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Introduction

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This issue of *Limina: a Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* presents two articles that speak to women/feminist issues and to raising or re-imagining the female voice. Svea Hundertmark’s article examines the reimagined female villain’s voice and representation in fairy tales, through their analysis of Disney’s *Maleficent* (2014). WhiteFeather Hunter provides insight into the history, identification, and ‘deviance-ness’ of contemporary technofeminist witches through a consideration of feminist scholars and witchcraft historiographers. Both of these articles highlight longstanding issues in the representation of womanhood and femininity, through fairy-tales and rape-culture, in the case of Hundertmark’s article, and the on-going battle around the autonomy of women’s bodies, as Hunter examines.

Both of these authors will present their papers at the forthcoming *Adaptations in the Humanities: Reimagining the Past, Present and Future* Conference (that was postponed from 2020 due to Covid-19). The conference will be *Limina*’s 15th annual conference, and is organised with the Perth Medieval and Renaissance Group, Medieval and Early Modern Studies at UWA, and the ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions. It will be a hybrid in-person and online event held over the 9-10 September 2021. The [programme, registration](https://conference.pmrg.org.au/) (open until 8 September 2021), and further information can be found on the [conference website](https://conference.pmrg.org.au/). I highly encourage those who are interested in these articles or Adaptation Studies to register for the conference to hear from the authors themselves and our other presenters.

This issue also includes six book reviews: Jessie Tu’s *A Lonely Girl is a Dangerous Thing* (Allen & Unwin); Nadia Rhook’s *boots* (UWA Publishing); Giulia Mensitieri’s *The Most Beautiful Job in the World* (Melbourne University Press); Michael Bradley’s *Coniston* (UWA Publishing); Stella Budrikis’ *The Edward Street Baby Farm* (Fremantle Press); and Linda Weste’s *Inside the Verse Novel: Writers on Writing* (Australian Scholarly Publishing). Many of these books, including *boots, A Lonely Girl is a Dangerous Thing, and The Edward Street Baby Farm*, also address or include feminist issues generating a very (unintentional, but welcomed) theme for this general edition that centres on women’s perspectives and issues.

We hope you enjoy this Volume 26, Issue 2 edition of *Limina* for 2021. In light of Covid-19 our world is drastically changing to acclimate to new formats, and this continues to greatly impact the academic and research communities. *Limina* continues to be a free and open-access space for post-graduates and early-career researchers in historical and cultural studies to gain experience in the publication process and share their research, but we are not without change. As mentioned, our upcoming *Adaptations* conference will be a hybrid format that should allow an international audience and those restricted by travel regulations to attend. Our *Limina* committee
meetings have also taken on a hybrid format where we meet in-person when possible on the University of Western Australia campus, on Whadjuk Noongar boodja, but always allow for virtual attendance. Thus, inviting and encouraging postgraduates in the Humanities to participate more actively in Limina. If you are interested in joining the Limina Collective information can be found on our website.
‘Both Hero and Villain’ – Rewriting the Tale, Revising the Villain, and Retelling Gender in Disney’s Maleficent (2014)\(^1\)

Svea Hundertmark

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Fairy tale films have always been popular but since the beginning of the twenty-first century many well-known fairy tales have been once again retold and refashioned. This article analyses Maleficent (2014), Disney’s retelling of their own film Sleeping Beauty (1959), which is an adaptation of The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood by Charles Perrault. Maleficent draws on the animated Disney film and other versions of the fairy tale while telling the story from the perspective of the evil fairy. This change of perspective results in a reinterpretation of the villain. Additionally, Maleficent counterbalances the inactivity of the sleeping beauty, reimagining the story as a narrative about female empowerment. Focusing on the revenge taken by the protagonist as well as her healing process and ultimate redemption, this article examines how the changes in perspective and plot offer a different interpretation of the role of women in the fairy tale ‘Sleeping Beauty’.

Fairy tales have provided inspiration for films since the beginning of the medium, when Georges Méliès transformed them into moving pictures by employing special effects of his own creation.\(^2\) Many fairy-tale films of the twentieth century, for example Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Cinderella (1950), and The Little Mermaid (1989), are still very popular. Since the start of the twenty-first century, however, there has been a real boom in retelling the well-known stories anew.\(^3\) Although the resulting films rely on classic fairy tales and their previous film versions, they differ significantly from both. On the one hand, recent fairy-tale films preserve the tradition of the respective fairy tale. They do so by referring to plots, characters, motifs, and settings known from fairy-tale texts and by considering changes that have been made by earlier adaptations.\(^4\) Thus, they suggest that fairy-tale films, including themselves, belong to a fairy tale’s tradition. On the other hand, these fairy-tale films oftentimes focus on a certain aspect of the tale that has been neglected before. In doing so, they offer a new interpretation rather than narrating the story again only through

\(^1\) An early version of this article was presented at SWPACA, Albuquerque, February 2019.
\(^3\) Especially women have been rewriting fairy tales for a long time, for example to undermine the male dominance of the genre. D. Haase, ed., Fairy Tales and Feminism. New Approaches, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), vii–ix. Accordingly, there have been feminist fairy-tale revisions before the twenty-first century, for instance by Angela Carter, which have been discussed in depth by fairy tale scholars. C. Bacchilega, Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Recent big-budget US-American fairy-tale films, however, are often regarded as less innovative than artistically inferior to independent or international fairy-tale productions. Therefore, they are either not considered for further investigation or are only addressed in passing. S. Short, Fairy Tale and Film: Old Tales with a New Spin, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 13, 19.
\(^4\) F. Liptay, WunderWelten: Märchen im Film, (Remscheid: Gardezl-Verlag, 2004), 133.
a different medium. By including current trends of thought, like debates about gender equality arising in the context of #MeToo, fairy tales are updated for contemporary audiences and a different perspective on them is provided. Such modernisations move these interpretations away from fairy-tale adaptations that try to be identical to the literary versions.5

This tendency to simultaneously honour and deviate from what has come before the respective fairy-tale films can be illustrated using the example of Maleficent (2014). Maleficent is a retelling of Disney’s 1959 film Sleeping Beauty. Sleeping Beauty in turn refers to Charles Perrault’s La Belle au bois dormant (1696; The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood) as its basis.6 While allusions to Dornröschen (1812; Little Briar-Rose) by the Brothers Grimm can be noticed in both films, Maleficent also takes up the version by Giambattista Basile, Sole, Luna e Talia (1636; Sun, Moon and Talia). Maleficent functions as a prequel to its literary and filmic predecessors, but also merges with them. To match the prequel part of the film to the old fairy tale, changes are made to the latter. While the film still relates the familiar story, it nevertheless proposes a different interpretation by employing a new perspective, namely that of the evil fairy. This is underlined by the fact that Maleficent is promoted to title character.

I argue that in the context of the fairy tale ‘Sleeping Beauty’ the change of perspective has two effects. First, it contributes to multiperspectivity by moving away from a one-sided account of the story. Thus, Maleficent’s actions are motivated and she is transformed from a flat two-dimensional character to a more rounded character.7 Secondly, it promotes the reimagining of gender roles that are portrayed in the fairy tale.8 By making the villain the protagonist, the focus shifts from the inactively sleeping title character of the fairy tale to a more active woman. At the same time, she is not depicted as being purely evil anymore, resulting in the need for a new antagonist. In Maleficent, this role is occupied by a male character through the insertion of a metaphorical rape that is based on older versions of the tale but has been softened or erased from many of its most famous variants. Maleficent is not the first rewriting of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ that includes the motif of rape, but its intended audience and the fact that it has been released by a production company that is associated with films for

5 The problems of regarding adaptations only in light of their fidelity to the adapted text have been widely discussed and many scholars refrain from exclusively focussing on this criterion. L. Hutcheon and S. O’Flynn, A Theory of Adaptation, 2nd edn, (London: Routledge, 2013), 6–7. However, many earlier fairy-tale films tried to resemble an original which does not exist for fairy tales. Still, the demand for fairy-tale films to be faithful to the Grimm versions was dominant for a long time in Germany, for instance. H. Heidtmann, ‘Von Dornröschen zum Shrek. Wandlungen des Märchenfilms’, in A. Barsch and P. Seibert, eds, Märchen und Medien, (Baltmannsweiler, 2007), 91.
6 C. Geronimi et al. (dir.), Sleeping Beauty, (Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 1959), film, 75 min.
8 David Gauntlett says about the relationship of gender and media after the 1980s that ‘[t]he traditional view of a woman as a housewife or low-status worker has been kick-boxed out of the picture by the feisty, successful “girl power” icons.’ D. Gauntlett, Media, Gender, and Identity: An Introduction, (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 248. Maleficent can be read as a continuation of this development.
children sets it apart from other rewritings that foreground rape, incest and the tale’s erotic potential.9

The following analysis is comprised of looking at the interplay between Maleficent and earlier versions of the ‘Sleeping Beauty’ tale, tracing the villain through the narrative’s history, as well as reading Maleficent in terms of gender roles against the backdrop of these older texts.10 To do so, I will refer to Gerard Genette’s concept of transtextuality.11 In this context, instances of modernisation, especially the revision of the female villain, will be examined. In the process of rewriting the tale and revising the villain, the gender roles that have been inherent in the story are questioned, resulting in a retelling of gender by granting a powerful, active woman her own story and emancipating her from the role of the villain.12 Interestingly enough, there is nevertheless a debate about the film’s feminist potential, although Maleficent seems to do better than many other successful films of the time when it comes to employing female protagonists.13

Transtextuality

The interplay between a text and its predecessors can take on various forms. Gérard Genette reworked the structuralist concept of intertextuality for literary studies. He coined the umbrella term ‘transtextuality’ to summarise five types of relationships that can be established between texts.14 The first type is ‘intertextuality’, which Genette defines as ‘the actual presence of one text within another.’15 Specific forms of intertextuality include quotation, plagiarism, and allusion.16 Genette calls the second

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9 Among the literary adaptations of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ that deal with these aspects are Anne Sexton’s poem ‘Briar Rose’ from her collection Transformations (1971), in which the father forces the sleeping princess into an incestuous relationship, and Anne Rice’s The Sleeping Beauty Series (1983-2015), a quartet of slightly comedic BDSM novels. Films that base their plot on the premise of a sleeping woman and then tell other, oftentimes darker or erotic stories are, for example, Some Call it Loving / Sleeping Beauty (1973), directed by James B. Harris, and Sleeping Beauty (2011), directed by Julia Leigh.

10 Donald Haase calls for an expansion of the scope of the scholarship on fairy tales and the development of new approaches. Haase, ed., Fairy Tales and Feminism, xiii. This article is an attempt to offer an analysis that takes the tale’s history, its relation to gender, and current social debates into account. However, this does not constitute an entirely new approach to fairy-tale scholarship.


12 I speak of retelling gender since in Maleficent a combination of reworking the character of the female villain, commenting on the material’s history, and positioning itself in contemporary debates about gender equality and rape culture is at play. This goes beyond questioning gender roles, for example by inverting them.


14 Genette, Palimpsests, 1.

15 Ibid, 2.

16 Ibid.
form of transtextuality ‘paratextuality’. Paratexts are all the information that, in addition to the actual text, belong to a literary work, for example, the title. Paratextuality describes the relationship of a text to its paratexts. The third type is ‘metatextuality’. It refers to a critical relationship between two texts, in which one of the texts comments on the other without naming or quoting it. This critique is therefore often suggestive. ‘Hypertextuality’ is the fourth form of transtextuality. It describes the relationship between a hypertext and an earlier hypotext. The hypertext could not exist without the hypotext it originates from, being the result of a transformative process. Genette describes two forms of transformation. While the ‘direct transformation’ draws on the action of the hypotext (a plot is reproduced in an altered form, e.g. Ulysses as a reproduction of the Odyssey), the ‘indirect transformation’ or ‘imitation’ mirrors the structure of the hypotext while conveying a different story (e.g. the Aeneid as a hypertext to the Odyssey). The fifth type Genette identifies is ‘architextuality’. The term ‘architext’ denotes ‘the entire set of general and transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text.’ Architextuality therefore describes an unarticulated relationship between a text and other texts, for example, through genre.

