaths at the stake of Kirsten Sørensdatter and Fru Olufsdatter, and how their accusers regret too late their part in serving patriarchal systems of oppression. However, it is when powerful men arrive that

[83] Kruse and Willumsen, 'Magic Language', 5.
[84] Ibid, 5.
[85] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 279.
[86] Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark,* 14.
[87] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 98; for an excellent overview of the utopian mode see Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies* 5:1 (1994): 1-37.
[88] Hargrave, 'The Real Women of the Vardø Witch Trials', para 9.

the women's utopia is disrupted and the writing switches readily into the dystopian mode. Hargrave presents the isolated female utopia as corrupted by learned male ideas about demonology brought via Cunningham. In the hands of a contemporary woman writer the godliness/goodliness of the Vardø women is not in question, instead, patriarchal ideologies are under the microscope.

The Voices of Women

A recurring theme unites the court records of these trials with *The Mercies*; that of the ability to speak. In seventeenth century Vardø, women's voices are distorted by patriarchal systems in various ways. It is considered 'indecent' for women to speak to the sailors who come to trade, indeed only Kirsten does so, who becomes the symbol of women's strength and rebellion.[89] The cultural, religious and state prohibitions on gender roles mean that women who rebel such as Kirsten are persecuted and punished – most harshly and most visibly in witch trials.

The memorial at Steilneset (the site of the executions) highlights how the voice of the church-state subsumed the voice of the woman on trial through intimidation and violence. A specific case in 1621 is detailed at the memorial: Anne Lauritsdatter confessed after she was dropped into the freezing Barents Sea, 'that she could not weep or confess her sins before she was cast into the sea, that this was because the Evil Devil had tongue-tied her'.[90] Anne's voice as well as her silence is formed into a narrative of guilt, so that

[89] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 39.
[90] Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Anne Lauritsdatter', in *Steilneset. Memorial to the Victims of the Finnmark Witchcraft Trials,* ed Katjana Edwardsen (publisher, 2011) PDF, https://www.livhelenewillumsen.no/res/Anne_Lauritsdatter_1621.pdf. Information about Anne Lauritsdatter's 1621 trial originates from Hans Hansen Lilienskiold's account *Trolldom og ugudelighet I 1600-tallets Finnmark (Sorcery and wickedness in Seventeenth century Finnmark)*. Lilienskiold was district governor of Finnmark from 1684 to 1701. I did not have access to this account therefore I have used the wording on the Steilneset memorial to Anne in this paper.

in the official record or *canon* of history she is recorded as a verified witch. The authority of official records and language is evident when Hargrave's protagonist Maren feels afraid upon hearing Kirsten's confession of harmful witchcraft read aloud by the Lensmann, when previously and subsequently her knowledge of Kirsten tells her it cannot be true.[91] To the contemporary reader, Anne's confession after nearly drowning is clearly forced from her, I would argue to the extent that the court is speaking *through* her. The power of patriarchal structures and ideologies combine in the court to co-opt her voice, and in this way she remains silent before and after the water ordeal.

Another aspect of the confessions is that women's voices are only heard as a response to questioning, which reveals an additional power dynamic; the structuring of when women could speak. Raisa Maria Toivo and Willumsen allow that the voice of the accused is heard in a trial at two points, using an example from 1663, 'Margrette [Jonsdatter's] own voice is heard first in her denial of witchcraft and later in her confession'.[92] I would not go so far as to attribute Margrette's own voice to her confession, as invariably the Finnmark confessions are achieved through state-sanctioned violence, which I argue co-opts, distorts, and robs women of their voice. There are court records for fifteen of the twenty-six people accused in the chain beginning in 1620 and ending in 1626. Where the water ordeal is mentioned in these records the accused uniformly confess, either when threatened with the ordeal or after having been subjected to it. Two people were threatened, one woman and one man; and four people were swum (dunked), three women and one man. Thus, torture is shown to extract speech, so that the voices of women heard in these confessions are all co-opted. Willumsen classifies the voice of the law as 'in the wording of the verdict and sentence… the application of torture

[91] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 323-324.
[92] Raisa Maria Toivo and Liv Helene Willumsen. 'A Narratological Approach to Witchcraft Trial Records: Creating Experience'. *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47:1 (2022): 45

signals the voice of the law as well'.[93] I argue that the law is also heard in the women's voices, co-opted as they are to parrot patriarchal demonology in order to prevent further torture. It is thus evident that historical sources cannot be considered the ultimate and only authority on women's voices – that information is quite simply lost to *his*tory.

Similarly, at the climax of the novel, Hargrave's second symbol of patriarchal power, Commissioner Cornet, strangles the protagonist Maren so that 'She cannot speak!'[94] The protagonist in fiction is typically the focalisation point, meaning that the reader hears their inner thoughts and empathises with them whether they are written in first or third person. The significance of the scene in which the protagonist is silenced is twofold; as in the trials male violence is the method by which she is silenced, and the secondary protagonist, Ursa, a woman of a different class, comes to her aid. Ursa is key to how contemporary historical fiction is constructed. Cooper and Short state, 'It is through maintaining [the] co-existence of two different historical moments that historical fictions reveal something crucial about each – the moment of production and the moment of being (re)produced'.[95] Direct to this point, the character of Ursa is imbued with the ideologies of the present moment and utilised as an ambassador to the past. She represents enlightened principles of logic and reason which allow her to see the charges as an 'absurdity' and call Maren 'stupid' for believing them.[96] Ursa's voice is therefore the voice of contemporary women writers. To everyone else in a seventeenth-century context, however, the accusations sound reasonable. Ursa's status as an enlightened voice of reason aligned with a twenty-first century reader is achieved through her outsider status. Hargrave conflates space – Ursa's upbringing in the city of Bergen – with time – the

[93] Liv Helene Willumsen, *The Voices of Women in Witchcraft Trials: Northern Europe.* (Routledge, 2022) 12.
[94] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 328.
[95] Cooper and Short, 'Introduction', 7.
[96] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 308; 311.

centuries which have eroded belief in witchcraft. Indeed, fear of witches was prevalent even in Norway's largest cities; as Kruse and Willumsen note, the infamous witches' hill Lyderhorn is just outside Bergen.[97] By conflating space and time, the character of Ursa is the contemporary reader's stand-in. As such, she 'wonders briefly if she has found someone as appalled by this as she'.[98] She does not find a like-minded woman at the trial, however, highlighting the rarity of her voice within a seventeenth-century context. In relation to the strangulation scene, the character of Ursa is thus the contemporary woman (whether she is writer or reader) intervening in the historical record to allow women to speak.

Conclusion

I have listed some of the ways in which women's obedience was enforced. To draw a conclusion, what voice can a woman on trial for witchcraft have? For an accused woman, Hargrave concludes only that her friend may shout her name amongst the crowd's cries of 'witch'.[99] Indeed, the only decisive voice is Ursa's, who is entirely fictional. Concerning historical records, Willumsen agrees that the voices of women are only heard in particular circumstances.[100] The power of Lensmann Cunningham and his officials means that their voices were loud, and the women's voices were quiet in comparison. This means that the sole situation in which history documents a Vardø woman's voice is when she is on trial and speaking under duress of torture and knowledge of her inevitable death. I have shown that such circumstances distort the woman's voice; it must also be acknowledged that literature inevitably co-opts and distorts women's voices as part of the creative process. However, this paper has demonstrated how historical fiction attempts to

[97] Kruse and Willumsen, 'Magic Language, 30.
[98] Hargrave, *The Mercies,* 305.
[99] Ibid, 306.
[100] Willumsen, *The Voices of Women,* 20-21.

fill in the gaps left by male-dominated history and create equal space for female history. There are a range of women's voices in *The Mercies*; rich, poor, scared, bold, secular, pious, but all these women are subject to patriarchal demonology's unwinnable tests.

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"All in the name of progress… and for a few lousy bob": *Brassed Off,* Rebellion and Deindustrialisation

T.N. Gibson

In May 2021 and to commemorate twenty-five years since the release of *Brassed Off* (1996), director Mark Herman was interviewed by Loz Etheridge. The first question Etheridge asked was 'at what point [during filming] did you realise you were creating something special?' Herman responded as follows:

> The more time we spent in Grimethorpe, working in a town that had such similar experience and with people who had lived through those closures, the more obvious it was that we were making something that mattered.[101]

The film, which stars Pete Postlehwaite, Tara Fitzgerald and Ewan McGregor, tells a story of community struggle and the consequences of rebellion.[102] The story is focused on the members of Grimley Colliery Brass Band in 1994-95, as they navigate the final operating days of the town's colliery. Found throughout the film is the theme of rebellion. During this time, the characters must balance their daily, often closely tied lives, alongside bolstering a continued protest effort to keep their workplace in operation, whilst also preparing themselves and their families for a post-colliery life. Within *Brassed Off*, the theme of rebellion is of high importance to both the film's narrative and the historical context it takes inspiration from. Grimley – a stand-in for the South Yorkshire town of Grimethorpe – is illustrative of the woes that the closure of local centres of employment can bring. Not only economically, which scholars of the 1990s – around the same time

[101] Mark Herman, "25 years on – Brassed Off: In Conversation with Mark Herman", interview by Loz Etheridge, God is in the TV, 26th May 2021, https://www.godisinthetvzine.co.uk/2021/05/26/25-years-on-brassed-off-in-conversation-with-mark-herman/.
[102] *Brassed Off!* directed by Mark Herman (Channel 4, 1996), disc.

Brassed Off was produced – estimated would lead to 78,000 job losses from 31 pit closures, but also that the social consequences would be of great detriment to any impacted community.[103]

This article will provide an analysis of how *Brassed Off* demonstrates the theme of rebellion and disobedience within soon-to-be ex-coal mining communities. This is achieved throughout the main plot of the film. On a broad scale, the town of Grimley is rebelling from centres of authority, including the British Government and National Coal Board (NCB), who wish to see their colliery closed. The primary plot is then designed to evoke the elements of wider protests surrounding the closure of coalmining in the 1980s and 1990s in Britain, as well as the defiance of those communities who pushed to maintain their way of life. These efforts, by the time of the film's setting in 1994-'95, are increasingly in vain, though this does not stop many from continuing their actions.

As well as its primary elements, the plot of *Brassed Off* also demonstrates the theme of rebellion on a smaller scale, specifically the act of an individual prioritising their personal needs rather than that of the community, be that Grimley or the colliery band. As economic and social circumstances become increasingly dire as the possibility of colliery closure grows closer, this leads multiple characters into conflict with each other, which damages community solidarity further. Certain characters are also representations of the community as it was when centred on heavy industries in late twentieth century Britain. So, what happens to these individuals can then be viewed as an artistic interpretation of the impact of colliery closure on community identity. Overall, the theme of rebellion is paramount to the storytelling seen in *Brassed Off*, as well as to similar representations of the end of coal mining in Britain, academic or otherwise.

[103] Andrew Glyn, "Economic Costs of Coal Pit Closure Programme in UK", *Economic and Political Weekly* 27:49/50 (December 1992), 2638.

The opening minutes of *Brassed Off* feature no dialogue, besides some background chat between characters to add atmosphere. Instead, the film begins with a recording of a brass band. This type of music is understandably a core feature of *Brassed Off* and is heard throughout, both when the colliery band is performing as well as during key points of the story. The music played over the opening scenes is titled *Death or Glory* and was originally written by Robert Browne Hall. While the title of the piece isn't brought up in dialogue and is only seen in the end credits, its militaristic name and nature can be taken as insight into the possible fates of both Grimley colliery as well as its townsfolk. *Death or Glory* is played over a montage containing the opening credits, showing miners in a colliery seam drilling coal, then coming back to the surface, showering and finishing their shifts. As the miners leave the colliery site, several items are highlighted. There is a protest camp at the site entrance, mostly consisting of women. As some miners pass the protestors, they wave, smile or blow the horn on their car, showing solidarity. When the miners leave site, the colliery's entrance sign is visible, showing the viewer that this is Grimley Colliery, located in the Barnsley area.

The opening minutes of the film establish Grimley as a community, as well as a centre of economic prosperity. Seeing miners laugh, be jovial with their coworkers, and show solidarity with the protesters, who were often women or the wives of those working, highlights how any threat of colliery shutdown is a threat to the entire community, not just to those directly employed. This was common among coalmining communities of the time and has been noted by scholars. Robert Gildea, for example, highlights testimonies from those involved in the 1984-'85 miners' strike in the South Wales and Durham coalfields. Gildea notes how any efforts to boost community morale, such as soup kitchens, raffles or packages of aid – often set up by women or miner's wives to support their husbands, families and friends – were a community effort. He quotes one induvial

from closures in the Durham coalfield, who had seen many try to alleviate the suffering of others throughout the miners' strike. The interviewee summed up this sentiment, saying "you've got to do something."[104] In the first minutes of *Brassed Off* and before there is any dialogue, the local importance of community and colliery are established, highlighting what is at stake should the latter cease operation.

Within both public and academic settings, most discussions have focused on the 1984-'85 miners' strike, often due to its spectacle and popularity within popular culture.[105] Scholars such as Jörg Arnold have, however, questions the importance of this event. While it is an important moment within the process of deindustrialisation, it but one of many events within a decades-long process to close heavy industries such as coal mining.[106] Indeed, the 1980s was the second of two major programmes of closure for the coal mining industry. The first programme spanned the 1960s, overseen by multiple prime ministers, such as Harold MacMillan, Alec Douglas-Horne, Edward Heath and Harold Wilson.[107] Despite this, *Brassed Off* follows the trends set by historians and commentators to highlight the impact of colliery shutdown on the miner himself, particularly focusing on the emotional toil that comes from the threat – and then reality – of such economic hardship.

In *Brassed Off*, rebellion is shown on a maximalist scale, often associated with the community of Grimley attempting to keep the colliery in operation, either through ballot or protest. A later scene where the miners are discussing an offer of redundancy made by the Conservative government is a prime example. The offer, made by the John

[104] Robert Gildea, *Backbone of the Nation: Mining Communities and the Great Strike of 1984-5* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2024), 123.
[105] Jörg Arnold, "Like being on death row: Britain and the end of Coal, c.1970 to the present", *Contemporary British History* 32:1 (2017), 9.
[106] Ibid, 2.
[107] Kathy O'Donnell, "Pit Closures in the British Coal Industry: A Comparison of the 1960s and 1980s", *International Review of Applied Economics* 2:1 (1988),63-65.

