



Indiana University Journal of Undergraduate Research

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Editors-in-Chief

Stephanie Zhang & Abe Leite

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IUJUR

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in and support of our undergraduate researchers' tremendous work. This has been a transitional year for our journal, as we continued to solidify our rolling-publication, multi-stage review pipeline. Our vision for IUJUR is as a mentoring journal whose review process provides the feedback and hard questions necessary for our authors to produce the most polished, rigorous, and relevant research. We are proud of the breadth of papers published in this volume, including research topics ranging from active category learning to Emily Dickinson's death poems.

In addition to running the journal, our staff has worked tirelessly to promote undergraduate research across campus. In the fall semester, our second annual Research Day was a great success, attracting some 278 students to learn about opportunities and careers in research as well as research techniques and ethics. In the spring semester, COVID-19 did not prevent us from holding the fourth annual Research

Slam, which brought six of IU's brightest undergraduate researchers together virtually to face off in five-minute lightning talks about their work.

All of this work would not have been possible without outstanding contributions from our undergraduate staff. Our student editorial boards provide thorough reviews for rigor and relevance, working with authors over multiple revision rounds to make their work the very best it can be. Our public relations and online creative content boards promote awareness and contribute thoughtful discussion of the research going on on campus. And our visual design and publishing board designs our distinctive and visually appealing layouts, which rival many professional journals in their style. Our staff has gone above and beyond to contribute to our journal's excellence this year. Even as we transitioned all of our meetings and activities to a virtual setting, and our staff still continued to work as we watched not only the country but the entire world come to a standstill to combat the novel coronavirus.

We would be remiss not to thank the generous and thoughtful contributions of our faculty mentors over the past year: Cate Reck, Kody Steffy, and Melissa Blunck. They have thought with us about how our journal can work to reduce societal inequities and offered feedback for many of our events and activities. We also thank Jamie Wittenberger for teaching our class on scholarly publishing and all of the faculty who contributed their time and effort to reviewing our authors' work.

We hope that in the coming years, the Indiana University Journal of Undergraduate Research will continue its work as a mentoring journal that helps students from all disciplines and backgrounds produce polished, rigorous, and relevant research.

All that said, we hope you enjoy this volume of outstanding scholarship!

Sincerely,

Abe Leite & Stephanie Zhang
Editors-in-Chief, Volume VI

IU Journal of Undergraduate Research

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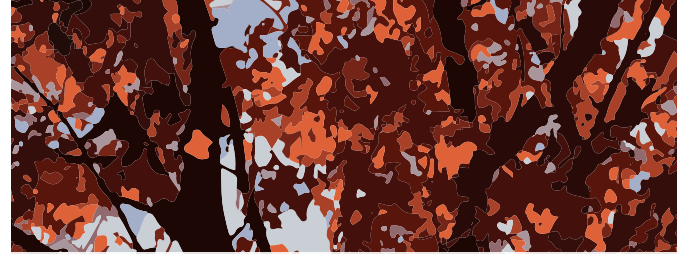
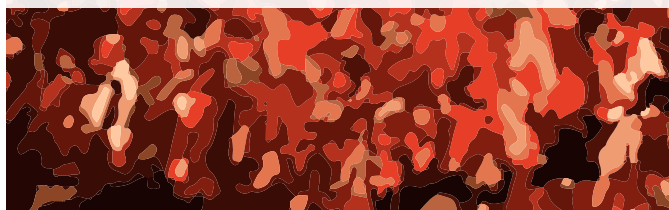
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A Memory Sterilized, Utilized, and Realized

William Robison

Faculty Mentors: Dr. David Pace and Dr. Edward Linenthal, Department of History,
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ABSTRACT

After the French suffered a humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the conditions in France were such that a proletarian uprising proved imminent. These volatile conditions, the famine, indebtedness, and national shame of the loss to Prussia, resulted in the formation of the Paris Commune in 1871. The Commune's abortive existence shocked Europe, and it generated highly charged opinions throughout the continent, from the poorest laborers to the wealthiest nobles. The effect of the Commune on continental political movements was particularly divergent as men and women continued to grapple with the memory and determined for themselves how best to render it intelligible. Some decided to pacify the memory, preaching of heroism and class struggle rather than violent revolution and anarchy. Others decided to utilize the memory of the Commune to incite revolts and strikes while others worked to realize the Commune's mission by following tangible lessons from the Communards. This paper demonstrates the numerous occasions in which the Commune was critically remembered and showcases the diverse effects of that memory's use by focusing on late 19th and early 20th century French revisionism, Dutch, Belgian, and Spanish revolts, and the Russian Revolution of 1917 (among other movements). It also places the Commune into a contemporary understanding by analyzing it within the frames of the wider academic literature on memory and of the recent French yellow-vest protests.

KEYWORDS: Paris Commune, socialism, Marxism, memory, Franco-Prussian War

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the Commune of Paris, following a bloody civil war that caused a profound loss of life along with the destruction of much of Paris, was one of the most memorable events of the late nineteenth century. Europeans across the continent had many different reactions, with some fearful of the possibility of a larger proletarian uprising, and others proud of the Communards for their valiant fight against the bourgeoisie and “undemocratic” principles. However, after the Commune's short, two-month hold on power, France did not experience any more large-scale violent labor uprisings. France had once been the primary hotbed of revolutionary movements, some major examples being the Revolution of 1793 and the June Days of 1848. However, it no longer seemed interested in violent liberal revolution. It even seemed to shy away from the idea of championing international revolution as it had in the past.