With the exception of paratextuality these types can readily be applied to transtextual analyses of films as well. As the focus of this article is on the interplay between a text (Maleficent) and its hypotexts, only intertextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality will be further regarded in the analysis. Other theories of intertextuality and criticism towards Genette’s concept suggest that a text should not be viewed exclusively in terms of its relations with other texts but should always be read for its self-sufficient uniqueness as well since both aspects are inseparable in the text itself. It is also in view of this criticism that this article combines the analysis of transtextual relations with a close reading of Maleficent in terms of gender roles. Nevertheless, the retelling of gender in this film can only be determined in comparison to its hypotexts, since the gender roles questioned here originate in the tale and its history.

Many Stories but Only One Villain
Numerous versions of ‘Sleeping Beauty’, which are united by a common core, exist throughout the world. An evil fairy puts an infant princess under a curse who

17 Genette, Palimpsests, 3–4.
18 Ibid., 4.
19 Ibid., 5–7.
20 Ibid., 1.
21 Ibid., 4–5.
22 The concept of paratextuality has to be adapted to the filmic medium before employing it for film analysis as films differ from written texts both in terms of reception and in terms of material qualities. G. Stanitzek, ‘Texts and Paratexts in Media’, Critical Inquiry 32, no. 1 (2005): 27–42.
23 Architextuality between Maleficent and its hypotexts could nevertheless be analysed since instances of intertextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality underline the fact that they are affiliated with the genres ‘fairy tale’ and ‘fairy-tale film’.
25 Hans-Jürg Uther illustrates the geographic spread of international folktales by listing specialized type and motif catalogues in which the respective tale has been included. ‘Sleeping Beauty’ (ATU 410) is listed for 35 regions / ethnic and language groups. H.-J. Uther, Animal Tales, Tales of Magic, Religious Tales, and Realistic Tales, with an Introduction, (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004), 245.
consequently falls into a death-like sleep as an adolescent. Eventually, a prince finds her and wakes her or witnesses her awakening. In the end, they get married. The tale has been told in many different ways, but the villain seems to stay the same.

In the French version by Perrault, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, an old fairy curses a newborn princess. She has not been invited to the christening because she was assumed to be dead or enchanted. When she nevertheless makes an appearance, she is not provided with a case of golden cutlery while the other seven fairies are. Feeling slighted, the fairy casts a curse: in the princess’ fifteenth year, she will prick her finger on a spindle and die. Another fairy is able to change the curse so that the princess will not die but sleep for one hundred years. A prince then finds her just in time to witness her awakening and falls in love with her.26

The fairy who casts the curse is not considered any further. She remains an archetypically evil and flat character whose actions and reasons are out of proportion. However, there are no consequences for the villain other than her curse not having the desired effect. At a later point in Perrault’s version, the prince’s mother, an ogress, wants to eat the princess and the two children she conceived from him. The fairy is therefore not the only villainous woman in the story. In contrast to her, however, the ogress dies because of her actions. When her plan to eat the princess and her children is foiled, she orders them to be executed. Her son interrupts this and she kills herself.27

The German version by the Brothers Grimm, *Little Briar-Rose*, is close to the one by Perrault. One of the thirteen fairies in the realm is not invited to the christening because there are only twelve golden plates. The fairy turns up nevertheless and explicitly states that her not being invited is her reason to curse the infant. One of the other fairies changes the death curse into a hundred years of sleep. After this time, a prince finds Briar-Rose and is so enthralled by her beauty that he kisses her just before she wakes up. However, there is no indication that she awakens because of the kiss.28

In this version as well, the fairy is not mentioned anymore after casting the curse. Her actions only set the story in motion, which is common in fairy tales.29 The reason for the curse seems to be her injured pride. Similar to Perrault’s version, the fairy is rendered an evil archetype because of her disproportionate reaction and she does not have to face any consequences.

In Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* the villain is called Maleficent and she is a witch, not a fairy.30 She appears at the celebration for Princess Aurora uninvited, stating that she ‘…felt quite distressed at not receiving an invitation.’31 Maleficient casts a curse so that ‘…before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, [Aurora] shall prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and die.’32 One of the good fairies alters the curse so that Aurora will only be asleep and can be woken by true love’s kiss.33

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27 Ibid.
30 Geronimi et al. (dir.), *Sleeping Beauty*.
31 Ibid., 00:07:33-00:07:37.
32 Ibid., 00:08:20-00:08:30.
33 Ibid.
Contrary to the other versions, the villain is not omitted for the rest of the story. Maleficent is explored further and she is portrayed as being cruel and evil, indicated by the way she interact with other characters.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, there are explicit comments about her character by herself and others. Maleficent states that she is ‘…the mistress of all evil’\textsuperscript{35} and implies that she is in alliance with ‘…all the powers of hell!’\textsuperscript{36} However, her deeper motives for cursing Aurora are not explained.

Nevertheless, Maleficent goes to great lengths to keep the curse intact. She tries to find Aurora, who has been hidden from her, and takes on a very active role in fulfilling her own prophecy.\textsuperscript{37} To make sure her curse cannot be broken, Maleficent abducts Prince Phillip. After he escapes, she raises a forest of thorns and turns herself into a dragon to stop him.\textsuperscript{38} Still, all her efforts fail: the prince kills Maleficent and her magic loses its power.\textsuperscript{39} Phillip then breaks the curse with true love’s kiss.\textsuperscript{40}

The reviving kiss originates in the version by the Brothers Grimm, although there it does not end the curse. This kiss, stolen from the sleeping beauty because the prince is not able to restrain himself, however, might be a toned-down variation of the Italian tale by Basile, \textit{Sun, Moon and Talia}. Here, Princess Talia is not cursed. Her driving a splinter of flax into her finger and falling into a death-like sleep is part of her destiny, which is predicted when she is born. The way she is woken is not included in the prophecy. During her unconsciousness, a married king finds her in a secluded castle. The king is so charmed by her beauty that he decides to ‘gather…the first fruits of love.’\textsuperscript{41} Nine months later, the still sleeping Talia gives birth to twins. When they suck on her finger, the flax comes out and Talia wakes. For a modern day reader it might come as a surprise that the villain in this story is not the unfaithful king with a tendency for rape. Instead, his wife plots to have the twins killed and served as dinner to the king as well as to burn Talia at the stake. The queen fails and is burnt to death herself. Talia, in turn, marries the king and both live happily ever after.\textsuperscript{42}

Not only does this tale exhibit a disturbing attitude towards rape, but it also depicts the deceived wife as a furious and murderous villain. She acts out of jealousy and is driven by her need for revenge. Although a motivation for her actions is given, they are unreasonable and directed at the mainly innocent Talia. Moreover, the queen ignores Talia’s explanation that she did not seduce the king but was unconscious when he found her.

All versions of the fairy tale exhibit the same kind of female villain. She is raging and vengeful; she acts emotionally and behaves irrationally. Additionally, her oftentimes superficial reasons are out of proportion in comparison to what she does and she directs her revenge at the innocent female protagonist. Consequently, the depiction of the female villain only ranges from the archetypically evil and flat fairy-

\textsuperscript{34} Geronimi et al. (dir.), \textit{Sleeping Beauty}.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 00:48:09–00:48:11.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 01:06:05–01:06:08.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
tale character to the jealous and hysterical wife. Moreover, the female protagonist is passive and does not object to being used for a man’s pleasure.

These stories serve as hypotexts for the hypertext Maleficent as it originates from them, influencing not only the plot but also the characters, including the villain. It should be noted, however, that they have been hypotexts of each other before. The oldest version of the story discussed here is Sun, Moon and Talia (1636), but we may assume that it is much older. In their commentary on Little Briar-Rose, the Brothers Grimm compare Briar-Rose to Brunhild, a character from Old Norse and Germanic legends who has to be woken from a long sleep as well. They also mention Perrault and Basile, having been aware of the other versions of their tale. Thus, former hypotexts can become hypotexts for later texts, which illustrates how a fairy tale’s tradition is continued through adaptation.

In the same manner, recent fairy-tale films do not refer to only one specific version of a fairy tale but to its tradition as a whole. Additionally, they may exhibit transtextual relationships to other texts: Sleeping Beauty mentions Perrault’s story as its hypotext. True love’s kiss, however, first appears in Little Briar-Rose, although here it does not wake the princess. This kiss might also result from softening the rape scene in Basile’s version. At the same time, the kiss in Sleeping Beauty might be a reference to Disney’s Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) in which a kiss revives the lifeless protagonist. Consequently, while Sleeping Beauty is the main hypotext for Maleficent, many parts of the film point to other versions of the tale.

Rewriting the Tale – Revising the Villain

The film Maleficent sets out to explore the backstory of the fairy tale ‘Sleeping Beauty’, focussing on Maleficent. Maleficent is a fairy living in the magical realm of the Moors. In her childhood, she befriends a human peasant boy, Stefan, after he tries to steal a jewel from a pond in the Moors. Later on, he cuts off her wings and pretends to have killed her to become the ruler of the human kingdom he grew up in. To take revenge, Maleficent curses Stefan’s daughter, Princess Aurora.

By concentrating on the actions of the antagonist, the film counterbalances the passiveness of the sleeping title character of the fairy tale. As this change of perspective puts the villain at the centre of attention, her underlying reasons are revealed. Screenwriter Linda Woolverton addresses the search for the fairy’s motives in an interview. Although the film is based on the Disney version, Woolverton considered older stories to find an explanation for Maleficent’s acts. Realising that the villain was initially a fairy, not a witch, Woolverton decided to focus on the loss of Maleficent’s wings.

44 Liptay, WunderWelten, 133.
45 Geronimi et al., dir., Sleeping Beauty.
46 Kay Stone argues that passive/persecuted fairy-tale heroines do not necessarily have less to offer than active/heroic ones because they often are resourceful or dauntless. K. Stone, ‘Fire and Water: A Journey into the Heart of a Story’, in Haase, ed., Fairy Tales and Feminism, 125.
Even though Maleficent deviates from its hypotexts by adding a deeper motivation for the fairy’s actions, there are some similarities regarding the villain: she rages and seeks revenge, which she takes out on someone uninvolved and innocent. Additionally, Maleficent refers to Sleeping Beauty with the protagonist exhibiting a trace of the animated villain’s cruelty. After uttering the exact same words to cast the curse, which makes this an intertextual quotation, Maleficent states that the only possibility to break the curse is true love’s kiss. This scene visually resembles the one in Sleeping Beauty as it exhibits a similar, albeit darker, colour scheme and partly employs the same camera angles. In the older version, this alteration was made by a good fairy. Now, Maleficent uses it to mock Stefan since both of them are sure that true love’s kiss, given to Maleficent by him when they were young, does not really exist.\(^{48}\) Despite these parallels, Maleficent differs considerably from the other female villains.

Although it is still unacceptable to harm an infant to get back at the father, her reasons make her behaviour seem less disproportionate than is the case with her predecessors. Maleficent does not act out of injured pride but because Stefan deceives and mutilates her.\(^{49}\) Her sedation and the cutting off of her wings as well as her screams of pain the next morning are depicted in a way that clearly evoke the connotation of rape.\(^{50}\) Surprisingly, Maleficent justifies her revenge with Stefan’s treachery being motivated by his political ambitions, not with the pain he caused her.\(^{51}\) This analysis has been confirmed by Angelina Jolie, who portrays Maleficent.\(^{52}\) Nevertheless, there are different interpretations of the scene. For example, it has been read as an act of disabling Maleficent, depriving her of her ability to fly, and taking away her power and agency.\(^{53}\)

However, Maleficent is not only a rape victim but, at the same time, a rejected lover. Even though Stefan claims to have given her true love’s kiss, he betrays Maleficent to ascend the throne and marry the former king’s daughter. Maleficent in turn only sets out to take revenge once she learns that Stefan and his wife are having a child and decides that Stefan’s daughter is going to suffer for his actions.\(^{54}\) It is only then that Maleficent’s transformation into a villain is completed, indicated by her now entirely black attire that covers her whole body as opposed to her light brown or grey dresses and bare feet. Additionally, the character and the Moors are associated with darker colours and dimmer lighting. The most obvious change in Maleficent’s presentation, however, is the colour of her magic that changes from a warm gold to a

\(^{48}\) R. Stromberg (dir.), Maleficent, (Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2014), film, 97 min.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{50}\) Ibid. The morning after Stefan assaults Maleficent, the normally colourful Moors are clouded, grey being the dominant colour. Maleficent wakes up slowly and feels for her now missing wings. She starts to scream, her cries of pain audible throughout her entire realm. The camera moves upwards while she is seen lying on the ground sobbing.
\(^{51}\) Ibid.
\(^{54}\) Stromberg (dir.), Maleficent.
poisonous green.\textsuperscript{55} The motifs of rape and the rejected lover are metatextual references to the version by Basile. They comment on the rape scene depicted there and more specifically on the fact that it is not problematized as well as on the rage of the deceived wife. The fact that Prince Phillip does not want to kiss Aurora without her consent (but is urged to do so nevertheless) underlines this reference to Basile’s story.

