

# THE ARCHIVE

*Sex that Kills: The story of  
Catholicism in Latin  
America*

*The first customer  
complaint: A defense of Ea-  
Nasir*

*Interview with a  
Latinist: A sneak peek inside  
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## A DIFFERENT KIND OF "BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME"

By Ian Blackman-Staves

Design by Eva Ji

It's easy to take timekeeping for granted. We can end a conversation with someone on the other side of the world, and immediately be presented with the number of minutes and seconds it used up. We can set as many alarm clocks as we like, and we don't need to change them when we cross time zones. We can easily set our microwaves to go for however long the back of the package indicates, and be sure that our food will be cooked. But this was not always the case. Today we'll talk about units of time throughout history, and some of the revolutions that have made our timekeeping system the way that it is.

### Seconds

Let's take a second to talk about the second. Today, one second is defined as "the length of time in which the radiation from the unperturbed ground-state hyperfine transition of the caesium-133 atom oscillates 9,192,631,770 times."<sup>1</sup> From this, we can define the minute as 60 seconds and the hour as 60 minutes. This is very convenient if you intuitively measure time in terms of the frequency of atomic radiation. That being said, as it may shock you to learn, this was not always the accepted definition of a second.

But before modern standardization, definitions tended to work in the other direction, defining small units of time only in relation to larger ones. Seconds were usually considered to be subdivisions of the hour; in fact, this subdivision is where the word "second" comes from: the Latin *pars minuta secunda* means "the second small part (of an hour)," and the "first small part" is the *pars minuta prima*.<sup>2</sup> Over time, these became, respectively, the second and the minute. There have, historically, also been thirds and fourths (a third is 60 times shorter than a second, and a fourth 60 times shorter than a third). As you can imagine,



Image of the 'Black Sun', from Splendor Solis, a German alchemical treatise, 1582

these can't have been very useful for most people, but some scholars made interesting use of them to precisely predict astronomical events.<sup>3,4</sup>

## Minutes

Now, let's take a minute to talk about the minute. It might be a good time to ask, "what's the deal with 60?" The simple mathematical answer is that it is easier to work with, because it leads to whole numbers when talking about halves, thirds, fourths, fifths, and sixths (for example, half an hour is 30 minutes, a third is 20 minutes, a fourth is 15, a fifth is 12, and a sixth is 10). But, it also has some historical significance. The ancient Babylonians may have been some of the first to use subdivisions of 60 to measure time. However, they didn't use the 60-part division in quite the same way that we do; the closest thing they had to a minute was an *uṣ*, which is about four of our minutes.<sup>5</sup> In other words, an *uṣ* is 1/360 of a day—meaning that it corresponds to one degree of the sun's movement in the sky (relative to an observer on the Earth). In fact, the geometric "degree" is probably an extension of this unit of time.<sup>6,7</sup> This is natural, as these divisions were used primarily by astronomers in ancient Babylon (as you might imagine, without a clock or a protractor, such small divisions of the hour and the circle would be hard to keep track of).

Although the practice of dividing time into 60 parts has been predominant, that's not to say its reign has gone unchallenged. In 1793, in France, time was decimalized. A minute was redefined as only one hundredth of an hour, or a thousandth of a day. But this did not last long, and it was returned to a base-60 system in 1795.<sup>8,9</sup>

A more long-lived decimal system existed in ancient China, where the *kè* (one hundredth of a day) existed as early as at least the first century CE – although it was further subdivided into the familiar 60 parts as early as the sixth century CE.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, the word *kè* (刻) still exists, and it means one quarter of an hour (or 1/96 of a day, which is not too far from its original definition). Speaking of an hour...



Donald Davis, *Strange Night*, 1970s, NASA Ames Research Center

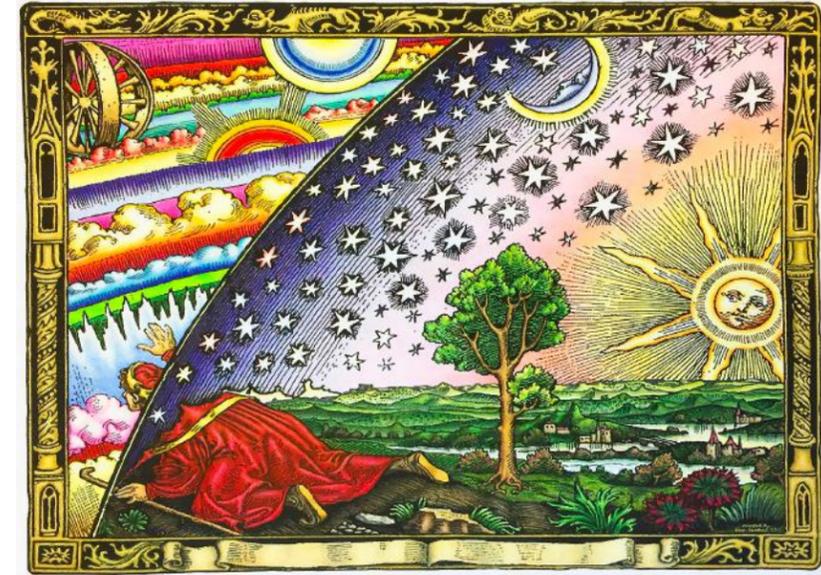
## Hours

Things start to become more interesting once we get to larger, more intuitive scales of time. Up to this point we've been talking about (relatively) small units of time which, even though they've been used by scientists for millennia, were pretty useless to most people since they usually didn't have a clock to keep track of them.

The hour, on the other hand, is long enough that it is a natural and convenient way to keep track of the passage of time throughout the day. But here in Michigan, daylight might start after 6 hours and end 16 hours later (in the summer) or start after 8 hours and end 10 hours later (in the winter). So, the modern hour isn't really that good at dividing up the day after all. Why not just divide the useful part (sunrise to sunset) into 12 parts, and the useless part (the rest) into 12 more, even if that would mean that day and night hours are different lengths? This was the case in the Babylonian system mentioned before,<sup>11,12</sup> as well as most other cultures.

To us, standardization of the hour seems like an obvious thing to do, but it was useless and impractical to almost everybody throughout much of history. A similarly impractical standardization is the concept of time zones. If you're 300 miles away from me, and I have no convenient way to travel to or communicate with you, why should my 10:00 am be the same as yours? Timekeeping naturally varied continuously from place to place without any need for official demarcation, but once travel by train became common, it suddenly became important for someone in Bristol to know when to catch one from London. Enter time zones.<sup>13</sup>

Time zones are a great example of how timekeeping often has more to do with the people of a region than the position of the sun. For instance, China is a very large country with only one official time zone, which is calibrated to Beijing (on the eastern side of the country).<sup>14</sup> This means that in parts of western China, the time is as much as two and a half hours different from what



Houston Physicist, 1888, *L'atmosphère : météorologie populaire* ("The Atmosphere: Popular Meteorology"), A modern colorized version of the Flammarion Engraving

it was before the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949.<sup>15</sup> In Xinjiang, a separate, unofficial time zone is also used which runs two hours faster.<sup>16</sup> The use of the two time zones in Xinjiang tends to fall along cultural lines, and communication in Chinese usually uses Beijing time while communication in Uighur tends to use Xinjiang time.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the choice of time zone is really a proxy for a much more complicated cultural situation. While minutes and seconds have historically been in the arena of science, the hour is clearly tangible enough to be relevant to the lives of many more.

The timekeeping systems of different cultures are a lot more than ways of breaking up the day; each has its own purposes and can trace its genealogy to systems that came before it. Cultures from all over the world and all through history had interesting timekeeping systems, each with unique details and applications. Even though this article might be exhausting, it's not exhaustive: if you'd like to learn more thoroughly about the system of a particular group, if records from that time exist, the information is all out there – and don't even get me started on calendars. ■

## Notes:

1. BIPM, *Le Système International d'unités/The International System of Units*, Book, 2019.
2. Matthews, Robert, "How was the length of a second first calculated?", Article, N.D.
3. Birūnī, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations: An English Version of the Arabic Text of the Athār-Ul-Bākiya of Albirūnī, Or "Vestiges of the Past."*, Book, 1879.
4. Speaking of astronomical events, a group of people called the "International Earth Rotation and Reference Systems Service" have spent all their time since 1987 making sure that quasars are where we expect them to be at any given moment. If they're not, they add a second to everyone's clocks and call it a "leap second" in order to fix the discrepancy, because that is easier than moving the quasars.
5. Rochberg-Halton, Francesca, "Babylonian Seasonal Hours", Article, 1989.
6. Ibid. Rochberg-Halton, Francesca.
7. Unfortunately, a "minute" of an angle does not correspond to the modern "minute" of time, but to 4 seconds, and a "second" of an angle corresponds to 1/15 of a second.
8. Actually, time is still usually decimal in

the metric system (a longer-lasting French revolutionary innovation) once we get smaller than one second, which is why we are allowed to say "one millisecond" instead of "three thirds and thirty six fourths."are allowed to say "one millisecond" instead of "three thirds and thirty six fourths."

9. Roulet, Christophe, "Decimal Time: The Revolution That Never Was", Article, 2010.

10. Sōma, Mitsuru, Kin-aki Kawabata, and Kiyotaka Tanikawa, "Units of Time in Ancient China and Japan", Article, 2004

11. This is actually a little more complicated: when hours are different lengths during the day and the night, it makes subdividing them into *uṣ*, for example, much more difficult. In fact, Babylon had both seasonal hours (which changed with the lengths of the days and nights) and non-seasonal hours (which were absolute).

12. Rochberg-Halton, Francesca, "Babylonian Seasonal Hours", Article, 1989.

13. Carradice, Phil, "The Great Western Railway Creates Standard Time", Article, 2012.

14. Schiavenza, Matt, "China Only Has One Time Zone—and That's a Problem", Article, 2013.

15-17. Ibid. Schiavenza, Matt.

# A DEFENSE OF EA-NASIR

by Will McClelland  
Design by Oliver Higgins

Have you ever worked retail or food service? Ever had to deal with an annoying or angry customer? If so, I'm so sorry. Just know that you are so brave, and if ever the opportunity presents itself, I'll cook you dinner.<sup>1</sup> But, if it's any consolation, you're far from the first person to be yelled at by a dissatisfied customer. In fact, the legacy of customer complaints is one that (unfortunately) goes back nearly 4000 years.

In the words of that annoying guy from Tall Girl (2019), "let me paint you a word picture."<sup>2</sup> Imagine you're a copper merchant from ancient Mesopotamia that sometimes trades for the palace at Ur (a city in what is now Iraq). It's a high-pressure job; copper was an essential ingredient for the creation of bronze, which was the "It" metal of the ancient Mediterranean in the 2nd millennium BCE, so having to make sure the royal palace of the king of Old Babylonia had enough of it means there's a lot riding on your shoulders! So, when you get the chance, you take a little time off to go visit your merchants' guild in Dilmun (modern-day Bahrain, on the Persian Gulf) for a nice beach vacation while picking up some more product. You're having a great time hanging out with the lads from the Alik Tilmun guild, drinking Ye Anciente Bud Light Lime on the beach, listening to Djimmi Bu-fit, but then you go home and find PILES of angry customer complaint tablets on your doorstep demanding your copper and accusing you of being negligent. Like, come on. That would

suck.

This is what happened to a real copper merchant named Ea-Nasir, who lived sometime during the 18th-century BCE.<sup>3</sup> Personally, if I were in that situation, I'm pretty sure my eyes would go completely black and I'd start throwing the tablets against the walls, so the fact that we still have them even after nearly four millennia is truly a testament to Ea-Nasir's self-control.<sup>4</sup> The most famous of these tablets is one written to him in Akkadian - one of the most widespread languages of the Middle Bronze Age Mediterranean - by someone named Nanni.<sup>5</sup> It accuses Ea-Nasir of refusing to provide Nanni with the high quality copper ingots that he had ordered; specifically, when Nanni sent a messenger to pick up the copper, Ea-Nasir put lower quality copper in front of him and said "If you want to take them, take them, if you do not want to take them, go away!"<sup>6</sup> Nanni also mentions that he had already paid for the copper, but Ea-Nasir had claimed that Nanni still owed him one mina of silver for the product.<sup>7</sup> I'll be the first to admit I don't know much about the intricate workings of ancient Mesopotamian economics, but what I do know is that if someone at Starbucks doesn't pay for their drink, we're not allowed to give it to them.<sup>8</sup> So, yes, Ea-Nasir could be grifting, but he could also just be doing his job.