Major government and likely following a 1992 decision by Michael Heseltine to close over half the remaining collieries in Britain, made even while feasibility studies are still being carried out.[108] Dialogue in this scene highlights how the film takes place roughly a decade following the 1984-'85 miners' strike. 1994-'95 was a time where income inequality in the United This was a time where income inequality in the United Kingdom reached a peak, with living standards seeing a slow decline since their peak in the mid-1970s.[109] The Gini coefficient reached approximately 40% around 1994-'95, 10% higher than the 1980s.[110] Following Heseltine's announcement, protesters gathered in London's Hyde Park with activist David Douglass calling it "the last stand of the miners" when referring to the history of industrial action by those in the industry.[111] While *Brassed Off* does not demonstrate the theme of dispute to such a grandiose level, it demonstrates how a whole community can come together in the face of such adversity, relying upon each other for both financial and emotional support.

While protests against the Conservative government or NCB is an overarching theme throughout *Brassed Off*, much of the story and character development comes from moments where individuals act from against the community, and the consequences this can have. Many of the characters in this film are illustrative of the suffering faced in coal mining communities, with one – Danny Ormondroyd, played by Pete Postlethwaite – arguably representative of the community's spirit or morale. Danny, the band's conductor, is encouraging the members to continue rehearsals, in preparation for concerts and contests around the country. When some members speak about ending the band when the

[108] Jeremy Tranmer, "A new conflict between old adversaries: the National Union of Mineworkers and the Conservative Government, 1992-1993", *Les Années John Major 1990-1997* 7 (2009), 3.
[109] Danny Dorling, *Shattered Nation: Inequality and Geography of a Failing State* (London: Verso, 2024), 28-31.
[110] Brigid Francis-Devine, "Income inequality in the UK", *House of Commons Library*, 17th April 2024, https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7484/.
[111] Gildea, *Backbone of the Nation*, 298-9.

colliery shuts, Danny scolds them, noting how previous players would be "turning in their graves" if they could see the band now, with a similar thing happening in a contest where the band doesn't compete well.

The impact of deindustrialisation on local and national identity is something that has been well documented by scholars.[112] Gildea indicates how strikers, under a slogan of "close a pit, kill a community", attempted to forge closer ties, especially between men and women when faced with a strike.[113] Similarly, Jeremy Paxman shows how this unity could be seen on the national scale, noting a moment at the end of the 1984-'85 strike, where Arthur Scargill – leader of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) – proclaimed that the miners "had been betrayed by the rest of the trade union movement".[114] Yet despite this, most of the impact seen in *Brassed Off* comes at a smaller scale. Phillip O'Brien investigates deindustrialisation through an examination of *Waterline* by Gene Cartwright, which details life in Glasgow's Clydebank shipyards. O'Brien notes how the destruction of this industry happens alongside the decline of the main character, Mick.[115]

This impact is shown artistically in *Brassed Off*, through multiple characters but especially Danny. He has been shown to be of ill health and frequently seen coughing up blood, implying that he is suffering from is coal workers' pneumoconiosis, known better as black lung, caused by breathing in coal dust kicked up through the process of mining.[116] In one montage scene, we see the band performing in the Yorkshire town of Halifax on the day the mine workers vote on the future of the colliery, in which they ultimately decide

[112] Almuth Ebke, "The decline of the mining industry and the debate about Britishness of the 1990s and early 2000s", *Contemporary British History* 32:1 (2017), 123.
[113] Ibid, 137.
[114] Jeremy Paxman, *Black Gold: The History of how Coal made Britain* (London: William Collins, 2021), 327.
[115] Philip J. O'Brien, *The working class and twenty first-century British fiction: deindustrialisation, demonisation, resistance* (Milton: Routledge, 2019), 98.
[116] Lorin E. Kerr, "Black Lung", *Journal of Public Health Policy* 1:1 (1980), 50-51.

to vote for redundancy and to cease operation, unbeknownst to Danny or the rest of the band. They are victorious in this contest but return to Grimley to find the colliery and town eerily silent, with the phrase "we fought and lost" graffitied onto the entrance sign. Danny takes a few steps away from the other band members toward the pit and then collapses, eventually being rushed to hospital. If Danny is then representative of community spirit and unity in Grimley, then it is evident how this betrayal – as the band was set to cease performing should the colliery close – is an act of internal rebellion, one that *Brassed Off* does not celebrate.

Danny's fate in this scene shows the consequences of both industrial closure and personal selfishness for community spirit. However, other characters represent a similar warning, but for the individual. Phil Ormondroyd – Danny's son, played by Stephen Tompkinson – is one such example. Phil is shown to be highly loyal to both the colliery and to the band, often at a cost to himself, and his wife and children. His dialogue points out that he took part in the 1984-'85 strike and is still in debt following the extended period with no pay. Phil works as a clown to entertain children's birthday parties, known as Mr Chuckles, as a secondary job to help with household income. However, but this isn't enough as bailiffs frequently arrive to remove furniture or other items. When it comes time to decide on the future of the pit, Phil secretly votes for redundancy, unlike his peers and acting in the interests of himself and his family.

This action is shown to have dire consequences. Following Danny's collapse, Phil sees his wife leave with their children, and with a combination of these pressures alongside the uncertain future for the pit, he eventually snaps. Dressed as Mr Chuckles at a child's birthday party, Phil begins a foul-mouthed rant about the conservative party, former Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and the state of Grimley. Shortly after, Phill attempts suicide by hanging himself from part of the colliery's structure, still

dressed as Mr Chuckles. It is only after this, alongside a heartfelt moment with his father, that Phil admits to voting for redundancy to the other band members. While they appear uncomfortable with the news, they still encourage him to come for a drink, but only because of what he has been through and the colliery has closed anyway.

Throughout *Brassed Off*, Phil is shown to be the embodiment of someone who is loyal to the colliery and community above all else, also bolstered by him being the son of Danny, who embodies this community spirit. The reasons many wanted to stay employed at collieries like Grimley can be vast, but most wanted to remain in long-term jobs. Martin Bulmer notes the example of Tudhoe Colliery, Spennymoor, County Durham, where most of those working had started immediately after leaving school at sixteen and had little or no experience in other fields of work. At Tudhoe, whist 102 men were offered the chance to apply for vacancies at nearby pits or take redundancy, only 43 took the latter.[117] Miners had formed social bonds, some of which originated during school years; the negative impact of no longer having access to these workplace relationships highlighted the importance of workplace comradery in coalmining, as well as the apparent lack of it in more modern service industries.[118] Lee Waddington notes how because coalmining was such a dangerous industry, workers were told to watch out for each other and while this might have helped to avoid incidents that would slow production, it led to a "sense of dependency" on one's fellow man".[119] This in turn led to "valued emotional standards" and an emphasis on "humility, respect, and stoicism." Phil then is shown to be the embodiment of these traits, being deeply loyal to cause of the band and colliery, but

[117] Martin Bulmer, "The Decline of Mining: A Case Study in Spennymoor" in Martin Bulmer, *Mining and Social Change: Durham County in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford; New York: Routledge Revivals, 1978), 241-2.
[118] Tim Strangleman, "Networks, Place and Identities in Post-Industrial Mining Communities", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25:2 (June 2008), 260.
[119] Lee Waddington, "Rethinking Camaraderie as emotional practices: deindustrialisation and deskilling in South Yorkshire Coalfields, 1980s-2000s", *Contemporary British History* 37:3 (June 2023), 437.

also taking on less-skilled work to support his family. His story calls attention to the emotive aspects of deindustrialisation for coal mining communities, particularly the impact it can have on those not trained in other fields, as well as the toll on the family unit and one's mental health.

The stoicism Waddington describes can explain other moments in *Brassed Off*, especially those where one's loyalty to the colliery and community is questioned. In one scene, Andy (Ewan McGregor) is talking with Jim (Phillip Jackson). Andy is dating Gloria (Tara Fitzgerald) who is working with colliery management, making many characters – including Jim – distrust her. Upon learning of Andy's new relationship with Gloria, Andy claims, "I'm not a kid anymore Jim," and begins to walk away. Jim replies, "aye, but old enough to be a scab then." Andy, as well as the others in the conversation, immediately freeze, with Andy telling Jim to not mess around with 'words like that." Jim then backs down and apologises, calling Andy stupid rather than a scab, this being seen as a lesser insult, given the issue of picketing in this community.

Being called a scab – typically associated with someone who broke the 1984-'85 miners' strike and returned to work – became something deeply offensive in coal mining communities like the one Grimley represents in *Brassed Off.* At best, being known as a scab would ostracise one from the rest of their community. At worst, it could lead to verbal or physical violence, as well as your home being graffitied or vandalised. Waddington notes how even after the strike concluded, scabs would still be subject to this turmoil as tensions could quickly rise over one's employment history.[120] Hew Beynon and Ray Hudson also note the impact of scabs. As so many had returned to work, especially in the Durham coalfield where no colliery was free from a "significant contingent" of 'scabs', the topic of working alongside those who had seemingly betrayed their fellow man was a

[120] Ibid, 449.

contentious one.[121] Beynon and Hudson focus on one example at Easington Colliery, where the situation concerning one strike-breaker became so hostile that management "isolated him in remote workplaces on the surface until he left the industry." Such distrust of fellow workers became especially concerning for ongoing protest efforts in the Durham region, which employed 230,000 in mining alone at its peak in the 1910s, as well as hosting the "Pitman's Parliament" at Redhills in Durham city centre, where 239 seats were reserved for colliery delegates.[122] Such treachery threated to undermine any progress during the 1984-'85 miners' strike and, according to Scargill as discussed earlier, it did.[123]

Scholarly discussions often present the 1984-'85 strike like a war, which can be problematic, but help to explain the artistic choices seen in *Brassed Off*. Peter Kennard notes the strike to be a "defining battle in Thatcher's full-spectrum war against the working class and labour movement," so it is easy to see how scabs could be seen as deserters, cowards, or supporting the wrong side of such a conflict.[124] Many of these discussions can glorify the strike and lead to discussions on deindustrialisation to be purely focused on its events, as noted by Jörg Arnold and discussed earlier.[125] Yet from the perspective of *Brassed Off*, this interpretation holds value. To look back at the scene where Danny collapses, this takes place following a ballot, where we later learn the decision to close won four to one. This betrayal by the community over the decision to close, which will likely lead to economic uncertainty as well as the erosion of some social ties, causes the embodiment of the community spirit in relation to mining to nearly pass away. Only when the community comes together – when the band decides to perform

[121] Huw Beynon; Ray Hudson, *The Shadow of the Mine: Coal and the End of Industrial Britain* (London: Verso, 2021), 144.
[122] Peter Sark; Bill Lancaster, *Releasing the Genie of Coal: The Lower Derwent Valley, the Great Northern Coalfield and the Climate Crisis* (Consett: Land of Oak and Iron Trust, 2021), 38.
[123] Paxman, *Black Gold,* 327.
[124] Peter Kennard, *Visual Dissent* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 66-67.
[125] Jörg Arnold, "Like being on death row", 9.

outside of Danny's hospital window, playing *Danny Boy* – does he begin to recover. This highlights how rebellion against one's community in coal mining towns could lead to dire consequences, either for the individual, as seen with Phil, or for the community, as demonstrated with Danny.

This scene leads into the final act of *Brassed Off*, where the band initially decide to cease playing after performing outside of Danny's hospital window. Whilst they had qualified for the national finals during their performance in Halifax, they decided against going, given the colliery closure and the cost of travelling to London. Gloria returns, having been asked to leave due to her connections with colliery management, with £3,000 to pay in travel costs. Andy then wins his instrument back, having lost it in a bet, and the band decides to reunite. The village then turns out to wish the group good luck as they set off for London. Danny doesn't conduct, given his health issues, but is able to watch Harry (Jim Carter) guide the band to victory. Danny is then invited on stage and gives a key speech:

> Because over the last ten years, this bloody government has systematically destroyed an entire industry. *Our* industry. And not just our industry – our communities, our homes, our lives. And for a few lousy bob… A fortnight ago, this band's pit was closed. Another thousand men lost their jobs. And that's not all they lost. Most of them lost the will to win a while ago.[126]

Within this speech, Danny exemplifies the theme of rebellion seen throughout *Brassed Off*. Firstly, as a character whose primary motivation was the preservation and success of the band, Danny expresses a form of selflessness like those who put the colliery above

[126] Mark Herman (dir.), *Brassed Off,* (1996, Channel 4), (Danny Ormondroyd, 1:40:40).

their own interests. Rather than taking in his achievement of winning the national championships, he uses his time to bring attention to the sacrifices the community has been forced to make, and he forsakes his achievement – possibly the last time he may conduct the band as it is now, given both his ill health and the condition of Grimley – just as the others sacrificed for the sake of the band. At this moment, Danny also again acts as an embodiment of the those impacted by deindustrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s, many of which felt forgotten by those in government.

Scholars have noted how towns experiencing deindustrialisation often undergo a crisis of identity. One such study by David McGuinness and other academics investigated South Bank, Teesside, as it tried to "secure a viable future" following deindustrialisation and economic decline; whilst funding had eventually led to some regeneration, the stereotypes associated with coming from an area of deprivation impacted residents' aspirations or confidence.[127] In some cases, ex-industrial communities questioned what it meant to be "British" during this time, as the closures perpetuated narratives of overall decline throughout the country and impacted how journalists or politicians "negotiated British identity" according to historian Almuth Ebke.[128]

The ending of *Brassed Off,* then, is one not of complete optimism or pessimism. The day isn't saved, the colliery remains closed and most of the cast are now unemployed, excluding those who were retired already like Danny. Almost everyone will need to find new work, which may mean moving away and a likely period of financial hardship. Yet despite this, the ending remains positive. The band is travelling through London on a double-decker bus, likely beginning their return to Grimley. Andy and Gloria kiss and

[127] David McGuinness et al., "Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its 'reason for being' - the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland" (Newcastle, Regional Studies Association Annual International Conference, 2011), 4-5.
[128] Ebke, "The decline of the mining industry", 122.