Even if the image and memory of the Paris Commune did not inspire radical upsurges in proletarian violence in the years after its fall, they did have a profound impact on the history of the European labor movement. It becomes important, then, to grasp the nuances and intricacies of how the memory of the Commune had a tangible effect on later labor movements throughout the continent. Memory, oftentimes, is not a recollection of the true events as they occurred. More often, it is a remembrance of the most pertinent qualities for a group at a specific time and under specific circumstances. The Commune provides a wonderful framework for analyzing just how memory changes over time and how it can differ based on the needs of both the individual and of the collective. In its most common uses, the memory of the Paris Commune served as a source of romantic spiritual maintenance, a catalyst for proletariat aggression, and as a blueprint for practical revolutionary tactics throughout Europe.

BACKGROUND: THE SEEDS OF REVOLUTION

To best understand the basis for Revolution, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 should be briefly touched upon. A balance-of-power political model (which, until after World War II, thoroughly guided most

diplomatic decisions of European nations vis-à-vis their continental neighbors) had long kept France wary of a united Germany. However, the Prussian chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, worked tirelessly to navigate the political landscape of Europe to finally bring about a strong and centralized German Empire. The French worked to subvert the Prussians, and vice versa. What Bismarck needed most of all was a demonstration to the minor states of central Europe that strength could only be found in unity. Such a demonstration (and such an enemy) could easily be found in the leadership of Napoleon III and his Second French Empire. With tensions between the two nations already high due to an ongoing crisis of Spanish succession, Bismarck knew the political and social climate was finally ideal for German unification. To capitalize on the tense political environment, Bismarck sent a telegram to the French which could only be perceived as an insult to the French people. However, when the French reacted to it, the Prussians considered it an affront to Prussian (and wider German) prestige and honor. With this Ems Dispatch, Bismarck drastically increased public tensions between France and Prussia, leading Napoleon III to declare war on Prussia to rally public opinion in support of his Empire, which was faltering in popular support.

The war lasted less than a year, with Prussia routing the French on several occasions and generally proving far superior on the battlefield. Napoleon III fled the country in response to the humiliating defeats, leading to the collapse of the Second French Empire, the declaration of the Third Republic, and a humiliating Siege of Paris. The new republican government, centered in Versailles, quickly antagonized the working classes. The poor men and women of Paris were especially resentful of this new government, resulting in a massive uprising. A second government, the Parisian Commune, was formed on March 18, 1871 on the foundation of true republicanism, as opposed to the veiled royalism present in the Versailles government. A civil war soon ensued, with troops loyal to the Versailles government and Communards fighting in the streets of Paris. Male and female Communards burned and looted buildings all throughout Paris as their defeat drew closer, causing resentment among the French moderates. On May 28, 1871, the Communards were defeated, and the movement was thoroughly driven out. Strict punishment and an intense cultural backlash against the Communards followed,

especially against the women who were portrayed crudely by many French newspapers.¹

MEMORY STERILIZED

As previously mentioned, France did not experience any large-scale violent labor revolutions in the decades following the defeat of the Commune. This can largely be understood in the context of general European labor trends of the time. The French had developed “potent trade unions,” and Marxist “revisionism” was becoming more popular as a method for enacting change.² This movement towards gradualism and cooperation through existing government channels stood in stark contrast to the anarchic, violent, and thoroughly confusing ideology of the Commune. Evolutionary tactics began to come into style, with gradualism and cooperation within the French Left standing against what Henri Lefebvre deemed “revolutionary action.”³ As such, the Commune was not seen as an appropriate example for rallying another revolution; the time for revolutions had come and gone. This is not to say that French leaders on the Left did not find a use for the memory of the Commune. The massive working class continued to hold onto the memory of the Commune, even if they did not apply it in a violent, tangibly aggressive manner.

French socialist leaders such as Louis Dubreuilh and Jean Jaurès (both of whom held positions writing for French socialist newspapers) used the Commune as a memory to organize and rally workers. Dubreuilh emphasized the valiant “heroism of individual Communards” to infuse the energy of the Communards’ high-pitched struggle into the French Socialist Party. Without looking for tangible lessons from the Commune as a revolutionary precedent, he focused on the triumphant beginning rather than the “violent end” the men and women faced on the streets of Paris.⁴ Jaurès also focused on the “heroism of the Communards” and drew upon the rich “symboli[sm]” to commemorate the event and to instill hope into the French working class.⁵ For these leaders (and many more of the time), the Commune’s memory was used to encourage the individual by solely focusing on the individual. One of these individuals, a famous female Communard named Louise Michel, was mentioned frequently at the annual commemorative marches to Père-Lachaise. Socialist leaders often spoke in romantic terms about the struggles and incredible will-power of Communards such as Michel to pay respect while maintaining distance from the Communards’ more destructive and violent tendencies.

Despite the frequent references to the Commune in early French Socialist discourse, many leaders could not reconcile the cognitive inconsistency between their revisionist ideals and the Commune’s dogmatic traits and violent tendencies. The annual marches to Père-Lachaise were utilized by labor leaders to “recall 1871 as a tragedy” and give cause for somber remembrance rather than “collective action.”⁶ When the Russian peasantry organized for the December Uprising of 1905, French Socialist newspapers such as offered few connections between the Uprising and the Commune because of the continued desire to advocate “evolutionary thinking.” Even decades after the fall of the Commune, French leaders feared the violent social repercussions that could follow if a popular resurgence in revolutionary tactics grew in France. More often than not, they preferred to use the Commune

as a vague “symbol” whose grittier past was better “forgotten” and sterilized for public consumption.⁷

There were some French socialists who worked to portray the Commune in a more positive revolutionary light. One example of this was the moderate Edouard Vaillant, who “reveled in France’s revolutionary past” and spoke in favor of strengthening class solidarity. A Communard himself, he energetically outlined the importance of unity in the socialist movement by fitting the Commune within the entire history of French revolutionary history, something Jaurès was not willing to do.⁸ Jaurès and Dubreuilh used the symbolism of the Commune as an isolated memory to energize the French socialist movement while Vaillant saw the Commune as the inevitable and wonderful culmination of decades of revolutionary tradition. However, neither side advocated for open revolution in their own time. They were intent on maintaining the revisionist status quo, working through the existing channels of the Third Republic to enact change through evolutionary tactics.