You may be thinking, "should Ea-Nasir really be forgiven for his schemes? He ripped a guy off pretty badly, and I also find it aggravating when

*The Ea-Nasir tablet, written in Akkadian cuneiform. It is currently housed at the British Museum, the home of many famous and highly notable historical pieces that absolutely do not belong to the British.<sup>11</sup>*

my local copper merchant deals me low-quality ingots." Well, before you make up your mind once and for all, let me just say this: customer service is the WORST. It's a Sisyphean nightmare where every shift you work, you go in wishing for just one normal day where no one is unnecessarily rude to you, but you always leave disappointed. So, in my totally unbiased opinion, I think service workers should be allowed to do whatever they want, even if that includes being rude to their customers. Actually, especially if it includes being rude to customers. Maybe you think I'm being too forgiving and Ea-Nasir may have truly been an unpleasant guy that was trying to scam Nanni and all of his other business partners. And maybe you'd be right! But you know what? Game respects game. If he wants to grift a bunch of Mesopotamian business majors for shits and giggles, I think we should just let him. It's a tough job - I'm of the opinion that he deserves to cause a few problems. Anyways, maybe Nanni was an especially annoying customer who had once complained to Ea-Nasir's manager about copper ingots that were perfectly normal. Who's to say! Forbes Magazine may think he's the worst businessman of the Mediterranean Bronze Age, but as for me?<sup>9</sup> Ea-Nasir will receive nothing but my utmost respect - I hope you feel the same. ■

*A Southern Mesopotamian mina from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BCE) modeled after a mina from the standard of Shulgi, a Sumerian king from 2094-2047 BCE. It weighs 978.3 grams.<sup>10</sup>*

## Notes:

1. I work at Starbucks. We're in this together.
2. Yes, I do hate myself for making this reference, thanks for asking! Also yes I know that all the guys from Tall Girl are annoying. Let's move on.
3. Though maybe without the Djimmi Bu-fit; Kristina Killgrove. "Meet the Worst Businessman of the 18th Century BC." Magazine Article. May 11, 2018.
4. If you come to Starbucks during peak hours, you can see this in action as I start throwing frappuccinos at customers while screaming at the top of my lungs! Love and light <3
5. "The Eastern Mediterranean and Syria, 2000-1000 BCE." Museum Exhibit. 2000.
6. Translated by A. Leo Oppenheim. Letters from Mesopotamia: Official, Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia. Book. 1967. Pg. 82.
7. Ibid. Letters from Mesopotamia: Official, Business, and Private Letters on Clay Tablets from Two Millennia.
8. REAL comrades do anyway though. If my boss is reading this please don't fire me-
9. Kristina Killgrove. "Meet the Worst Businessman of the 18th Century BC." Magazine Article. May 11, 2018.
10. Amin, Osama Shukir Muhammed. "A One-mina Weight from Southern Mesopotamia." Photo. 2016.
11. "Complaint tablet to Ea-Nasir." Photo. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

# SALTY BUSINESS IN PRE-COLONIAL AFRICA

By Claire Kowalec

Design by Ian Sandler-Bowen

Table salt. Sodium chloride. A substance that looks and feels like tiny white grains of sand. However you know salt, you certainly know its presence in world cuisine and culture.

Humans have traded and valued salt for centuries and, in the meantime, developed rich cultural traditions around it. As an important and often unnoticed part of our diets, it seems strange to think of the power salt holds in our daily rituals: we might sprinkle salt over our meals, or perhaps onto a stage before a Japanese theater production.<sup>1</sup> In Western tradition, spilling salt brings bad luck, while throwing it over the left shoulder repels evil spirits. Pre-colonial West African societies famously traded gold and enslaved people for salt and other goods, making them some of the wealthiest societies in history. Along the Atlantic coast of Central Africa, the Kongolese developed their own thoughts around salt (maybe aided by Christian influences in the 15th century CE).<sup>2</sup> So, in many ways and in many cultures, superstition, rituals, and spirituality all intersect at the junction

***in pre-colonial Africa, salt and power — not just spiritual — went hand in hand.***

of salt. And in pre-colonial Africa, salt and power — not just spiritual — went hand in hand.

It's important to note that African cultures are plentiful and very diverse, and this article only peeks into a few of their interesting relationships with salt. We'll first look at West Africa during the medieval period. Then, we'll turn to traditions that



Detail from the Catalan Atlas Sheet 6 showing Mansa Musa

belong to the Kongolese of western Central Africa. West African societies traded gold for salt while the Kongolese incorporated salt into their understanding of the spiritual world. And in return, salt allowed glimmering African traditions and rituals to arise.

Imagine: The powerful king of ancient Ghana is dressed in lavish jewelry and a golden headdress as he sits among his court. He's sitting in "a pavilion around which stood ten horses in gold trappings... the pavilion was guarded by hounds, wearing collars and bells of silver and gold, which were the constant companions of the monarch."<sup>3</sup> Such was the wealth and beauty of Ancient Ghana according to one traveler. Ancient Ghana (modern day Mali and Mauritania) existed from roughly 500 CE to the early 13th century CE as a lavish society filled with gold. Merchants from North Africa traveled through the Sahara with goods like salt, beads, and copper to trade with dynasties such as ancient Ghana, Mali, and the Songhai.<sup>4</sup> These societies built their power off of the traders from

the Maghreb, whom they taxed when they passed through their lands.<sup>5</sup> Like the author quoted above, early Muslim writers traveled to Ghana and were fascinated by its impressive wealth and power. Ancient Ghana traded its ample gold for salt (which seems like a very unusual swap to us today).

The people of ancient Ghana definitely may have valued gold, but not in the way we think. In Ghana, gold itself wasn't treasured for being a prized, precious metal. It was simply a good that West African societies had at their disposal, so they traded with it (which seems like a good problem to have). The king and the people used

***Gold got its value because it could be traded for salt...salt got its power because it was so important for survival***

and wore gold because it was something that simply existed within their realm.

Merchants from North Africa gladly traded salt for gold because gold was an expensive commodity in other trade networks. But in the eyes of the ancient West Africans, salt was truly the more essential commodity for survival. Salt is a preservative for food and a necessary mineral for many bodily functions. Gold got its value because it could be traded for salt, while salt got its power because salt was so important for survival.

Yet the gold diggers of ancient Ghana kept the origin of their gold very secret, and merchants never knew where it came from. They once tried to capture a gold digger to find out. He never told; the trade stopped for three years, and only after

the gold diggers direly needed salt did they continue the trade.<sup>6</sup> Because the merchants desperately wanted gold, trade resumed without question while the mystery of the gold's location fell by the wayside.

Therefore, the people of Ghana certainly valued gold: its secrets were worth keeping. But this anecdote tells us that salt was also a prize to the people of Ghana because it was a necessity that they couldn't risk living without. And we also learn that the people who controlled the salt trade also controlled the gold trade (and vice versa).<sup>7</sup> Salt equals power. The Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta records that the people of the region used small blocks of salt as currency in addition to silver and gold.<sup>8</sup> Thus, salt and gold had equal — or at least similar — values.

Among the Mande (the founders of ancient Ghana), salt also had spiritual value; it was thought to protect and enhance a man's virility. In the centuries leading up to the colonization of Africa, some records show that men would either save up to purchase salt regularly or carry a piece of salt with them, licking it periodically.<sup>9</sup> From this, salt seems to be linked to masculinity, health, and power, which makes sense given the need for salt for a healthy body. However, very little is clear about other ritual uses of

***salt didn't need any magical powers ascribed to it; salt in and of itself was already powerful.***



Map of the Kingdom of Congo, circa 1630

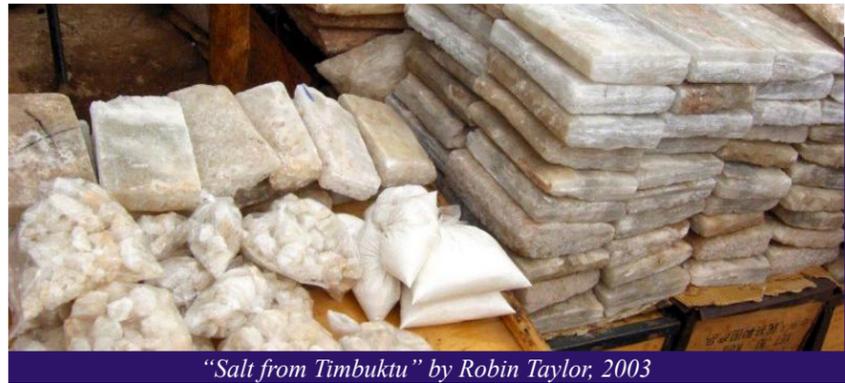
salt in West African cultures. Salt's power was inherent: salt was necessary for people to survive. As a result, maybe salt didn't need any magical powers ascribed to it; salt in and of itself was already powerful.

On the other hand, salt has great ritual power among the Kongolese. Most of us are familiar with witches of the cauldron and broom variety, but cultures like the Yoruba (in modern day Nigeria) and the Kongolese (generally around modern day Angola) conceptualize witches in other ways. To the Kongolese, witches are female spirits who prey on the living and sometimes the recently deceased.<sup>10</sup> To take preventative measures against witches (or to kill them), salt plays a big role. The witches of the Kongolese can remove their skin to travel outside of their bodies at night, then roam as spirits, visiting people while they're asleep.<sup>11</sup> The witches "ride" the unsuspecting sleeper by both spiritually and physically possessing them, using their hair as reins. Victims often have bruises or scratches from the visit, and if a witch returns to the same person multiple times over multiple years, that person might die. Something like sleep paralysis describes the experience of encountering a witch while a person is asleep. To prevent any witchy activity, someone can salt the witch's body while her spirit is away at night.<sup>12</sup> Then, once the witch returns to her salted body, she'll die (in burning pain, a slightly more intense alternative to the "I'm melting!" scenario).

Kongolese traditions also say that people can put salt under the body of a deceased person to ward against evil spirits, witches included.<sup>13</sup>

***Salt was powerful because it gave merchants and leaders power... whoever controlled the salt and gold trade was king of the world***

Therefore, salt protects against evil spirits, a theme found in several world cultures. However, it's unclear if the Kongolese developed this idea independently of the Western world, since much of this information dates from after the point of contact between Christian Europeans and Indigenous Africans. As an example, when Christians came to the Kongo to baptize converts, they baptized with water and



"Salt from Timbuktu" by Robin Taylor, 2003

salt, which was based on an old European custom of placing salt on the tongue.<sup>14</sup> The Kongolese saw salt as the more important component of the baptism.<sup>15</sup> To the same point, other Catholic rituals didn't stick with the Kongolese — salt baptism alone (or "eating salt") generally attracted more people than a simple water baptism. Perhaps this came from an older cultural connection the people had with salt and any spiritual powers they ascribed to it, but scholars can't be sure. If Kongolese ideas about the ritual powers of salt come from their early relationship with Christianity — which started with the Portuguese in the late 15th century CE — then salt's powers are very different than they are in West Africa.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, it seems that in West Africa, salt's significance came from its economic value, but attitudes toward salt might say much more about the cultures that need it than salt itself. Salt was powerful because it gave merchants and leaders power. As mentioned, whoever controlled

the salt and gold trade was king of the world (sometimes very literally — we're looking at you, King of Ghana). There's no clear answer for what describes these different outlooks, but salt and humanity are, for whatever reason, linked.

It's part of the human condition to find meaning in things that might not mean anything; whether or not this is a bad thing is up for debate. Regardless, salt — table salt, sodium chloride, tiny white grains of sand — is one of those things that's so common and key that it has power and meaning of its own. ■

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In traditional Japanese theater, sprinkling salt on the stage guards the actors against evil spirits. Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*, Book, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *Kongo* spelled with a *k* refers to KiKongo, the language the people spoke, and their namesake. The Portuguese wrote it with a *C*, which explains the word today. To reference the Kongolese culture, *k* is used here. For more info: "Kingdom of Kongo: 1390-1914," South African History Online website.

<sup>3</sup> E. W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, Books, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> J. F. P. Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion, eds, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, Book, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Charles M. Good, "Salt, Trade, and Disease: Aspects of Development in Africa's Northern Great Lakes Region," *Journal Article*, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Bovill, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, 82. A special thank you to Professor Ellen Poteet for reminding me of this anecdote!

<sup>7</sup> "The Salt Trade of Ancient West Africa," *World History Encyclopedia* website.

<sup>8</sup> Hopkins and Levtzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic*

*Sources for West African History.*

<sup>9</sup> B. Marie Perinbam, "The Salt-Gold Alchemy in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Mande World," *Journal Article*, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Warren Matthews, *World Religions: Seventh Edition*, Book, 2013. Babatunde Lawal, "The Living Dead: Art and Immortality Among the Yoruba," *Journal Article*, 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in the Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*, Book, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*.

<sup>13</sup> Young, *Rituals of Resistance*.

<sup>14</sup> Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History*.

<sup>15</sup> Young, *Rituals of Resistance*. John Thornton, "Cannibalism, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World," *Journal Article*, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> "Kingdom of Kongo: 1390-1914," *South African History Online* website.

From the Edo Period to Today:

# Long Live Young Pretty Boys

By Nadir Gerber

Design by Will McClelland

Is a caterpillar a butterfly? Most would say no: caterpillars become butterflies. A chrysalis similarly isn't a butterfly. While it's a transitional stage between a caterpillar and a butterfly, a chrysalis is still its own distinct state of being. So, too, was it with the *wakashu*. A child born with male genitalia during the Edo period (1603-1867) would grow from a child to an adolescent to a man. Though his sex would be considered male the entire time, he would not become a man until after he was no longer a *wakashu*. The stage of being a *wakashu* would typically span adolescence (ages twelve to twenty). For ease of communication within the scope of this article, terms such as "boy" and "youth" refer to this distinct gender phase and the reader is advised to not equate the gender of "boy" with the gender of "man."

#### What is gender?

Before we can begin approaching the construction and transfiguration of gender and gendered expression in Japan, it's necessary to establish what constitutes "gender." Scholars and non-scholars alike have engaged with the question for much longer than I have been alive, and I am under no illusions that the definition I present is anything particularly more insightful than what has come before me. Yet, I still request to be humored briefly here. Within the scope of this article, gender is not so-

meting chosen and identified with on a solely individual basis. Rather, it is negotiated and navigated through the lens of the surrounding culture and society. This contributes to the perceptions and expectations of other people being formative in the construction of gender. Though emphasis is placed on personal identification instead of physical presentation within modern discourse, gender as it will be approached in this article is based primarily on embodiment.<sup>1</sup> This is to say that clothes, behavior, age, and occupation are all critical to defining one's gender.