Phil reunites with his wife and children. As they pass the Houses of Parliament, Danny says, "let's make them listen for a bloody change!" and the band performs a rendition of *Pomp and Circumstance* by Sir Edward Elgar. As the band play, the following text appears on screen: "Since 1984 there have been 140 pit closures in Great Britain at the cost of nearly a quarter of a million jobs." The credits then begin as the music swells.

Any form of rebellion to keep the colliery open has failed, but Grimley – at least for now – remains intact and arguably closer than before. The band and, by extension, the community, have been victorious. Following colliery closures like the one seen in *Brassed Off*, many towns were left searching for a reason for their continued existence besides past economic prosperity. Many, as highlighted by Nerys Anwen Jones, showed reactions of being "shattered, or devastated." The majority noted how they were not surprised at the closure, though were still angry and upset.[129] Similarly, Jim Tomlinson noted how the public corporations which "embodied the very essence of problems of British industries" for Thatcherites protected collieries from closure.[130] Though this is contested due to the amount of collieries closed and workers impacted, it is certain that the advent of the Thatcher government in 1979, and the 1980 Coal Industry Act, which meant financial cuts for the NCB would largely cease by 1983-'84, demonstrates that the goals the Conservative government deemed important were cutting financial costs and defeating the NUM, not assisting communities like Grimley.[131] It is, then, a notable artistic decision to end *Brassed Off* with the band performing outside Parliament. This shows how the band and, by extension, the community of Grimley, as well as coal mining communities of the north of England more broadly, will continue to rebel away from a government that

[129] Nerys Anwen Jones, "Coal was our life" (PhD Diss., The Open University, 1996) 194.
[130] Jim Tomlinson, "Deindustrialisation and 'Thatcherism': Moral Economy and unintended consequences", *Contemporary British History* 35:4 (2021), 629.
[131] Ibid, 631; O'Donnell "Pit Closures", 63-65.

doesn't listen to their concerns not only about taking their jobs, but their way of life and reason for being.

To conclude, *Brassed Off* heavily utilises the theme of rebellion throughout its runtime to demonstrate the efforts those in coal mining communities would go to in an effort to keep their respective collieries in operation. By demonstrating how united a community can be against a rival force such as the 1979-1997 Conservative government, the film promotes the idea that the problems seen in coal mining were impactful beyond those directly employed and it was the whole community's responsibility – including women and those not employed at the colliery – to protest its closure. Individual characters highlight a more nuanced approach to the rebellion theme, where they often must make decisions between providing for their community, either through their time or effort, versus acting in their own interests. Almost all the characters in *Brassed Off* exemplify these traits to some extent, though Phil is the most explicit case. He has fought both the government and his community, to extreme detriment to himself, and only when the band and community reunite does his situation improve. Danny follows a similar path to Phil, being thembodiment of community spirit forged through the colliery. As Grimley and its band fall apart, Danny's health falters until his eventual collapse and – like his son – only once the wider community decide to carry on in the face of such adversity does he recover. *Brassed Off's* utilisation of the rebellion theme then demonstrates how coal mining communities can defy those who would seek to close their economic centres, not to keep them in operation, but to remain a community despite a local way of life being taken away. Grimley colliery band was able to persist without its colliery, demonstrating the rebellious nature needed to discover a new reason for existence, without coal.

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‘It became a symbol of my incapacity and I hated it’: Resistance to High-Technology Augmentative and Alternative Communication, c. 1980-2020

Ally Keane

Introduction:

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) refers to a group of strategies which can be used by people with communication impairments, including no-tech (such as signing and gesturing), low-tech (such as communication boards or books), and high-tech (such as voice output communication aids (VOCAs)). This paper will focus on users who either abandoned or rejected high-tech devices. For this paper, abandonment refers to those who did not use any high-tech AAC and opted for other methods. In contrast, rejection refers to those who refused specific devices or resisted using high-tech options for some time before eventually returning to them. This research will focus on reasons users did this, including the stigmatisation of AAC, the poor reliability of high-tech devices, and issues with conversations (timing, inability to gain attention, insufficient vocabulary on devices, and poor speech quality), highlighting that these devices were created to provide acceptable voice output in a world which prioritises the spoken word rather than creating devices that best-suited users’ wants and needs.[132]

AAC, particularly high-tech AAC, are relatively new assistive technologies (ATs), especially compared to other ATs, such as hearing aids or prosthetics. The field of AAC emerged in the 1950s when speech and language therapists (SLTs) realised that despite speech therapy intervention, some people could not produce clear speech. As a result, no-

[132] Meredith Allan, “AAC and Self-Identity,” *Communication Matters* 20:3 (2006): 11 and Ally Keane and Joanna Kocsis, “Missing Methods and Epistemic Injustice: A Scoping Review of Qualitative Research with AAC Users,” *Disability & Society* (2025): 2.

and low-tech options were created, which were highly individualised to suit the unique wants and needs of the user. In the 1980s, speech synthesis devices entered the market, providing high-tech options for users with voice output, following the advancements of other related technologies, such as personal computers. This was the first time AAC could begin to replicate the societal expectation of communication through speech. However, whilst some welcomed the new high-tech options, many AAC users found them detrimental to communication.

An issue since the introduction of high-tech AAC has always been the high abandonment rates. Whilst an average of one-third of all ATs are abandoned, AAC rates could be as high as 90 per cent.[133] Rowley et al., focusing on provision between 1983-86, found that devices were rejected in 14 of the 29 instances.[134] Murphy (2004) found that of the 10 people who had been given a high-tech device, only one continued to use the device.[135] There are two decades between these two studies, but both show continued high abandonment rates.

Technoableism and AAC:

Shew defines technoableism as a type of ableism with a 'belief in the power of technology that considers the *elimination of disability* as a good thing, something we should strive for'.[136] Technoableism manifests in the field of AAC by creating a hierarchy of AAC methods, with high-tech devices at the top and no-tech options at the bottom. As a result, high-tech AAC is seen as what all people with communication impairment should

[133] Glenn Goodman, Drew Tiene, and Pamela Luft, "Adoption of Assistive Technology for Computer Access among College Students with Disabilities," *Disability and Rehabilitation* 24:1-3 (2002): 80 and Joan Murphy, "'I Prefer Contact This Close': Perceptions of AAC by People with Motor Neurone Disease and their Communication Partners," *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 20:4 (2004): 263.
[134] C.M. Rowley et al, "Communication Aids Provision 1983-1986," *British Journal of Disorders of Communication* 23 (1998): 8.
[135] Murphy, "Perceptions of AAC," 263.
[136] Ashley Shew, *Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2023), 8.

aim for. Sheldon highlights there is the assumption that 'disabled people will inevitably reap [technology's] rewards'.[137] As the experiences in this paper highlight, disability technologies have a 'double-edged' nature.[138] Not every AAC user enjoys using these technologies; many find them detrimental to their well-established communication methods.

This perspective is understandable as through the medical model of disability, which situates disability as an individual flaw, AAC is a tool to replicate speech, thereby solving users' inability to produce clear speech. By providing someone with a high-tech device, the assumption is that technology restores the user to near normal or their pre-diagnosis self and restores societal normativity. We expect humans to communicate vocally, and societally, we are unaccustomed to people who cannot speak. However, even with advancements in high-tech AAC and the quality of voice output, these devices can still not fully recreate speech (such as intonation or natural speech rhythms). The assumption that high-tech options are the best for everyone creates a history which prioritises technological advancements whilst minimising the experiences of AAC users.

This paper uses several sources, including the journal *Communication Matters* (produced by the charity Communication Matters (CM), which supports AAC users), which provides both user testimonies and professional accounts of the rejection and abandonment of high-tech AAC. Studies from the social sciences, including first-hand accounts of participants' experiences using high-tech AAC, are also utilised. While users' voices are prioritised throughout this paper, some remain missing. Since there is a reliance on those who are literate, the first-hand accounts of those who use symbol-based systems are more difficult to find. Furthermore, the use of studies means only those deemed

[137] Alison Sheldon, "Disabled People and Communication Systems in the Twenty First Century" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2001), 5.
[138] Mike Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (London: Macmillan Education, 1990), 126.

capable of giving informed consent are included (missing the experiences of those with learning disabilities, for example).

Stigmatisation of Devices:

Moorcroft, Scarinci, and Meyer found there were five key factors which contributed to the acceptance versus rejection or abandonment of AAC devices, three of which included attitudes towards the devices from three key stakeholders: the person who would benefit from AAC, loved ones, and members of society.[139] The stigmatisation of devices could be seen amongst these groups, often leading to (internalised) ableist attitudes towards AAC users and use. The stigmatisation of the devices was felt strongest by people with acquired conditions and teenagers, who had previously been normal or wanted to fit in with their peers.

Society:

Societally, there are numerous instances where AAC users had negative experiences with members of the public. A lot of people are unfamiliar with AAC devices, sometimes unaware that they exist, and there is anxiety about how to communicate with people who have a speech impairment.[140] There is also the perception that anyone who uses AAC, regardless of their condition, has learning disabilities.[141] It's hard to ascertain why this belief is so common, but it even extends to healthcare professionals who view

[139] Alison Moorcroft, Nerina Scarinci, and Carly Meyer, "'We were just kind of handed it and then it was smoke bombed by everyone': How do external stakeholders contribute to parent rejection and the abandonment of AAC systems?" *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders* 55:1 (2020): 60.
[140] Kate Ellis, "Changing Attitudes," *Communication Matters* 12:1 (1998): 18 and Alice Wong, "Augmentative and Alternative Communication: How Becoming a User Changed My Relationship," *Teen Vogue*, 20 May 2024, accessed 22 May 2024, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/augmentative-and-alternative-communication
[141] Beth Moulam, "AAC and Identity," 19 October 2021, accessed 28 January 2025, https://www.bethmoulam.com/aac-and-identity/

people who use AAC as 'stupid,' 'crazy,' or 'childish' people.[142] This leads to the infantilisation of AAC users, especially since people with learning disabilities are often seen as eternal children. For example, Bennett, as part of an ongoing training programme where young adults went into town to use their AAC in everyday situations, found that people interacted with her rather than the AAC users.[143] Furthermore, she found that 'some elderly people occasionally treated the children as though they were babies,' which 'didn't go down too well'.[144]

The unfamiliarity of AAC and the fact that many AAC users are severely physically disabled led members of the public to show pity towards AAC users, further highlighting the ableist perspectives of society. Mandy said she could tell when 'someone [was] disgusted at the looks of some disabled persons' or 'if they feel sorry for them'.[145] She follows with, 'we do not need these looks of disgust or pity – we need to be looked at as human beings or just another person doing their shopping, college, work etc. and to be treated as an equal'.[146] *Users:*

To some, high-tech AAC represented something negative: their condition, their loss of voice, their deterioration, or they are close to death.[147] Murphy and Bloch highlighted that whilst there were technological 'solutions' to the loss of voice, a 'wide range of experiences and feelings' were felt during this transition, and there was a need for greater 'psychological solutions' whilst undergoing this process.[148] Denise Gubbay, who was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND), found the process of losing her voice

[142] Steffy E.A. Stans et al., "Who Said Dialogue Conversations are Easy? The Communication Between Communication Vulnerable People and Health-Care Professionals: A Qualitative Study." *Health Expect* 21:5 (2018): 854.
[143] Yvonne Bennett, "Changing Attitudes Towards AAC," *Communication Matters* 19:3 (2005): 28-9.
[144] Ibid., 29.
[145] Mandy Brown and Joan Murphy, "The Personal Touch," *Communication Matters* 16:1 (2002): 3.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Jeanne M. Johnson et al, "Perspectives of Speech Language Pathologists Regarding Success Versus Abandonment of AAC," *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 22:2 (2006): 87.
[148] Joan Murphy and Steven Bloch, "Motor Neurone Disease: AAC and Everyday Conversation," *Communication Matters* 16:1 (2002): 6.

very difficult to come to terms with, and felt she was losing her identity.[149] Her high-tech device 'became a symbol of [her] incapacity', reminding her 'of the world [she] had lost'.[150] She felt that she and the device were 'inextricably bound together forever' and did not want to accept that the 'strange device was actually [her] voice'.[151]

This feeling of using a 'strange device' was common, and many AAC users wanted to be seen as normal. A therapist in Baker, Carlson, and Wharton's study found that one highly competent user rejected the device as 'he felt it set him apart from his peers and made him appear "handicapped"'.[152] Similarly, Sarah went to great lengths to 'present herself as "normal",' and felt 'stupid' using the device.[153] Part of this issue of needing to appear normal comes from the lack of representation of AAC users; people who could benefit from or use AAC do not see people who look like them anywhere, and therefore, their communication methods are not normalised. When representation was seen, it often led to people who had previously rejected their high-tech devices using them again. For example, one pupil who was part of a role model investigation had rejected his DynaVox despite having regular sessions to support and encourage use.[154] He refused to have the device mounted on his wheelchair and would regularly try to throw his device in the bin.[155] He had never seen an adult using AAC, so he thought 'when [he] grew up

[149] Denise Gubbay and Lindy van Creveld, "A Pilgrim's Progress," *Communication Matters* 12:2 (1998): 20, 22.
[150] Ibid., 20
[151] Ibid.
[152] Rachel Baker, Tracy Carlson, and Sarah Wharton, "Factors Influencing the Continued and Discontinued Use of Voice Output Communication Aids for People with Learning Disabilities," *Communication Matters* 18:3 (2004): 17.
[153] Gail Teachman et al, "Interrogating Inclusion with Youths who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication," *Sociology of Health & Illness* 42:5 (2020): 1117.
[154] Kathy Claxton and Tamsin Crothers, "Role Models: Who Needs 'em?" *Communication Matters* 21:1 (2007): 4.
[155] Ibid.