\textit{Maleficent} combines the seemingly incompatible motifs of the rape victim who takes revenge and the rapist’s rejected lover in its title character.\textsuperscript{56} This might be one of the aspects Pauline Greenhill has in mind when she labels \textit{Maleficent} ‘…a (faux) feminist re-vision’.\textsuperscript{57} However, she does not elaborate on this. The film has evoked a range of different reactions regarding its feminist potential, both from reviewers and journalists upon the film’s release as well as from academics later on. Some of the arguments that have been made about the film’s portrayal of women and rape are discussed here.

Even though \textit{Maleficent} employs a strong female protagonist, reviewers have pointed out factors that render the film less feminist than it initially seems to be, for example concerning the portrayal of other female characters and the problematic relationships between them. Aurora, for instance, is dependent on either a group of pixies who are not able to take care of her or the one fairy who cursed her, which is why she is in a helpless situation at all. Additionally, Aurora is the product of a political and loveless marriage.\textsuperscript{58} One could add that it is also based on an act of deception since Stefan did not really kill Maleficent.

Others read the film differently. Hayley Krischer highlights how Maleficent’s backstory shows that rape culture is so omnipresent that ‘a metaphorical rape occurs in a Disney movie.’\textsuperscript{59} However, Krischer also emphasises that in \textit{Maleficent} a woman who has been assaulted is empowered and given the chance to reclaim the story.\textsuperscript{60} She argues that \textit{Maleficent} can thus be regarded as ‘a commentary on rape culture’ and therefore attributes societal relevance to the film.\textsuperscript{61} Her interpretation seems to be in line with the film makers’ intentions since Jolie claims that the main topic of the film

\textsuperscript{55} This colour is not only an intertextual allusion to \textit{Sleeping Beauty} but it is also associated with a number of other Disney villains. ‘Disney Movies Taught Us That Lime Green is a Harbinger of Evil’, Oh My Disney, 12 November 2015. \url{https://ohmy.disney.com/movies/2015/11/12/disney-movies-taught-us-that-lime-green-is-a-harbinger-of-evil/}, accessed 14 June 2021.

\textsuperscript{56} This distinguishes Maleficent from other female fairy-tale characters who take revenge, like Ravenna (\textit{Snow White and the Huntsman}) or Gretel (\textit{Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters}). They do not have this kind of relationship with their tormentors and they direct their revenge at them or those like them. L. M. D’Amore, ‘Vigilante Feminism: Revising Trauma, Abduction, and Assault in American Fairy-Tale Revisions’, \textit{Marvels & Tales} 31, no. 2 (2017): 386-405.


\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
‘...is abuse, and how the abused then have a choice of abusing others or overcoming and remaining loving, open people.’\footnote{S. Holmes, ‘Angelina Jolie Says Violent Maleficent Scene was a Metaphor for Rape’, Elle, 12 June 2014. \url{https://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/news/a15426/angelina-jolie-maleficent-scene-metaphor-for-rape/}, accessed 14 June 2021.}

Jack Zipes states that the film also envisions ‘...an alternative “green” world of social justice, one that is ruled by a woman.’\footnote{J. Zipes, ‘Beyond Disney in the Twenty-First Century: Changing Aspects of Fairy-Tale Films in the American Film Industry’, in J. Zipes, P. Greenhill, and K. Magnus-Johnston, eds, Fairy-tale Films beyond Disney. International Perspectives. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 290.} He argues that this woman is Aurora, who unites the two kingdoms by simultaneously succeeding her father to the throne and becoming queen of the Moors.\footnote{Ibid.} If one was to follow this argument, it seems that Aurora is indeed more apt to rule over both realms than either Stefan or Maleficent. However, I would disagree to a certain extent. Since Aurora states in her final voice-over that her country was unified by someone who was both hero and villain (Maleficent), she disregards her own role in bringing the kingdoms together and does not realise that only she could rule over both.\footnote{Stromberg (dir.), Maleficent.}

Maleficent gives its title character the chance to make up for the pain she caused and to cope with the pain she had to endure. When she decides to take care of Aurora, Maleficent slowly starts to heal. This is indicated by the return of colours and light to the depiction of the character, especially when she interacts with Aurora, and can also be seen in her magic, which sometimes becomes golden again. It has been argued that she falls victim to her own curse in which she proclaims that Aurora will be ‘...beloved by all who meet her.’\footnote{Bartyzel, ‘Maleficent is less Progressive than 1959’s Sleeping Beauty’; Stromberg (dir.), Maleficent, 00:29:53–00:29:56.} However, the fact that Prince Phillip’s kiss is not able to wake Aurora indicates that the curse does not instantly evoke true love. When Maleficent saves Aurora with a kiss of maternal love, she redeems herself. Although this way of saving Aurora subverts viewer expectations that a man will save her and undermines gender roles, this scene has been criticised by Claudia Schwabe. She states that female fairy-tale villains, like Maleficent or Regina in Once Upon a Time (ABC, 2011-2018), are redeemed by ‘defining them through their identities as mothers,’ consequently domesticating them.\footnote{C. Schwabe, Craving Supernatural Creatures: German Fairy-tale Figures in American Pop Culture, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), 152.} Nevertheless, Maleficent is rewarded for saving Aurora when she gives Maleficent’s wings back to her. Aurora, who was supposed to pay for her father’s crimes, therefore becomes the one to right the wrongs he has committed. With the return of her wings, Maleficent’s healing process is completed and she becomes herself again.

There are more studies on Maleficent beyond these examples. For instance, there has been research on the film’s depiction of age in connection to fourth-wave feminism, reading the conflict between an aging witch and a young woman as a clash of feminist waves.\footnote{R. Schubart, “‘How Lucky You are Never to Know What it is to Grow Old’ – Witch as Fourth-Wave Feminist Monster in Contemporary Fantasy Film’, Nordlit 42, (2019): 191-206. \url{https://doi.org/10.7557/13.5012}} Others have compared the story of the evil fairy to the persona of
Angelina Jolie.\textsuperscript{69} Evidently, there is a plethora of interpretations on the film’s feminist potential.

The inclusion of contemporary issues that sets \textit{Maleficent} apart from earlier versions of the story is complemented by structural changes. This becomes especially apparent when looking at Maleficent and her functions for the tale. Vladimir Propp describes the structure of Russian fairy tales, stating that they are composed of several functions. These functions are specified ‘as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of [the character’s] significance for the course of the action.’\textsuperscript{70} Propp describes 31 functions, which he combines into ‘spheres of action’, resulting in seven main functions: the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought-for person, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero.\textsuperscript{71} Maleficent fulfils the functions of villain and hero both, while before the fairy solely functioned as the villain. This change is underlined by her being treated differently from other villains after casting the curse as she is neither omitted nor killed.

By rewriting the fairy tale and revising the female villain in this way, a new antagonist is created. While the motif of rape is not new to the story of ‘Sleeping Beauty’, it is used in \textit{Maleficent} to introduce a male villain in addition to retaining the female one. Stefan assumes the function of the villain gradually. He is introduced stealing because he owns almost nothing, but his later betrayal of Maleficent is based on an obsession with becoming king. However, Stefan’s reasons for this fixation are only explored superficially. Growing up without parents, he wants to escape his scarce life.\textsuperscript{72} This lack of motivation resembles that of the earlier female villains, rendering him equally flat.

The consequences that his deeds have for him, in contrast, are explored in more detail. Stefan’s advancement is based on several acts of betrayal. He intoxicates and mutilates Maleficent, but he also deceives the former king, who promised to reward the person who kills Maleficent. Stefan uses Maleficent’s wings as (false) proof for her death.\textsuperscript{73} Therefore, she poses a threat to his claim to the throne. Stefan develops a paranoid fear of Maleficent, which is illustrated by his increasingly neglected appearance and the character’s association with fire, dark colours and dim lighting, mirroring Maleficent’s descent into villainy. Still, he is never portrayed as a victim but as someone who brought his fate upon himself. This impression is reinforced by the fact that Stefan does not show remorse for his actions and ultimately dies because he is not able to make peace with Maleficent.\textsuperscript{74}

Triumphing over the fairy seems to be more important to Stefan than protecting Aurora. His lack of parental affection for her sets him apart from Maleficent. He also abandons his wife on her deathbed, confirming that their marriage was never based on love. The fact that Stefan uses women to satisfy his own needs, most prominently his wish for a higher status, echoes the actions of the male characters in the earlier versions of the fairy tale. That he is clearly rendered as the villain and is met

\textsuperscript{70} V. Propp, \textit{Morphology of the Folktale}, 21.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 79-80.
\textsuperscript{72} Stromberg (dir.), \textit{Maleficent}.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
with resistance by positively portrayed female characters like Aurora critically comments on these adaptations.

The comparison between Maleficent and the earlier villains of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ illustrates the change that took place in the way women are portrayed in the tale, questioning the gender roles that were engrained in the story before, especially those of female villain and male saviour. However, Maleficent goes beyond questioning the tale’s traditional gender roles by also retelling gender. Using the motif of rape that has been inherent in the story for centuries, the film gives an assaulted woman agency and punishes the perpetrator instead of rewarding him with a wife. To do so, the motif is shifted into the parent generation of the fairy-tale characters, the victim no longer being the sleeping princess but the evil fairy who is now equipped with a motivation for her actions. By doing this, the film additionally positions itself in the current debate about gender equality and rape culture.

**Conclusion**

While Maleficent diverges considerably from Sleeping Beauty they both work towards a deeper understanding of the fairy tale and its villain. Sleeping Beauty explores how the evil fairy could have been involved in the fulfilment of the curse and the consequences she might have to face. Maleficent proposes an idea as to where the curse could have originated. These aspects are scarcely discussed in other predominant versions of the fairy tale. Thus, both films contribute to the narrative by interpreting, expanding, and preserving the story. Consequently, they show how films are indeed part of a fairy tale’s tradition. The films also indicate that we should keep on telling fairy tales in a way that connects them to contemporary social discourses.

In the case of Maleficent, this is predominantly done by revising the villain and thereby retelling gender. Owing to the change of perspective, the film’s focus shifts towards the active female villain. Maleficent does not merely fulfil the task to set the action in motion, but is entitled to her own story. This revision of the female villain simultaneously enables the creation of a male villain. Furthermore, Maleficent takes up a current social discourse: rape and the challenges rape survivors face in our society. Maleficent is provided with a deeper motivation and transformed into a character whose experiences illustrate the havoc violence can cause but who is still given a chance to heal. Maleficent provides a critical engagement with the topic of rape and depicts the rapist as the villain. Thus, the film provides a comment on current social discourses as well as a critical engagement with the story’s tradition and the material’s history.

However, there is still a justified debate about the film’s feminist potential. Maleficent is not a perfect representation of women, as can be seen in the analyses

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25 Maria Warner warns against the silencing of women’s voices and a misogynistic focus on evil women in fairy tales through the erasure of the tales’ historical context by corporations like Disney. M. Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), 416-417. Maleficent’s sequel, Maleficent: Mistress of Evil, employs a flat female villain once again. Phillip’s mother prepares for war with the fairies but her motifs are only explored superficially. Later, she is punished by being transformed into a goat. J. Rønning (dir.), *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, (Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2019), film, 119 min. The opportunity to continue the exploration of female characters initiated by Maleficent appears to have been lost in this film. Consequently, Maleficent: Mistress of Evil affirms Warner’s apprehension.
conducted by various critics. There are flaws in the portrayal of relationships between women, there are controversial aspects like the combination of the rapist’s rejected lover and the rape victim in one character, and there is the problem of the protagonist cursing an infant. Still, there is also the potential of depicting women differently than it has been done before in many versions of ‘Sleeping Beauty’. This version of the fairy tale moves away from the hysterical female villain and the inactively sleeping protagonist to a more profound portrayal of women.
The Witch in the Lab Coat: Deviant Pathways in Science

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Witches gain access to protected spaces through deviant pathways, twisted beings that they are. Are they twisted to begin with, or do they become distorted through necessity for such navigational means? This text examines historic underpinnings and contemporary responses to convoluted institutional restrictions around science technologies concerned with the body – embedded structures reinforced by capitalist modes of knowledge specialization and social classism. Such structural hegemony can stymy transdisciplinary, collaborative research and disenfranchise autonomous practitioners. Drawing on works of feminist scholars and witchcraft historiographers, this text shows how European capitalism/colonialism wrought what has become a prominent witchy identity: artists who deliberately bend technologies towards counterhegemonic ends, reveling in the shapeshifting ‘witch’ as a natural fit for propagating unrestricted access to high-tech manipulations of biological systems. Concepts of deviance are examined as social triggers that instigate feminist revolt through ‘reclaimed’ witchcraft actions, towards socially reconstructive modes of knowledge and culture production.