MEMORY UTILIZED

These moderate revisionists were not the only socialists in Europe, nor was the memory of the Commune confined to French territory. Karl Marx used the events of the Commune and the Franco-Prussian War that preceded it to write *The Civil War in France* in just under a month. The pamphlet, though hastily written, immediately assumed a vital role for socialists everywhere who opted to view the Commune as part of an integrated and continuing struggle against capitalism. Marx made his thoughts on the Commune’s place in history clear when he closed the pamphlet with:

The soil out of which [the class struggle] grows is modern society itself. It cannot be stamped out by any amount of carnage. To stamp it out, the governments would have to stamp out the despotism of capital over labor – the condition of their own parasitical existence. Working men’s Paris, with its Commune, will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators history has already nailed to that eternal pillory from which all the prayers of their priest will not avail to redeem them.⁹

Such a rousing memory at the end of an equally rousing chapter could only serve to increase the resolve of the working class to continue their struggle against perceived bourgeois oppression. As the most widely circulated source on the Parisian Commune, the emotionally charged text of *The Civil War in France* gave Marxian socialism a foothold for the first time in America and the Netherlands. In addition, new Italian, Spanish, and German translations made the legend of the Commune increasingly accessible across the continent.¹⁰ As the legend of the Commune spread, socialists across Europe were moved to follow Marx’s rousing calls.

One area in which this call was clearly answered was in the Belgian town of Liège. In 1886, Belgian socialists prepared to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the fall of the Commune with a march, not unlike those annual marches to Père-Lachaise undertaken by the French socialists. The crowd of Belgian socialists was filled with men who desired radical change, and even women and children marched to honor those women and children who fought alongside their male compatriots. “Red flags” filled the air and proud speakers reminded the crowd of the sacrifices and heroism of the Communards and their fight

⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁸ Ibid, 13-14.

⁹ Karl Marx, “The Civil War in France.” In *Selected Works*, Vol. 1, pp. 473-545. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/>, (1958), Ch. 6, par. 47-48.

¹⁰ Dennis Bos, “Building Barricades: The Political Transfer of a Contentious Roadblock.” In *the European Review of History*, 12:2, 345-365. doi: 10.1080/13507480500269183, (2006a), 350-351.

¹ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, s.v., “Franco-German War.” <https://www.britannica.com/event/Franco-German-War>.

² Casey Harison, “The Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the Shifting of the Revolutionary Tradition.” *History and Memory* 19, no. 2 (2007): 5-42. doi:10.2979/his.2007.19.2.5., 7.

³ Peter Starr, *Commemorating Trauma: The Paris Commune and Its Cultural Aftermath* (US: Fordham University Press, 2006b), 23.

⁴ Harison, “The Paris Commune of 1871,” 10.

⁵ Ibid, 12.

⁶ Ibid, 17.

for class equality. Unlike the relatively docile annual marches to Père-Lachaise, however, this march became much more politically and emotionally charged. The crowd converged on the city center while “looting and fighting the police.” The conflict eventually sparked even greater unrest, resulting in further “strikes and looting,” increased clashes with the police, and more destruction.¹¹ “With twenty-five dead, the insurgents had accomplished little more than adding the more immediate grief of their comrades’ deaths to the overall tragedy of the French Commune.

Later that same year, a spontaneous proletariat insurrection broke out in Amsterdam, resulting in twenty-six deaths over two days of fighting against the military. Like Liège, Amsterdam was filled with red flags, but the Dutch also built barricades, a new development in the history of Dutch insurrection which intimately connected Amsterdam to the physical memory of the Paris Commune. The use of the barricade, popularized by the depictions of the Communards’ romantic struggle, proved of little practical use to the Dutch. However, the inclusion of such an iconic symbol lent credence to the riot and placed it within the scope of a wider remembrance of the Paris Commune and socialism’s constant march towards class solidarity and equality.¹²

Other nations utilized the cultural significance of the now legendary Parisian Commune as well, weaving their struggles into the emerging tapestry to honor the ongoing work of the European proletariat. In 1909, revolutionary fervor in Barcelona came to a head with a “fierce battle”, later becoming known as the “Tragic Week” (“*Semana Tragica*”), alluding to the “Bloody Week” that corresponded with the fall of the Commune.¹³ In a fiery speech in 1908, Lenin attached the Russian December Uprising of 1905 to the Parisian Commune, foreshadowing the later relocation of revolutionary leadership from France to Russia.¹⁴ By utilizing the Paris Commune, movements could orient themselves within the shifting European political system, anchoring themselves to a foundation of distinctly leftist uprisings. The memory of the Commune served a direct role in bolstering the spirits of those men and women who fought against oppression. Additionally, it served to legitimize the movements that adopted the Commune’s memory and hailed it as the inspiration for their struggle.