#### The *Wakashu*

The gender of *wakashu* was defined by youthful male beauty and was accompanied by its own expectations of how one should dress, including wearing loose sleeves, having forelocks, and having a shaved patch toward the top of one's head. Physical appearance was central to being a *wakashu* as the shaving of one's forelocks was legally recognized as being able to turn a *wakashu* into a man.<sup>2</sup> Beauty was a fundamental tenet of being a *wakashu* since Japanese society during the Edo period considered beauty "an intrinsic quality of the youthful male form."<sup>3</sup> The legacy of the *wakashu* in both popular conception and within academic discourse is often grounded in regard to the *nanshoku*, the sexual relations



Suzuki Harunobu, "Geese Descending on the Koto Bridges" from Eight Fashionable Parlour Views (1768-70), wood-block print. Image courtesy of the Art Gallery of South Australia.

that the *wakashu* were commonly known to have with older men.<sup>4</sup> This approach often confines them to the realm of the sexual and constructs the *wakashu* as objects rather than active participants in history. It also must be recognized that while *nanshoku* was a prominent aspect of the lives for many *wakashu*, *wakashu* signifies a gender and was not intrinsically connected to male/male sexuality. The depiction of *wakashu* as being sexual partners with little agency or identity outside of sexual relationships emerges from the lack of sources created by *wakashu* themselves. Indeed, most records of the *wakashu* are found either in wood-block prints (*ukiyo-e*), which convey very little about their personal lives and inner thoughts, or in later books where the *wakashu* is included only for the desire of the male narrator. Thus, the *wakashu* becomes rendered "as the target of masculine consumption, an erotic object more than a desiring subject."<sup>5</sup> This perception was reinforced as the boundaries of *wakashu* as an identity became blurred. The *wakashu* came to be split into two groups: the *ji-wakashu* and the *kagama* (both groups were still being referred to as *wakashu* during this time). The *ji-wakashu* or "non-professional *wakashu*" refers solely to the distinct gender phase. The *kagama*, on the other hand, were stage actors who often worked as prostitutes. All *kagama* were *wakashu*, though not all *wakashu* were

*kagama*. Moreover, many *ji-wakashu* still engaged in sexual relations with older men; they just did so for pleasure rather than as an element of their profession. This distinction became further troubled by the introduction of the *onnagata*, male actors who played female roles in *kabuki* theater (traditional Japanese dance-dramas that involved elaborate masks, makeup, and costumes) and were often seen as being sexually available.<sup>6</sup> While the *ji-wakashu* and the *kagama* were both understood to be a gender distinct from male and female, the *onnagata* were men who came to embody an idealized and perfected version of femininity.<sup>7</sup> It also became increasingly popular to incorporate *wakashu* as characters within these dramas, but their characters were often confined to being tools to advance other plots rather than distinct characters on their own. Because of this one-dimensional space the *kagama* came to occupy within *kabuki* theater, the *wakashu* lost their distinction as a separate gender and instead came to represent an androgynous space between male and female.<sup>8</sup>

### The Decline of Pretty Boys

During the Meiji period (1868-1912) came the parallel figure of the *bishounen*, literally translated to "pretty boy." While the identity of *wakashu* had generally been lost by this time, *bishounen* was a proud continuation of the

valorizing of youthful, androgynous male beauty. Unlike how the *wakashu* had been cloistered away within the realms of theater and prostitution, the *bishounen* was given a central and prominent image within Japanese society as he came to represent Japanese progress and modernization. The archetype of the *bishounen* was often depicted wearing a Western-style school uniform, and in one magazine spread was posed in charming juxtaposition against a *wakashu* who has been dismissively labelled with the phrase "*otoko no kusatta*" or "emasculated."<sup>9</sup> Yet, it was not the *wakashu*'s androgyny or beauty that made him emasculated. After all, the celebrated *bishounen* was generally characterized as having "snowy white skin, lustrous black hair, [and] flowery red cheeks," all of which

were beauty standards also strongly associated with women.<sup>10</sup> Rather, it was the *wakashu*'s inability to embrace Japan's rapid industrialization and Westernization that made him emasculated.

The *bishounen* would not long be afforded this venerated space in popular thought. Along with Japan's embrace of Western values came the gradual rejection of anything that was seen as threatening to the Western standard of the gender binary and heterosexual relations. Growing concerns in the 20th century about the corrupting nature and prevalence of *nanshoku* among school age boys led to the rapid reevaluation and eventual rejection of youthful male beauty.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, research by German sexologists was being translated and introduced



Right: Unsigned, *Daisho No Mai* (The Dance of the Months), Hanging scroll, Kanbun era (1661-1673). MOA Museum of Art, Japan.

# 若衆



to Japanese audiences, not only bringing the topic of sexuality to the forefront of societal awareness but also laying the groundwork for there to be a defined understanding of *hentai seiyoku* or “perverted sexual desire” which included not only homosexuality but also bestiality, incest, pedophilia, extreme violence as a kink, and rape.<sup>12</sup> The sudden awareness of these “perversions” lead to an equally sudden call to reject them in the name of improving public morals and pursuing “civilization and enlightenment.”<sup>13</sup> Ironically, the public condemnation and moral outrage over sexual perversion also kept it within the public consciousness and firmly grounded a space within society for those of a more subversive nature to continue engaging with it.

Into the Taisho period (1912-1926), the subculture of *ero guro nansensu*, “erotic and grotesque nonsense,” flourished. Japan cultivated a sizable publication industry devoted to the topic of perverse sexuality where by the 1920s at least ten journals were founded with the sole intent of depicting *hentai seiyoku*.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps because of the space it occupied as a taboo, Japanese society, when not decrying it, could not get enough of sexual moral degradation.

## The Pretty Boy Returns

These depictions of sexuality died down during World War II. However, as the manga industry began emerging in the post-war era, many of the dynamics that had been so popular to present through the medium of *ukiyo-e* (wood-block printing) began emerging in this new storytelling medium as well. Early manga continued prior trends of *eru guro* through its showcasing of explicit violence and sexuality, leading once

more to an outcry against how these topics encouraged moral perversion. By the 1980s, the Japanese government decided to no longer sit idly by and issued legislation banning the depiction of adult genitalia and pubic hair in manga.<sup>15</sup> Rather than this leading to manga being dictated by more puritanical and anti-sex values, artists found a rather glaring loophole to the prohibition of depicting adult genitalia: simply depict pre-pubescent genitalia instead. As Aleardo Zanghellini, a top researcher of the intersections between law and sexuality, aptly summarized:

“On the one hand, the unrepresentability of pubic hair and adult genitalia would directly encourage artists to focus on characters whose nudity was capable of being fully depicted: prepubescent children. On the other hand, the absence of proscriptions against child nudity and sexualized representations of children allowed for other phenomena leading to an overrepresentation of children or child-like characters in manga and anime to operate undisturbed also in the context of erotic cartoons and comics.”<sup>16</sup>

During this period of censorship was when the genre of Boy’s Love (BL), a romance genre dedicated to male/male sexuality, began to take shape. Because these stories often forayed into more overtly sexual territory, BL manga also witnessed the proliferation of disarmingly youthful and sexually available protagonists. Though the censorship laws would be repealed several years later, inter-community and self-policing continued to flourish with many publishers electing to continue abiding by the pre-repeal standards.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the 20th century, the youthful protagonists of BL gradually cemented

themselves as a new character archetype: the *bishounen*. Like their Meiji predecessors, this new generation of *bishounen* were defined foremost by their beauty with “lean body shapes, artful hair, elegant or delicate features, ambiguous sexuality, and above all an androgynous, almost feminine aesthetic in relation to appearance, clothing, and behavior.”<sup>18</sup> Though *bishounen* could be found across a range of genres, their overwhelming prevalence in the realm of BL continued to cement them not only in the realm of gender ambiguity but also in that of homosexuality. The modern *bishounen* also pays homage to its ancestry of the *onnagata* as they must be “not just good-looking but positively beautiful. Indeed, in a reworking of the myth of the unmatched femininity of female impersonators [*onnagata*] in *kabuki* theatre...the ideal seems to be that the characters involved be more beautiful than women.”<sup>19</sup> It is notable the parallels the *bishounen* has to the *onnagata* instead of to the *ji-wakashu* or the *kagama*. No longer does the *bishounen* signify a distinctly gendered space, but rather it has become the feminizing of masculinity. It should also be noted that the *ji-wakashu*, *kagama*, and *onnagata* were all groups of people, whereas the modern *bishounen* exists primarily only as a character archetype. It is not meant to be a depiction of any actual group.

While the modern *bishounen* may at first glance appear to be a relatively unaltered continuation of youthful male beauty and gender, its separation from reality and its establishment as a character archetype actually serves to destabilize this continuity. Since the modern *bishounen* are characters, the primary interaction with them will be that of consumption. Thus, the *bishounen*’s androgyny is not to represent his own sexua-

*shounen*, often being drawn surrounded by and sparkles.<sup>21</sup> The *bishounen* are “object[s] of devotion” and “objects of affection” while also being something that the female readers are intended to identify with and become.<sup>22</sup> Then, the *bishounen* are no longer men entering ambiguously gendered space, but they should instead be read as women entering these spaces. The *bishounen* of the BL genre are not a continuation of the historical *wakashu* and *bishounen*. They are female characters being remade into men to fit within this genre.<sup>23</sup>

The modern *bishounen* presents a red hering within the gendered history of Japan. Though it shares many traits with previous alternate gender spaces and even bears the same name of the *bishounen* from the Meiji period, the modern *bishounen* is a fundamental inverse of these genders. While the *wakashu* centered upon masculinity engaging with androgyny, the modern *bishounen* actually provides a space for women to engage with gender subversion. ■

## Footnotes & Sources

1. This is not to say that personal identification with a given gender was not present in Japan’s history. However, there are very few sources from the perspective of genderqueer people. Instead, most of our understanding of early gender subversion comes from woodblock prints, thereby necessitating that the discussion of gender is foremost approached on a physical basis.
- 2, 5, 6, 7. Asato Ikeda and Ryoko Matsuba. *A Third Gender: Beautiful Youths in Japanese Edo-Period Prints and Paintings (1600-1868)*. Book, 2016.
- 3, 4, 8, 9, 10. Gregory M. Pflugfelder. *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950*. Book. 1999.
8. Pflugfelder specifically identifies the other figure as being a *kagama*, thus serving to frame the *bishounen* firmly in the context of male/male sexuality.
9. Pflugfelder stresses that while these beauty standards were also commonly held by women, the *bishounen* still embodied a gendered space distinct from both male and female, defined primarily instead by its rejection of adulthood and valorization of beautiful youth.
- 11, 12, 13. Mark McLelland. “A Short Story of Hentai.” Journal Article. 2006.
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## Quiz:

by Quin Zapoli  
Design by Oliver Higgins

# Which Japanese Monarch Are You?

*The Japanese monarchy is the oldest in the world, with 126 official emperors all from the same family line. Answer these ten questions to find out which Japanese emperor you are!*

### Question 1: You’ve just become emperor of Japan; what’s your goal?

- A. Bureaucratic efficiency and centralized control.
- B. Unity, with a tad bit of conquest.
- C. Factories.
- D. Stability, peace, culture, Olympics, Mario Kart, helping my people live for a really long time. Stuff like that.

### Question 2: How are you going to achieve that goal? What kind of leader will you be?

- A. Active. If I’m in charge, things are going to be done my way.
- B. Forward-thinking. I don’t want to dwell on the past - strong nations must move forward.
- C. Groundbreaking. I want to define an entire people.
- D. Passive. I like to let the government handle that sort of thing; I’ll stick to my speeches.

# 美少年



**Question 3: You may be the emperor of Japan, but that doesn't always mean you're actually in charge. In your Japan, who should have the power to rule?**

- A. Me, obviously.
- B. The people...as long as they do what I say.
- C. The factory owners, the Diet, and me.
- D. The people, obviously.

**Question 4: Every great leader must be ready to fight for their country. What's your weapon of choice?**

- A. My index finger and a map. Fighting is for the military.
- B. A sweet longbow. As tall as I am! And I want a giant crow perched on top!
- C. Dynamite.
- D. Do we have to fight? Can't we just have a good time?

**Question 5: An emperor having a favorite city is like a mother having a favorite child – absolutely normal! What's yours?**

- A. Kyoto
- B. Yamato
- C. Tokyo
- D. Tokyo, but taller.

**Question 6: Good relations with the rest of the Imperial House of Japan is crucial to surviving court life. How do you talk to your relatives?**

- A. Have the servants deliver a message, possibly via bird.
- B. Through deep prayer.
- C. Send a telegraph. It's cutting edge!
- D. Um...with a phone?

**Question 7: The emperor is by no means the only important figure in Japan. Who's your favorite celebrity?**

- A. Siddartha Guatama, the Buddha.
- B. Amaterasu, goddess of the Sun.
- C. Iwasaki Yatarō, founder of Mitsubishi.
- D. Naomi Osaka, goddess of Tennis.

**Question 8: Every leader needs some time away from the stress of imperial rule. What would you do for fun?**

- A. Tour the palace - carried by servants, of course.
- B. Play with Yatagarasu, my giant crow.
- C. Peacefully ride trains around the country.
- D. Zip around in the royal yacht.

**Question 9: After an era of prosperous rule, your time in this world is coming to an end. How old are you?**

- A. 69 (nice).
- B. Preferably at least 127.
- C. 59. I'm a live fast, die middle-aged kind of fellow.
- D. What kind of question is that? I'm in excellent health!



**If you answered mainly A, you're Emperor Kanmu!**

The 50th Emperor of Japan, ruling from 781 to 806 CE, Kanmu is said to have been one of the most powerful emperors in Japanese history. Unlike his many successors, who often relied on Shoguns or elected leaders, Kanmu ruled and reorganized his bureaucracy personally. Despite being a devout Buddhist, he sought to limit the power of Buddhist sects over his government. To achieve this, he famously moved the capital to Kyoto, far away from the most powerful Buddhist temples. Your answers show you would be a no-nonsense, hands-on ruler of Japan, not content with allowing the political forces of the day to interfere with your divine right to rule.



**If you answered mainly B, you're Emperor Jimmu!**

The legendary first emperor of Japan, Jimmu is said to have ascended in 660 BCE. He is said to be the descendant of the Shinto sun goddess Amaterasu and is famous for his conquest of what was then Yamato Province. He is also famous for most likely being entirely fictional. Living to the ripe old age of 127, Jimmu founded the Empire of Japan with his signature longbow, giant crow, and help from the gods. Your answers show you would be transformative and legendary, redefining world history through your actions.