Witches gain access to protected spaces through deviant pathways, twisted beings that they are. Are they twisted to begin with, or do they become distorted through necessity for such navigational means? This paper will examine some of the historical underpinnings of, and resultant contemporary responses to convoluted institutional restrictions around science and technologies concerned with the female sexed body. Specifically, how present-day witches wend their ways around these structures, which are embedded with and reinforced by capitalist modes of knowledge specialization and social classism. Such constructs maintain hegemonic masculinity and protect industrial productivity, disenfranchising practitioners not affiliated with sanctioned institutions in ways that compromise bodily autonomy and self-knowledge.

Drawing predominantly on works of feminist scholars and witchcraft historiographers, I explore how ideas about patriarchal capitalism have wrought a prominent, new witchy identity: artists who deliberately bend technologies towards

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counterhegemonic ends. They revel in the shapeshifting ‘witch’ as a natural fit for propagating circuitous access to high-tech manipulations of biological (and biotech knowledge) systems. I turn first to authors who have recently re-emerged as pivotal feminist protagonists in the ever-unfolding ‘witch’ conversation: social sciences scholar, Silvia Federici, and second wave activists/ co-authors, Barbara Ehrenreich and Dierdre English. These authors have provided provocative, exploratory, critical opinion about the trajectory of oppression that still characterizes demonization of women’s control over their own bodies and their related autonomous involvement in communities.

I also recognize science philosopher, Donna Haraway, as a respected troublemaker who helped initiate application of the post-natural lens to witchcraft. Haraway’s legacy has fastened witchery in feminist imaginations as the potential for transformative, technophilic actions towards knowledge and gender democracy in the technological age. These voices are deliberately privileged here, over usual historiographical narratives about witches and witchcraft, since Federici et al. explicitly address the aforementioned niche feminist topics within feminist frameworks. As such, they continue to serve as key reference points for a number of contemporary witchcraft precepts and projects that antagonize the current state of capitalism.

The importance of dissecting the sociocultural establishment and continued maintenance of a patriarchal ‘normal’ as it pertains to control of knowledge around women’s biology and health care, is evermore salient as new biotechnologies are constantly developed faster than social policies to mediate them. Also important to understand, is the subsequent medicalized and moralized othering of anyone who strays from the norm – through a process called deviantization. I am particularly interested in how such deviance is subversively utilized by artists claiming the ‘witch’ identity as their catalysing motif, specifically for the performance of technofeminist defiance within biopolitical discourse.

Prioritizing the cultivation of critical positioning in relation to new technologies, and infiltrating technocracy through tactical use of biotechnologies – both goals that characterize technofeminism – are essential and effective political tools for contemporary witches. Concepts of deviance will first be examined as social triggers that instigate feminist revolt through ‘reclaimed’ witchcraft actions towards these socially reconstructive modes of knowledge and culture production. A common thread will be drawn between behavioural deviance, and socio-biological concepts of contamination; both are parallel determinants of perceptions of women’s innate corruption in moralized systems of reproductive control within the body politic.

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4 For more on the goals and politics of TechnoFeminism, see J. Wajcman, TechnoFeminism, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).
Deviant Pathways

This section will discuss the role of deviance in solidarizing such iconic personae of women’s noncompliance – ‘witches’ – particularly their noncompliance with hegemonic norms. Later sections will discuss how these norms, embedded in processes of capitalism, restrict access to the means for shaping technocultural advance. ‘Deviant’ is both a social label and a descriptor of traits possessed by she, so-named: ‘a person who differs markedly... from what is considered normal or acceptable.’ ‘Normal’ and ‘acceptable’ are far from neutral terms; they are context-dependent and contestable, begging the question: who is responsible for deciding what constitutes standards of the norm?

Legally, deviance is criminalized behaviour, perceived to destabilize social structural cohesion – and, as this text will highlight cohesion of a capitalist system, via threats to its economic imperatives and dominant order of function. Situated within biopolitical (and medicalized) discourse, these threats manifest as individual ‘failure’ to meet instituted objectives for social reproduction: societal expectations may include education/indoctrination leading to development of marketable skills, leading to employment and marriage, leading to reproduction (of labourers), for instance. Miscarriage of such milestones are seen to violate ‘objective standards’ of ‘adequate performance’ and ‘moral duty’ of the ‘good and virtuous life of reason’ embedded within the juridical logic of capitalism. Following capitalist ideology, deviant (unvirtuous, inadequate, substandard and immoral) persons may be considered aberrations in the social order, for a variety of reasons: being un(der)employed due to lack of access to education, or due to illness, disability, age or family burdens; sexually autonomous, asexual or queer; unwed, a single parent or non-reproductive. Important to note, is that these factors may be intersected not only by gender and class, but also by race.

The consequences of such transgressions have oftentimes been severe, as with death sentences for ‘witches’ during the European and colonial witch hunts. Such histories are not, however, simply relegated to a distant, regrettable past. The eugenics movement, in the last 100 years, saw promiscuous women who were, ‘deemed habitually or incorrigibly immoral or anti-social, especially those guilty of sexual crimes and alcoholics,’ involuntarily sterilized so that they could not reproduce deviant tendencies and infect society. Such ‘hygiene’ strategies were meant to eradicate perceived social evils by eliminating ‘unfit’ individuals. More recently, Canadian colonial governance regulated the forced sterilization of indigenous women beginning in the 1930s, with continued medical coercion occurring up until 2018 – a

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strategy for minimizing a distinct, embodied threat to the social reproduction of (capitalist) colonial hegemony.9

In light of such targeted embodiments, one must further assess the constructs for why ‘deviance’ happens and how it is made specific to women. Strain Theory, a foundational criminal sociology theory, defines ‘pathways’ that lead to deviance.10 Like water flows, deviant paths wend their ways in response to societal obstacles, pressures or ‘strains’ in order to reach desired end points. To provide a concrete illustration, physically deviant pathways emerge in public space, identified as ‘desire paths’ that represent civil disobedience.11 These erosion artefacts, inscribed in the ground, attest to the regular exercise of free-will in persons knowingly skirting around imposed directives; sidewalks are ignored when wayfinding easiest movement between access points, cutting across boundaries and breaking rules of use for public space. By this example, deviance (synonymous with free-will) may be more commonplace than such an identifier suggests.

Criminal sociologist, Joanne Kaufman has built on ‘…earlier versions of strain theory [that] focused on the inability to achieve economic or class-based status goals as stressors,’ by considering female-specific aggravations such as ‘…gender-based discrimination, behavioural restrictions, more extensive demands from family members, and greater exposure to certain types of criminal victimization.’12 Through this lens, she analysed health datasets to support a psychologically deterministic view of relative female passivity. Kaufman found that due to greater interpersonal guilt, women are likely to internalize stressors and express deviant behaviour in non-confrontational ways such as suicide, eating disorders and depression.13 However, one necessary challenge to this finding is to ask: what does health data miss about women’s more outward expressions of deviance in the face of unjust social structures that include the health industry?14 In the absence of pathologizing, how else might women adapt to gender-based stressors, in more empowered ways?

Sociology theory posits deviance not only as self-destructive or risky behaviour but also as an integral, dynamic part of society – a boundary position that fosters change in nonobvious ways.15 Deviance is culturally relative and alterable as societies

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14 Add to this the fact that, ‘Merton was among the first to develop a distinctly sociological theory of deviant behaviour that reacted against biological and psychological explanations.’ Featherstone and Deflem, ‘Anomie and Strain’: 477.

15 Referred to as, ‘Durkheim’s paradox’ or ‘double bind’, present in theories introduced by Émile Durkheim. For more, see C. Coleman and N. Ben-Yehuda, ‘Deviance and Moral Boundaries: Witchcraft,
shift; it may also instigate cultural shifts as an adaptive method, such as through acts of rebellion.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, stigmatization through labelling of ‘deviant’ can serve to generate new senses of solidarity, not only amongst dominant groups united against deviants; those marked ‘disruptive’ may claim ownership of nonconformity, forging social identities around which to mobilize.

Ehrenreich and English first raised the challenge that ‘There is fragmentary evidence – which feminists ought to follow up – suggesting that in some areas witchcraft represented a female-led peasant rebellion’ against the advances of capitalism in feudal European and early colonial societies.\textsuperscript{17} Regardless of whether these speculations could be true, Federici highlights that

…it was only in the wake of the [2\textsuperscript{nd} wave] feminist movement that the witch-hunt emerged from the underground to which it had been confined, thanks to feminists’ identification with the witches, who were soon adopted as a symbol of female revolt… [they] were quick to recognize that hundreds of thousands of women could not have been massacred… unless they posed a challenge to the power structure.\textsuperscript{18}

Federici also gives the impression that a certain level of injustice is continued through mainstream dismissal of ‘witches’ as simple victims of inexplicable cultural sadism, reducing them from active subjects with political agency to passive sufferers abused during a vintage glitch in humanity.

For the sake of discussion of the topics in this paper, the deviance of contemporary witches will be positioned within sociality and publics as creative resistance born of desire (as in the curvilinear ‘desire path’).\textsuperscript{19} Here, desire is a double-bind: where deviance is located within female sexual/reproductive autonomy, and in the exercise of political free-will through witchiness – an archetypal state almost always associated with lasciviousness. Through case studies, I will focus on two intersecting pathways to deviance – those shaped by 1) rejection of institutional means of advancement, and 2) formation of new goals progressed through non-institutional channels – identified as innovation and rebellion.\textsuperscript{20} It is these well-defined forms of deviance that will be shown as relevant to contemporaneous reconstructions of the ‘witch’ that serve some marginalized groups in invoking social change.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} For more, see N. Ben-Yehunda, Deviance and Moral Boundaries: Witchcraft, the Occult, Science Fiction, Deviant Sciences and Scientists, \textit{The British Journal of Sociology} 39, no. 1 (1988): 127.
\textsuperscript{19} These concepts are developed specifically in terms of what has been labelled ‘soft’ deviance, meaning nonviolent behaviour. Hardcore deviance (violence) is statistically more often perpetuated \textit{en masse} by larger entities such as governments and institutions, rather than individuals. For more, see N. Ben-Yehunda, \textit{Deviance and Moral Boundaries}.
\textsuperscript{21} Ben-Yehuda has explained how systemic hard-core deviance has, historically, been seen as socially permissible when justified as an act against an ‘oppressor’ (war, coups or other massacres, for example).
The Old Taint – Witches as Biopolitical Contaminants

Here I provide brief examination of the deviantization of women by the medical science system, to begin to understand how the witch, plying her craft in such an environment, remains a contaminant. ‘Contaminant’ is here used as both a descriptor of that which breaches barriers and disrupts controls (in the language of biomedical discourse) while also referencing sociocultural and psycho-spiritual liminality rooted in constructs of (gender-based) bodily otherness. This section examines historic erections of, and contemporary feminist responses to institutional restrictions around disciplines such as medical sciences and biotechnology.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English first suggested in their self-published flyer, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses* that, ‘The [European] witch hunts left a lasting effect: an aspect of the female has ever since been associated with the witch, and an aura of contamination has remained...’ What actual contamination is this? They provide the context of ‘layperson’ versus ‘professional’, in a critical assessment of how situated knowledges of folk medicine, afforded to rural poor, were historically suppressed to promote newly developing, rarefied licensed medical services, mainly for the upper classes. The enduring contamination, as this paper will later illustrate, is that of layperson: the autonomous, lower class practitioner – made even more disreputable through gender and suspected association with witchcraft – squatting precariously at the boundary of what has become conventional science and medicine. Such historical social developments, formally theorized within the study of ‘biopolitics’ have been explained thus:

Biopolitics was inextricably bound up with the rise of the life sciences, the human sciences, clinical medicine. It had given birth to techniques, technologies, experts and apparatuses for the care and administration...
of the life of each and of all… [giving] a kind of ‘vitalist’ character to the existence of individuals as political subjects.25

The new ‘experts’ and technologies were initially facilitated by ensnared patriarchal enterprises of religion, academia and industry. Silvia Federici details in an economic survey of the witch-hunts, that in the highbrow project of witch-proofing society, ‘… men of the law could count on the cooperation of the most reputed intellectuals of the time… scientists who are still praised as the fathers of modern rationalism…’ including ecclesiastical fathers, who, ‘… provided the metaphysical and ideological scaffold…’ to support use of a more literal one.26 Namely, their privileging of lofty theological doctrines in the development of (moralized) medical knowledge over practical empiricism, such as embodied knowledge carried by so-called ‘wise women’ – particularly those specializing in reproductive health care.27

Social scientist, Nachman Ben-Yehuda has demonstrated that birth control, for example, was hugely significant in women’s capacity to hold property, resources and generate income, in the wake of new opportunities presented at the beginning of the industrial era.28 ‘This fostered better standards for living and resistance to marriage, leading to ‘virulent misogyny.’29 Also, the presumption of women’s sexual availability, to men of new economic means, resulted in a glut of unwanted pregnancies. Ben-Yehuda makes the case that unwed mothers and other ‘witches’ (prostitutes, infertile women and, I would argue, women lay healers or abortionists who secretly attended to them) were used to demonstrate the consequences for such activities, as admonished by the church.30 This directly connects political control of women’s reproductive capacities to their persecution as witches.