[he] would be able to speak'.[156] However, after he met an adult AAC user, he became more accepting of his high-tech device, and he 'wanted to be like [his role model]'.[157]

Loved Ones:

Research from CM highlighted that support from family made it more likely that a device would be used and accepted.[158] By proxy, loved ones often became users of the devices themselves. By attending training, setting up the devices, and continuing to programme new vocabulary into the devices, they had to be proficient in how to use them. However, many people did not have the time to utilise the training outside of the sessions, especially those who were full-time carers or had other work or care commitments. As a result, some SLTs felt that some parents had rejected AAC on their children's behalf because working on their child's speech was easier and less time-consuming.[159] However, this opinion from SLTs may come from the pressure they have to find measurable results from their intervention, with high-tech devices providing more immediate and acceptable results than other AAC methods.[160] This feeds into the technoableism of the field, seeing high-tech AAC as the gold standard of AAC intervention.[161]

Furthermore, some parents found it difficult to come to terms with their child needing high-tech AAC. In a study conducted by Moorcroft, Scarinci, and Meyer, SLTs

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[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] "Lay Summary: What factors do we need to consider when providing high tech communication aids?" Communication Matters, accessed 5 April 2021, https://www.communicationmatters.org.uk/app/uploads/2019/01/2013_high_tech_aac_factors_lay_summary.pdf
[159] Alison Moorcroft, Nerina Scarinci and Carly Meyer, "Speech Pathologist Perspectives on the Acceptance versus Rejection or Abandonment of AAC Systems for Children with Complex Communication Needs," *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 35:3 (2019): 199.
[160] Judith De Ste Croix and Sally Chan, "Identifying, Recording and Measuring Outcomes – A Pilot Project," *Communication Matters* 20:2 (2006): 13.
[161] Chris Hagen, "Assistive Communication Systems for the Anarthric and Severe Dysarthric Patient: A Rationale for Their Use and Criteria for their Selection," *Scandinavian Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* 10(1978): 164.

suggested that some parents went through a period of grief where they 'were grieving the loss of the child whom they expected'.[162] This complicated grief of grieving the child they had envisioned whilst supporting the child they had meant these parents were less likely to access AAC devices for their children in comparison to those who had accepted their child's need for AAC.[163] As a result, these parents were 'really eager for their child to communicate verbally,' denying their child's need for an AAC device, believing that AAC would prevent their child from developing speech.[164] Therefore, these parents rejected and abandoned high-tech AAC on behalf of their child due to the complex emotions which they did not always receive support for.

Reliability:

As part of Scope's *Speak For Yourself* report, they found that 70% of respondents' aids had broken down, 'leaving users without a voice'.[165] When this occurred, 70% were left without equipment for more than one day, and 46% were not provided with a replacement aid.[166] CM found ten important factors when considering high-tech AAC, one of which was reliability, which was highlighted as a significant issue that 'stopped people from using their aids'.[167] This included issues such as batteries running out quickly, aids being broken, or not working at all.[168] This highlights that despite technological advancements, the key components of high-tech devices often did not achieve what the AAC user needed. Issues such as batteries running out quickly meant they could not communicate with

[162] Moorcroft, Scarinci, and Meyer, "Speech Pathologist Perspectives," 195-7.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid., 197.
[165] James Ford, *Speak for Yourself* (research report, Scope, 2000), 6.
[166] Ibid., 24.
[167] "What factors do we need to consider."
[168] Ibid.

people outside their familiar communication partners for vast periods of the day. In contrast, there was no chance of this happening with no- and low-tech solutions.

Not only are there reliability issues with the devices themselves, but also the access options. For example, Sarah had issues with the switch access for her Lightwriter.[169] Due to a lack of standardised access options at the time, she could only use the device with that brand's foot pressure switch. She said that 'the pressure on the switch constantly had to be adjusted with a screwdriver,' something she could not do herself, which was an 'unbearable frustration'.[170] She said, 'it was easier to repeat [herself] umpteen times or try to spell words out, than use the Lightwriter'.[171] Her experiences are echoed by Scope's report, which found that 22% of users had difficulties 'accessing keypads and using switches' with their devices.[172] Across all aspects of the technology, it felt as if manufacturers were not prioritising the essential elements of the devices. In the same way that most humans can rely on their ability to speak to communicate, AAC users did not have this reliability for their voice.

Issues with Conversations:

Multiple issues surrounding conversation were cited, including devices being slow to use, users not gaining or keeping a communication partner's attention, devices with limited vocabulary, and poor speech quality. In Rowley et al.'s study, when the participants were asked why the communication aids were abandoned, the main reasons were conversational issues: 'slowness of communication, loss of eye-to-eye contact,' and 'attempts at communication being necessarily limited'.[173]

[169] Sarah Ezekiel, "Sarah's Chin and Tonic," *Communication Matters* 19:3 (2005): 7.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ford, *Speak for Yourself*, 27.
[173] Rowley et al, "Communication Aids Provision," 7-8.

Timing:

Timing has always remained an important consideration when choosing which method of AAC to use and is a key reason for abandonment. As CM highlights, users wanted quicker devices to suit societal conversational norms better.[174] Mandy, for example, refused to use high-tech devices as 'they are too slow', preferring instead to use low-tech aids.[175] She highlighted that 'people have tried to change [her] to a high-tech aid', underscoring the technoableism attached to low-tech AAC. Still, she refused to use one, citing the downfalls of low-tech AAC (such as people incorrectly guessing what she was saying) were much easier to deal with than those of high-tech devices.[176] Similarly, John said he had used a 'keyboard for 20-odd years' but still '[scribbled] faster than [he typed]'.[177] Like Mandy, he preferred using a pen and paper, a no-tech option, due to the speed at which he could communicate.

For individuals who used switches or other access options rather than direct access (using hands to type), sometimes the effort required to operate the device outweighed the benefits. For example, Brewster and Gregory worked with a child, MW, who found the effort outweighed the benefits due to the 'high risk' associated with the device; if he missed the 'target item' whilst scanning for the letter or word, he had to start the scanning process again, meaning conversations took a lot longer than other methods.[178] Similarly, a participant in Harris' research never used a high-tech device outside the home.[179] She

[174] "What factors do we need to consider."
[175] Brown and Murphy, "The Personal Touch," 3.
[176] Ibid., 3.
[177] John Diamond, 'John Diamond,' *The Times* 1 April 2000, 79.
[178] Stephanie Brewster and Neil Gregory, "Auditory Scanning a Large Word List for Communication," *Communication Matters* 16:1 (2002): 14.
[179]Catherine Harris, "Progressing from Paper Towards Technology: Using High-tech AAC for Functional Communication and Therapy Practice: Single Case Studies," *Communication Matters* 18:2 (2004): 37.

used a range of 'gesture and low-tech methods' and became 'a skilled communicator within her own environment', and rejected the aid because it was 'too slow'.[180]

Attention:

A significant aspect of communication is eye contact, demonstrating that a communication partner is paying attention. Eye contact is challenging when using a high-tech device. Mandy felt this was an important reason for rejecting a high-tech device in favour of a low-tech communication board, saying 'you are able to see if a person is being honest or not, able to understand you or just saying they do, if they are happy or sad'.[181] Using her low-tech AAC, she knew she had someone's attention because they had to look at the device together to speak. Her communication partner had to 'look at [her] facial expression and follow [her] eyes', giving a more 'personal touch' than a high-tech device could have provided.[182] Similarly, Murphy and Bloch's research, which focused on people with MND who had rejected their devices, found that many people had rejected them as they detracted from 'social closeness'.[183]

Inputting Vocabulary:

Lack of vocabulary and the difficulty of inputting new vocabulary also made conversations difficult as some AAC users did not have the vocabulary available to communicate effectively. Nicola said she couldn't 'say things that were in [her] head'; the abstract thoughts she had, not just her basic needs.[184] She rejected the device because she did not have the vocabulary she needed to express these.[185] For those who were

[180] Ibid.
[181] Brown and Murphy, "The Personal Touch," 3.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Murphy and Bloch, "AAC and Everyday Conversation," 4.
[184] Ford, *Speak for Yourself*, 2.
[185] Ibid.

making the transition between paediatric and adult services, when they had not been seen for an extended period, SLTs found that vocabulary often had not been updated 'since school', which meant that their AAC device was not 'as relevant or motivating for college/adult life'. This links to the infantilisation of AAC users; their vocabulary was limited to their child self.[186] Furthermore, in some cases where the user was illiterate or unable to input their own vocabulary, the vocabulary and the way it was organised was determined by their SLT, causing difficulties for the user as the organisation differed from how they communicated and created a reluctance to use the device.[187]

Speech Quality:

The quality of speech output was quite poor, particularly for the early speech synthesis devices in the 1980s and 1990s. However, even as late as 2010, Trembath et al. found that speech quality was still a significant reason people rejected their devices.[188] One participant in the study said that when they used their device, people 'couldn't understand me'.[189] This was supported by a participant in another study who said they had tried their AAC device, but both 'he and his elderly mother found it difficult to understand'.[190] Issues around sound quality also presented themselves in the volume that could be provided on these devices, with many not being suitable for noisy environments, as the volume levels

[186] Lucy Domoney and Tracy Phillips, "Supporting Communication Aid Users in the Transition from Paediatric to Adult Speech and Language Therapy Services in Oxfordshire," *Communication Matters* 23:1 (2009): 13.
[187] Catriona Bennie, "The Semantic Organisation Patterns of Adults with Learning Disabilities: Implications for People who use AAC," *Communication Matters* 20:3 (2006): 3 and Joan Murphy et al., "AAC Systems: Obstacles to Effective Use," *European Journal of Disorders of Communication* 31 (1996): 32.
[188] David Trembath et al, "'Communication is Everything': The Experiences of Volunteers Who Use AAC," *Augmentative and Alternative Communication* 26:2 (2010): 81.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Rebecca Palmer, "VIVOCAL A Voice Input, Voice Output Communication Aid," *Communication Matters* 20:2 (2006): 35.

were too quiet to be heard.[191] Therefore, many AAC users suggested they ended up picking a device and rejecting others simply because it provided the clearest voice they could find or utilised a device where voice output was not needed to overcome these barriers.

Conclusion:

Whilst many users have welcomed high-tech AAC, an ongoing issue has been the high rates of rejection and abandonment of devices. Whilst there are many reasons for this, often highly personal, there have been recurring reasons since the inception of high-tech devices. The stigmatisation of devices from society, users, and loved ones, their unreliability, and their issues during conversations are problems that have caused people to abandon high-tech devices. With high-tech AAC often seen as the pinnacle of communicating as closely to everyday speech for those with communication impairments, there has been an overemphasis on encouraging AAC users to move to high-tech devices without considering the wider spectrum of communication methods AAC users utilise daily. Focusing only on the acceptance and use of high-tech AAC minimises the experiences of those who have abandoned the devices or use them as a small part of their communication methods. It also prioritises the spoken word as the correct way to communicate, leading to technoableism from society and healthcare professionals rather than challenging society to be more open to other forms of communication. This research has shown that disability technologies do not always work for the people they are designed, with key components of the technology not being prioritised by manufacturers.

[191] Sarah Marshall, Amanda Hynan, and Nicole Whitworth, "Perceptions of People Who Use AAC About the Potential of Speech-Generating Devices to Express Identity," *Communication Matters* 33:3 (2019): 39 and Jackie Reeves and Susan Harris, "Case Study: AAC and Aphasia," *Communication Matters* 15:3 (2001): 26.

Whilst high-tech AAC continues to have these flaws discussed in the paper, they will continue to be rejected and abandoned by some AAC users.

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Global South Narratives of Rebellion in International Human Rights Law

Bernardo Carvalho De Mello

The architecture of international human rights law has been historically entrenched in Eurocentric jurisprudence, consolidating hierarchical legal orders that perpetuate the marginalisation of Global South epistemologies. Although human rights are ostensibly universal, the historical and contemporary realities of postcolonial struggles reveal the extent to which dominant powers instrumentalise international legal frameworks to sustain their geopolitical and economic interests. The acts of defiance that emerge from these struggles embody a counter-hegemonic praxis that interrogates and reshapes the foundational principles of international law.

This study critically engages with the role of rebellion in shaping human rights discourse, highlighting case studies from India, Algeria, Bolivia, and Brazil. These instances of contestation—spanning anticolonial struggles to contemporary resistance against neoliberal extractivism—exemplify the agency of subaltern communities in dismantling juridical structures imposed by colonial and neocolonial governance.

In India and Algeria, the assertion of self-determination disrupted entrenched legal doctrines that had long justified colonial rule. The Indian nationalist movement's strategic deployment of non-violent civil disobedience and the *Front de Libération Nationale's* (FLN) armed struggle in Algeria underscore how resistance, both within and outside formal legal parameters, can catalyse shifts in international legal norms, particularly regarding sovereignty and self-determination.

Beyond the historical moment of decolonisation, contemporary struggles in Bolivia and Brazil illustrate the persistence of colonial forms of governance in neoliberal economic frameworks. The Cochabamba Water War in Bolivia epitomises grassroots mobilisation against the commodification of essential resources, exposing how neoliberal legal regimes subordinate human rights to corporate imperatives. Similarly, Brazil's Indigenous rights movement challenges state-backed territorial encroachment and extractivist policies that erode both ecological integrity and Indigenous sovereignty. These movements express a demand for a reconceptualised human rights paradigm that transcends Eurocentric individualism's limitations to foreground collective and ecological entitlements rooted in localised ontologies.

This research adopts an interdisciplinary methodological approach and contends that rebellion is not merely an act of resistance but a constitutive element of human rights evolution. By amplifying the voices of those who defy hegemonic legal frameworks, this study calls for a paradigmatic shift in international human rights law—one that dismantles epistemic hierarchies, recognises subaltern legal traditions, and facilitates a truly decolonial and pluriversal legal order. Here, 'pluriversal' refers to an approach that acknowledges multiple coexisting worldviews, challenging the dominance of a singular, Eurocentric perspective and embracing diverse epistemologies and ontologies.[192] Through this lens, resistance is recast not as an anomaly within legal discourse but as a fundamental driver of juridical transformation and global justice.

1. Decolonisation and Resistance: A Critical Examination of India and Algeria

[192] Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

The anticolonial struggles of India and Algeria represent paradigmatic cases of decolonisation, each exhibiting distinct yet interwoven historical, sociopolitical, and ideological trajectories. India's predominantly non-violent resistance movement, championed by Mohandas K. Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, starkly contrasts with Algeria's protracted armed insurrection against French colonial rule, orchestrated by the FLN. Despite these methodological divergences, both movements profoundly reshaped international legal and human rights discourse, systematically undermining the legitimacy of colonial hegemony and reinforcing the principle of self-determination as a cornerstone of international law.