**If you answered mainly C, you're Emperor Meiji!**

Perhaps one of the most famous Japanese emperors, Emperor Meiji ruled Japan during its swift industrialization in the 1860s and in the decades following. He is credited not only with the establishment of Japan as a modern power, but for its earliest imperial expansions into Korea. Meiji also moved the capital to Tokyo, where it stands today. Your answers show you're a modern, forward-looking leader with a passion for modernization. You would reject economic and political stagnation in favor of complete transformation.



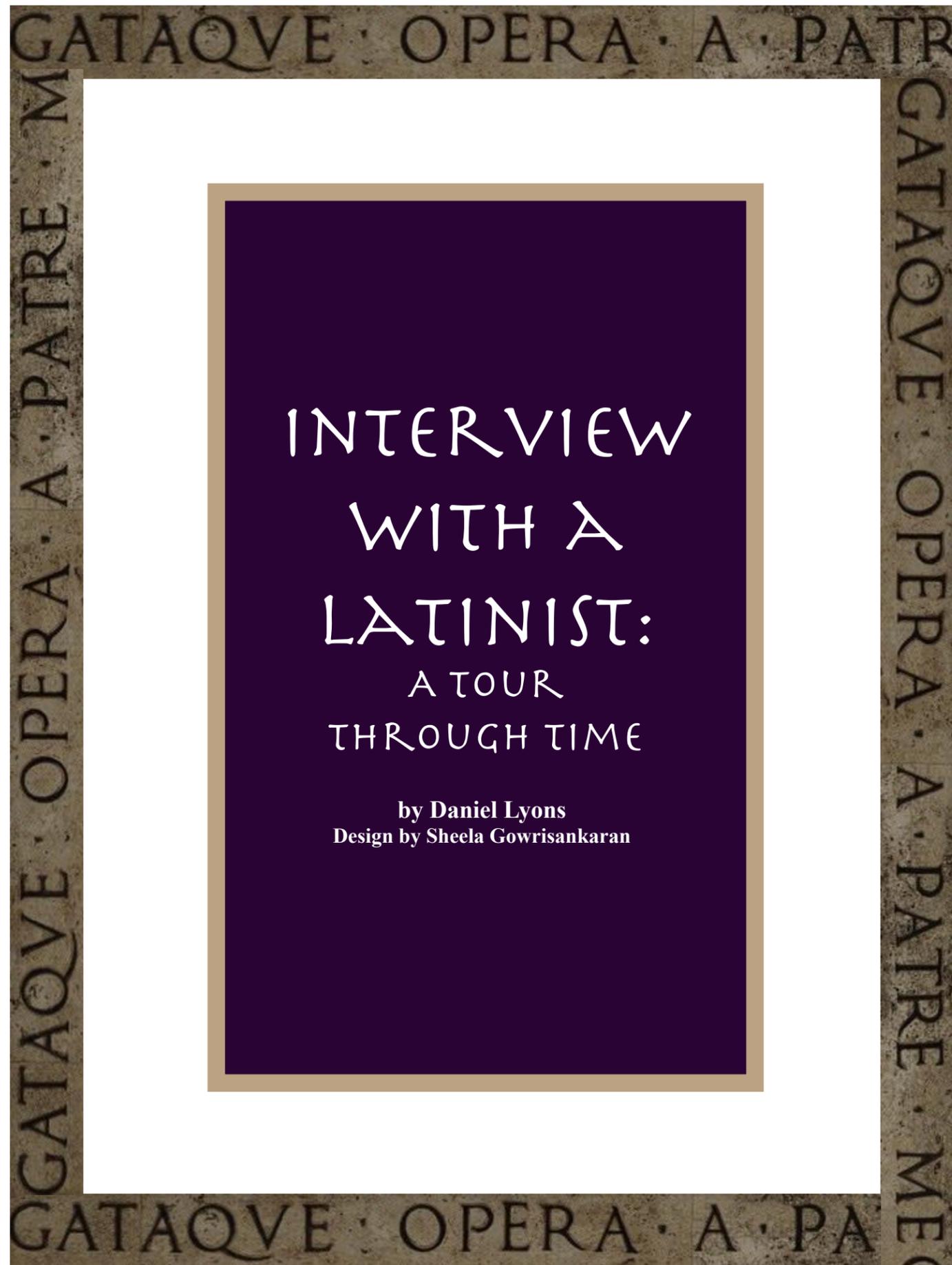
**If you answered mainly D, you're Emperor Naruhito!**

Emperor Naruhito is the current emperor of Japan - the 126th emperor, to be exact - ascending in 2019 after the abdication of his father, Emperor Akihito. Naruhito is one of the few Japanese emperors to have traveled the world, and the only one to have studied abroad. He studied marine transportation and history at Oxford University. He currently rules modern Japan as a figurehead, allowing the elected government to exercise real power. Your answers show you are a peace-loving, removed monarch, supportive of democracy and the popular will.



**Turn over for results!**





# INTERVIEW WITH A LATINIST: A TOUR THROUGH TIME

by Daniel Lyons  
Design by Sheela Gowrisankaran

Despite its reputation as a “Dead Language” and relic of the past, Latin, the language of the Romans, is still taught in a spoken form in various settings. In fact, there was never a point where it stopped being taught as a spoken language. Since the time of the Roman Empire, Latin has continuously been used as a form of communication, predominantly in churches and monasteries, though extending into other fields as well such as science and literature. Even today, one can go live in a monastery, or monastery-like school, and use Latin as their spoken language for communication. Aidan Causil-Baggott, a personal friend and former colleague of mine from my years at the Defense Language Institute, attended one such school, studying Latin and ancient Greek as didactic tools for continuing classical traditions. Today, we ask him about his insights as a Latinist into this ancient tradition.



**How did you get into Latin?**

Honestly, I started wanting to learn classics because I thought that Latin as a language was just really cool. You see it when people want to make something seem magical, or ancient, or have a particular gravitas. They'll use Latin and, growing up, I always thought, “Wow, that's really cool,” especially when it's the root of all the



“The Pantheon and the Fontana del Pantheon in Rome” by Ank Kumar, 2015. CC by 4.0.

Romance languages. I thought, “I really want to learn how to speak that,” but I [was] told people don't speak Latin anymore. When I got older, I found out that spoken Latin was still very much a thing that exists, and I tried to find out where I could do that. I told myself since I was a kid, “That's going to be something I do when I grow up.”



**Where did you learn to speak Latin?**

I found out about a school in Italy called Accademia Vivarium Novum [VN], which is essentially based on the monastery school, the Vivarium, which Cassiodorus, [a] Roman statesman founded back in the 6th century CE where basically [they're] mimicking that in the VN. You would live there, and while you lived

there, you were only allowed to speak Latin and ancient Greek. You studied, pretty much all day, classical literature and classical languages. They do summer courses and I went there. I liked it so much I asked, “Can I stay for another year?” They said, “Sure.” At the time I think there were 28 scholarships for people coming in for their first year. I was one of them.



**Was your daily routine modeled after the original Vivarium?**

Somewhat. The Vivarium back in the day was based on coenobitic principles, which [is] the idea of living together in a single place. [Cassiodorus] created it as a [place] attached to a monastery. There is a monastic component and also a retreat. The idea was that you would go there for study, and you could also engage in a more strict form of monasticism. Even that was based on the old classical principle of retreating, in order to better align oneself with a particular philosophy or way of life [so] that you then would come back into public life and be more upright. Emperor Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius were known to do it. Cicero did it when he wrote his *Tusculanae Disputationes*. He retreated to his villa to study and he felt that he was lacking, so he went away to build up his soul and morale before reentering public life. Part of that process that we have at VN is we would speak only Latin and ancient Greek, because that would help us better understand and

learn the languages, so that we could then better study the classics.

**You know, there's actually this really interesting divide, or gap. In the 500s CE we're talking about these Christian monasteries, and you brought up these ancient Roman figures, such as Marcus Aurelius and Cicero. You know, in the 6th century CE, [Mediterranean Europe] was [predominantly] a Christian society. Society was fundamentally transformed. At that point were they speaking the Latin of the Romans? Were they speaking the same Latin that Cicero and Marcus Aurelius would be using?**

That's a very interesting question with a somewhat complicated answer: not necessarily. Latin had never stopped being spoken in any form. The Vulgar Latin that the populus spoke was continuously spoken until it transformed into the modern day Romance languages. It's not like some other language supplanted it. However, at the same time, due to the widespread nature of it, many different people used Latin as a lingua franca<sup>1</sup> to better communicate. It was easier; if someone was educated and in a position of power, they likely spoke Latin. It was convenient for everyone to learn it, but it changed substantially from the classical era into the medieval era. After the reign of Augustus, the Golden Age of Latin ended. You usually will say, "post-Augustinian Latin," or later Latin. You saw a lot of change in that regard [in the medieval period], up until the Renaissance period where there was a revitalized desire to learn and approximate classical Latin as it was spoken back during the Golden Age, because that would make it more "pristine," as it were. The Church, though it maintained a very solid and steady stream of Latin speakers and Ecclesiastical Latin, [uses] a very crisp form of Latin that has been perpetuated. It has the ability to be very succinct even though it's not strictly classical. It brought the knowledge into that period of time and kept it alive until when the Renaissance humanists began to go back and go through classical texts to try to make it as close to what it had been as possible. That's where you'll see my pronunciation of Latin, which is the Reconstructed. [It was] basically created by Desiderius Erasmus, an incredibly famous Latinist of the 1500s CE. He himself very likely spoke with an Ecclesiastical pronunciation, but he created what is now known as the Reconstructive pronunciations, or the Erasmian pronunciations, which is how we believe Romans likely spoke.



"Latin Biblia" from 1566. Photo by Csanády, 2005. CC by 1.0.



**Was this the formal pronunciation you used at your school?**

That I use. Not everyone uses Reconstructed. There are still a large amount of people that use Ecclesiastical. It does not inhibit understanding either way, whether someone speaks with an Ecclesiastical pronunciation versus Reconstructed. You just have to hear it. The bigger thing that stands in the way is an individual's accent, more often in their pronunciation. Enough time speaking will usually fix that. There were a good number. Most of the people who were Italian used Ecclesiastical because it's basically pronouncing Latin as though it were Italian. Many of the people from Spanish speaking backgrounds preferred the Reconstructed, but it was down to personal choice. I personally prefer the sound in speaking with Reconstructed but there's no real difference. Just a couple subtle differences between certain letters and things like that.<sup>2</sup>



**Did you have classmates from all over the world?**

Yes. There were about 40 of us in total. We had some people from Columbia, the United States, Brazil, and Italy. A couple people were from Russia, Serbia, Croatia, Singapore, and the Netherlands. That was just while I was there. There are people coming in and out.

**A lot of these countries seem to have a history very strongly connected with Christianity. Do you think that this relationship of Christianity and Latin played an important role, even today with the students that it's bringing in, towards the preservation of Latin as a spoken tradition?**

Yes, I would say that the history of Latin, in terms of both its utility and its ability to endure, is inextricably linked with the Church. They were the source of learning for such a long period of time; basically the only people who could learn Latin were people who had access to that education. In Europe, it was

Christians predominantly, and a lot of later Latin literature was also Christian. People wrote about pretty much anything you can think of all throughout time, in Latin. Anything worth reading, anything international, would be written in Latin. I believe 70-80% of printed material in the later Middle Ages was in Latin. Christendom and the Catholic Church played a large role in preserving and propagating Latin.

**Obviously Latin has given way as a lingua franca to other languages. [But] there are modern monasteries. There's also the school that you went to. Where do you see Latin's place in the modern world? Is VN the only school of its kind? [And] do you think there's going to be more like it?**

I believe there are a couple schools that are similar. There's one in the Netherlands. The Netherlands school is somewhat similar but nowhere near the scale of VN. Do I think more will pop up? I do wish there would be more. There's a lot of value to it and it does something very good, especially for English speakers. The ability to have a strong command of even the basics of Latin allows you to, in terms of scientific knowledge, [understand] scientific wording. Having that kind of power over your own language is very useful, especially considering how English is growing to be very much the lingua franca of the scientific and engineering worlds. It's encroaching into political spheres as well. It's a nice little cheat code into having a very strong command of English. I wish more [schools] would show up; however, I don't think that schools quite like VN will because of the amount of effort and money that they require to be able to produce, as well as the specialized teachers. The teachers at VN were all exceptional. People now don't put as much stock into the humanities and into the benefits they provide, which has been the growing case with classics in many ways. It used to be that the classics were an important part of an individual's education. In the modern day, you're not seeing that kind of respect for literature. However, in terms of spoken Latin as a tool, it had been on the decline previously, but it is picking up again. Many universities' classics departments are beginning to see the utility of spoken Latin and they are growing. At the University of Kentucky I met [a woman] who was part of the graduate admissions and a graduate teacher. Milena Minkova; a phenomenally competent Latinist. The University of Pennsylvania has several very competent speakers and there are many more that I'm sure that I don't know or that I'm forgetting to mention. I've met people from China, I've met people from Africa that all [are] phenomenal Latinists. Far better than myself. And they are growing and they are bringing their skill and capacity to the places that they are: that is, allowing it to grow more and showing that it is still a very useful skill and a useful tool within the field of classics.

**That's perfect. Would you recommend learning Latin? [Attending] VN?**

Oh yes, 100%. Even if you don't want to study classics by itself. If you are interested in learning Latin, which I think is a

very useful skill, the VN has a summer program; you can either do one month or two months. It costs a couple thousand dollars, but I mean that's room, board, and education for two straight months. And, I can guarantee, you will speak Latin by the end of it. [You will] have a command of Latin better than most. If you studied Latin in high school or college, unless you are speaking Latin there as well, I guarantee you that you will learn more at VN than you will have learned in your entire college [experience]. I've met people who studied classics for a decade that had less of a command of the language than I did after a couple months there. I think that it's by and far, a very, very worthwhile place to go if you would like to learn Latin. And, again, once you understand classical Latin, all of Latin becomes comprehensible to you, even though there are some differences between different areas. You can pick up a work written anytime between like 500 BC until now, and you will be able to understand it. And I think that that's just a very valuable thing in and of itself.