Even after the most intensive period of witch-hunting was coming to a close, well into the nineteenth-century, doctors who sought to improve healthcare by observing the specialization of female lay healers such as midwives, were ostracized. In 1846, Johns Hopkins medical school professor, Ignaz Semmelweis noted that doctors in two maternity clinics experienced a prevalence of fatal ‘childbed fever’ in birthing women they tended to, while midwives working in the same facilities did

26 Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 168.
27 This is not a suggestion that all folk healers throughout history provided effective care. Remedies practiced by common people were sometimes based on conjecture, causing harm. For more, see Ben-Yehuda, Deviance and Moral Boundaries, 26. However, so have techniques and medicines supplied by authorized medical communities, arguably more so. Thalidomide given to pregnant women is one classic case of such harm. Science Museum, s.v. ‘Thalidomide’, 11 December 2019, http://broughttolife.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/themes/controversies/thalidomide, accessed 13 March 2020. See also Ehrenreich and English, Witches, Midwives and Nurses, 1st ed., 51. Also Ben-Yehuda, Deviance and Moral Boundaries, 61.
28 Ben-Yehuda, Deviance and Moral Boundaries, 67.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 63-67.
not. He deduced that the disease was spread via unclean hands, since doctors had also performed autopsies on the victims. Though astute in recommending handwashing to prevent further spread of illness, Semmelweis was vehemently shunned (and eventually committed to a mental asylum), as his hypothesis not only challenged medical authority but seemed to blame doctors directly. Alas, women continued to pay the price of protecting the establishment with their lives, the taint of female/reproductive lay care still considered the bigger threat.

Federici has emphasized that fierce suppression of women’s leadership persists and is ‘…a phenomenon, therefore, to which we must continually return if we are to understand the misogyny that still characterizes institutional practice…’ Ehrenreich and English also recently called attention to the fact that medical science is now even more profit-driven and that

Today we tend to confine our critiques to the organization of medical care, and assume that the scientific substratum of medicine is unassailable. We too should be developing the capability for the critical study of medical ‘science’ – at least as it relates to women.

Recent instances of institutionalized authoritarianism, as previously described in this text can confirm that misogynist virulence has continued unabated into current biopolitical contexts. In following sections, other current examples will be highlighted, within technofeminist frameworks. I will give the majority of attention to the GynePunk Collective (originating from Califou, ES). GynePunk are the ‘Cyborg witches of DIY gynecology’ who ‘want to update ancestral knowledge with the independent use of technology’. To do this, they perform radical events to educate and expand public access to tech tools that concern subjugated knowledge domains, around women’s sexual health. Their body-affirming theology centralizes traditional cultural care practices infused with DIY tech savvy, with the intention of disrupting capitalist strangleholds pervasive in industrialized approaches to women’s healthcare. This, to prioritize self- and community reliance, and adaptive free will – for which they continue to be met with moral outrage, including accusations of diabolism and criminal behaviour.

Witches in Labs – Technofeminisms

Technofeminism is ‘interested in examining how gender relations and the hierarchy of sexual difference influence scientific research and technological innovation…’ This

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Federici, Caliban and the Witch, 164.
35 Ehrenreich and English, Witches, Midwives and Nurses, 2nd ed., 74.
37 Ibid.
text means to promote a technofeminist embrace and critique of bio(medical) technologies, centred on interest in the fact that the old ‘taint’ still remains – now vexing the practices of feminist, transdisciplinary arts practitioners whose hands-on training and critical applications of advanced biotechnologies towards bodily autonomy, particularly in collaborative and non-academic contexts, are undervalued, mistrusted and demonized in mass cultural contexts.\(^39\)

In her most recent publication on witches, Silvia Federici has only briefly touched on the topic of biotechnology and bodies/capital, to leave a provocative prompt:

…even in this age of superautomation, no work and no production would exist except for what is the result of our gestation. Test-tube babies do not exist – this is a discursive formula that we should reject as an expression of a masculine search for procreation outside the female body, which is the one frontier capital has yet to conquer.\(^40\)

Artist and technofeminist scholar, Cornelia Sollfrank, asserts however that

As forms of biopower, capitalist technologies themselves produce life. For this reason, they can no longer be regarded, as they were in the 1970s, as instruments of liberation or oppression distinct from bodies, material, and the environment. Unsullied nature does not exist…\(^41\)

Sollfrank’s ideas reflect influential writing by oft-referenced feminist scholar, Donna Haraway, one of the first to recognize that ‘Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women world-wide.’\(^42\) Haraway called for feminist appropriation of new technologies that typically serve patriarchal capitalist goals. She proposed a ‘doctrine of embodied objectivity’ akin to empiricism that is ‘…about limited location and situated knowledge.’\(^43\) It is these precise forms of experiential knowing, or onto-epistemologies, that have long been forcibly disembodied – incinerated or sterilized from the female bodies that once held them.

Technofeminists of today ‘…understand their praxis as an invitation to take up their social and aesthetic interventions…’ through the exploration of new technologies, ‘…to enable common activity, common learning, and common unlearning’ – a re-

\(^39\) Taint is a slang term for the (predominantly female) perineum. Etymological origins stem from staining and concurrently, shame: from Old French teinte, based on Latin tingere, ‘to dye,’ and to ‘touch, tinge, imbue slightly (usually with some bad or undesirable quality).’ Tint, also influenced by teinte refers to a slight trace of colour such as a stain, as well as to ‘sully, stain, tarnish (a person’s honour).’ Also, to prove guilty. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. ‘taint, v.’, 2020. Such indicators point to the concept of taint as connected to the moral state inherent in a woman’s reproductive function (menstruation). Federici states that, ‘Tracing the history of words frequently used to define and degrade women is a necessary step if we are to understand how gender oppression functions and reproduces itself.’ S. Federici, *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, (PM Press, 2018), 35.


\(^41\) Sollfrank, ed., *The Beautiful Warrior*, 16.

\(^42\) Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 465.

democratization of knowledge production. Sollfrank explains that, ‘Here, care abandons its traditional territory of reproduction and begins to enter into a relationship with the complexities of technology and technoscience…’ for as Haraway and recent history have shown us, there is no escape from technological intervention.

Technofeminist witchcraft is a distinct nuance of contemporary revisitations of witchiness:

...belief systems like 'Witchcraft' have creativity, fantasy, and innovation at their core, allowing practitioners…to respond in a unique way to the post-modern age by integrating technology into their perception of the sacred.

Science and humanities scholars have embraced biotechnology as

...a range of practices that have been institutionalised, but that – particularly with the last few years’ decreased costs and ‘deskilling’ of biotech through the creation of standardised parts, kits, and other simplifying tools – allows multiple actors to exist at its fringes.

Today’s witch in the lab coat is a contaminant and knows it – she is there to contaminate, cross-contaminate and fertilize, in order to mutate current biotechnological systems into more equitable, personally meaningful domains. Such fringe biotechnologies, which ‘cover institutional, entrepreneurial and amateur engagements in biotechnology with non-scientific aims’ merge into spheres of deviant science. ‘These material engagements with…biotechnology form a complex network of interactions with the biotechnosciences,’ including art and design approaches that are positioned within the realm of ‘boundary-work’. Gaining visibility in and access to the restricted ‘territory’ of biotechnology is crucial, and the peripheral position is one that technofeminist witches have now (re)claimed.

Technofeminism owes its philosophical trajectory to Haraway’s exposure of what she called ‘the god trick’ – the ‘infinite vision’ of the technoscientific worldview, where the narratives generated by science create the illusion of disembodied objectivity by ‘seeing everything from nowhere.’ Haraway offers that ‘Feminists don’t need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence, a story that loses track of its mediations just where someone might be held responsible for something...’ The escapism Haraway denounces does not, however, eliminate possibility for metaphysics in accordance with earthly agents, or other-worldliness.

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44 Sollfrank, ed., The Beautiful Warrior, 2.
48 Vaage, ‘Fringe Biotechnology’: 111.
49 Ibid., 109.
50 Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges’: 581.
51 Ibid., 579.
spiritual side of technofeminist witchcraft praxes remain embodied and experiential – rooted in the relational and physical body, in commensal and/or corrupted ecologies, and in technological systems where sacredness is located on a continuum of physicality and meta-physicality. It is a process of “…establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries and the depths,’ where old, mystic figures are ‘revivified in the worlds charged with microelectronic and biotechnological politics.’ What might this look like in reality?

Case Study, Innovation: Kiss My Ars

Here, I will highlight a fairly recent instigation of technofeminist innovation, to illustrate use of social provocation to pressure for accountability in technocapitalism: a social media campaign labelled, #KissMyArs that took place in 2016. The contextualizing historical referent provided below renders the activity inadvertently diabolical, but a critical distinction will be made with regards to enactments of deviance and feminist witchcraft.

During the European witch hunts, inquisitor manuals such as the Compendium Maleficarum (1608) established that a witch’s pact with the devil involved, ‘kissing his posterior – the osculum infame [infamous kiss], also called the “kiss of shame,” because it was regarded as an act of abasement.’ The expression, kissing arse, appears in numerous historical cultural references of the time period as crude behaviour associated with devils, curses and magical formulas. The price associated with gaining powers to manipulate earthly elements towards one’s will was understood as moral, sexual (and likely microbial) contamination. Revisiting deviance theory here is useful for understanding how a culturally repugnant action came to represent humorous audacity. In an act of taking power back, one unwittingly associates with the machinations of the underworld through a statement of crass defiance: a flippant, kiss my arse/ass to any institutional power demanding subjugation. Here, deviance is deliberate as a political statement.

The collective project, #KissMyArs was a social media campaign instigated by artist and biohacker, Heather Dewey-Hagborg, and involved other technofeminist artists who used social media to address gender disparity in the largest, most well-known art, science and technology festival, Ars Electronica. #KissMyArs pointed specifically to gender-biased recognition that has, over the 40-year history of Ars, been given predominantly to male participants. #KissMyArs actively engaged...
technofeminist critique to intervene in how knowledge in science and technology is constructed, disseminated and canonized. The campaign included a feature article in *Guardian Science*, which inspired suggestions for improvements in the public comments section.\(^{58}\) One suggestion offered was that Ars should institute different categories for men and women as is done in sports competitions, insinuating that the professional capacity of creative women in tech be considered diminutive to that of men.\(^{59}\) The old taint does indeed still remain.

Ongoing male elitism in both the art and sci-tech realms presents a well-known set of obstacles for women.\(^{60}\) Access remains elusive due to lack of visibility, credibility and remunerative parity. Thus, alternatives continue to emerge like folk medicinal techno-weeds, from the dark, desiring depths of feminist socio-political circuitry. Haraway has referred to ‘the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges’ and Sollfrank refers to the ‘techno-underground’, both referencing deviant sci-tech knowledge systems.\(^{61}\) But in the case of #KissMyArs, what was the alternative?