MEMORY REALIZED

However, none of the movements viewed their actions as a natural *continuation* of the actions of the Commune, Lenin being the exception. Rather, they used the Commune as a doorway into the international proletarian struggle. They were woven into the common tapestry of the Commune, viewing it as the torchbearer, but not the guide. The movements began to carry an international quality, an unsurprising development with the Commune itself including “revolutionary exiles” from Poland and “immigrant workers” from Belgium among its ranks.¹⁵ As previously mentioned, Marx’s literature on the French Civil War was translated and distributed widely, and Engels’ added introduction in honor of the twentieth anniversary of the Commune describes the efforts of American socialists to “shake off the yoke” of aloof government and “political speculators.”¹⁶ The Commune began to be remembered simply within the context of a larger international history of labor resistance. Especially in France, the Revolution of 1789

was still seen as the most important revolution of them all, and it was that original Revolution, not the Commune, which was the source of so many “historical analogies” for all aspiring political revolutions.¹⁷

Opposing this mode of thought, Lenin stood out among the revolutionaries of Europe primarily because of his insistence that the Commune deserved to be remembered not as a defeat, but rather as a spearhead for modern revolution. In his speech, “Lessons of the Commune,” he outlined the mistakes of the Commune while suggesting how a revolution may succeed if socialists would heed the Commune’s lessons of history. He goes on to show how those lessons were applied to the December Uprising of 1905. Critiquing the Communards, Lenin cites their lingering “patriotism” and their desire to “exert moral influence” as opposed to punishing the bourgeois class as a clear mistake.¹⁸ The Russian proletariat, he noted, was quick to shed patriotic allegiances and was not shy about direct, armed conflict with their enemies in order to attain their goals. In true consistency with his idea of each revolution building on the foundations of those prior, he looks ahead and predicts a larger uprising that will finally result in a proletariat “completely victorious.”¹⁹

That foreshadowed conflict would become a reality with the October Revolution of 1917 and the subsequent Russian Civil War which ultimately resulted in Bolshevik control of Russia. It is of little surprise that one would look for similarities and common links between the Commune and October Revolution. Both were ultimately produced by the previous government’s inability to wage an effective war, resulting in popular discontent and the eventual disintegration of the old regime. Each conflict eventually led to a battle between two governments, one parliamentary and one revolutionary. The Russian parliamentary government, the Duma, was the result of the previous February Revolution of 1917, while the national French government at Versailles was popularly declared in the abdication of Napoleon III. For both the October Revolution and the Communards’ uprising, the republican government predated the revolutionary government. Both involved outside interference, with Bismarck aiding the government in Versailles²⁰ and Western European powers briefly aiding the monarchist White Army in Russia.²¹ While not carbon copies of each other, the similarities between the two events warranted a more serious consideration of the Commune and its role in guiding future socialist uprisings through tangible, historic lessons.

The Hungarians also staged a revolution of their own soon after, drawing on the memory of the Commune to work toward radical social change. With an economy racked by World War I, and a casualty count of up to “ninety percent of the armed forces” called to fight for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the residents of urban centers such as Budapest were faced with uncertainty on all sides. Scarce food, declining real wages, and a housing shortage all culminated in the establishment of a National Council, a democratic republic that took power on October 31, 1918.²² However, the National Council was, for many reasons, an abject failure of a government. The lack of real elections, the inability to distribute land to the peasantry, and the inability to respond to foreign territorial demands crippled its chances of maintaining support. After a brief period of anarchy, the Hungarian Republic of Soviets was proclaimed, among promises of nationalization of key industries, resistance to the demands of the

¹⁷ Harison, “The Paris Commune of 1871,” 20.

¹⁸ Lenin, “Lessons of the Commune,” par. 3 & 6.

¹⁹ Ibid, par. 11.

²⁰ Marx, “The Civil War in France,” Ch. 6, par. 4.

²¹ Katherine E. Ruiz-Díaz, “The Russian Civil War,” Boston University, accessed October 20, 2019, <http://sites.bu.edu/revolutionaryrussia/student-research/katherine-ruiz-diaz/>.

²² Istvan Deak, “Budapest and the Hungarian Revolutions of 1918-1919,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 46, no. 106: 129-40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4205930> (1968), 134.

¹¹ Ibid, 357.

¹² Ibid, 357-358.

¹³ Ibid, 358.

¹⁴ Vladimir Lenin. “Lessons of the Commune.” *Zagranichnaya Gazeta*, No. 2. In *Lenin Collected Works* vol. 13, 475-478 (1972). Moscow: Progress Publishers. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mar/23.htm#fwV13E168>, par. 10.

¹⁵ Bos, “Building Barricades,” 354

¹⁶ Marx, “The Civil War in France,” Postscript, par. 13.

Entente powers, and support from the Russian army in securing peace for the nation.²³

The new Republic, proclaimed after a commemoration of the Parisian Commune in Budapest, was fated to be short-lived. It only lasted 133 days before losing the faith of the workers and succumbing to counter-revolutionary pressure from the Entente and rural areas of Hungary.²⁴ Among many factors, the most crucial errors of the Budapest Commune were the communists' "wild anti-religious propaganda" and the loss of urban support.²⁵ It was hardly the glorious end that the Parisian Commune was so well known for, and the Hungarians ended where they began, with very little meaningful or lasting social change from either the National Council or the Budapest Commune. In stark contrast to the successful Russian revolution that preceded it, the Hungarian example demonstrates just how difficult it was to enact lasting socialist change in early twentieth century Europe, a lesson that the Parisian Communards also learned the hard way.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MEMORY

When looking at all the riots and revolutions that drew from the memory of the Commune, both directly and indirectly, the issue of how memory is (and was) utilized becomes integral to a fuller understanding of what all these events have in common. There are the obvious similarities, of course: the common use of the memory of the Commune, the proletariat nature of the movements, and the distinctly international quality of group. However, it is not entirely obvious why the Commune would be referenced and not the Revolution of 1789 which was successful in its attempt to oust the monarchy and, arguably, caused much more of a stir across Europe. The June Days of 1848, the result of a much shorter and less formalized ideological struggle, still inspired riots and monarchical panic for months to come, even causing some European leaders to take drastic action such as adopting constitutions and limiting their own power. The Commune, for all it did, lived on simply as a bad memory for the bourgeoisie. And unlike the June Days, it did not immediately inspire similar revolutions or Communes in surrounding nations.