1.1. India's Non-Cooperation Movement: The Strategic Deployment of Civil Disobedience

India's anticolonial struggle marked a sophisticated mobilisation of non-violent resistance, largely defined by Gandhi's doctrine of satyagraha—a term translating roughly to "truth-force" or "holding firmly to truth".[193] Drawing upon indigenous philosophical traditions and influenced significantly by Western intellectual currents, Gandhi specifically incorporated Thoreau's principles of civil disobedience, advocating moral responsibility to resist unjust laws, and Tolstoy's ideals of pacifism and ethical non-cooperation with oppressive institutions. This synthesis positioned civil disobedience as a powerful method for delegitimising colonial authority.[194]

[193] Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).
[194] Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019).

The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), initiated under Gandhi's leadership, was explicitly structured around the principles of satyagraha in response to oppressive measures by the British colonial administration. Notably, it addressed the draconian Rowlatt Act of 1919, which authorised detention without trial and reacted against the violent suppression exemplified by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of the same year.

Nevertheless, despite the movement's theoretical commitment to satyagraha and non-violence as tools for delegitimising colonial power, it also exposed underlying fissures within Indian society. The ascendancy of Hindu nationalist rhetoric within the independence discourse marginalised Muslim and Dalit constituencies, underscoring the exclusionary dynamics of nationalist mobilisation.[195] Furthermore, the British colonial administration strategically exploited sectarian and caste-based cleavages by employing divide-and-rule policies, such as separate electorates and preferential treatment for certain groups, to deepen intra-communal divisions—divisions that have contributed to contemporary manifestations of exclusion and communal tension, including present-day Hindu nationalism.

Despite these internal tensions, the movement's strategic effectiveness reverberated globally due to its ability to expose moral contradictions within oppressive regimes. Satyagraha succeeded primarily because it demonstrated how disciplined, collective non-cooperation could effectively disrupt economic interests and bureaucratic functions without recourse to violence. For instance, widespread boycotts of British goods significantly impacted British economic interests, while acts of civil disobedience,

[195] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

such as public salt-making during the Salt March of 1930, undermined colonial legitimacy through powerful symbolic actions. These tactics resonated internationally, inspiring similar strategies in subsequent struggles against racial and colonial oppression, notably the American civil rights movement and South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle.[196]

1.2. The Algerian War of Independence: The Imperative of Armed Struggle

In stark contrast to India's largely non-violent resistance, Algeria's independence was achieved through a protracted armed conflict. French colonial rule in Algeria, established in 1830, institutionalised systemic racial discrimination, economic disenfranchisement, and brutal repression.[197] Algeria's designation as an extension of metropolitan France privileged European settlers and imposed a juridical framework on indigenous Algerians that denied them substantive political and civil rights.[198]

The FLN, formed in 1954 as a unified nationalist movement dedicated to securing Algeria's independence from French colonial rule, launched an armed struggle (1954-1962) in direct response to entrenched colonial violence and exclusion. The war encompassed extensive guerrilla tactics, including targeted assaults on French military and civilian infrastructure, while the French counter-insurgency campaign employed widespread torture, mass incarcerations, and extrajudicial executions.[199] The war's ramifications extended beyond Algeria, catalysing political upheaval within France and precipitating the collapse of the Fourth Republic.[200]

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[196] Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019).
[197] Belkacem Belmekki, "Revisiting Colonial Behavior in French Algeria and British India," *Agathos: An International Review of Humanities and Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (2019): 25-44.
[198] Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[199] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1955).
[200] Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training, *Algeria's Struggle for Independence* (ADST, 2016).

A critical dimension of the Algerian struggle was its engagement with international legal institutions. The FLN adeptly leveraged global diplomatic forums, particularly the United Nations, to frame its insurrection within the broader discourse of self-determination.[201] This strategic advocacy contributed to the institutional recognition of national liberation movements as legitimate political entities under international law, culminating in landmark declarations such as the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.[202]

1.3. Comparative Analysis: The Enduring Legacies of Resistance

Although divergent in execution, the Indian and Algerian movements constituted fundamental challenges to colonial sovereignty and legal structures. India's negotiated transition to independence in 1947 stressed the efficacy of political mobilisation and diplomatic engagement, setting a precedent for other nationalist movements. Nevertheless, the transition was marked by the deeply traumatic Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, driven by communal tensions intensified by colonial policies such as divide-and-rule strategies and separate electorates. This abrupt territorial division caused unprecedented mass displacement, violence, and lasting sectarian conflict, the repercussions of which continue to shape communal relations in the region today.[203]

Conversely, Algeria's war of liberation demonstrated that, though costly, armed resistance could dismantle entrenched colonial apparatuses. Ultimately, the Evian Accords (1962) formally secured Algerian sovereignty but left a deeply fractured

[201] Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[202] United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Resolution 1514)* (New York: UNGA, 1960).
[203] Trevor Getz, *Making the Global Local: Comparing Decolonization in India, Vietnam, Nigeria, and Algeria* (Forthcoming, 2025).

postcolonial polity marked by enduring political instability and military interventions.[204] Moreover, France's persistent reluctance to fully reckon with its colonial atrocities continues to strain Franco-Algerian relations, reflecting the unresolved legacies of the French Empire. More broadly, this reluctance is emblematic of how empires generally carry fraught and unresolved legacies—histories of violence, exploitation, and structural inequality—that continue to shape contemporary geopolitics, social relations, and cultural tensions around the globe.

1.4. Decolonisation, Legal Precedents, and Contemporary Implications

India and Algeria represent contrasting, yet complementary, case studies of anticolonial struggles shaped profoundly by their respective colonial contexts. India's strategic adoption of satyagraha, a philosophy advocating non-violent resistance through mass civil disobedience, was a calculated response to British colonial governance that, despite severe repression, maintained a semblance of legal and democratic institutions susceptible to moral and political pressure. Gandhi's method harnessed widespread civil engagement, demonstrating the capacity of disciplined, collective non-cooperation to delegitimise colonial authority economically and politically without resorting to violence. This strategy proved effective largely because the British colonial administration, reliant on international legitimacy and susceptible to economic disruption, was compelled to engage diplomatically, eventually granting independence through negotiation.

Conversely, Algeria's decision to pursue armed guerrilla warfare emerged from a markedly different colonial context characterised by extreme settler-colonial oppression, institutionalised racial hierarchies, and violent exclusion of indigenous populations from

[204] Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019).

substantive legal or political participation. The French administration's refusal to acknowledge peaceful political claims, coupled with systematic violence and marginalisation, made armed resistance appear both strategically necessary and morally defensible to Algerian nationalists. The guerrilla tactics employed by the FLN effectively undermined French military capabilities and public morale, leading ultimately to France's withdrawal despite an enormous human cost. In this sense, the method of armed struggle was not necessarily "affirmed" as ideal but rather recognised pragmatically as the approach capable of disrupting an entrenched colonial regime unresponsive to peaceful protest.

Both movements significantly shaped international legal norms, particularly through reinforcing the legal principle and recognition of self-determination. India's non-violent resistance indirectly influenced international opinion and subsequent formulations of self-determination rights within the emerging United Nations framework. Algeria's struggle explicitly advanced the global recognition of the right to self-determination, notably articulated in the landmark 1960 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1514 (Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples), which unequivocally condemned colonialism and established self-determination as an essential global human right. These cases thus contributed fundamentally to reshaping international law, cementing self-determination as both a legal norm and an internationally recognised human right.

These histories emphasise the continuing relevance of decolonial critique in contemporary geopolitics. The persistence of neocolonial economic paradigms, structural inequalities, and asymmetrical global power relations necessitates an ongoing interrogation of imperial legacies, including economic dependency, unequal trade

relations, cultural hegemony, and racialised global hierarchies inherited from colonialism. As Aimé Césaire asserted, decolonisation must transcend mere political independence to dismantle the epistemic and economic structures underpinning colonial domination.[205]

The struggles of India and Algeria thus remain instructive, highlighting the unfinished project of global decolonisation and the imperative of sustained resistance to contemporary forms of imperialism. However, whether complete decolonisation is achievable remains subject to scholarly debate. Some theorists, such as Walter Mignolo, argue that true decolonisation requires a fundamental restructuring of global epistemic systems and power relations, asserting that without dismantling Eurocentric epistemologies, decolonisation remains incomplete.[206] On the other hand, scholars like Fanon suggest that ongoing resistance to neocolonialism, while vital, cannot entirely erase colonial legacies due to deeply embedded structural inequalities and psychological scars left by colonisation.[207] Thus, while complete decolonisation may be an aspirational ideal, its pursuit remains essential in striving toward a more equitable global order.

2. Grassroots Resistance and Human Rights: Bolivia's Water War and Brazil's Indigenous Movement

Analogous to the earlier anticolonial struggles in India and Algeria, two seminal cases — Bolivia's Cochabamba Water War and Brazil's Indigenous Rights Movement — illustrate how grassroots mobilisation confronts dominant economic paradigms and asserts alternative governance frameworks. The resistance to neoliberal governance and environmental dispossession in the Global South underscores the agency of subaltern

[205] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1955).
[206] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
[207] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

communities in challenging state and corporate encroachment. Two seminal cases—Bolivia's Water War and Brazil's Indigenous Rights Movement—illustrate how grassroots mobilisation confronts dominant economic paradigms and asserts alternative governance frameworks. These struggles reveal the inadequacies of existing legal and economic structures and redefine the discourse of international human rights and environmental jurisprudence.

2.1. Bolivia's Water War: Resisting the Commodification of Water

The Cochabamba Water War (2000) is a crucial instance of collective defiance against neoliberal privatisation. Under the directives of the World Bank, the Bolivian government awarded a 40-year concession for Cochabamba's water supply to Aguas del Tunari, a consortium dominated by the U.S.-based Bechtel Corporation.[208] This privatisation scheme, a component of structural adjustment policies, led to drastic price surges, with some households experiencing a 200% increase in tariffs.[209]

Opposition to this privatisation was immediate. The Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y la Vida, a coalition encompassing labour unions, peasant organisations, and urban residents, emerged as the primary force of resistance, employing tactics such as road blockades, mass mobilisations, and strategic occupations.[210] While initially framed as a struggle specifically for water access, the movement evolved into a broader critique of

[208] Matthew Clements, "A Look at Neoliberalism in Bolivia: The Water War to the Present," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2007): 23-45, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X07002881.
[209] Susan Spronk, "Roots of Resistance to Urban Water Privatization in Bolivia: The 'New Working Class,' the Crisis of Neoliberalism, and Public Services," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 71 (2007): 8-28, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547907000312.
[210] Manuel Schiffler, *Water, Politics, and Money: The Cochabamba Water War* (Springer Studies in Global Development, 2015).

corporate-led governance, extractivism, and state complicity in transnational capital accumulation. This transformation occurred as activists increasingly recognised the interconnectedness between the local privatisation of water and larger systemic issues of neoliberal economic policy, environmental exploitation, and corruption in governance. Despite violent state repression, including militarised crackdowns and civilian deaths, the government ultimately annulled the privatisation contract, reinstating public control over water distribution.[211]

The ramifications of the Water War extended far beyond Cochabamba. It laid the groundwork for Bolivia's broader repudiation of neoliberalism, culminating in the election of Evo Morales in 2005. His administration institutionalised the movement's objectives by enshrining water as a human right in the 2009 Bolivian Constitution.[212] This case illustrates how localised resistance can catalyse systemic shifts in governance and international human rights norms.

2.2. Brazil's Indigenous Rights Movement: Contesting State and Corporate Expansion

Brazil's Indigenous Rights Movement exemplifies the struggle against land dispossession, environmental degradation, and state-backed corporate expansion. While Brazil's 1988 Constitution ostensibly guarantees Indigenous land rights, systemic bureaucratic and political impediments have obstructed their realisation, fuelling decades of resistance.[213] This struggle intensified under right-wing administrations that have

[211] Massimiliano Tomba, "Social Property in the Cochabamba Water War, Bolivia 2000," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 28, no. 1 (2023): 73-86, https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2023.2183174.
[212] Matthew Clements, "A Look at Neoliberalism in Bolivia: The Water War to the Present," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39, no. 3 (2007): 23-45, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X07002881.
[213] Pedro Calafate, "The Rights of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil: Historical Development and Constitutional Acknowledgment," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 25, no. 2 (2018): 183-209, https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02502002.

systematically eroded environmental protections and territorial safeguards, notably by undermining Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) and endorsing agribusiness incursions into Indigenous territories.[214]

The central axis of contention remains the demarcation of Indigenous lands. Article 231 of the Brazilian Constitution affirms Indigenous territorial rights, yet enforcement has been consistently undermined by bureaucratic inertia and political obstructionism. Under the Bolsonaro administration (2019–2022), legislative and executive measures sought to facilitate extractivist projects, exacerbating conflicts between Indigenous communities and state-backed corporate interests.[215] In response, Indigenous activists leveraged legal mechanisms, pursuing strategic litigation through international human rights bodies such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the United Nations.[216]

The movement has also reframed Indigenous rights within an ecological paradigm. Prominent activists, such as Sônia Guajajara, who notably represented Indigenous communities at global platforms, including the UN Climate Change Conferences (COP), have emphasised Indigenous land stewardship as essential to global climate governance, directly challenging policies and practices that fuel deforestation and biodiversity loss in the Amazon.[217] By positioning Indigenous rights as a bulwark against environmental collapse, the movement disrupts dominant neoliberal and Eurocentric

[214] David R. Goyes, Salo de Carvalho, and Valeria Vegh Weis, "Politics and Indigenous Victimization: The Case of Brazil," *British Journal of Criminology* 61, no. 1 (2020): 251-271, https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azaa059.
[215] Alcida Rita Ramos, "The Indigenous Movement in Brazil: A Quarter Century of Ups and Downs," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2010): 15-20.
[216] Pedro Calafate, "The Rights of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil: Historical Development and Constitutional Acknowledgment," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 25, no. 2 (2018): 183-209, https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02502002.
[217] Tracy Devine Guzmán, *Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity After Independence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

human rights frameworks, advocating for the recognition of collective and ecological entitlements.