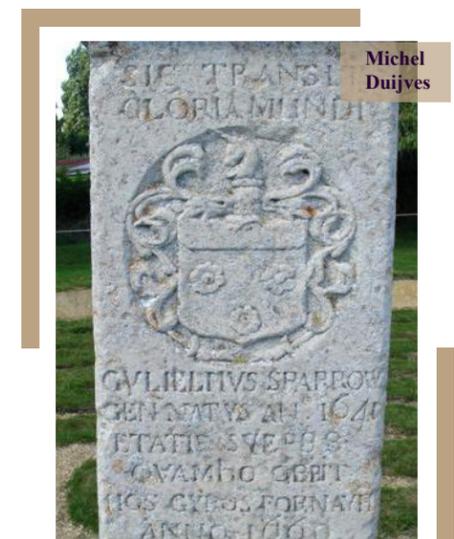
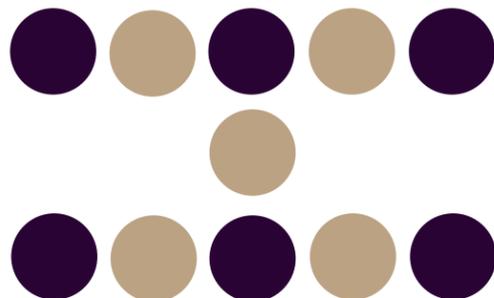


**Okay, perfect. We covered a lot of topics. I think you've given really excellent answers. It's going to be a lot to chew on for both me and the audience. I just wanted to thank you. I really appreciate you coming on here today, and giving such terrific answers.**

I try my best. Glad to be here. ■

## Notes:

1. Lingua Franca: a common language used by people who do not share a native language.
2. Reconstructed: AE sounds like long I. V is pronounced like W. C and G are always hard. When I is used as a consonant, it is pronounced like a J. Ecclesiastical: AE sounds like /ay/. V is pronounced like English V. C and G are hard before A, O, U; soft before E, I, AE, OE. Soft C has the sound of /ch/.



Michel Duijves

Latin inscription on stone pillar at the centre of Hilton turf maze, Cambridgeshire, England. The Latin motto Sic transit gloria mundi means "Thus passes the glory of the world" by Michel Duijves, 2005.

# SEX THAT KILLS

## *CATHOLIC CRIMES IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA*

By Cassidy Chapman  
Design by Will McClelland



Anonymous, *Escudo de la Santa Inquisición*, 17th century, oil on canvas. Museo Nacional del Virreinato.

When you think of the word culture, what comes to mind? Is it the behaviors of a group, the language, or maybe even the traditional dress of that culture? Obviously culture isn't just one thing, it's a combination of many different aspects of a group that are glued together. Culture is not just one tradition, language, or story; it is a shared experience between those who identify with a group and/or place. When it comes to the dark history of colonization in the world, a large number of countries that have suffered the effects of colonialism have had changes and alterations to their history, which in turn alters their culture. In this case, the colonization of Latin America brought many European ideas that, today, altered their ideals, beliefs, and overall culture. Most of these changes were destructive to the indigenous culture that was already present. For example, the Andes and Mesoamericas, before Spanish colonization, were gender-parallel societies, with men and women working in two distinct but equal spheres of society. What this means is that both men and women had their own political and religious cultures, with women having their own spiritual hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> Spanish societal standards brought new social ideas such as homophobia, racism, and misogyny to Latin America, along with Catholic rule.

Women were no longer allowed to operate in their own part of society, but instead were forced to comply with eurocentric standards for women. For example, women were now expected to stay home with children and be homemakers. With that, the Catholic rule created a new code of ethics for those living in Latin America — one that was forced upon them.

An important part of understanding the Spanish invasion of Latin America is through Spanish Inquisition. Formed in the late 1470's, the Spanish Inquisition — which I will be shortening to just the Inquisition for the rest of this article — was a court that looked to limit and stop heresy in Spain and Portugal, and eventually all the places those countries invaded and colonized. Though the Inquisition used the guise of enforcing Catholic ethical code as their *raison d'être*, or their reason for being, their true goals were to uphold the Spanish monarchy.<sup>2</sup> With that rule, obviously, comes homophobia, misogyny, and racism. For one part, the Inquisition saw any form of sexual action that was unrelated to procreation as sodomy, specifically targeting people who did not follow the Catholic norm of husband and wife. While adultery was looked down upon, women who cheated on their spouses were punished

much more harshly than men. The Inquisition perpetuated the idea of *limpieza de sangre* or purity of blood. This consists of looking at the specific percentages of one's racial background to ensure and determine their whiteness. This was used this as a means of discrimination. Though technically the percentages of one's racial identity is how *limpieza de sangre* was technically determined, there was no real science behind determining these percentages; it was just to discriminate against non-white, non-Catholic people in the Iberian Peninsula. The idea of "*limpieza de sangre*" originated in Spain when Catholic rule used it as a means of discrimination towards people with Muslim and Jewish ancestry, and eventually made its way to Latin America with their brutal colonization of the area. Though the Inquisition was dissolved almost 200 years ago, the standards enforced by this cruel tribunal, as well as colonization as a whole, still have a strong influence on Latin American culture to this day. For example, those who are ethnically indigenous, European, or African, are still affected by the idea of *limpieza de sangre*, as xtheir history has been wiped by years of unnecessary labels like mestiza (white and indigenous), zamba (black and indigenous), or mulatto (black and white). These labels were used to categorize people in



Unbekannter Künstler, Juan de Zumárraga, erster spanischer Erzbischof von Mexiko, 16th century, Painting, Wikimedia Commons.

colonial Latin America, and are sometimes still used today. Despite its dark past, these labels may have been useful in helping those who do not have well documented ancestry.

To understand the true brutality of the Inquisition, I want to look into the trial of Simpliciano Cuyne and Pedro Quini, two indigenous men accused of sodomy and tried by the Inquisition.<sup>3</sup> Both the crime and the trial took place in August of 1604, in present day Morelia, Michoacan, located in central Mexico. During the *Fiesta de la Virgen*, a festival celebrating the Virgin Mary 40 days after the birth of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> These two men were seen by a fourteen year old boy who claimed that they were doing an unsavory act. In his testimony to the Inquisition, the boy said that he originally believed the two to be a man and woman doing something “carnal,” but after hearing sounds and seeing thrusting, he discovered they seemed to be two men. The boy then fled and told two Spanish men what he had seen, who then reported Simpliciano and Pedro to the Church. After being discovered, Cuyne fled the scene and went directly to the Church of San Agustín. Because

Cuyne fled to a church and seemingly attempted to repent immediately, he was spared from the trial. On the other hand, Quini seemed to lack remorse, so he was not as lucky. While Cuyne was not tried for sodomy, both men did have to appear in front of the tribunal and testify.

Unfortunately, because the Inquisition was a Spanish institution, indigenous and black people in Latin America, who might not have spoken Spanish, were forced to use translators during their trials; as such, there is a significant lack of records remaining of their stories in their native tongues.. Therefore, everything documented has to be taken with a grain of salt, as their testimonies went through translators during the trial. Though we can have faith that these translators were loyal to correctly translating these men’s words, we can never be sure. During their trial, both men were found to have wives and children. This brings up an interesting point of whether or not they even wanted to be married, as they clearly were searching for other sexual contact; their marital status may have been due to the so-

cial pressures to marry into a heterosexual marriage. At the same time, even if the men were interested in polyamory that was still a crime, therefore that was not a way to excuse the act in court. According to the moral code of the Inquisition, both men were committing multiple crimes, including heresy, sodomy, adultery, and acting in disorderly fashion. Because the men were not acting in a way that men “should” by having sex in a public place, between two men, and in a way that Europeans deemed as feminine, they were acting in a criminal manner according to the Inquisition. People were not only tried for their actions, but for their mannerisms as well. If men were acting feminine, they were deemed as unnatural, despite no real criminal activity. In the case of Simpliciano and Pedro, because the men were seen acting in an intimate manner, with one on top of the other, even this position of straddling a man was seen as a feminine mannerism.

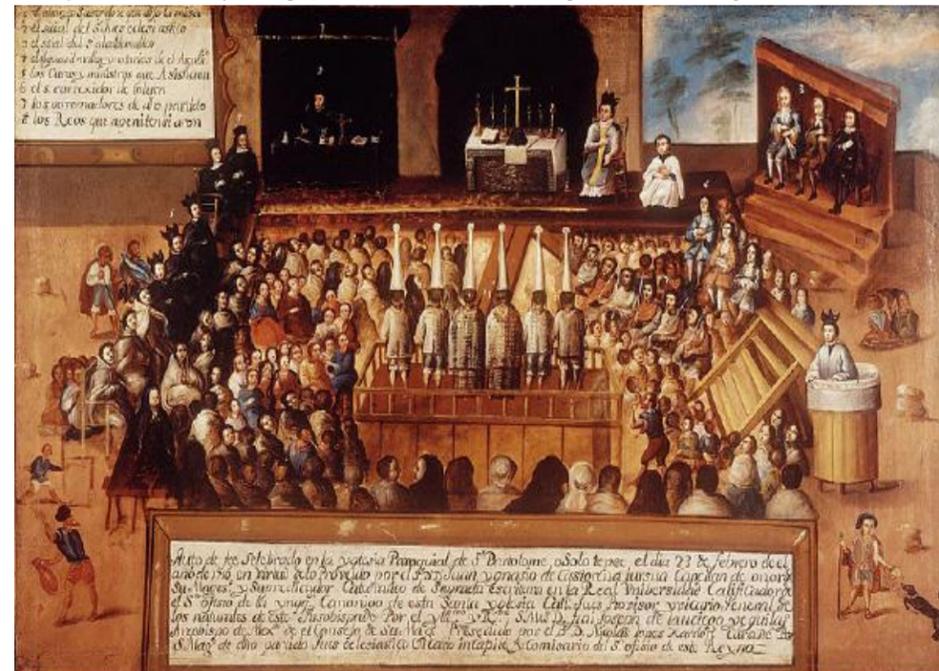
The trial of Simpliciano Cuyne and Pedro Quini is interesting in the way that it shows multiple facets of the Inquisition: namely, how they enforced Spanish societal standards. In this case, the fact that these men were unable to truly argue their case due to the language barrier is inherently unfair. This trial also shows us how the Inquisition was not just restraining people’s sexuality, but their gender expression as well. The Inquisition enforced societal standards, such as the idea of “machismo,” in which men needed to be ultra-masculine and only fornicate with women in order to be pure in the eyes of Catholicism. Machismo culture

has carried on into Latin American culture today because of the gender roles forced upon them during colonization; as a result, queer people in Latin America face violence and discrimination. As we saw in the 1604 trial, the men were not only told that their sexual acts were unnatural, but their mannerisms and gender expression as well. This, coupled with machismo standards, left queer people unable to enjoy their sexuality and express their gender identity, as it was illegal to do so. People in Latin America today still live in fear of the standards set in place hundreds of years ago, despite the end of the colonial period.

Not only are men affected by this standard, but women as well. Men are told to lack emotion and sympathy, leaving women to be solely responsible for the care of men and children.<sup>5</sup> Along with machismo culture, the Inquisition also enforced the standard of abstinence before marriage, leading to a lack of proper sexual education in Latin America today. Combined with other social issues, like poverty, many young women become pregnant unintentionally due to lack of education and/or lack of resources, leaving them struggling to care for their children.

The Inquisition’s religious ideas created societal standards that still negatively affect the lives of people across Latin America today. While there are protests and movements to fight the effects of these cultural standards, the Inquisition drove deep stakes into the heart of Latin American culture that may never truly heal. ■

Anonymous, *Un auto de fe en el pueblo de San Bartolomé Otzolotepec*, 18th c., Painting. Wikimedia Commons.



## Notes

1. Karen Vieira Powers. *Women in the Crucible of Conquest: The Gendered Genesis of Spanish American Society, 1500-1600*. Book. 2005.
2. Robert A. Maryks. “Purity of Blood.” Article. 2014.
3. Z. Tortorici. “‘Heran Todos Putos’: SODOMITICAL Subcultures and Disordered Desire in Early Colonial Mexico.” Article. 2007.
4. Eva Summer. “Feast of the Virgen Del Carmen.” Article. 2021.
5. Courtney Andrews. “The Impact of Machismo on Women.” Academic Blog. 2021.

# 10,000 Years Of Australian Myths, History & Something In-Between

BY DANIEL LYONS

Design by Eva Ji

If you would, imagine a game of telephone. You start with a word or sentence. Something easy, like, "the cat went out back." And you whisper it into someone's ear. They do the same, spreading the phrase around the room, person after person, whisper after whisper, until after ten or so people it comes back around to you as some incredulous phrase, like, "the rat stole my hat." Very quickly the message sent became a parody of itself. Now why did it do that? Well, as each person hears the message, there's the possibility they mishear it a little and, as they tell it, even in such a short span, they might misremember it or fail to enunciate it properly. All of these are shortcom-

ings when telling stories by word of mouth. One can imagine longer and more complex stories with deep characters and vivid descriptions of places and events told and retold, sometimes years going by since they were last heard or spoken of. These stories suffer a similar fate: a repeated process of accidental embellishment where the story quickly morphs into something it once was not. Not exactly the best way of transmitting knowledge faithful to its origins, is it? Many anthropologists believe this is what happened in preliterate societies, that without a written language to record their cultures' stories, the myths and legends they tell are only that: fiction upon fantasy con-

cocted from whimsical imaginings, and nothing more. It was once believed that without writing, without carefully putting to paper an account to be saved for all time, a story about a real person or historical event could only stay faithful for perhaps a thousand years until the game of telephone degrades it into pure fantasy.<sup>1</sup> So, as far as anthropologists were concerned, anything earlier than that might as well be fiction.