Why the Commune?

As is evident, the Commune pales in comparison to the Revolution of 1789 and the June Days of 1848 in terms of its immediate effects on the European political climate. However, there are three arguments that could be made for why the Commune became so pivotal to so many disparate movements across generations and political boundaries. In one manner, it was exactly because the Commune was so chaotic and contradictory. Anarchists, socialists, communists, and all manner of other ideological representatives fighting against the Versailles government found common ground under the banner of the Commune. The ideas and visions of the Communards were often incongruous, and the form of government was such that primary leadership was impossible. The task they undertook turned from discussions of the future of their fledgling government toward arson in defense (and spite) against the Versailles army and Thiers. Because it was so historically messy, it was much easier to detach the legend of the Commune from what Eich Auerbach described as its "[material]... historical context". Without having produced something tangible and visible in a "definite domain", the event eludes "classification", and the contemporary minds of the age were free to use the memory as it suited them.²⁶

²³ Ibid, 135-136.

²⁴ Bos, "Building Barricades," 358, and Deak, "Budapest and the Hungarian Revolutions," 137.

²⁵ Deak, 138.

²⁶ Starr, *Commemorating Trauma*, 1.

Secondly, legends serve a more cultural role; they may serve to strengthen the narrative of the speaker far better than dry discussions of facts and figures by tapping into subtle trends and even subtler cultural undercurrents and foundational "truths". Even Marx, who wrote on the history of the Commune in order to give the socialist movement a detailed, objective analysis of the event, did not refrain from adding emotionally charged passages. He could not help but add to the legend of the Commune through his villainization of the bourgeoisie and the heroism he attributed to the Communards. In addition, within his charged passages he touched on a new, burgeoning cultural force that was emerging in Europe. Not confined to borders or states, class culture attached the legend of the Commune to the new, revolutionizing class. The French socialist leaders such as Edouard Vaillant and Louis Dubreuilh used the legend of the Commune to instill energy into their revisionist framework, drawing upon a culture which knew its place in the world very well. The French population Vaillant and Dubreuilh reached were energized by their conception of carrying on the national mission of change, albeit in a more moderate manner. Lenin drew upon the culture of literature, drawing upon objective lessons and applying them to the Russian Uprising of 1905 and the later October Revolution of 1917. But even more than the objective lessons, Lenin used the legend to engage with more subtle cultural currents in the Russian peasant's growing class consciousness. He also used it to *build* the culture of the group that would, in time, dominate Europe's attention and triumph over the same tyranny the Communards failed against.

The third reason is that the collective memory of the Commune was flexible and changed over time. Through the various cultural metamorphoses and social events that Europe underwent over the span of many decades, the image of the Commune changed. Viewed through the eyes of a new generation, the place it held in French, Russian, and wider European societies moved and stretched into various forms.

Pierre Nora, in his article "Between Memory and History," gives stark importance to the issue of memory and its place in a society. "Memory is life," he writes, "borne by living societies," societies that change, grow, move, and possess a cultural memory. To survive, a culture may utilize memory insofar that it, unlike history, does not connect to the harsh past, but to the "eternal present," a view that connects the past with what is presently occurring. This may be seen in Lenin's work, fitting the memory of the Commune into the ongoing struggle for rights among Russia's lowest classes. The Commune was not used as a decades-ago symbol, rather, it was an extension of the present, a present that never ends, and a present that continues to live long after it has become "the past."

Nora writes that memory "only accommodates those facts that suit it," a clear reality for the use of the Commune as a collective memory. The French revisionists accommodated different facts about the Commune than the Dutch revolutionaries did. Both accommodated only those facts that lent credence to their movement, that of the Communards' brave struggle or of their violent means to an end. The "gigantic and breathtaking storehouse" that is memory is full of uncountable stocks: gestures and social structure, political action and social norms, individual reason, and collective madness. The Commune, an event molded and changed through the passage of time, was utilized in diverse events because it caused a shift, albeit a long-germinating one. It could be linked to an "eternal present," and its chaotic nature meant it could be used to encourage moderation, excess, and boldness under different circumstances.²⁷

²⁷ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7-24. doi:10.2307/2928520.

MEMORY'S PERSISTENCE

Up until this point, the focus of this article has been on the use of memory as a catalyst for events in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The change over time, and across regions, may still seem detached from the contemporary world in which we live in. The Russian Revolution of 1917 largely superseded the Commune as a rallying point for proletariat uprising in the middle to late twentieth century. Even closer to the present day, global communism has collapsed with the fall of the Soviet Union, ground-breaking revolutions are largely absent in a world dominated by neoliberal ideology, and where there are riots (such as in Hong Kong, Chile, and the Middle East), the extent is largely localized. Does the Commune have any persisting relevance in the modern world?

To answer the question, it is again beneficial to turn to a more specialized definition of memory. Alon Confino describes collective memory in detail, and in his article "Collective Memory and Cultural History," he asserts that each "society sets up images of the past." The Commune, for Europeans in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was an image of the past which could be viewed from several different perspectives, as has been previously discussed. Confino goes on to write that for a "certain past" to be considered a mobilizing force, a viable and arguable source for social movement, it must "steer emotions [and] motivate people to act," meaning it must inspire and motivate.²⁸ To determine whether the Commune is relevant, as a "certain past" and as a memory utilized, to the modern world, examples of use (for inspiration, motivation, or both) should be present and obvious.