Although the last few years have seen some change and progress, with regards to women (artists) in tech, acceptable or newly celebrated examples are still nested within economically justifiable, technocapitalist niches of ‘innovation’.\(^{62}\) Fringe prototypes are seen as ripe for potential industrial development and scalability through private sector investment. For example, Ars Electronica’s 2018 STARTS prize winner, Giulia Tomasello’s project, *Future Flora: Celebrating Female Biophilia*, is a proposed commercial DIY kit for harvesting and cultivating vaginal flora to treat infections.\(^{63}\) While Tomasello’s project beautifully tackled the subject of female sexual autonomy within the realm of industrialized biomedical technology, it, like #KissMyArs, did not fully challenge technocapitalist paradigms. Rather, it simply benefited from the inclusion, while others continue to be excluded.\(^{64}\)


\(^{59}\) Ibid. See comments section.


\(^{64}\) At the time of writing this paper, the *Golden Nica*, the top prize awarded by Ars Electronica, had never been given to a woman of colour. The closest honour was the 2015 award to Indonesia-based XX-Lab. For more, see *Wikipedia.com*, s.v. ‘Prix Ars Electronica’, last modified 28 March 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prix_Ars_Electronica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prix_Ars_Electronica), accessed 13 December 2019.
Conversely, self-identified witches in lab coats are distinctly post-capitalist in their intentions. As previously discussed, witches have been squinting sceptically at capitalism since its inception. Although #KissMyArs represented technofeminist innovation as an adaptive strategy of deviance, arising from a desire to infiltrate and ‘contaminate’ the old boys club of elitist art and technology (including bio-art), it did not extend to full rebellion. Rebellion would have seen the rejection of institutional means and a move towards new social priorities altogether. The next case study presented is an example of techno-underground rebellion that means to, broadly and inclusively, dismantle profitable propriety/proprietary structures that subjugate.

**Case Study, Rebellion: GynePunk**

In the small-press Ecuadorian publication, *Becoming Plant-Witch-Machine*, ‘transhackfeminists’, Aniara Rodado and Klau Kinki (Chinche) explain that ‘The only criterion for becoming [a biotechno-hybrid witch] is the desire to regain possession of one’s body.’ They offer as a starting point that ‘We meet ourselves at the exercise of gynecological health.’ Diagrams of medical examination tools and anatomical illustrations, including collages of human-plant hybrid sex organs complement their critique of the methods of ‘medical-scientific conquer and progress’. The book also includes the seditious and unrepentant GynePunk Manifesto.

From a Harawayian technofeminist footing, the GynePunk Collective position themselves as ‘auto-exploration’ experts within the context of body decolonization, defying the spectre of European/colonial deviantization of women’s, queer, and other ‘weird’ bodies. In their manifesto, body decolonization is enacted as noncompliance with ‘…prohibitive and creepy technologies of diagnosis, conservative patriarchal occultist methodologies…’ found in the biomedical field. They decry that doing a basic microbial culture of vaginal yeast or other pathogens entails enduring moralizing, inquisitive bureaucratic harassment where ‘the total technical control of diagnosis generates a dependent classist stratification… lab diagnosis technologies which send a message readable only by doctors, as if they were in possession of a clinic oracle, a unique sacred truth.’ The base premise of transhackfeminism is that the body is a technology that can be hacked, and for GynePunk, such technologies, ‘must not be fossilized in materialities or people’, meaning they must be adaptable and made accessible. There is no room for paternalistic, prohibitively expensive and

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65 With an eye towards the final collapse of the capitalist system.
66 Federici states that, ‘… studying the genesis of capitalism has been an obligatory step for activists and scholars convinced that the first task on humanity’s agenda is the construction of an alternative to capitalist society.’ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 11.
68 Ibid., 9.
69 Ibid., 21.
70 Ibid., 36–49.
71 Kinki, et al., *Devenir Planta-Bruja-Maquina*, 43
72 Ibid., 37.
73 Ibid., 39.
discriminating ‘god trick’ methodologies. Even the simplest of changes to the medical approach can empower, for as they illustrate, ‘I insert the speculum myself!’\textsuperscript{75}

Their forums are ‘autonomous infrastructures’ such as queer gatherings and other peripheral place-makings. Promoting radical accessibility includes hijacking methods normally conceived as specialized knowledge requiring ultraclean space and sterile tools: ‘GynePunk’s objective is to foster DIY-DIT accessible diagnosis labs and technics [sic]…’ from unconventional spaces and mobile labs, ‘…underneath the rocks or from inside elevators if necessary…’.\textsuperscript{76} They lead performance-based and instructional workshops in ‘health heresy’, such as basic microbiology to culture one’s own vaginal flora, and demonstrate how household vinegar is used to detect cervical cancer.\textsuperscript{77}

Importantly, GynePunk clarify that their open-source tech tools are not developed already, but always in process.\textsuperscript{78} This continuous, unfinished and collaborative process (over product) can be understood as refusal to commodify knowledge within capitalist language and frameworks: such as with proprietary products, design and/or patentable, high-tech objects. They claim that such a focus has, ‘materialized the objectual fetishism [sic], the fascination for the “device”, but not the [class/economic] conditions when it is possible’.\textsuperscript{79}

GynePunk exercise their body decolonization to connect across expanses of historical revisionism, to expose that the denial of the power of ‘witches’ to resist colonial expansion in the past is centred on an investment in contemporaneous corporate elimination strategies for resource-grabbing, including reproductive labour. They clearly echo Federici, but make explicit that witches are ‘more than women’: they are knowledgeable and dissident people who resist capitalist expansion that aims at exterminating them.\textsuperscript{80} Spells now are called ‘art, politics, philosophy, technic, science, sexuality… witchcraft was, and is, the effective transformation and manipulation of the world based on [these] spells.’\textsuperscript{81} Their antidote to the erasure of modernity is to recognize that we, ourselves, are witches possessing the power to use technology to shape our own realities.

In 2018, a frenzy of orchestrated political outrage against GynePunk, was targeted at a gallery in Poland that hosted their workshops.\textsuperscript{82} This inspired a letter of support (here excerpted) on social media, that was signed by over 600 people, including artists and cultural managers; sex educators, therapists, feminist healthcare groups and midwives; historians, anthropologists and other academics:

We are anxiously observing the hate campaign against the Arsenal Municipal Gallery in Poznan due to the workshops with the Gyne Punk

\textsuperscript{75} Kinki, et al., Devenir Planta-Bruja-Máquina, 61.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 91-93.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Kinki, et al., Devenir Planta-Bruja-Máquina, 45.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 49.
collective... Their subject was practice of self-healing and emancipation of the female body from the dominant medical discourse... a member of the collective, shared with the participants her own experience of abortion. She warned against doing this in a way that threatens women’s health, which in no way constituted the practical part of the workshop... participants constructed their own DIY microscopes, which served for observation of tissues, were taught how to prepare natural medicines for infection of female genital tracts and prepared a natural lubricant. The right-wing media (Radio Poznań, TVP3 Poznań) manipulated the sense of the workshops, calling the event 'abortion workshops', 'homemade methods of making abortions'. As a result spreading false information and under the pressure of councilors... a preliminary opinion was formulated, expressing doubts concerning financing of the gallery... and referring the case to the prosecutor’s office, the campaign against the gallery persists and is clearly used in the political struggle for power... We also consider it particularly harmful to spread untrue information about the workshop during the Homily given by the Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki at the cathedral square in Poznan on 31st of May 2018... Instead of inciting public opinion and antagonizing society, we would like to treat the controversy around the workshops as an argument in a social debate on civil rights and women’s rights... We demand the denial of untruthful reports, respect for fair play in the ideological wars ongoing in the public debate and we call for the secular nature of the public space in Poznań... We do not agree to demonize the radical artistic tools used by contemporary artists...83

Conclusion
Unconventional (uncontrolled) care praxes involving women’s reproductive health and freedom, as Federici noted, continue to be met with moral indignation and hostility worldwide, as the GynePunk example most blatantly highlights. Although the biopolitics of Poznan may seem distant to a more Western audience, it exemplifies a misogynist grip not entirely foreign to numerous locales within contemporary North America and Australia.84 My own experiences of traumatizing harassment, as a young volunteer escort in charge of safely walking women in to their appointments at a small-town Canadian abortion clinic, can attest to this. Among the many insults flung at me (with holy water) by religious anti-choice protestors, one of the most frequent was, ‘You little witch.’

This paper has traced the process of the medicalized and moralized deviantization of women, including as witches. I have outlined concepts of deviance in terms of social triggers that instigate innovation, but also rebellion through ‘reclaimed’ witchcraft actions, towards socially reconstructive modes of scientific knowledge and culture production. Ben-Yehuda explained that the social construction of science occurs through a set of often contradictory goals, setting the parameters for deviant science:

…first, there is a social process that ‘certifies’ knowledge; second, there is a cognitive process that aims to discover, or create, new knowledge… [which] can counteract the social process of certification; it can especially challenge old certified knowledge. Thus, innovations in science can be perceived as deviant.⁸⁵

The point of this text has not been to disparage pursuit of scientific inquiry and experimentation, nor the production of new sci-tech knowledge. Rather, to dissect the tortuous (and gender-specific) controls around access to such processes, particularly when community- and/or self-directed. As I have shown, contemporary biotech witches are not anti-science, but rather anti-capitalist, a position which typically contradicts a more industry-focused, institutional impetus for sharing scientific research and technological discovery.⁸⁶ Biomedicine and technologically mediated care praxes work with and through bodily interfaces that contain their own somatic wisdom, and express desire (or free will); also, however, through socially institutionalized forms of regulation that depersonalize, disenfranchise and control. Contemporary technofeminist witchcraft, as outlined, is a form of post-capitalist deviance that occurs through intersections of biotechnological science, art strategies and a greater sense of self rooted in notions of ancestral biopolitical engagement. Acts of technofeminist deviance through witchcraft challenge convention. With sexual autonomy and self-determination through situated technological knowledge as a goal, such witches remain controversial and disruptive, as social contaminants within a patriarchal capitalist, virtue-driven biopolitics.

⁸⁵ Ben-Yehuda, Deviance and Moral Boundaries, 108.
Jessie Tu's debut novel, *A Lonely Girl is a Dangerous Thing*, is a lonely book. It centres on Jena Lin, a young Asian-Australian woman whose childhood as a violin prodigy has created for her a vast kind of loneliness that only exceptionality can bring to one's life – a void that she fills through sex. Her friends and family hover at the edges of her life, kept at arms-length by her, and she finds herself in an intimate relationship with the controlling and sexually abusive Mark.

Though it has not been touted as such, *A Lonely Girl* is a narrative about trauma. Jena says, 'there are traumas written inside my body, cellular, larger than my own existence.' Not only is this a book that details experiences about racism and sexism, which are marginalising experiences in and of themselves, Tu has spoken in interviews about her experiences of intimate partner abuse, and how she drew on those experiences in writing the book. Yet most of the discussion around this novel has focused on themes of sexual freedom in a way that obscures the thread of pain that underlines this novel.

In her celebrated work *A Body In Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), the literary critic Elaine Scarry writes about the unshareability of pain, and its resistance to language – that physical pain 'does not simply resist language, but actively destroys it.' In this way, pain stops the throat and holds the tongue, and in doing so, 'destroys a person’s self and world'.

Giselle Au-Nhien Nguyen’s review of *A Lonely Girl* (Sydney Review of Books, Nov. 2020) notes that ‘it is hard for other characters – and readers – to connect with the largely affect-free Jena, especially as her decisions become increasingly erratic and self-sabotaging.’ Jena is lonely, she is absent, she is hardly there. At many points in the book, she disappears into the writing. Her descriptions grow staccato and abrupt, as though she could not bear to say more.

In the first chapter of the book, Jena’s worlds collide when she has sex with a bassoon player immediately before a performance. Her descriptions of sex read as though they were written in morse code.

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Pantyhose down. Donut rings around ankle. Cunt salivating. His tongue slips inside my mouth.
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Curiously, her descriptions of performing music are much the same.