2.3. Comparative Analysis: Grassroots Movements and Structural Transformation

The Cochabamba Water War and Brazil's Indigenous Rights Movement exemplify the dichotomy between grassroots activism and entrenched state-corporate alliances. While Bolivia's mobilisation secured an immediate policy reversal, Indigenous struggles in Brazil remain an ongoing confrontation with deeply embedded political and economic structures. Both cases stress the transformative potential of local resistance, yet they also reveal the resilience of neoliberal and extractivist paradigms.

These movements share key dimensions. First, grassroots mobilisation emerges as a powerful instrument of political agency, enabling marginalised communities to contest hegemonic governance frameworks. Second, these movements reconceptualise human rights beyond the prevailing Eurocentric paradigm, which prioritises individual civil and political rights, reflecting Western liberal traditions, often at the expense of collective, cultural, and ecological dimensions valued by non-Western societies. In contrast, they advocate explicitly for collective entitlements, environmental stewardship, and the recognition of diverse epistemologies and ontologies. Third, they illustrate the strategic importance of engaging legal and institutional mechanisms, as seen in Bolivia's constitutional reforms and Brazil's international litigation strategies. Finally, transnational solidarity has been instrumental in amplifying these struggles, exerting pressure on national governments to uphold human rights commitments.

2.4. Toward a Decolonial Human Rights Framework

The cases of Bolivia and Brazil underscore the limitations of conventional human rights paradigms in addressing economic dispossession and environmental degradation. They necessitate a reconceptualisation of human rights that prioritises territorial, ecological, and collective entitlements, challenging the dominant neoliberal legal architecture. These struggles reaffirm the role of grassroots resistance in shaping global governance and highlight the urgency for international institutions to uphold the agency of local and Indigenous communities directly impacted by governance decisions. Moving forward, a decolonial approach to human rights must dismantle power asymmetries and recognise the epistemic authority of subaltern movements. Like the anticolonial movements of India and Algeria before them, the cases of Bolivia and Brazil stress the limitations of conventional human rights paradigms in addressing economic dispossession and environmental degradation.

3. Decolonising Human Rights: Epistemic Ruptures and Structural Transformations

The contemporary edifice of international human rights law remains indelibly marked by the legacies of colonialism, sustaining a hegemonic epistemic architecture that privileges Western jurisprudential paradigms while systematically occluding the ontologies and normative contributions of the Global South. This entrenched asymmetry necessitates a rigorous decolonial critique—one that interrogates the epistemic violence perpetuated by Eurocentric legalism and seeks to reconstitute human rights as a pluralistic and equitable framework.

3.1. Implications for International Human Rights Law

The genealogy of international human rights law is inextricably interwoven with the project of colonial modernity, wherein human rights discourses were strategically deployed to consolidate imperial governance while simultaneously circumscribing the political agency of colonised peoples. Roland Burke elucidates how post-World War II human rights frameworks were exploited by former colonial powers to perpetuate neocolonial structures under the guise of universalist legalism.[218] This strategic use of human rights discourse constructed a legal architecture that prioritises civil and political liberty, reflecting a Eurocentric focus on individual rights rooted in Western liberal tradition, while relegating economic, social, and cultural rights to a subordinate status, thereby maintaining the asymmetrical global order.[219]

Meredith Terretta highlights the significance of anticolonial legal mobilisation in contesting existing hierarchies of international law, notably through nationalist movements in French Cameroon that strategically leveraged human rights discourse to articulate their demands for self-determination.[220] This analysis is crucial as it demonstrates how historically marginalised groups actively reshape human rights frameworks to better reflect their specific political contexts, lived experiences, and juridical aspirations. Emphasising such praxis challenges dominant epistemic norms and illustrates the necessity of including Global South perspectives to achieve a genuinely inclusive and equitable international human rights order.[221] Anti-colonial movements in India and Algeria likewise leveraged emerging human-rights rhetoric – pressing the

[218] Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
[219] Ibid.
[220] Meredith Terretta, "Decolonizing International Law? Rights Claims, Political Prisoners, and Political Refugees in French Cameroon's Transition to Statehood," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 42, no. 1 (2022): 3-19, https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-9696919.
[221] Ibid.

United Nations to recognise self-determination – and, in doing so, broadened the international legal framework from below.

3.2. Epistemic Decolonisation and Plural Legalities

The decolonisation of human rights necessitates an epistemological rupture with the universality claims of Western legal modernity, such as the assertion of a singular, neutral, and objective system of law rooted in European Enlightenment rationality and liberal individualism. Instead, it advances a pluriversal legal framework that recognises the legitimacy and value of diverse juridical traditions and epistemologies. Shelley Wright critiques the Eurocentric genealogy of human rights as a civilising mission, highlighting how the erasure of indigenous and non-Western legal ontologies has reinforced epistemic subjugation by marginalising and delegitimising alternative worldviews, knowledge systems, and legal traditions.[222] Wright argues for a reconceptualisation of human rights as a site of contestation, wherein marginalised communities articulate their own normative orders. This reconceptualisation is significant because it enables diverse communities to assert their epistemic autonomy and challenge dominant, exclusionary legal frameworks, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and equitable global understanding of justice.[223] This reconceptualisation finds practical resonance in the case studies: Bolivia's Water War elevated a communal right to water (rooted in local Indigenous values) into law, and Brazil's Indigenous movement injected Amazonian cosmologies of land stewardship into human rights debates – concrete examples of pluriversal legal thinking in action.

[222] Shelley Wright, *International Human Rights, Decolonisation, and Globalisation: Becoming Human* (London: Routledge, 2001).
[223] Ibid.

Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im advances a complementary critique, positing that contemporary human rights regimes operate within an exclusionary paradigm that subordinates localised epistemic traditions to Western liberal norms.[224] He advocates for a transformative shift toward people-centric human rights enforcement mechanisms, emphasising the need for community-based interpretations that resonate with Indigenous sociocultural structures.[225] An-Na'im's critique aligns with William Twining's assertion that a truly global jurisprudence necessitates the incorporation of Southern legal traditions to disrupt the prevailing Eurocentric hegemony.[226]

3.3. Structural Reconfigurations and Reparative Justice

Beyond epistemic transformations, decolonisation necessitates structural overhauls within global human rights institutions to dismantle the entrenched inequities that sustain neocolonial domination. Darren Zook critiques the United Nations' selective application of human rights norms, noting examples such as inconsistent enforcement of resolutions on violations, disproportionately targeting weaker states while powerful states often evade scrutiny, exemplified by the differing levels of enforcement surrounding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international covenants.[227] He argues that UN interventions frequently reinforce, rather than rectify, existing global power asymmetries. Zook further contends that achieving genuine decolonisation in human rights enforcement requires proactive institutional reforms within the UN system

[224] Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, *Decolonizing Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[225] Ibid.
[226] William Twining, *Human Rights: Southern Voices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[227] Darren C. Zook, "Decolonizing Law: Identity Politics, Human Rights, and the United Nations," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 19 (2006): 97-130.

itself, including equitable representation of postcolonial states and marginalised communities in global governance structures and decision-making processes.[228]

Reparative justice is central to this structural recalibration. Burke underlines the failure of international human rights mechanisms, specifically those established by the United Nations, such as the Human Rights Council and treaty-monitoring bodies, to adequately address and redress the economic and material dispossessions resulting from colonial exploitation.[229] He posits that material reparations (financial compensation) and epistemic reparations (addressing the historical erasure or marginalisation of knowledge systems) constitute essential avenues for rectifying historical injustices and rebalancing global asymmetries.[230] Juan Martin Liotta and Amadeo Szpiga extend this argument, advocating for the dismantling of economic dependency structures perpetuated by neocolonial financial regimes.[231] They call for a reconceptualisation of human rights to encompass demands for redistributive justice, moving beyond abstract legalism toward material equity.[232]

Contemporary decolonial initiatives span grassroots legal activism, transnational advocacy, and diplomatic interventions aimed at restructuring international institutions. The intersection of decolonisation with environmental justice movements—exemplified by indigenous resistance to extractive capitalism—demonstrates the transformative potential of a pluralised human rights discourse that actively contests corporate and state

[228] Ibid.
[229] Roland Burke, *Decolonization and the Evolution of International Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
[230] Ibid.
[231] Juan Martin Liotta and Amadeo Szpiga, "Unsettling the Regime of Human Rights: Decolonial Reflections Beyond the Law," *Sortuz: Oñati Journal of Emergent Socio-Legal Studies* 12, no. 1 (2022): 153-169, https://doi.org/10.35295/osls.iisl/0000-0000-0000-1260.
[232] Ibid.

violence. These movements highlight the necessity of embedding human rights within broader struggles for systemic transformation.

3.4 Decolonial human rights?

Decolonising human rights law demands a radical reconceptualisation of its epistemic foundations, institutional configurations, and normative orientations. The persistence of colonial legacies within human rights jurisprudence necessitates an urgent interrogation and reconstitution of legal paradigms to ensure their alignment with the multiplicities of global ontologies. By foregrounding subaltern epistemologies, amplifying collective rights frameworks, and advocating for reparative and redistributive justice, the international human rights regime can transition from its colonial entrenchment toward an emancipatory and genuinely pluralist paradigm.

Conclusion: Voices of Defiance and the Imperative of Decolonial Reconfiguration

The historical and contemporary struggles analysed in this study—spanning the decolonisation movements in India and Algeria, the grassroots resistance in Bolivia and Brazil, and the broader epistemic ruptures within international human rights law—illuminate the persistent and multifaceted contestation against structures of domination. These cases collectively underscore the agency of marginalised populations in resisting entrenched systems of oppression through varied modalities, including political mobilisation, armed struggle, strategic legal advocacy, and the articulation of alternative epistemological frameworks.

The examination of India's and Algeria's respective paths to liberation demonstrates how self-determination evolved as both a legal and political imperative, catalysing shifts within international law. The strategic deployment of nonviolent

resistance in India and armed insurgency in Algeria, despite their methodological divergences, fundamentally undermined the legitimacy of colonial governance. These movements compelled the international legal order to confront the contradictions within its own principles, particularly as colonial rule had long been rationalised through legal mechanisms. The recognition of self-determination as a binding principle in international law was not a benevolent act of global institutions but rather the consequence of relentless, organised resistance that redefined sovereignty and autonomy from the peripheries of empire.

Similarly, the grassroots struggles in Bolivia and Brazil foreground the persistence of colonial economic and ecological paradigms within neoliberal globalisation. The Cochabamba Water War and Brazil's Indigenous rights movement exemplify how contemporary capitalist structures perpetuate systemic dispossession under the guise of economic development. These cases illuminate the ways in which global governance continues to facilitate resource extraction, environmental degradation, and corporate control over essential resources, all of which disproportionately impact historically marginalised communities. However, these movements also highlight the capacity of localised resistance to subvert hegemonic paradigms, compelling legal and institutional transformations that redefine governance beyond the state-centric model. Bolivia's constitutionalisation of water as a human right and the legal mobilisation of Indigenous communities in Brazil against extractivist policies demonstrate the efficacy of grassroots contestation in reshaping international human rights discourse.

At a structural level, the decolonisation of international human rights law remains an unfinished project, as the discipline continues to reflect the epistemic and institutional legacies of colonial rule. The foundational constructs of international law—including

sovereignty, legality, and human rights—were historically deployed as instruments of imperial control, and their contemporary manifestations still reinforce asymmetrical global hierarchies. Meaningful decolonial transformation necessitates an epistemological rupture with Eurocentric universality, advocating instead for a pluriversal legal order that incorporates diverse juridical traditions and ontologies.

This imperative of decolonisation extends beyond theoretical critique; it necessitates substantive structural reconfigurations within global institutions. The persistent marginalisation of postcolonial states and Indigenous epistemologies within human rights mechanisms underscores the need for a recalibration of institutional priorities. Achieving this recalibration requires a fundamental redistribution of decision-making power and an active engagement with reparative justice—materially, in addressing the enduring economic legacies of colonial extraction and epistemically, in dismantling the intellectual hegemonies that continue to exclude non-Western legal traditions. Without an explicit commitment to redistributive and reparative frameworks, international human rights law risks perpetuating rather than mitigating historical injustices.

A truly decolonial approach to human rights must move beyond abstract legalism and engage directly with the lived realities of those resisting systemic oppression. Legal transformation must be conceptualised as an iterative and dynamic process, informed by and responsive to grassroots mobilisation rather than dictated by hegemonic institutions. Resistance should not be perceived as an aberration but rather as an intrinsic component of legal evolution, wherein subaltern communities assert their normative agency to redefine the contours of justice.

The call to action is, therefore, unequivocal. First, legal scholars and practitioners must critically interrogate and dismantle the colonial foundations embedded within human rights jurisprudence, advocating for legal frameworks that reflect the heterogeneity of global justice struggles. Second, international institutions must transition from performative commitments to substantive transformations, ensuring that marginalised voices are not merely included but centred in decision-making processes. Third, activists and institutions must deepen transnational solidarity, recognising that struggles against neocolonial economic and political structures inherently interconnect across geographies and historical contexts.

The enduring legacy of anticolonial movements in India and Algeria, the success of Bolivia's fight for water sovereignty, and continued Indigenous advocacy in Brazil all emphasise the transformative potential of sustained resistance in reshaping legal norms. Ultimately, the "voices of defiance" examined in this work reinforce the fundamental reality that legal and political landscapes are not immutable but are continuously reshaped by those who challenge power. The enduring legacy of anticolonial movements, environmental struggles, and Indigenous advocacy highlight the transformative potential of sustained resistance. If human rights law is to function as a genuine mechanism for emancipation rather than an instrument of control, it must be radically reconceptualised—not as a static, universal framework imposed from above, but as a dynamic and contested site of legal and political struggle. Moving forward, the imperative is not merely to acknowledge these voices but to amplify and institutionalise their demands within the evolving architecture of global justice.

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The Bunny Game – A modern counter-cultural rebellious masterpiece of female empowerment and subversion of film-making norms.