That is, until Nick Reid, an associate professor and linguist at the University of New England, challenged that notion. Back in 2015, Reid – who specializes in Aboriginal Australian languages such as Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri –

along with geology professor Patrick Nunn from the University of the Sunshine Coast, began a project to cross reference a number of Aboriginal stories with historical geologic projections of sea levels in the region. These stories, passed by word of mouth, all tell of a time long ago when the ocean was lower and lands that are now islands were once traversable by foot. Initially they were dismissed as a mythic history, but reveal an oral tradition that "accurately described geographical features that predated the last post-ice age rising of the seas,"<sup>2</sup> when compared to actual historical coastlines. With corroboration from modern science, these folk stories now have proof that they are not only rooted in fact, but are well-preserved, accurate accounts of sea level changes.

Each of the stories analyzed and cross-referenced with geologic data are unique to the peoples that tell them. While each contains elements of the formation of local geographic landmarks, they are interwoven with other mythic elements including legendary figures and explanation stories.



Aboriginal Art by Tiya (CC BY 2.0)



Aboriginal Rock Art, Anbangbang Rock Shelter, Kakadu National Park, Australia, CC BY-SA 3.0

Not only would they have geographic signifiers in their arsenal to help them keep their stories faithful, but in Aboriginal cultures, the retelling of a story such as that of Ngurunderi, a mythic hero for the Ngarrindjeri people, would be accompanied by paintings on rocks or bark, drawings in the sand, songs, dances, and even elaborate ceremonies in order to tell the story exactly as it's supposed to be. And as the story is told, there are assigned roles across generations of people, where despite there being one great storyteller, even the younger in the audience are relied upon to

correct inaccuracies when they spot them. In essence, "That rigor provided 'cross-generational scaffolding' that 'can keep a story true.'<sup>1</sup>

Imagine you are of the Ngarrindjeri people, and one evening the whole community comes together. Perhaps it is a special night, or perhaps it is but one of many nights beneath the stars. The storyteller says he will tell one of your favorite stories, the tale of Ngurunderi: a great ancestor of your people. He is a mythic figure, but also a genealogical one. And this is the story of him and his search for his two runaway wives.

*Ngurunderi and his two sons, while searching for his two wives who had run away from him, had taken to sailing down a stream in his canoe. Ngurunderi spotted a giant Murray cod fish (Ponde), who with every powerful sweep of his tail widened the stream into the great Murray river. Ngurunderi followed this cod and saw, as it swam, the fish made billabongs and swamps in its wake.*

*Ngurunderi tried to spear the great fish, but missed and the spear became Long Island (Lenteilin). When he reached what is now Taillem Bend (Tagalang), he threw*

another spear, and in order to avoid it, the massive fish rushed forward and created another great straight in the river. Finally, with the assistance of the brother of Ngurunderi's wives, Nepele, Ponde was slain.

Ngurunderi then cut up the fish into small pieces and threw these pieces back into the river. They became the various species of fish that now live within the lakes and rivers of Murray-Darling.

While this was happening, Ngurunderi's wives were making a campfire. They intended to cook bony bream, a fish forbidden for the women of the Ngarrindjeri to eat. Ngurunderi, smelling them cook, then knew his wives were near.

But his wives heard him as he came, and they rushed to build a raft of reeds and grass to escape across Lake Albert. When they reached the other side, they fled south.

Ngurunderi then followed his wives to Kingston. There, he encountered Parampari, the great sorcerer. They fought with everything at their disposal, from mundane weapons to magic powers. But in the



Aboriginal painting, c. 2014 (CC0 1.0)

end, the formidable Ngurunderi came out on top. He then took Parampari's body and burnt it in a grand funeral pyre which is symbolized by the granite boulders that rest there today.

Ngurunderi then spent a great deal of time making his way across the Murray Mouth along the Encounter Bay towards what is now Victor Harbor. He stayed at Middleton and fished by throwing a great tree into the ocean in order to make a seaweed bed. He even caught a seal, whose last cries can still be heard there today. Making his way to Port Elliot, he stayed there

awhile; camping, fishing, and still searching for his wives. He became frustrated with his lack of progress and in anger, threw another of his spears into the sea near Victor Harbor. This spear became the islands there.

Finally, after so long, Ngurunderi heard his wives' laughter as they played in the water along King's Beach. Ngurunderi tossed his club aside, making the Bluff (Longkuwar), and took after them.

His wives fled from him, racing away down along the beach until they reached Cape Jervis. Back then, what is now Kangaroo Island was still a peninsula attached to the mainland. So the two wom-

en ran to it, seeking refuge. Seeing this, and full of anger, Ngurunderi used his magic to make the waters rise. He called out in a great voice, and made it so. The two women were swept away by the rage of the sea. Drowned, they became a series of rocky islands named the Pages.

After this, Ngurunderi crossed to the island that he made. And once on Kangaroo Island, he threw his spear into the sea, removed his old skin, and dove into the ocean. He then ascended and became a star in the Milky Way.<sup>3</sup>

As a vivid mixture between myth and reality, the story of Ngurunderi and others like it challenge our preconceptions of history. No story is wholly true, but serves merely as an account of subjective historical events. Regardless of whether it's spoken or written, it is solely a fiction used as a tool to remember actual events. While intermixed with mythic tropes, the story of Ngurunderi contains actual historic events too. The Ngarrindjeri lived at these locations before and after the geological shifts occurred, and they encoded these geographic transformations within these myths. Nunn believes this opens up an opportunity to reexamine other oral traditions. What other historical events might reside in these cultural stories? Just as there have been for Aboriginal peoples, there may be other stories, myths, and folk tales that hold more history than previously thought.<sup>4</sup>

Nunn would have us turn our ears to the Klamath people who reside in what is now the state of Oregon in the United States. The Klamath, like the Ngarrindjeri, have stories of a time before the formation of local geographic features, namely: of Crater Lake. Once, it was a volcano defining the skyline of the area. The Klamath have a story about the volcano god who, after being defeated by a rival, protector deity, threatened the people and collapsed the volcano into the lake we know today.

Over thousands of years and generations later, this story has been passed down with a warning so as to not disturb the volcano god who still lies within the caldera. The actual event this may be based upon occurred approximately 7,600 years ago, which would make this story as old as many of the Australian Aboriginal peoples' stories. And like the Aboriginal peoples, the Klamath have a rich tradition of specialized story-keepers.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than the previously held belief on the chronological limit of faithful oral traditions, Nunn would suggest that these accounts of the Aboriginal peoples, as well as other groups like them such as the Klamath, demonstrate that orally transmitted knowledge can last even up to 10,000 years—orders of magnitude longer than once thought.<sup>4</sup>

Quite remarkably, despite the hardships endured by the Aboriginal peoples as a whole in the wake of European colonization, these stories are still being told today. These traditions are alive and well, much in the same form as they would have been thousands of years ago. There is a throughline for the Aboriginal peoples, in that their myths contain their history. In the legends and stories they share, they are not only relaying history, but participating in and continuing it. ■

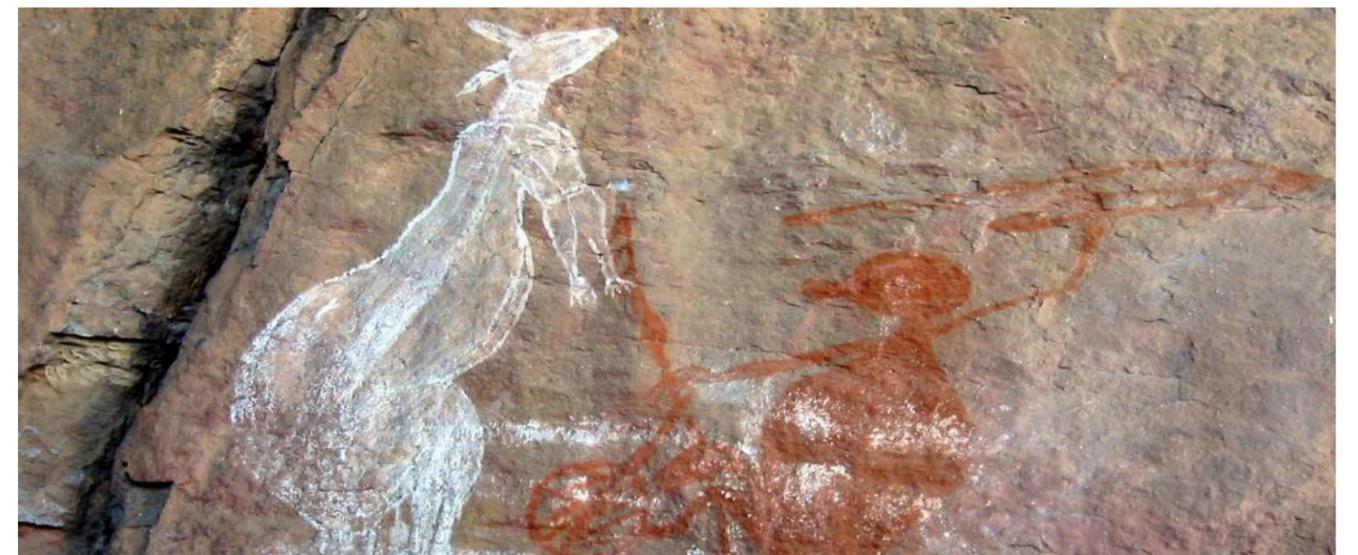
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<sup>1,3</sup>Reid, Nick and Nunn, Patrick. "Ancient Aboriginal stories preserve history of a rise in sea level." The Conversation. Online Article. 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Upton, John. "Tales of Ancient Sea Rise Told for 10,000 Years." Climate Central. Online Article.

<sup>3</sup>Graham, Clark. "Ngurunderi - Dreaming of the Ngarrindjeri People Murray River." Online Article. & Australian Geography Teachers Association. "The Ngarrindjeri people of South Australia." Online resource.

<sup>4</sup>Nunn, Patrick. "The Oldest True Stories in the World." Sapiens. Online Magazine Article. 2018.



Aboriginal Rock Art, Anbangbang Rock Shelter, Kakadu National Park, Australia (CC-BY-SA)

# DEATH, DECAY & DEV PATEL

*The Roots of David Lowery's The Green Knight*

by Will McClelland  
Design by Oliver Higgins

Warning: this review contains spoilers!

Think of the most confusing movie you've ever seen. Now make it 10x more confusing, add a cool magical fox, slap Dev Patel in there for shits and giggles, and you've got *The Green Knight*, director David Lowery's latest passion project. Don't get me wrong: it's a fantastic movie, and I would highly recommend it for anyone who enjoys sticking their head into frothing cauldrons of symbolism. Or for people who enjoy Arthurian legends. Or for those who just like to look at Dev Patel.<sup>1</sup> It's truly a film for everybody, when it comes down to it.

If you haven't seen it yet, *The Green Knight* tells the story of Gawain—King Arthur's nephew—and his encounter with the Green Knight, a supernatural entity that comes to Camelot on Christmas Day to offer a challenge to the Knights of the Round Table. The challenge is this: the knights are asked for a volunteer among them to try to land a blow against the Green Knight. Then, after a year passes, that volunteer is to find the Green Knight at the Green Chapel to receive the same blow that he had dealt the year earlier.<sup>2</sup> Gawain, not yet a knight, volunteers in the hopes of proving himself worthy of knighthood, and he immediately proceeds to behead the Knight with Arthur's sword.

However, this was something of what scholars may call an "oopsie-daisy-fucky-wucky," as the Green Knight simply picks up his head and rides away laughing. So, during the next year's Yuletide, Gawain goes on a quest to find the Green Chapel, having various strange and/or magical encounters along the way.

The story told in *The Green Knight* is a relatively old one, as it's based on the 14th-century Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.<sup>3</sup> There's a lot to be said about the poem, like how it's written in a beautiful a1-



literative style, or how its bob-and-wheel structure is a clever and satisfying method of ending a stanza, or how we don't know who wrote it even to this day.<sup>4</sup> But now that I've mentioned all of that ever so subtly, I can move on to the juicy bit: **the themes.**<sup>5</sup> One of the most clear themes of Sir Gawain is the tension between "civilization"—Camelot—and the chaotic forces of nature.<sup>6</sup> The poem also uses the trope of the chivalric hero, who obeys the social rules of his Christian society and proves his mettle by being tested in a variety of different ways. However, Gawain is actually one of Camelot's most perfect and most special boys: for one thing, some scholars think he may actually be the remnant of an old Celtic sun god.<sup>7</sup> But, there's also a pattern in Gawain-centered romances where

he's a character that constantly crosses between the ordered, Christian world and the chaotic, pagan, natural world, acting as a bridge between the two.<sup>8</sup> He's also associated with magic a lot, which I think is VERY fun and, dare I say, sexy of him.<sup>9</sup> This is all to say that supernatural challenges like the one offered by the Green Knight don't just happen to anybody; Gawain is simply built different.

But wait, you say, does the film pay due diligence to its original source material? Well, it's complicated. One thing the film does a great job of is encapsulating that primary theme of nature as a chaotic, uncontrollable force that will inevitably get us all. The final scene where Gawain accepts that he must eventually give way to nature and death (as personified by the Green Knight) and thus





takes off his protective belt exemplifies this well. If that's not enough in and of itself, Lady Bertilak's speech about how everything would eventually succumb to the color green—including "your skin, your bones, [and] your virtue"—is also pretty on-the-nose regarding what the story's all about.<sup>10</sup> However, one of the most memorable moments where *The Green Knight* shows this theme is about halfway through the movie, when Gawain is lying in the forest after being tied up by bandits. The camera does a slow, 360-degree pan around the forest scene, and the season slowly changes from

winter to spring. When it reaches Gawain again, he is nothing but a skeleton; time is then reversed, and the camera goes right back around as the season changes back to winter. It's one of the most intriguing shots in the entire film, and for good reason. It really drives home the key message that David Lowery is trying to communicate to his audience: eventually, everybody's going to die and be reclaimed by nature, and there's not really anything we can do about it. Truly just a pleasant little film to watch with the besties!