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I guide the violin into my neck. Bow on the A string. Pull.
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The brief, impersonal nature of Tu’s descriptions are anathemas to the usual writings on music and sex, which are more often invoked to lively effect. But Tu does something different. In keeping the writing flat, she attempts to depict the extremities of Jena’s loneliness. In doing so, she creates a harsh, abrupt character, but also one who
is rendered inaccessible to the reader. This begs the question – what is it that we are not being allowed to see? And why are we not allowed to see it?

A hooded sense of shame hangs heavy over this novel, an unwillingness to reveal oneself that is helped along by the book’s insistent centring of sex. The novel is littered with descriptions of sexual encounters with partners whom Jena views with a mix of contempt, boredom and dull fear. She does so to ‘forget all my [her] inadequacies’; to avoid an encounter with her own self, and the traumas and insecurities that inevitably follow. This sense of shame not only leaves the book stranded in emotional stagnancy, it also creates within the narrative fundamental problems of plot.

For example, the fact that Jena lived in Wayne, New Jersey for a time is introduced early on in the novel, and continuously referred back to as some crucial turning point in Jena’s life. Chapter 14 begins with Jena saying: ‘Before New Jersey, before the breakdown...’ Yet despite the apparent importance of New Jersey to the narrative, New Jersey is introduced in Chapter 8 as a throwaway comment made secondary to the fact that while she was there, Jena created a ‘taxonomy of men’, classifying them according to race and other categories. The novel’s focus on Jena’s sexual encounters gets in the way of us knowing what precipitated the move to New Jersey. Knowing that a breakdown had occurred is not the same as knowing what happened. The ‘New Jersey’ problem is less of a sexy, mysterious diversion inasmuch as it creates a problem of plot that, writ large, obscures the possibility of narrative altogether in the novel. In Elaine Scarry’s words, it destroys Jena’s world.

A Lonely Girl is a story that seems to unmake itself at every turn. Throughout the novel, important points of plot are gestured at and then submerged, and the views of other characters, unless directed at Jena’s musical ability or her body, are erased or rendered non-existent. In this way, Jena manages to hide whilst in full view, and we the reader are continually returned to loneliness; Jena’s beginning and end.

What is to be gained, by the un-telling of one’s own story? To exist in the safety of one’s words and perspectives alone? Elaine Scarry writes, ‘to have great pain is to have certainty; to hear that another person has pain is to have doubt.’ And surely, for this doubt to be entertained in the realm of story-telling is a good thing. Doubt opens up other perspectives, other possibilities; the potential for characters to change and grow. And perhaps most fundamentally, allows them to be able to move through their own inner worlds. For in literature as much as in life, there may be nothing more vital to a person in trauma than the possibility of moving on.

Janelle Koh
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The quintessence of poetry, if it has such a thing, resides in that part of it that we cannot understand, and in the fact that it has a part that we cannot comprehend.


Brooks’ assertion regarding poetry is most apt. I rarely read poetry and when I do, I labour long and hard to make sense of it. As someone with limited experience in appreciating poetry, let alone critiquing it, I approached the review of Nadia Rhook’s book of selected poems *boots* with some trepidation. I do, however, share some common ground with Rhook: we both share a love of history. Given that Rhook has drawn on her extensive knowledge of history to craft her poetry, I hope I contribute a fair appraisal of her work here.

Nadia Rhook was born in Birrarangga/Melbourne and lectures in colonial and Indigenous history at the University of Western Australia. Prior to her work within academic history, Rhook taught English in both Australia and Vietnam. *boots* is inspired by Rhook’s knowledge of Australia’s troubled colonial past, her thoughtful insights into contemporary Australia, and her own experiences as a white settler woman.

Rhook’s poems are shared amongst five chapters which at first glance provide some wonderful alliteration: ‘Docking’, ‘Digging’, ‘Seizing’, ‘Shooting’, ‘Blooming’. This is quite deliberate: these titles represent a theme which each poem very loosely follows. Yet, the poems within each chapter do not conform to any sort of historical chronology, nor do they confine themselves geographically. While starting with the innocuous title ‘Docking’, each section becomes increasingly foreboding until they reach a crescendo in ‘Shooting’, with ‘monsters do yoga too’ representing a midpoint in the despair, and the children’s countdown in ‘Walyalup sunset’, both innocent and ominous at the same time, giving us a sense of welcome finality. An element of hope emerges in ‘Blooming’ with poems like ‘elation’, ‘blooming’ and ‘light’ (‘I’m going to find the light side shouldn’t be hard’) revealing a glimmer of optimism in the dark. One of Rhook’s best poems on imperialism (in my opinion) ‘empire III’, is actually set in Vietnam. Here the author enjoys breakfast in an imperial themed café but shares with us an underlying feeling of both the familiarity and perhaps comfort of an imperial past and the recognition that the vestiges of empire still lingers:

I realise (at least I think I realise) the foreigner everyone wants to photograph is also the foreigner everyone’s tired of watching hold court.
The form of the poems is an important element of *boots*. The reader is challenged by Rhook’s use of spaces, italics, and her unorthodox approach to punctuation and grammar. This appears to be a very deliberate ploy on Rhook’s part: to not only have the reader alter their perception but also to challenge the imperial project – a hint of which can be seen in the poem ‘968 A.D.:

the capitals betray where I come from. in the tradition of Descartes and the British I’m trained to privilege definitions over dreams…

*boots’* poetic forms crashed through my expectations of what a poem ‘should’ look like and forced me to re-evaluate my positions on literature. This is an important dynamic in *boots* as the discomfort caused by the form prepared me to be further shaken from my comfortable existence by the prevailing themes of colonialism, imperialism, dispossession and complicity. *boots* revealed to me the unsettling truth: that I am a white settler man living a privileged life on stolen land.

Rhock struggles with her own complicity as a beneficiary of colonialism. Her anguished thoughts appear abruptly in her poems and jarred me into recognising my own complicity. ‘Once we were settlers’ recounts the finding of a buried horseshoe. The prose is divided into two columns so the poem can be read in any number of ways making the reader’s experience unique. The horseshoe becomes a treasured item for the author ‘Kept it in my room for As long as I could’. The shoe is a keepsake from a distant but uneasy past: ‘Like once we stole this full earth’. The horseshoe is a metaphor for Australia’s buried and arguably unacknowledged past. We want to live with the elements of our past that make us feel comfortable, only to have our history resurface when we least expect it.

The author’s poems regarding her own difficult journey with fertility treatments and pregnancy also resonate. As someone with a partner who has suffered her own painful reproductive experiences, Rhook’s poems ‘infertility and trips to Bunnings’, ‘the day before egg collection’, and ‘pink petals’ brought into sharp relief the hopes, dreams, and indignities shared by women trying for pregnancy. The author’s own gentle but assertive rebelliousness against the absurdity of her situation is suggested in ‘infertility and trips to Bunnings’ where she encourages us to ‘be the trolley with disobedient wheels’. It is clear to me that the author’s poetry is suggestive of a strong and resolute woman prepared to endure the poking and prodding of painful medical procedures to bring new life into the world.

*boots* is not intended to be comfortable reading. Rhook, as a white settler woman, has resolved to confront the past at a personal level, to try and make sense of its sometimes ugly nature, and to use her poetry to address the injustices of the past and present. *boots* challenges the reader to alter their perspective and to think. While it offers insights into imperialism and colonialism, it levels no accusations against the reader and it leaves it to us to reach our own conclusions. Others may disagree and regard it as a subversive text, but there will always be some who are unwilling or unable to confront uncomfortable truths about our history, and how this history’s reach has extended into contemporary Australia. *boots* forced me to look deep within myself and to ask the questions that linger in the shadows: how am I complicit? How am I a beneficiary? What can I do to contribute to healing the wounds? *boots* challenges
us to examine our place in the world and therefore makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of our humanity.

Troy Rule

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Literary and cinematic representations of the fashion industry – such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) – depict it as a glamorous realm, chock-full of opportunities and rewards for those willing to work hard. But this new study by French anthropologist Giulia Mensitieri acts as a necessary corrective, exploring the prevalence of exploitation and insecure work within the industry, and also asking why people stay.

The author’s approach combines macro summaries of how the industry has developed – from a specialised field based around Paris to a tentacular system servicing global fashion empires – together with close observations of people working within it at all levels. From the latter, a cast of characters emerge: stylist Mia, who wears only designer labels but who cannot afford the rent on her tiny apartment; Marie-Sophie, a skilled seamstress who is paid two euros an hour for work on a dress which costs thirty thousand; Gilbert, who left a sales job at a department store for work with a luxury label, but was paid the same and denied a permanent contract. (It is noted that he matches the description put forth of a ‘perfect’ luxury sales employee: stylish and well-educated, but not wealthy enough to afford the merchandise.)

Mensitieri spent months in the field, attending magazine shoots and private fashion shows. This enables her to look beyond the glamorous images projected by the industry, seeing instead the gritty reality of how the industry is constructed and marketed. At a shoot with Mia, she observes the unhealthy appearance of some of the models, but of their final image in photographs she says

> Under the lights they gave out a sense of being almost supernatural, unattainable, superhuman. Utterly hypnotic…The physiological fact of these bodies, with their tampons, compression socks and yellowing teeth, had been transformed into aesthetically pleasing bodies, dressed up and optimized under the lights, to be frozen forever on glossy paper or screens. This is how the dream is confected.

This ‘dream’ is a crucial concept for the author. She describes it as:

> this fantasy world of luxury and beauty, which circulates globally on television and cinema screens, on the pages of glossy magazines and via the Internet…kindling desire and encouraging consumption… a place where all these fantasy elements exist alongside financial and job instability, exploitation, dominance and the quest for power.

Through the ‘dream’, a simple cardigan can transform into a desirable item, because of the images of luxury and elitism attached to its branding. In a similar way, workers in the fashion industry can be seduced into accepting lower pay and uncertain futures.
in exchange for their proximity to this dream, and the prestige and symbolic value attached to their roles.

One fascinating aspect of Mensitieri’s work is her exploration of how globalization has changed the industry. Although much of her research is based in Paris, she also follows Mia to private fashion shows in Hong Kong, and to shoots for Dubai-based magazines, noting how the industry operates across many different frontiers, with many of its greatest consumers (particularly of haute couture) coming from developing countries, as well as Russia, China and the Arab world. Despite the challenge this poses to European capitals in terms of hegemony, the latter still retain significant symbolic capital: she explores this through the meanings attached to labels (‘made in China’ versus ‘Made in Italy’), but also through the conditions of work in different cities (noting that Paris holds the most symbolic value and recognition for those working in fashion, but it is also where they earn the least).

The territory covered in The Most Beautiful Job in the World is vast: the author not only offers a comprehensive assessment of exploitation within the fashion industry and how it is justified, but also uses it as a case study for the failings of neoliberalism itself (much space is dedicated to exploring how the ‘flexible’ employment model has been promoted over traditional salaried work since the 1990s). As a book, it is never taxing to read: peppered with vignettes from the lives of people working at the heart of the fashion industry, it is difficult not to be drawn closer and feel empathetic to their plight. Particularly striking is Mia, who ‘moves in a world of luxury without being part of it in a material sense’. She stays in five-star hotels while on a shoot for which she is rarely (or else badly) paid, but eats McDonalds in her room because she can afford little else. Mensitieri coolly notes these frustrations, while also appraising the continued attraction which outsiders have to working in fashion, combining both into a searing criticism of this billion-dollar industry.

Caroline Smith
The University of Western Australia
Coniston, a book about massacres in the region surrounding a Central Australian cattle station of the same name, is an important read. Accessible prose details inconceivable events, and explores the legal process surrounding the 1928 slaughter of an estimated one to two hundred Warlpiri, Anmatyerre, and Kaytetye peoples by police constable and ‘Protector of Aborigines’ William George Murray and associated parties.

Bradley takes the reader through the documentation, public outcry, condemnation and – conversely – the condoning of the attacks, all the while questioning why it has not remained at the forefront of Australian history and consciousness. The last point is pertinent, considering the Warlpiri were decimated.

The trigger for the massacre was the killing of a white man, Fred Brooks, by a Warlpiri man, Kamalyarrpa Japanangka (‘Bullfrog’). He was never sought out, nor arrested, although knowledge of the deed was known and shared. Bradley reports that by local Aboriginal laws no crime was committed, as it was believed that Brooks had taken Japanangka’s wife.