The bulk of contemporary uses of the memory of the Commune and the cultural foundations it left with its defeat are largely found in France. The diversity of Communards in the civil war of 1871 has an analogous element in the protests against the declaration of a state of emergency in France in 2016. Crowds took to the streets protesting against "strengthened security laws" in the face of ISIL killing 130 in Paris. There were a diverse mixture of men and women from varied backgrounds in the demonstrations; there were anarchists, an element that was also predominant in the Commune, undocumented migrant workers, some of whom would have been directly impacted by the raids and increased power the French government gave itself, and pro-Palestinian campaigners, concerned about what the government's stance would mean for Palestine's future.²⁹ The cosmopolitan nature of the Commune has carried over into the modern world, having bled into French political culture partly thanks to the memory of the Commune.

There are also examples of the Commune's use as a *specific* memory utilized in French politics. The recent yellow-vest movement in response to reforms by French president Emmanuel Macron provide a wonderful source of investigation for similarities and direct reference to the Commune. For some, the barricades built on the avenues of Paris in 1871 have been compared to the modern barricades the yellow-vests have erected in modern boulevards. Charged demonstrations of the Parisian working class include such events as yellow-jacket rioters walking through Père Lachaise Cemetery on their way to pay their respect at the Communards' wall.³⁰ Macron's government has been depicted as standing against the interests of the average working Frenchman, a historical callback to the depiction of Thiers's government in Versailles as an enemy to the people.

To be transparent, the 1789 Revolution has been the main

political and cultural touchstone for these protests. It is a reference to "what every French citizen learns in school," and it is completely understandable that a more widely known and embraced historical event, especially one as iconic as the Revolution of 1789, would be a rallying call for the French. Still, the notes of the Commune's presence are there. Some anti-authoritarian leftists in France have looked with scorn at the yellow-vest movement precisely because it is chaotic and messy. Some of the protesters uttered "racist and sexist slurs," while some called cops on "undocumented migrants." The movement grew to not only protests against increases in fuel taxes, but also to fight against "teaching staff cuts" and police brutality against high school aged protesters. Like the communards of 1871, the yellow-vest protesters have used the wider movement as a channel to express their own frustrations and demand changes to a system they perceive as unjust, unfair, and distant. In a way, the yellow-vests of the 2019 protests are analogous to the red flags the communards fought behind so long ago.³¹

The yellow-vests have also organized horizontally, rather than vertically. That is, they have "reclaimed politics" by moving away from "expert" guidance towards collective action. Theirs is a politics that moves beyond the "left-right" divide, and refuses to fall to either side of what they see as a "partisan" system that devalues their worth as citizens. The racist, anti-Semitic, and sexist elements that originally marred the movement (through negative media portrayals attempting to chalk the movement up to far-right, fascist violence) were gradually weeded out through such a system of horizontal self-policing. Now, lesbians and Muslims participate in the movement without fear of attack from within the yellow-vest movement, and without qualms about what they are fighting for. What they fight for is national recognition, a redistribution of power away from the hands of the elites, and a nation that they can live in as equal participants of the political culture.³² Like the Versailles government under Thiers, Macron's government has been branded as distant, aloof, and ignorant of the needs, desires, and dreams of the working-class French.

The Paris Commune, in all the different interpretations it has lived on through from the late nineteenth century to the present, cannot be separated from the movements it has inspired. Far from being forgotten, the memory of the Commune lives on even to this day, a strong testimony to the power the event holds for the working class, expressed both in direct references and in the analogous realities within movements such as the yellow-vest protests.

CONCLUSION

Whether used to bring spiritual maintenance, incite proletarian aggression, or serve as a model for political revolution, the Commune has served a key role in the modern European labor movement's memory. The French revisionists sterilized the memory of the Commune in order to bring about passive emotional support for the workers of France. They wrote and spoke avidly about the heroism of the Communards not to carry on the revolutionary tradition, but to gain support for their platform. However, once the international proletariat obtained the legend of the Commune, it was utilized to carry out petty riots and strikes in the name of socialism. They did not see their movements as the next step in progressing socialist ideals, but as necessary actions for the alleviation of their current oppression. Lastly, the Commune's legend was realized both positively, as in the case of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and negatively, as

²⁸ Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386-403. doi:10.2307/2171069, 1390.

²⁹ Shafik Mandhai, "France state of emergency protest draws thousands," *Aljazeera News*, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/03/france-state-emergency-protest-draws-thousands-160313030142388.html>.

³⁰ Will Morrow, "'Yellow vest' protesters pay tribute at the Communards' Wall in Paris," *World Socialist Web Site*, 2019, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/05/27/pari-m27.html>.

³¹ Zacharias Zoubir, "A Vest that Fits All," *Commune Magazine*, issue 4, 2019, <https://communemag.com/a-vest-that-fits-all/>.

³² Benjamin Dodman, "A year of insurgency: How Yellow Vests left 'indelible mark' on French politics," *France24*, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20191116-a-year-of-insurgency-how-yellow-vests-left-indelible-mark-on-french-politics>.

was the case for the Budapest Commune. These final movements were envisioned as carrying on the grand legacy of the socialist struggle that the Commune began, not simply to loot and kill, but to utterly destroy the bourgeois oppressors that had caused so much pain and suffering for the masses.