The Green Knight also

deliberate choice, though: in an interview with IndieWire, David Lowery made it clear that,

***"One of the initial changes I made when writing the script was the degree to which Sir Gawain is a virtuous knight. I wanted to tarnish his legend and see what changes the story would go through as a result."***<sup>14</sup>

And by Jove, he sure did succeed on that front!

The main way Lowery establishes Gawain as an asshole early on is by changing the nature of the Green Knight's

game itself. In the original story, the game is more explicitly about beheading; the Green Knight outright tells the court, "I'll kneel, bare my neck, and take the first knock."<sup>15</sup> Beheading games were actually a Thing in Arthurian romances between around 1180 and 1380 CE, both in England and the European continent (France and Germany, mostly), though they're generally thought to have come from an old Irish tradition.<sup>16</sup> So, in the poem, Gawain was actually supposed to go big or go home. Also, in *Sir Gawain*, Gawain doesn't just run up to the Knight and behead him with Arthur's



respects the original poem in the way that it's visually stunning, with a lot of artfully crafted shots, clever lighting, intricate costuming, and color symbolism that treat the visual medium with as much care as the Gawain poet treated his written one.<sup>11</sup> The landscapes are beautiful, too, which really highlights the centrality of the natural world in the story. Combined with those landscapes is some buck wild shit, though; at one point, Gawain accidentally eats some psychedelic mushrooms and proceeds to have hallucinations, one of which includes seeing a bunch of naked giants walking through a canyon "singing" an eerie tune not unlike a whale song. This was decidedly not in the poem, but it certainly emphasizes the uncanny, otherworldly qualities at the story's core.<sup>12</sup> The slow, thoughtful

camerawork adds a lot of extra time to the film, but it's worth it; it's a beautiful way of bringing out some of those funky little aspects of the original text.

While *The Green Knight* generally does a pretty good job of sticking to the original themes of the poem, there are some pretty key differences between the two, the most glaring being just how unlikeable Gawain is. In the poem, he's a pretty decent guy; he's nice, he follows through on his promise to show up to the Green Chapel and take the blow from the Green Knight, and most importantly, he doesn't cuck Lord Bertilak while staying in his house. But, in the movie, he's kind of a dick. He's not noble or courageous; he's just the nephew of the king who only wants to become a knight for the glory and attention.<sup>13</sup> This was a very

sword; Arthur actually tells Gawain to hit the Green Knight as hard as he can so he "needn't fear / the blow which he threatens to trade in return." Gawain even does the beheading with the Green Knight's own axe.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Lowery's choice to make Gawain's beheading of the Green Knight appear unnecessarily violent—as opposed to it being pushed on him in the poem—only maximizes Gawain's dickheadishness.

One of the most drastic narrative changes the adaptation makes is the ending itself. In the poem, Lord Bertilak and Gawain agree to give each other everything they acquire each day after Bertilak goes hunting and Gawain stays in his castle fending off Lady Bertilak's advances. Poem! Gawain upholds his end of the bargain for three days, giving some ever-so-

sweet kisses to Lord Bertilak in the meantime (since that's what he received from Lady Bertilak. Oops).<sup>18</sup> But, he keeps the girdle of protection that the Lady gives him on his last day there. When he gets to the Green Chapel, the Green Knight gives him only a flesh wound on the neck, rather than beheading him. Surprise! The Green Knight is actually Lord Bertilak, and he thinks it's honorable that Gawain mostly kept to his promise by not only going to the Green Chapel, but also his giving the Lord everything he'd received while staying at the castle! That is, other than the girdle, which is why Gawain received a scratch—a reminder of his failure to be as noble as he should've been in the face of death.

In *The Green Knight*, though, Gawain runs away from the Lord and the Lady after only





one day. When he gets to the Green Chapel, we see Gawain poignantly ask the Knight, “Is this really all there is?” The Green Knight responds, “What else ought there be?”<sup>19</sup> The film then shows an alternate future: one where Gawain runs away, continues his life, and eventually dies after finally taking the Lady’s girdle of protection off—a choice which causes his head to fall off of his body, showing that he never actually escaped the Green Knight’s ax and the bargain he’d made. The film then cuts back to the Green Chapel, and Gawain takes off the girdle. The Green Knight raises his ax, and BOOM. End of movie. While it’s pretty different from the poem, this is a genius choice by Lowery in terms of getting his point across, and it still manages to deliver a similar message as the original, despite the change. The sequence show-

ing Gawain’s possible future proves that everything decays, that everyone will die in the end anyway. Thus, Gawain taking the girdle off shows that he’s accepting that nature will inevitably get him one way or another, whether it’s there at the Chapel or later on. That’s just how it has to be. Just like in the poem, Gawain is afraid of death, and that fear keeps him from being as honorable as he can be; but, in the film, he learns. In those very last moments of the film, Gawain becomes someone who can look death in the face and accept it. He has come to realize that no matter how much he tries to run from it, the Green Knight—death and the return to nature—will catch him. Gotta say, that’s quite a powerful message for David Lowery to send in the midst of a global pandemic.



When it comes down to it, *The Green Knight* is a pretty damn good adaptation, in my opinion. The feeling I had reading the poem felt very similar to the feeling I had watching the movie, and that’s exactly what I think a film adaptation should be shooting for. It understood the most important underlying themes, smacked the audience upside the head with them, but still told the story in a creative and new way. That, I believe, is what the spirit of continuity is all about for literature in particular: preserving the heart of the original text while making it understandable and relevant to a contemporary audience. *The Green Knight* captured that spirit well, and for that reason, I can’t recommend it enough. There’s an entire different article waiting to be written on what all of the symbols in the film mean, but that’s for another day. In the meantime, maybe I’ll go watch the movie again... ■



# Literary Horror of the Summerless Year

By Thomas Droste  
Design by Ian Sandler-Bowen



Frozen Falls, c. 1880 courtesy of Robert B. Menschel and the Vital Projects Fund

This past year and a half has been taxing to say the least. Perhaps the most subtly damning catastrophe is the constant conundrum of climate change. First written about in 1896 by Svante Arrhenius, warned about explicitly in 1965 by the Johnson administration<sup>1</sup>, and covered up by oil executives through concentrated disinformation campaigns by 1980, the story of man-made emissions leading to ecological instability seems as overwhelming as it is frightening. It’s that unprecedented scale that is precisely what makes it the perfect material for a horror story, literally. Now that may seem far-fetched. How would portraying a phenomenon like climate change into fiction even function? Luckily for history, however, a parallel to global warming can be drawn to show how world events inform artistic movements. In this case, however, their primary climate change concern was the polar opposite scenario compared to today’s global warming. 200 years ago we can find evidence that artists were instead horrified by the opposite phenomenon: global cooling.

1815. Indonesia. Mount Tambora. An unprecedented eruption. Tens of thousands killed instantaneously. Volcanic ashes plume to the heavens, blanketing the atmosphere with poisonous substances and causing temperatures worldwide to drop by upwards of six degrees Fahrenheit by

## Notes:

1. So, the entire human race
2. David Lowery. *The Green Knight*. Film. 2021.
3. I say “relatively” because, as someone who mostly prefers to study the Mediterranean Bronze Age, seven centuries is nothing. Sorry, medievalists.
4. Anonymous, trans. Simon Armitage. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Book. 2007.
5. Who doesn’t love a delicious little theme or motif!?
6. This is a pretty old conflict for European pagan belief systems; you especially see it a lot in Celtic and Norse myths.
7. Alice Buchanan. “The Irish Framework of Gawain and the Green Knight.” *Journal Article*. 1932. 321.
8. In other words, he’s a liminal figure; Clinton Machann. “A Structural Study of the Gawain Romances.” *Journal Article*. 1982. 634.
9. Ibid. Machann. 635.
10. David Lowery. *The Green Knight*. Film. 2021.
11. One little costuming detail I love is the pentangle pendant worn by Arthur, which points to the idea of the five sets of five things/virtues honored by a chivalric knight as mentioned in the poem (page 65 of the Simon Armitage edition).
12. Lowery actually spends a lot of time - 45 minutes, specifically - showing the audience Gawain’s travel through the north towards the Green Chapel and Bertilak’s castle (even though that portion only takes up three pages in the poem). Personally, I think it’s very pogggers of him.
13. The man’s got daddy issues for SURE
14. Eric Kohn. “David Lowery Almost Quit Filmmaking Before ‘Green Knight’ Release: ‘It Was a Very Existential Year.’” *Newspaper Article*. 2021.
15. Anonymous, trans. Simon Armitage. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Book. 2007. 39.
16. Alice Buchanan. “The Irish Framework of Gawain and the Green Knight.” *Journal Article*. 1932. 315.
17. Anonymous, trans. Simon Armitage. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Book. 2007. 45.
18. Talk about a couple who needs therapy. Good lord.
19. David Lowery. *The Green Knight*. Film. 2021.

1816. Famines everywhere from France to China devour millions, while disease outbreaks ravage the survivors. In England, revolutionaries march on the cathedrals with the sign “Bread or Blood;”<sup>2</sup> coinciding with similar uprisings spreading throughout every continent. To appease the mass revolts, many parliaments were forced to implement rudimentary social safety nets to placate strikers. In Vermont, 7 years worth of population growth was erased;<sup>3</sup> while in New Hampshire, population levels in many towns have yet to recover, even after 205 years.<sup>4</sup> Many were forcibly condemned to their houses to escape the bitter chill that washed over the world. This included the aristocratic group of writers led by Lord Byron, a legendary English poet who, rocked by his tumultuous personal life in England, left to live in Switzerland in 1816. He immediately found himself trapped in a newly unforgiving world surrounded by a collection of rather talented—if not strange—authors. To avoid the stir craziness that one would reasonably develop in such a scenario, he challenged the group to write the most fantastically scary stories they could concoct as a sort of contest. The days trapped in the villa were notably unnerving. Byron wrote of them as being of “perpetual density” which mysteriously originated from “a celebrated dark day.” One can clearly reference his thoughts through his July 1816 poem “Darkness,” which literally begins with, “I had a dream, which was



Courtney Blazon, “Zaman Hujan Au (Time of the Ash and Rain)”, 2016, pen and marker on paper.

**I had a dream,  
which was not  
all a dream. The  
bright sun was  
extinguished...**



Mount Tambora Caldera by Jialiang Gao

not all a dream. The bright sun was extinguished...”<sup>5</sup> While his writings reflected a more literal interpretation of the events unfolding, the others in his group took perhaps a more metaphorical method of unleashing their thoughts on the world in a way that would irrevocably alter the horror genre: they pioneered gothic monsters.

The winner of the contest, Mary Shelley, forever altered the literary genre with her introduction of *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*. Drawing directly from Greek mythology, Shelley wrote her observations of a world too caught up in its own emerging modernity to consider the implications of its actions. This warning was strengthened by the story’s sympathetic view of Frankenstein’s monster, which in the original tale was not a grunting ghoul, but a tortured soul condemning its own creator as horrendously hubristic.<sup>6</sup> Shelley, who came from a wealthy intellectual family that had disowned her for her eloping with a radical activist, felt a particular connection to the question of changing climates both literally and metaphorically. In her work, she directly challenged the reader to ask themselves how best to progress forward when facing unprecedented circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Another entry was John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, credited with introducing vampirism (with a notably romantic aesthetic) to mainstream audiences;<sup>8</sup> has been famously extrapolated upon in stories such as *Dracula* and *Twilight*.<sup>9</sup> These stories capture the imagination of

a society scandalized by great terrors that impacted even the rulers of society, serving as cautionary tales for humanity’s path forward in each case. The contest and its entries showcase how the effects of even a temporally short crisis can alter the course

**These stories capture the imagination of a society... serving as cautionary tales for humanity’s path forward in each case.**

of artistic movements and set popular culture on an entirely new path in the process. But even so, summer returned by 1820, and the creatures created from analyzing a climate calamity eventually became stripped of their original contexts. If the changes of 1816 were so brief, then what good can the era’s gothic literature do to inspire the current moment? As it turns out, its implications are scarily plentiful.

Modern statements on the climate crisis in art are a bit harder to succinctly contextualize since the case study of 1816 is widely agreed to be a classic cause-and-effect relationship while newer climate change interpretations are continuously evolving. The event of 1816 was a natural phenomenon (despite many at the time believing it to be a divine punishment);<sup>10</sup> while the cause of modern-day climate change is scientifically uncontroversial as man-made. Despite some proclaiming it to be either natural or nonexistent, climate analysts are in universal agreement that man-made emissions are key in thrusting climate change forward, an observation that Svante Arrhenius predicted in 1902.<sup>11</sup> However, research shows that 71% of climate emissions originate from only 100 corporations.<sup>12</sup> Upon further investigation, 35% of emissions come from only 20 companies.<sup>13</sup> Many of these firms deal in fossil fuels and, as previously stated, funded massive disinformation campaigns to sow seeds of doubt in the general public as to

the validity of the quickly converging sciences that all agreed on climate change’s existence.<sup>14</sup> Miraculously however, such efforts were not unnoticed by the artistic world.

The first notably major modern piece advocating against the coverup of the climate crisis originated from a visual medium unknown to the world of Lord Byron’s: film. 1988’s *They Live* depicts a man given specialized glasses to peer through the consumerist propaganda of urban life. They immediately reveal that Earth’s rulers are actually secret space aliens who are deliberately warming the globe to make it more hospitable to their species while extracting the planet’s resources for profit in the process. While quite literal in its messaging, the imagery of *They Live* has



Smithsonian American Art Museum from Alexandre Hogue (Dust Bowl), 1933, oil on canvas.

become famous in modern protests as a call to question authority. The anthropogenic nature of the current climate crisis contrasts with the gothic literary revolution of the 1810s due to this more concise understanding of the problem’s true cause. Similarly, Bong Joon-ho’s 2013 *Snowpiercer* depicts the blowback of scientific endeavors to end climate change by instead inducing global cooling events that spell disaster for humanity because they, once again, refused to consider the elongated implications of their plans. Here, the identification of human causes overrides the need for supernatural or fantastical explanations seen in the stories of the Summerless Year, instead opting to focus on the specific man-made systems that exacerbate the issue, something *Snowpiercer*’s

lead actress Tilda Swinton explicitly noted.<sup>15</sup> Both of these recent examples being films is an interesting point of comparison to the novels born of 1816, as each respective era’s medium shares the desire to communicate a concern surrounding a societal ill yet is contrasted by the methods available for mass transmission.