At the time, drought affected Coniston and its surrounds. Settlers had appropriated soaks to water their cattle, and the use of these soaks by the Aboriginal peoples who seasonally occupied the region (‘myall blacks’) increased tensions between the two groups. Ironically, according to Bradley, by the laws of that era the dispossessed owners of the land were within their rights to access these watering holes, although this was not widely known or acknowledged by either community, as lip service was paid to most laws in place to protect Aboriginal Australians. Shortages of traditional food supplies also meant that stock was sometimes targeted for food.

Bradley accessed a number of sources, ranging from newspaper articles, to court records, to correspondence between Murray’s widow and Adelaide hospitals. From these narratives, it seems that the massacres were regarded by many as an extreme form of keeping the original owners of the land ‘in place’ rather than an endeavour to track down a killer and bring him to some form of justice. Reprisal was wide-ranging and punitive. Over a period of two months, Murray set out with a number of men, including Aboriginal trackers, and basically mowed down the inhabitants of any camp he came across. Not once, but a number of times.

Coniston states that the original murder was intertwined with another killing of a white settler, and assaults on two others. Nonetheless, most of the men, women and children hunted down were not connected to the cases. It also takes note of the widespread abuses against the Aboriginal peoples of the area and the apparent motivations behind all acts of violence.

Aside from the deaths, the book delves into other incidences of harm committed and sanctioned by the police. One example is the chaining of a wounded man to a tree and leaving him there for a number of days. Murray had shot him in the head and the captive later perished.
Bradley is a lawyer, so his exploration of the methods employed by the Board of Inquiry appointed to investigate the reported deaths (numbered between 17 and 31) is enlightening as it outlines the ways in which the procedures made a mockery of justice. For example, Murray sat in on proceedings, and prompted witnesses on the order and content of events; the Board’s members failed to visit the original killing or massacre sites; and, moreover, few Aboriginal witnesses were called as they were deemed unreliable due to being Aboriginal Australians. The evidence of the one Aboriginal person who did testify was not explored further, despite his recollection contradicting other reports.

Whilst Social Darwinism was used to justify colonialism and abuse of Empire throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, forms of humanitarianism also rose in popularity, particularly after World War 1, and protests were led by some church groups and journalists. However, in keeping with official government policy and the temper of the times, the majority of white response was of condescension. Nevertheless, all of Central Australia was under federal jurisdiction, including the appointments of the ‘Protector of Aborigines’ (Murray for this region), and in light of the mass killings the Federal Government was concerned about its reputation, especially as the slaughter had been reported upon by British media and criticised by the League of Nations. There was also a looming federal election to consider. As such, it established an inquiry, but the procedures and findings indicate that deliverance of justice for all was not prioritized. The actions of Murray and his colleagues, although deemed excessive, were considered to be justified and regarded as acts of self-defence. All non-Aboriginal Australian parties were exonerated of wrongdoing. Murray maintained his position as ‘Protector of Aborigines’ until his retirement in 1945.

Bradley’s detective work in accessing retellings and in piecing together published interviews – both with Murray and his accomplices – reveals that little to no remorse seems to have been felt. Decades after the massacre, the First Australians it so badly affected were asked to relay their version of events and, as Bradley states, a diaspora had occurred. He asserts that the Warlpiri in particular consider the land around Coniston to be so deeply populated with ghosts that they cannot contemplate return. Bradley outlines hidden documents, ineffectual words of protest, and government decisions that obstructed any justice that might have even partially addressed the great harm and pain that people of the region underwent.

Coniston focuses a lens on why suspicion, feelings of disempowerment, fear and resentment are passed down from one generation to the next amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and on how corrupted judicial systems are paramount in not only endorsing discrimination that still exists to devastating effect, but in retaining it. Coniston is an excellent exploration of what the law should not do, and an empathetic retelling of a dark pocket of Australia’s history that needs to not fade out of the recognition and understanding we have of ourselves as a nation.

Susan Laura Sullivan
Tokai University
True crime books report on crimes from the beginning of their investigation to their legal proceedings. These books not only restore the lived experiences of the perpetrators and their victims, but also reconstruct the complex circumstances in which the crimes were committed.

True crime books help readers see all the parties involved as genuine people. Instead of mere statistics and sensationalised media coverage, we follow the behind-the-scene stories of how crimes were initiated, conducted, scrutinised and solved. We experience the considerable impact of these events on individuals and communities.

In writing *The Edward Street Baby Farm*, Western Australian author Stella Budrikis confesses: 'I've always been fascinated by the way people's lives interact, bringing all their past experiences and personalities crashing together at a single place and time, before diverging again like billiard balls on a table.'

One of the three people featured in the book is Alice Mitchell, the notorious 'baby farmer' who was arrested in Perth in 1907 for the murder of a five-month-old girl. During the inquest and subsequent trial, the public was shocked to learn that 37 out of 43 infants in her care had died.

Questions were asked: How could so many babies have died when Mitchell's house was visited regularly by Perth's first female health inspector, Harriet Lenihan? And how could 25 of the death certificates have been signed by the same children's specialist, Dr Edward Officer, without him raising any concern about such a high mortality rate?

Through meticulous research on court records, state archives and newspaper reports from the time, Budrikis examines the events leading up to and beyond this tragedy. Her expertise as a general practitioner, pastoral carer and addictions clinic doctor helps shaping a highly intelligent narrative that is both informative and empathetic.

Budrikis further reveals the social history of Perth in the early 20th century, explaining how prominent criminal cases like Mitchell's can lead to essential changes in law. She pays specific attention to society's attitude towards protection of children of single mothers and other 'unfortunate' women back then.

Budrikis details how 'illegitimate' babies were often shunned by their families and society due to the lack of a parental marriage certificate. In her words, the 'illegal' status of these babies 'meant that no one felt responsible for seeing that they were well treated'.

Worse, the practice of 'baby farming' – private, for-profit foster care arrangements where the carers were purely interested in making money out of taking in children – was well known, but few seemed to care or offered any solution.

As Budrikis points out, at the time, whoever suggested these 'illegitimate' babies and their mothers should be better protected and provided with humane care.
would meet the response that 'that would just encourage other women to act immorally and take advantage of the system'.

The key phrase here is 'at the time', as Budrikis maintains a highly objective tone throughout the book, paying attention to detail while being mindful of her subjects as men and women of their time. It is only in her 'Afterword' that she evaluates the Mitchell case in accordance with today's medical standards and social norms.

For example, Budrikis acknowledges 'I became quite fond of Harriet Lenihan as I wrote about her, for all her quirks'. She further admits 'as I was writing, I had to keep reminding myself that Alice Mitchell had experienced the death of three of her children from common childhood illness', citing Freud’s psychoanalytical theory that 'subconscious motive and repressed emotions could influence a person's actions'.

In light of such professional detachment – which is critically necessary in true crime books – Budrikis’ decision to include what is known about each of the dead infants 'portrayed largely as mere exhibits in the investigation' of the Mitchell case is highly significant, if not unprecedented. It gives agency to the unrepresented.

Budrikis’ desire to ensure the hidden is seen is also evident in her selection of quotations from media coverage on the Mitchell case. While the research of the book clearly benefits from the ‘almost verbatim’ reporting style of the newspapers in the 1900s, the editorials and letters to the editors often quoted in length throughout the book help highlight the extent to which the murder trial had gripped Perth as a community.

Particularly in the fifteenth chapter 'Weekend Papers', considerable light is shed on the agenda of Truth, a weekly newspaper solely owned by John Norton since 1896 and published in Perth from 1903 to 1931. That Dr Officer was 'the chief target of Norton's editorial diatribe' is a reminder of the fairness and balance required in contemporary reading and representation of historical criminal cases.

Overall, Budrikis should be congratulated for having produced a well-researched and engaging book that is full of compassion and empathy. Compared to other true crime accounts, such as that of Louisa Collins by Caroline Overington (2014) and Carol Baxter (2015) and that of Martha Needle by Brian Williams (2018) and Samantha Battams (2019), the aim of The Edward Street Baby Farm is purely to present 'the story of how three people and a community became entangled in a tragic situation and its aftermath' – no more and no less.

Christine Yunn-Yu Sun

The one thing that most readily leaps off the page with *Inside the Verse Novel* is the proof that there is no one way to write a verse novel. In fact, as this collection proves, there are at the very least 22 ways to go about it, each of them yielding entirely different results that find themselves all over a broad range of subgenres. Linda Weste’s book of interviews – the first ever published collection of such with practitioners of the genre – is undoubtedly an important contribution to the field of studies interested in the verse novel. The way the volume gives precedence to various writers’ views of this form is original and refreshing, and the work itself constitutes a lovely compendium of different contemporary examples of a genre that is too seldom considered. The interviews in and of themselves were interesting, as the same nine questions yielded entirely different responses – in length, tone, theme, and content – for all contributors.

The verse novelists’ own perceptions of the genre and of the challenges associated with the verse novel’s process of composition is a good resource for academics but also for writers and readers who have a vested interest in the genre itself or who might wish to broaden their horizons. The contributors’ rich commentaries on the medium highlight at once the differences between the various forms the verse novel can take and the core elements all iterations of the medium share: ‘Poeticity, the whatever-it-is that makes poetry poetry, and narrativity, or ‘what makes a story interpretable as a story’. The form enables a use of literary techniques that can be seen as disjunctive at times, as it finds itself straddling the creative line between what is commonly associated with poetry and what belongs to prose fiction. Due to the flexibility of the genre, the finished work might not fit the expectations of certain readers, often resulting in mixed reviews for the various works.

While a number of interviews were refreshingly accessible, and drew me in, others tended to be weighed down by heavy jargon. Brian Castro’s way of describing his process as ‘a composition of fragments of poetry metamorphosing into prose segments and then processing onto … prose drafts,’ was much harder to grasp as an idea – and therefore less easy to engage with – than other contributor’s influences and choices.

Weste’s own explanation of her gravitation towards the genre, in contrast, pleasantly stood out. Her straightforward reasoning made it easy for me to rally behind her creative choices. She explains that quite plainly, she ‘chose free verse at the outset because it offered flexibility in line and rhythm, and enabled [her] to differentiate characters’ voices’. Indeed, throughout the volume, the interviews where the interviewee offered a candid outlook on their practice showed valuable and fascinating insight. Moreover, the openness and candidness of these contributions made it easier to engage fully with the form, which, I think, is the main objective of the collection. The interviews where the writers let their own interest in the format, its flexibility, and the freedom it allows shine were, by my estimate, far more interesting.
– not to mention thought-provoking – than the ones where authors seemed to venture dangerously close to self-importance.

The collection as a whole, and each of its contributors individually, are mindful of the uniqueness of the genre, its many possible interpretations, and the subjectivity of each included opinion. That said, there seemed to be a preponderance of advocates for the ‘story’ aspect for both the kind of verse novel the contributors want to read and write. A desirable verse novel is, largely, one that is story-driven, with special consideration for the pacing that is afforded by the choice of verse over prose. For instance, while Christine Evans anchors the specificity of the verse novel in the ‘novel’ part of the equation, calling it the ‘engine, which drives each book along,’ while the rest of it acts as the body, with ‘the language and its form gives each work its particular angularity, resonance, and suggestiveness’, Paul Hetherington aimed for an ‘immersion,’ a ‘lyric meditation,’ rather than a work in which the reader would be ‘continually pushed forwards by a conspicuous narrative drive’.

With this collection, Weste fully meets her goal of ‘expand[ing] knowledge of the diverse ways … authors [of this genre] combine narrative and poetic techniques to compose their distinctive works’. It offers welcome insight – for this reader anyway – into the thought process and artistic aims of wonderfully creative minds, and I found it pleasingly validating to read that a number of the writers, too, delight in the ‘singular pleasure that well-written verse gives from line to line, combined with brilliant with revealing observation, narrative energy and emotional intensity’. The awe generated by well-crafted words elegantly waltzing off of the page and into one’s mind never lessens, and I will gladly confess that the collection whetted my appetite for more of this genre I probably neglect.

As Fred D’Aguiar aptly puts it: ‘the form is not over with the world even if the world of readers are over with it’. The depth of its roots – with ramifications that reach from epic poems such as The Epic of Gilgamesh and Homer’s The Iliad, as well as the long narrative poems of the Romantic and Victorian periods and all the way to Byron’s mock-heroic Don Juan and Alexander Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin – points to the genre’s sturdiness, while the collection’s contemporary examples emphasises its evergreen nature.

Anne Sophie Voyer