The memory of the Commune has also been utilized in recent years during several French movements and protests. While it has not retained a wide, international relevancy, it cannot be said to be dead or completely irrelevant. Like most memories, the memory of the Commune is referenced when it is most convenient for a social or cultural movement. Facts, legends, and semiotic connections (or cultural touchpoints) are used to give credence and wider importance to cultural and social variations and revolutions. In observing this, it can only be beneficial that more awareness is given to the importance of memory as it applies to diverse culture groups. The origin of memory in one culture or nation may potentially and quickly bleed into the dominant or subversive narratives of other cultures and nations. Understanding how each individual in a culture is specifically and uniquely called to participate in the narrative of an ongoing memory (or the “eternal present”), is both intellectually rigorous and culturally necessary. It is intellectually rigorous in that the work is never really done, for memory influences individual actions constantly. It is culturally necessary, for without it, memory has a certain power over us, a power used for good and bad alike, and a people with no control over the cultivation and critique of their collective memory is a people lacking in direction.

Footnote

This article has been the beginning of a wider exposure to both European labor history and, perhaps more importantly, the wide literature on memory for me. There is still much for me to learn and much for me to comprehend on this subject specifically, and about memory more generally. As such, I fully understand that there are numerous ways in which to analyze the specifics of the Commune and the public memory of said event. There are always more scholarly articles, unique perspectives, and legitimate analyses to be uncovered. I hope with this article, more than anything, that others may become interested in what I have said in the space that was available to me. Knowledge only grows through cooperation and successive work, and this article is only a miniscule piece of a large (and growing) field of memory studies.

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How Venus Got Her Furs: Courtly Romance as Sadoomasochistic Erotica

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relevance of medieval courtly romance fiction to the development of sadoomasochistic erotica. It addresses how sadoomasochism influenced patterns of sexuality and media across medieval Europe and traces the evolution of these patterns over time. The bulk of the following analysis regards Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Cart* as an important precursor to modern sadoomasochistic erotica in order to answer the following questions: To what extent is courtly romance fiction a precursor to modern sadoomasochistic erotica? What is the historical trace of this genre? What were the social ramifications of courtly romance literature? To what extent does Chrétien's writing depict sadoomasochistic relations? How did it affect patterns of sexual behavior in medieval Europe? How did it impact women's agency? How did the world of sadoomasochistic erotica change after the Middle Ages? And likewise, how did its effect on society evolve over time?

KEYWORDS: medieval sexuality, courtly romance, Lancelot, Guinevere, sadoomasochism

In 2018, Peter Tupper said that "Sadoomasochism is a ritual for the modern age." He could not have been more incorrect. Sadoomasochism may be well within the sociocultural strata of modern society, but it was practiced long before the so-called 'modern age.' Images of masochists and dominatrices are found all throughout history; a proliferation can be traced all the way back to the Middle Ages, to the cultural phenomenon of courtly love. Despite an overwhelming lack of recognition in the academic sphere, the courtly romance literature of the 12th century provides some of the earliest fully realized examples of sadoomasochistic erotica. This lineage is best exemplified by the poetic endeavors of Chrétien de Troyes. One of his romances, *Knight of the Cart* (*Le Chevalier de la Charrette*) illustrates the extent to which the dichotomy of male subordination/female domination was embedded in courtly culture. It propagates a masochistic association between love, pain, and pleasure with the expressed purpose of titillating its readership. It reifies and recontextualizes public humiliation as an act with sexual connotations. As a result, this particular text bears striking resemblance to modern BDSM.¹

On a surface level, *Knight of the Cart* centers around the exploits of a knight (Sir Lancelot) and his endeavors to rescue his queen (Guinevere) from kidnappers. On a deeper level, however, *Knight of the Cart* tells the story of a masochist, who willingly suffers at his dominatrix's behest. With every step Lancelot takes, the line between pain and pleasure is blurred. In one particular instance, the knight braves a hazardous bridge of sharpened steel. He is wounded, but this pain soon becomes a source of gratification:

Love, which led and guided him,
Comforted and healed him at once
And made his suffering a pleasure²

In this passage, pain and pleasure appear conflated. This conflation is one of the central themes of Chrétien's narrative, and it perfectly encapsulates Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere. She exists simultaneously as a source of pain and pleasure. In fact, she is the very impetus of their coalescence. Lancelot's affection for Guinevere

and his status as a courtly lover act as driving forces that urge him ever onward, skewing his perception of pain and bringing him into a world of masochistic pleasure. Love is his guide, and she is a cruel and sadistic mistress.

The implications of this passage do not stop here, however. The association between pain and pleasure and the dichotomy of male subordination/female domination are as relevant to *Knight of the Cart* as they are to courtly culture at large. In Chrétien's writing, we see not only the passionate submission of one knight to one lady. We see one of the first, fully realized instances of sadoomasochistic erotica. We see how Venus got her furs. Scholars and historians have recognized the pervading masochism of this text but have yet to attribute this masochism to a larger tradition of textual eroticism. In the following pages, we will explore the relationship between Lancelot and sadoomasochistic erotica, the role of humiliation in Lancelot's masochism, and *Knight of the Cart's* connection to modern BDSM. There are stones in need of turning, and questions that remain unanswered by scholars. But before one can identify Chrétien's writing as sadoomasochistic erotica, before one can determine how this literary tradition influenced patterns of literature and sexuality across medieval Europe, one must delve deeper into Chrétien's current place in the world of academia.