Barnaby Falck

"The great instrument of moral good is the imagination. Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world".[233]

The Bunny Game (2010), is an experimental black and white horror film directed by Adam Rehmeier and written by Rehmeier and the films start, Rodleen Getsic. The film is split into roughly two parts. The first part details the life of a sex worker known only by the nickname 'Bunny' (portrayed by Getsic) who lives from job to job, is addicted to drugs and is taken advantage of and even raped by most of her clients. As she dejectedly wonders the streets of Los Angeles, 'Bunny' is abducted by a deranged truck driver known as 'Hog' (Jeff Renfro), who then proceeds to drive her out to the middle of the desert in order to torment and torture her, beginning the second part of the film. Up until the point of her abduction the film is presented in a traditional manner, with scenes following on from each other in a chronological manner, with a distinct lack of experimental shots or editing techniques; in short, everything feels overly clinical, clod and exact. Once 'Bunny' begins her horrific ordeal at the hands of 'Hog', however, the film assumes an extremely frantic and manic tone. Sequences begin overlapping with each other, the narrative becomes unclear and nonlinear, all while the direction and cinematography of the film

[233] Percy Bysshe Shelley. *A Defence of Poetry,* in*, Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments,* edited by Sandy, Mark. Literary Encyclopaedia. (1840).

physical change as well; different lenses and frame-rates are used to create a surreal, hellish feel that is difficult to comprehend.

Upon its release the film received a mixed reception. Many of the negative reviews for the film tend to focus on its 'failure' at being experimental, with James A. Janisse writing for Bloody Disgusting stating;

> *The Bunny Game is a well shot and expertly edited work, but it's not a film in the conventional sense. It's more of a vicious visceral experience. Because of the style and the wholesale devotion of Getsic and Renfro, The Bunny Game is captivating, but ultimately not an experience worth having.*[234]

Matt Barone, Jason Serafino, and Julia RP, writing for Complex, describe the unpleasant experience of watching the film as being '"*Torture Porn" without a funny bone in its celluloid body'.*[235] This phrase, 'Torture Porn', is an extremely contentious one amongst film academics. While it is impossible to determine exactly where the phrase came from, it is often attributed to David Edelstein to describe, initially, the film *Hostel* (2005),[236] and then more broadly a perceived trend amongst some film critics and audiences of the prevalence of films that focused almost exclusively on violence, gore, nudity, torture, and sadism.[237] In the United Kingdom, a country historically susceptible to media-related controversy and moral panics (see – Video Nasties Controversy discussed in great depth below),[238] the term was even used by the Member of Parliament Charles Walker in the

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[234] James A. Janisse. "The Bunny Game Doesn't Play Nice". *Bloody Disgusting.* August 3, 2012, https://bloody-disgusting.com/reviews/3157563/bd-review-the-bunny-game-doesnt-play-nice/ (Accessed 16 January 2025)
[235] Matt Barone et al. "The most Gruesome Films of All Time". *Complex.* October 29. 2021. https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/a/matt-barone/the-50-most-disturbing-movies (Accessed 16 January 2025)
[236] Edelstein, David. "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn". *New Yorker Magazine.* February 6, 2006. https://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/ (Accessed 26 March 2025)
[237] Doug Brunell. "Dr. Steve Jones Talks About His Book *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw". Brightlight Films.* May 28, 2014. https://brightlightfilm.com/book-torture-porn-talking-dr-steve-jones/ (Accessed: 26 March 2025)
[238] Martin Barker. "Video Nasties: Freedom and Censorship in the Arts". *Pluto Press.* 1984.

context of a wider discussion on online and extreme pornography, with Walker conflating *Hostel 2* (Roth, 2007) (a film he admitted to not having seen) with actual extreme pornography.[239] It is partially because of this reactionary nature and origin of the term, and its often sensationalised use, that many contemporary film academics argue that the term is not an appropriate one at all. Perhaps the most vocal critic of the term is Dr. Steve Jones, who feels that the term is even potentially dangerous;

> *"When I first heard the term 'torture porn', I was quite indifferent to what it implied about the films themselves. I felt that it was a clumsy attempt to broadly describe a trend in an overly simplistic, sensationalistic, attention-grabbing way. It reminded me of previous derogatory labels such as 'video nasty' and 'slasher film', both of which were eventually recouped by fans. As I saw it, 'torture porn' was just another one of those tags. One aspect that* ***did*** *immediately concern me is specific to the United Kingdom Context. At the time (mid-2000s), the Government (was) pushing to pass a piece of legislation known as the Dangerous Pictures Bill. Its ostensible aim was to render some forms of violent pornography illegal (necrophiliac porn, asphyxiation porn, and so forth). The wording of that legislation – which was eventually passed into law – is vague. – In that climate, 'torture porn' sounded like a rallying cry to ban or censor mainstream horror, especially given the association some journalists were making between 'torture porn' and misogyny. – I was concerned by how 'torture porn' might be interpreted in the broader legal context".*[240]

[239] Open Rights Group. "Charles Walker MP: Speeches: Online Pornography". *Open Rights Group.* 14 May 2012. https://wiki.openrightsgroup.org/wiki/Charles_Walker_MP#Online_pornography (Accessed 26 March 2025).
[240] Brunell. "Dr. Steve Jones Talks About His Book *Torture Porn: Popular Horror After Saw".*

This concern expressed by Jones can seen to be made manifest in the context of *The Bunny Game* when one considers the intention behind the film, its execution and the reaction the film received from the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), which decided to refuse to give the film an age rating – effectively banning it in the UK (more on this below).

In essence, through its frenetic presentation, Getsic and Rehmeier have created a work that truly breaks film-making conventions in interesting, purposeful ways. Nevertheless, *The Bunny Game* goes beyond breaking just filmmaking conventions; it pushes at the boundaries of what is 'acceptable' onscreen (as defined by the BBFC),[241] by creating a depiction of violence against women that is truly horrific. Particularly upsetting is the way 'Bunny's' suffering is depicted as evolving throughout the film. When she is first abducted she experiences pure terror, which shifts throughout the film into an unsettling sense of acceptance of her fate. By the end of the film Bunny does not know whether or not she should laugh or cry once she thinks she's managed to escape. Running through the desert, she cries as she begins to process everything she's been through, but once it becomes clear that she has nowhere to run, that there is no one coming to rescue her, she starts laughing. Eventually it becomes clear that she in fact no escaped at all, and that her tormentor was always going to find her. Upon this realisation she resigns herself to her fate, almost transcending physical and emotional pain into what can only be described as a form of ecstasy. Is this a depiction of pure suffering, and through this the letting go of the physical world? Or is it simply a woman reaching the limits of her sanity?

[241] BBFC Staff. "The Bunny Game: Unsuitable for Classification". British Board of Film Classification. 11 October 2011. https://www.bbfc.co.uk/release/the-bunny-game-q29sbgvjdglvbjpwwc00mziymzm. (Accessed: 9 April 2025).

Similarly terrifying is the way the character 'Hog' is juxtaposed to 'Bunny'. Initially he seems to have captured the protagonist in order to fulfil some kind of sick desire or fantasy. His apparent thrill-seeking fades into a deep set feeling of foreboding and despair, verging into self-hatred. This experience of subversion that both characters undergo is explained by Getsic herself;

> *"From day one in the desert, he goes through stages of curiosity, contemplation, awkwardness, remorse, and finally, in parallelling my character ('Bunny'), he experiences hysteria, thereupon, the void".*[242]

As detailed by Getsic herself, this element of subversion present in the film is intentional. In her 2012 article, entitled *My Monsterpiece*, which was originally written to protest the decision by the BBFC to ban the film, Getsic goes into depth on the production of the film and discusses the very real ordeal that everyone involved in the production went through to make it. Reading this article, one sense that the ordeal of creating the film was part of 'the point'. This germane is to both provide a piece of art that gives catharsis to those who have suffered from male sexual violence, while also acting as a warning to potential perpetrators to the potential moral degradation that will be inflicted on the offender.

Infamously, the film contains both unsimulated sexual acts and what appears to be real physical violence. These acts are conceived of, approved by, and consensually carried out on Getsic by her fellow cast members. They were people that she knew, trusted and loved in her real day to day life.

> *"Although the scenes in THE BUNNY GAME are brutal and dark, the difficult scenes are all infused with love, care, intention and a conscious drive".*[243]

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[242] Rodleen Getsic. "My MonsterPiece: An Art Film". *Cine-Excess Issue 1: Subverting the Senses: The Politics and Aesthetics of Excess.* 2013. https://www.cine-excess.co.uk/my-monsterpiece.html. (Accessed 16 January 2025)
[243] Getsic. *My MonsterPiece.*

Throughout the entirety of the extremely intense production, it was Renfro, not Getsic, who actively had an unpleasant time filming:

> *"I did not suffer emotionally nor physically for the film. In fact, although improvisational, I was well aware of everything as it happened. As they days went on, Adam and I found it increasingly difficult to get our co-star (Renfro) to show enough fierceness in his role. The man was giving up. Shame was holding him back. I repeatedly had to ask Adam to stop filming so that I could instruct my opponent on giving more strength in his action".*[244]

Such sentiments like those above seemingly point towards the film being a piece that experiments with ideas of empowerment and agency, both on and off screen.

> *"This issue goes beyond gender, and it is a key element in my film: empowerment transcending the exploitation of (the) female. – Rape survivors proclaim empowerment upon viewing THE BUNNY GAME. – THE BUNNY GAME is my extreme response, a rebellion of (male-dominated American) culture".*[245]

It is this sense of regaining control over this oppressive culture that Getsic is rebelling against and the subsequent feeling of ownership over trauma that those who have watched the film seem to have experienced that truly sets *The Bunny Game* apart from other so-called 'Torture Porn' films. In contrast to other contemporary example of similarly transgressive cinema, such as the *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls* (2006-2010)[246] and *August Underground* series (2001-2007),[247] *Melancholie der Engel* (2009),[248] and *Philosophy of a Knife* (2008),[249] *The Bunny Game* simply cannot be described as a *"seething*

[244] *Ibid.*
[245] Ibid
[246] Lucifer Valentine. *Slaughtered Vomit Dolls Series.* Unearthed Films. 2006-2010.
[247] Fred Vogel. *August Underground Series.* ToeTag Productions. 2001-2007.
[248] Marian Dora. *Melancholie der Engel.* Shock Entertainment. 2009.
[249] Andrey Iskanov. *Philosophy of a Knife.* Unearthed Films. 2008.

Hatework".[250] *The Bunny Game* is sympathetic and intentional in its approach to depicting sexual violence, as elaborated on by Getsic in her own reflections of the film, as well as in the film itself – Bunny is never blamed for anything that happens to her in the film. It is a film that calls on its audience to contemplate their own experiences and behaviours, rather than simply be disgusted, angered or purely unsettled. Through this it becomes a rebellion against societal norms, which have traditionally kept hidden difficult conversations about male sexual violence and women's anger against systems that perpetrate this kind of violence. In its presentation, the film seems to be foreshadowing the type of anger induced empowerment that would become increasingly common in a post-*MeToo* world. In Getsic's own words;

> *"My motive in creating THE BUNNY GAME is of high intention. It is a spiritual endeavour. It may seem paradoxical that I would have such a vision while creating a disturbing horror film, however, it is my lifetime goal to edify the possibility for real world peace. Through art, performance, and leadership, I aim to encourage and elicit positive, societal transformation. THE BUNNY GAME is indeed more than just a film. It is a mystical piece of art".*[251]

While it is a truly rebellious, transgressive film, it is important to note that the main reason that the film gained a significant amount of attention and notoriety in the first place is because it was 'banned' in the UK, with almost all coverage of the film focusing on this fact.

It is worth pointing out some technicalities about the film being 'banned' in the UK, the BBFC itself and its motivations for rejecting the film. Firstly, there are two tiers of film 'bans' in the UK. The first are films that have been deemed to be illegal – films that break

[250] James Aston. "A Malignant, seething hatework": An Introduction to U.S. 21st Century Hardcore Horror". *Senses of Cinema, issue 80. 1443-4059.* 2016. http://sensesofcinema.com/2016/american-extreme/hardcore-horror/ (Accessed: 13 December 2024).
[251] Getsic. *My MonsterPiece.*

the law, whether this be by breaching specific statutory laws like the Protection of Children Act 1978 (which made the production or selling of sexual images of children illegal),[252] or by breaking case law, like the 'R v Brown' case (which ruled that acts of 'grievous bodily harm' carried out in a consensual manner was still nevertheless illegal).[253] These are films that are usually produced for specialised audiences with no intention for said work to be seen by a wider audience, often with full knowledge that they are breaking the laws of many territories around the world, and potentially even produced with criminal intent and action in the first place (see 'Snuff' films or Child Sexual Abuse films).[254] These films are restricted by the British state and police force, with the selling of or possession of them (either physical or digital) constituting a serious crime.[255]

The second tier are films like *The Bunny Game,* works that have been rejected by the BBFC. While it is ultimately true that under British law that the ultimate authority of what can be shown in commercial cinemas are local councils, due to a series of historical agreements and general lack of resources amongst most council authorities, these decisions are deferred to the BBFC, an organisation that exists almost entirely to classify film. While there have been some examples of authorities around the UK contradicting the BBFC's judgement, such as the 1980 decision by Glasgow city council to ban *The Life of Brian* (1970)[256] from being shown within the city limits in cinema,[257] these cases are few and far between. While the BBFC lacks full legal control over what can be shown in the cinema, the Board does have full statutory control over what physical media can be

[252] Protection of Children Act 1978.
[253] Alex Kershaw. "*S&M: The Limits of Liberty*". *The Guardian.* 28 November 1992.
[254] Neil Jackon. "*Snuff: Real Death and Screen Media*". *Bloomsbury.* 28 January 2016.
[255] OfCom Staff. "*Illegal and Harmful Content*". *OfCom.* 2025. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/. (Accessed: 9 April 2025).
[256] Terry Jones. *The Life of Brian.* Python (Monty) Pictures. 1979.
[257] BBC Staff. "*City Lifts Ban on Life of Brian*". BBC News. 30 June 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/glasgow_and_west/8126490.stm (Accessed: 9 April 2025).

sold legally in the UK due to the Video Recordings Act 1984. If a film does not have a BBFC certificate, it cannot be legally sold (or exchanged) within the UK.[258]