However, while some may assume that visual media is naturally supplanting the written word, research indicates that literary access and subsequent demand is actually expanding due to technological growth.<sup>16</sup> This is crucial for climate narratives as professor Ben Holgate argues that literature in particular is the most effective tool in educating about the climate crisis. Holgate’s investigation showed written language counteracts a “crisis of imagination” (where individuals exposed to a status quo cannot effectively imagine a potential alternative) that occurs when confronting psychologically demanding prospects in a manner that visual mediums cannot replicate.<sup>17</sup> Further research builds on this analysis by suggesting that portraying climate issues through digestible narratives instead of solely within scientific or academic terminology helps people internalize the severity in a tangible, grounded way.<sup>18v</sup> As such, the emerging genre of climate fiction and its development highlights

**Literature in particular is the most effective tool in educating about the climate crisis**

a turning point in the public discourse on the matter, and how we utilize this advent is pivotal to determining our path forward.

In the end, art history reveals that a crisis can usher in a new movement to an established genre, whether it be through romantic warnings calling for humanity to cease its sinful activities in order to appease the climate or through a modern lens calling for the abolition of “solutions” prioritizing profiteering over ecological well-being. And it’s that depth of analysis that should make it clear to us in the age

of instant communications just how vital artistically dispersing the urgency of the situation should be. Ergo, art (and literature especially) is an indispensable asset in combating this crisis, as collectively it is a medium that expresses what scientific warnings by themselves cannot. Not everyone can easily decipher academic gibberish in papers made inaccessible through financially burdensome paywalls, but a gripping tale can spur a mass realization about the gravity of our planet's situation. A skilled artist can tie down even the most inexplicable events into a graspable reality. It happened in 1816, and given the emerging droves of creators showing themselves to be climate conscientious, it appears that "climate fiction" may prove the old saying that history rhymes to be correct. But if a single year of exceptional cold 200 years ago could alter the course of literary history forever, then what are decades of unmitigated climate change even beginning to unleash? Only the artists able to capture the story of the future can tell. ■



Forest fire at Umatilla National Forest, by Brendan O'Reilly

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Steven T. Corneliussen. "Climate Science, 50 Years Later." *Physics Today*. American Institute of Physics, December 14, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Gillen D'arcy Wood. "1816, The Year Without a Summer." *BRANCH*, December 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Evans, "Blast from the Past." *Smithsonian Institution*, July 1, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Harold F. Wilson. "Population Trends in North-Western New England 1790-1930." *The New England Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1934), 283-285.

<sup>5</sup> George Gordon "Darkness by Lord Byron (George Gordon)." *Poetry Foundation*, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Minori Cohan. "Shelley's Warnings in Frankenstein." *ST112 A Fall 2018*, September 26, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Frayling. *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula*, 108-. London: Faber and Faber, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> British Library. "The Vampyre by John Polidori." 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Deutsch History Museum. "The Year Without a Summer: How Europe Descended into Climate Chaos."

<sup>11</sup> Editor. "Hint to Coal Customers." *The Selma Morning Times*, October 15, 1902. Pp. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Tess Riley. "Just 100 Companies Responsible for 71% of Global Emissions, Study Says." *The Guardian*. *Guardian News and Media*, July 10, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Taylor and Jonathan Watts. "Revealed: The 20 Firms Behind a Third of All Carbon Emissions." *The Guardian*. *Guardian News and Media*, October 9, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Franta. "Early Oil Industry Disinformation on Global Warming." *Environmental Politics* 30, no. 4 (2021): 663-68.

<sup>14</sup> Kate Aronoff. "'Snowpiercer': If You Care About Climate Change, This Sci-Fi Thriller Is for You." *YES! Magazine*, July 8, 2014.

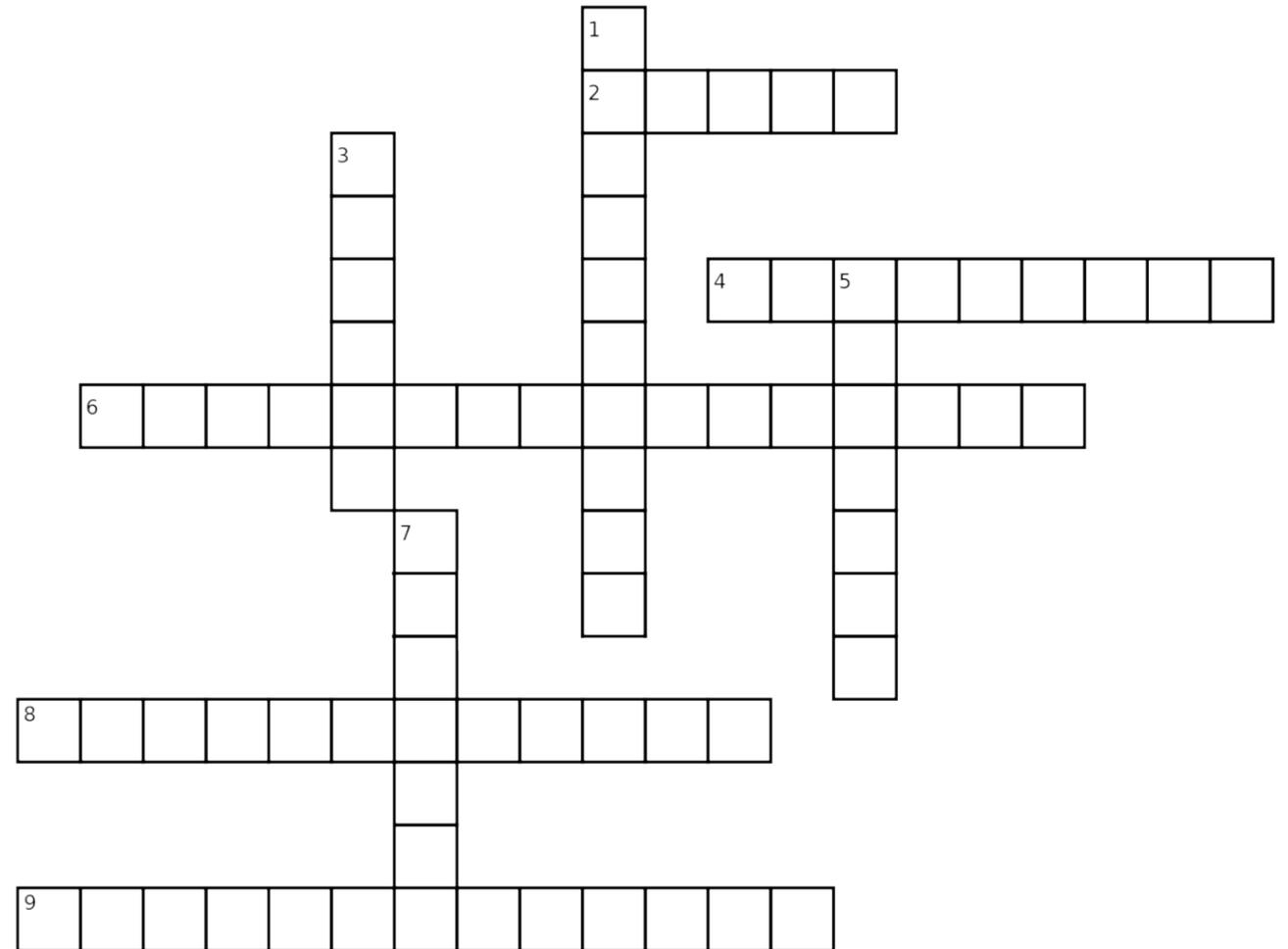
<sup>15</sup> Brandon Baker. "How Technology Is Making Education More Accessible." *University of Pennsylvania*, February 25, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Ben Holgate. "Climate and Crises: Magical Realism as Environmental Discourse." *Routledge*, January 31, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Mauro Buonocore. "Storytelling Is Part of the Solution to the Climate Dilemma." *Foresight*. *Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change*, August 3, 2021.

# CONTINUITY CROSSWORD

by Quin Zapoli



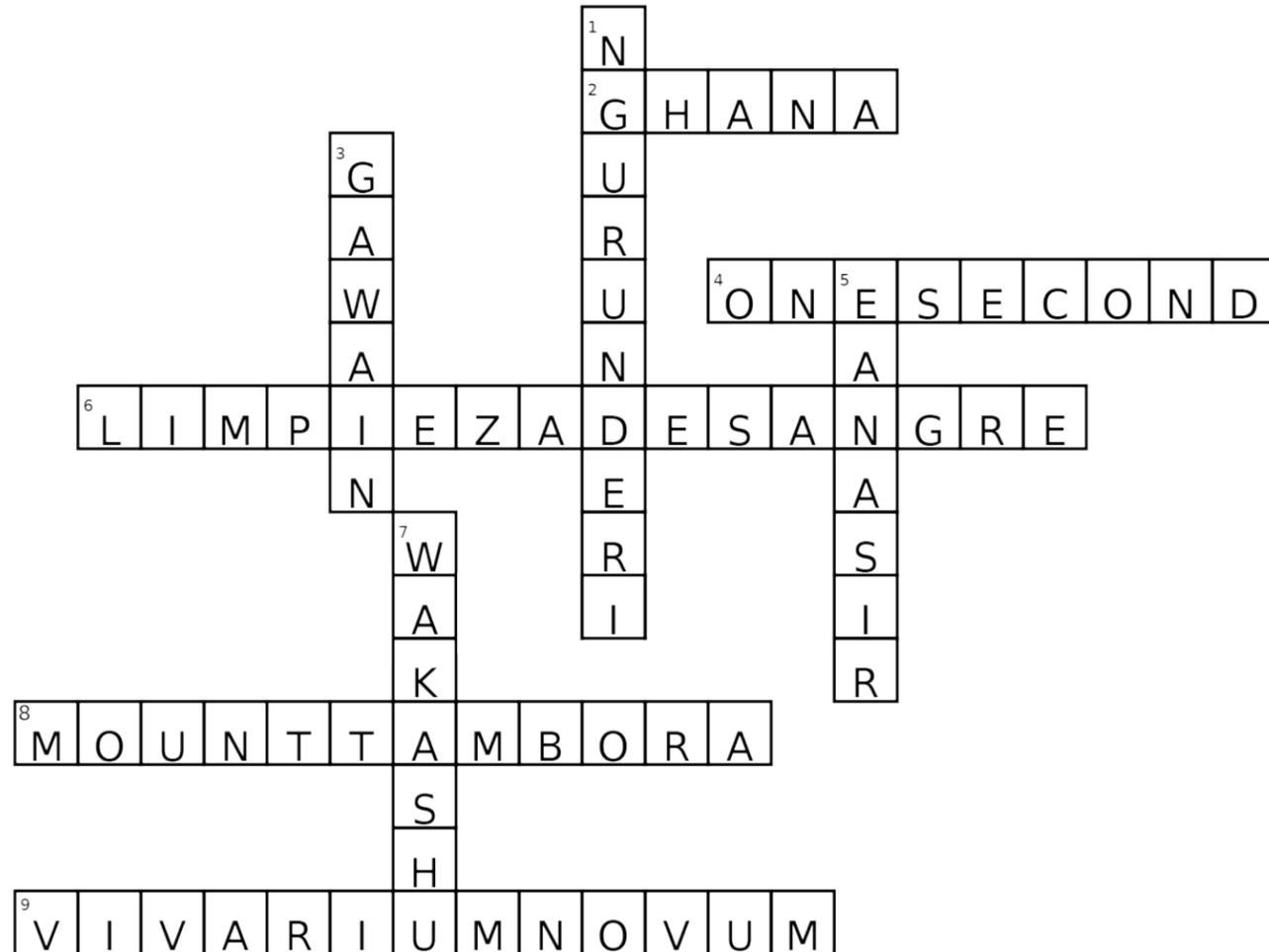
### Down:

1. A hero from mythic stories told by the Ngarrindjeri people in what is now Australia.
3. King Arthur's nephew and protagonist of *The Green Knight*
5. A completely innocent ancient copper merchant and a testament to the impossibility of customer service
7. A gender in Edo Period Japan focused on youthful male beauty

### Across:

2. The gold-laden African civilization who, despite the abundance of gold, valued salt quite a bit.
4. "The length of time in which the radiation from the unperturbed ground-state hyperfine transition of the caesium-133 atom oscillates 9,192,631,770 times"
6. "Purity of blood," an idea used by the Spanish Inquisition to discriminate
8. The Indonesian volcano whose unprecedented eruption inadvertently led to Mary Shelley's world-famous *Frankenstein*.
9. An immersive college program focused on studying Ancient Greek and Latin classics.

# CROSSWORD ANSWERS



How did you do?



A Note from the Editorial Board:

Thank you so much for reading our magazine! Our writing, design, and editing teams put an incredible amount of passion into their pieces and into the issue. Every article you see within these pages is the product of weeks of hard work by our entire staff, and we hope you are as thrilled with the final product as we are! As an E-Board, we would like to thank every person who helped make "Continuity" a reality; it's thanks to you all that this issue has gone from dream to reality!

We would also like to extend our deepest thanks to UMich Arts and the LSA Student Government for their financial support during this issue. Of course, we'd also like to thank YOU, the reader, for following us along the journey! We hope you continue to come back for more as we continue to develop and grow as an organization!

Our next issue, coming out in December 2021, will be called "Retrograde." This issue will take a deeper look at more recent world events, specifically those from the 1800s up to today. Make sure to follow our Instagram and Twitter (@thearchiveumich) to stay updated!

Once again, thank you all so much for reading, and we hope you've enjoyed "Continuity!"

Sincerely,

The Archive's Editorial Team