The outright rejection of a film is an action that is very rarely taken by the BBFC. In fact, throughout the 2010s only three films were rejected by the Board – *Lost in the Hood* (2009),[259] *The Bunny Game* (2011),[260] and *Hate Crime* (2012).[261] *Lost in the Hood* was rejected due to its premise being entirely centred on depictions of homosexual rape as the core 'selling point' of the film; subject matter that could be considered 'obscene' in British courts.[262] *Hate Crime* was rejected due to fears that if released the film could be *considered* to be Antisemitic;[263] the film (whose director is Jewish) details the brutal assault and murder of a Jewish family by Neo-Nazi's. Like *Hate Crime, The Bunny Game* does not have any material contained within it that could be constituted as being an actual crime. Regardless of this, both films were rejected, in part, over concerns the filmmakers could face legal challenges from the British Public or state.[264]

With this context in mind, it is perhaps more surprising that *The Bunny Game* was outright rejected with no recommendations for cut or edits upon its submission to the BBFC in 2011. Then director of the BBFC, David Cooke, stated that;

> *"It is the Board's carefully considered view that to issue a certificate to this work, even if confined to adults, would be inconsistent with the Board's Guidelines,*

[258] Video Recordings Act 2010.
[259] Edward James. *Lost in the Hood.* Edward James Productions, 2009.
[260] Rehmeier. The Bunny Game.
[261] James Cullen Bressack. *Hate Crime.* Unearthed Films, 2012.
[262] BBFC Staff. "Lost in the Hood: Unsuitable for Classification". *BBFC*. 7 May 2010. https://www.bbfc.co.uk/release/lost-in-the-hood-q29sbgvjdglvbjpwwc00mjy2nja. (Accessed: 9 April 2025).
[263] BBFC Staff. "Hate Crime: Unsuitable for Classification". *BBFC*. 2 March 2015. https://www.bbfc.co.uk/release/hate-crime-q29sbgvjdglvbjpwwc0zotaxmzm/. (Accessed: 9 April 2025).
[264] BBFC Staff. "Annual Report 2011". BBFC. 2012.

would risk potential harm within the terms of the Video Recordings Act, and would accordingly be unacceptable to the public".[265]

Following on from this initial statement, the BBFC elaborates;

"The principle focus of the Bunny Game is the unremitting sexual and physical abuse of a helpless woman, as well as the sadistic and sexual pleasure the man derives from this. The emphasis on the woman's nudity tends to eroticise what is shown, while aspects of the work such as the lack of explanation of the events depicted, and the stylistic treatment, may encourage some viewers to enjoy and share in the man's callousness and the pleasure he takes in the woman's pain and humiliation – The Board considered whether its concerns could be dealt with through cuts. However, the pervasiveness of the abuse makes it very difficult to deal with The Bunny Game by means of cuts. If the company would like to attempt to cut this work in order to submit it in a reduced form, they are entitled to do so, but the Board can offer no assurances that such re-editing would be successful".[266]

There is a certain sense of irony when reading the BBFC's reaction here, considering the rationale behind the features existence. The message is a warning to those that might instigate this kind of violence and as a form of catharsis for those who have experienced sexual abuse.

"In its bare bones, my film is about a woman getting taken advantage of by a man. Having personal experience with escaping dangerous situations, the film allowed

[265] David Cooke. "The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) has rejected the DVD THE BUNNY GAME*". BBFC. 12 October 2011.* https://www.bbfc.co.uk/about-us/news/the-british-board-of-film-classification-bbfc-has-rejected-the-dvd-the-bunny-game*. (Accessed: 9 April 2025).*

[266] BBFC Staff. The Bunny Game: Unsuitable for Classification.

me to enact the 'what ifs' of a woman actually getting abducted without escape".[267]

Getsic's central argument is that the film should be reconsidered in line with its original messages and intentions. She argues that *"THE BUNNY GAME is a shockumentary",*[268] that was intended to 'awaken' its audience, and that to appreciate it properly, one has to view it as a true piece of art, and to engage with it in its original intended context *"with interest";*

> *"I extend my condolences to the BBFC (-) and to any other viewers who watch my film without artistic interest. The Bunny Game is created for a specific audience. It is bold performance art transformative to society; a definite challenge to accepted filmic trends."*[269]

Getsic takes particular issue with the BBFC's accusation that the film might *"eroticise or endorse sexual violence."*[270]

> *"On the contrary, my film actually has the ability to recourse someone's potential for deviant behaviour. A sadistic portrayal is not typically considered erotic. The improvised scenes are only "real" in the spirit of a live show – (SIC) – contrary to the opinion that my film may eroticise sexual violence, and contrary to the idea that a young man might be influenced by the antagonist's alleged pleasure he is deriving from the infliction of torture in my film, in truth, it is obvious the old man becomes quite conflicted with his deviant tendencies. (Sic) My film is clearly not pornographic. Pornography is defined by having the purpose of sexual*

[267] Getsic. My MonsterPiece.
[268] Ibid
[269] Ibid
[270] Ibid

gratification. The Bunny Game is anti-porn – anyone attracted to it with the expectation of pornography will get a lesson they never bargained for."[271]

Getsic claims that the BBFC has fundamentally misunderstood the film, and attacks the Board for essentially being an apathetic and uninterested party;

"Reports and studies done by scholars and groups associated with or distant from alternative platforms cannot understand the spiritual and artistic intentions that Adam and I hold".[272]

Furthering her own defence of the film, and its position as a valuable piece of art and social commentary, Getsic reveals a great deal of behind-the-scenes information regarding the films production. The film infamously features Getsic being (at least at first glance) genuinely physically abused and injured by Renfro – something that the BBFC considered to be 'unacceptable' and a key basis for its rejection of the film. In opposition to this Getsic insists that;

"The infliction of staged abuse and defilement caused my rival more grief and worry than Adam and I had ever expected.(SIC) I played an active role in guiding the antagonist in his attempts to portray abuse. No one was hurt in THE BUNNY GAME, nor was anyone sexually aroused. (SIC)Shame was holding him back. I repeatedly had to ask Adam to stop filming so that I could instruct my opponent on giving more strength in his action. (SIC)The production was intense, and I put my body and soul into it. It is true, that I made unusually high demands of myself physically and spiritually for my film (SIC) Some people who view my film assume that my body underwent dangerously severe conditions, yet there are elements that should be considered. (SIC) During film production, each night when I returned

[271] Ibid
[272] Getsic, "My MonsterPiece".

home, my personal masseuse worked to help prepare my body and mind for the next day's events. My private chef made sure that I was well-nourished, receiving the proper nutrients in my diet. After production, I was a guest at the Canyon Ranch, a healing resort. – My only wound, which I did not need treatment for, was a sliver in my foot. Within one week, it emerged on its own".[273]

Adam Rehmeier, the films director, has also shown his support for Getsic's vision, stating he believes *The Bunny Game* is a valuable piece of work, going on to say;

"I think that it's much more damaging for society to have rubbish like… Pretty Woman on the Family Channel; a film where a prostitute ends up with the wealthy man of her dreams".[274]

This comment highlights the overall rebellious and anti-establishment nature of the film, and also underlines the irreconcilably differing opinions about what consenting adults should and should not be able to watch. Getsic is of the view that as long as the film was lawful in production, that everyone involved, including the viewer, is consenting, and the work is purposeful in its intentions, then it ought not to be withheld from an adult audience. This point is stressed extensively by Getsic, who makes a strong plea in the films defence, and against censorship, near the end of her article;

"Here we come to a point where government and the private interests of those in positions of control can kindly step aside. In the wake of this new era, people can make their own decisions. I urge Her Majesty's Kingdom and everyone in the world to feel free (SIC). I strongly oppose censorship, yet in the beginning I was glad that the BBFC banned my film. Not because it would give more publicity, worldwide and historically. I was glad because it heralded the message all over

[273] Ibid
[274] Getsic, "My MonsterPiece".

the world – that my film is a serious work of art. However, it is time for the BBFC to realize that the citizens of the United Kingdom are educated enough to make their own decisions. Nothing should be censored for the human-race. Controlling people will eventually breed revolt. All banned films should be awarded release. Adults, if they so choose, can watch films with respective, appropriate ratings. My film deserves an 18 certificate".[275]

Additionally, Getsic makes it clear that while she believes her film should receive an 18 certificate and be freely available to any and all consenting adults, she **is** clearly in favour of some kind of age restrictions and categorisation, especially when concerning children;

"Children should absolutely never watch THE BUNNY GAME".[276]

The BBFC on the other hand, firmly believes that there is quantifiable 'line' between acceptable and unacceptable viewing, especially in regards to depictions of sexual violence. This line is not one that is fluid or vague, but is fundamentally set in stone by the Boards regularly research and compiled guidelines. As the Board puts it in context of *The Bunny Game;*

"In making a decision as to whether a video work is suitable for classification, the BBFC applies the criteria set out in its current Classification Guidelines, published in 2009. These are the result of an extensive process of public consultation and research and reflect the balance of media effects research, the requirement of UK law and the attitudes of the UK public. The BBFC's guidelines clearly set ouf the BBFC's serious concerns about the portrayal of violence, especially when the violence is sexual or sexualised, but also when depictions portray or encourage callousness towards victims, aggressive attitudes, or taking

[275] Ibid.
[276] Ibid.

> *pleasure in the pain or humiliation of others. Even at the adults-only category of '18', the Guidelines make clear exceptions to the principle of free adult choice, including any material or treatment which "appears to the BBFC to risk harm to individuals or, through their behaviour, to society – for example, any detailed portrayal of violent or dangerous acts… This may include portrayals of sexual or sexualised violence which might, for example, eroticise or endorse sexual assault".*[277]

Getsic's position is that the film, through its intentional use of sexual violence as a vehicle to explore Getsic's reclamation of autonomy from the dangers of male sexual violence (and by extension, other women's ability to connect with this), while also being a tool to viscerally warn men of the moral dangers of committing such violence. This intentional attempt at eliciting feelings of discomfort, horror, and even shame sets *The Bunny Game* up as not only a rebellion against male sexual violence, but also against a largely male dominated subgenre (and the largely male dominated wider film industry). This rebelliousness is only further cemented by the BBFC's decision to ban the film in the UK, citing fears that it would be generally harmful to anybody who watched it, a position which is in direct opposition to Getsic's beliefs surrounding the power of her film.

This dispute between artist and regulator is a seemingly irreconcilable one, where both are coming from a place of concern for the well-being of those watching the film, but have completely different viewpoints on how to approach this concern. By rejecting the paternalistic approach of the BBFC, Getsic further entrenches *The Bunny Game* as a counter-cultural symbol, something that truly does challenge the status quo of both filmmaking and approaches towards the transformative effects of art.

[277] BBFC Staff. "The Bunny Game: Unsuitable for Classification".

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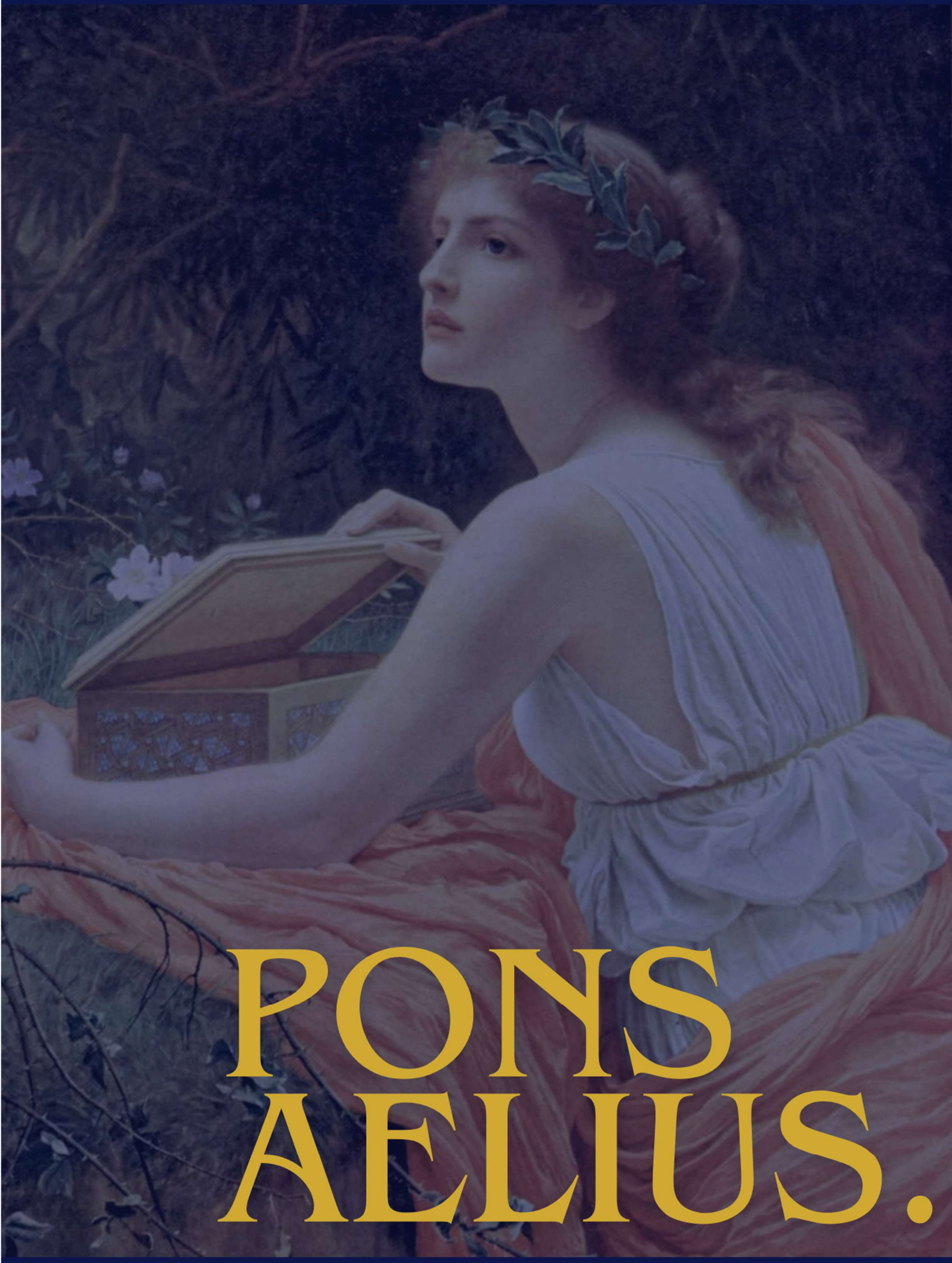
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