THE CRITIC AND THE CRITICAL

"Every lover serves" - Ovid

As the breadth of this academic inquiry finds itself based in the aftermath of Poststructuralism,³ it is imperative to conduct a preliminary examination of this antiquated school of thought, and explore its enduring relevance in the field of literary criticism. Structuralism proposes that one may understand human culture by way of language.⁴ In this theoretical framework, language is regarded as a way of knowing, whose meaning can only be amounted to the sum of its parts. It is static, and therefore formulaic. In this conception, everything that disseminates from human culture is defined and

¹ An acronym alluding to the dichotomies of dominance/submission and sadism/masochism.

² Chrétien de Troyes, *Knight of the Cart*, trans. William W. Kibler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), 131.

³ More specifically, these analyses are aligned with the literary criticism of contemporary queer theory, gender studies, and new historicism.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, "How do we Recognize Structuralism?" in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974* (Los Angeles: Semiotext, 2004), 171-173.

interconnected by basic, underlying structures that serve as a bridge between perceived reality and actual reality. Even literature, with its infinite complexities, can be boiled down to a common series of patterns. In this way, the same basic elements of language are combined in different ways over and over again throughout history.

Poststructuralism, on the other hand, has argued that language is dynamic and that meaning cannot be extrapolated from literature through the understanding and application of language as a systemic constant. In this school of thought, conceptual instability and plurality of meaning are paramount. There is not one way to interpret a literary text, but many. The great irony of Poststructuralism is that it combats the binary oppositions implicit in certain linguistic structures while simultaneously existing as the product of said structures.⁵ The very nomenclature of the philosophy is defined by its relation to the nomenclature of another. Therefore, our understanding of Poststructuralism is invariably tied to its progenitor. Linguistically, it is a response to Structuralism. It is but one half of a dichotomous whole. However, this is not an indication of Poststructuralism's limitations. It is an indication of language's limitations.

Perhaps the most glaring among these limitations is the existence of binaries (more specifically, binaries concerning gender, sexuality, etc.). It is all too unfortunate that scholars, namely those who limit their inquiry to the temporal parameters of the Middle Ages, have a tendency to impress their binaries upon other time periods.⁶ Even with the advent of new historicism, gender studies, and queer theory, terms like "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" are still attributed to the Middle Ages, despite medieval sexuality never having been defined by any such terminology. Again, this does not point to the limitations of academia; it points to the limitations of language. Because linguistic structures are fundamentally limiting when studying the distant past, it is impossible to completely circumvent the use of binaries in their entirety. The sheer distance between present and past is also a limiting factor when attempting to formulate an understanding of the Middle Ages.

This particular study is not exempt from these limitations: terms like sadomasochism were coined hundreds of years after the medieval period,⁷ yet they are strewn throughout these pages. The plain and simple truth is that Europe was ill-equipped to address sadistic and masochistic practices as a collective during the Middle Ages. It lacked the terminology necessary to express mass, public recognition. That is not to say that sadomasochism was not deeply embedded in the public consciousness, because it was. It was so ingrained that it began seeping into the realm of popular culture and media. Elements of sadomasochistic practices are found all throughout Europe during the medieval period, most notably during the 12th century, when courtly culture was still in its naissance.

During the 1100's, this cultural phenomena gave birth to what would come to be known as courtly romance. The courtly romance genre is perhaps the most abundant source of evidence that sadomasochism was not a foreign concept at the time. It was certainly no foreign concept to Chrétien de Troyes. As a troubadour, Chrétien committed several works to the courtly romance genre. One of his romances, *Knight of the Cart*, is laden with sadomasochistic subtext. But before one can explore the elements of sadomasochism that appear in this narrative, it is imperative to delve first into the preexisting scholarly responses to Chrétien's writing.

One branch of scholarly inquiry has explored the connections

between courtly romance and critical theory. In "Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* and Critical Theory," Robert S. Sturges surveys the process of adapting Poststructuralisms to the understanding of medieval texts. He ponders how older kinds of reading can be revised in light of recent Poststructuralist developments in the world of academia.⁸ Today, scholars are applying new theories to medieval texts, and in recent years, Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* has been a recurring subject of scholarly research.

With the application of new theoretical frameworks, the relevance of Chrétien's writing has been more or less rekindled in the academic sphere. Not only is *Knight of the Cart* "widely read and frequently taught" but it is also a "test case in the application of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical theories to medieval texts."⁹ However, psychoanalysis is just the tip of the iceberg. According to Sturges, "much scholarship on Chrétien has also focused on semiotics, and seems to imply a basis in reception theory."¹⁰ This is exemplified by scholars like Peggy McCracken, whose analysis in *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero* regards the implications of blood as a symbol within courtly romance literature. Despite these recent feats, it can be said that courtly romance and deconstruction were not fast friends.

Though psychoanalysts like Jacques Lacan were keen to focus their gaze on Chrétien in the years immediately following the advent of Poststructuralist critical theory, a vast majority of medievalists were not so keen. Sturges argues, "Deconstruction by and large proved a less tempting theoretical mode for most medievalists... because it was widely perceived as ahistorical," but in recent years scholars have begun to find that "deconstruction need not negate historicism."¹¹ Today, more and more medievalists are reconciling historicism with Poststructuralist sensibilities, and this is reflected in the scholarship. At this juncture, it is important to note that it is the intention of this study to follow suit.

The reconciliation of historicism and deconstruction has paved the way for scholars to ask new kinds of questions and thereby receive new kinds of answers from medieval literature. According to Sturges, "The questions of medieval reading and of women's status in the Middle Ages decisively returned social history to the forefront of medieval studies."¹² This brings us to the dichotomy of poetic invention and the reality beyond literature. Because literary undertakings reflect the society from which they disseminate, any study of Chrétien's writing also warrants an analysis of the social history of Chrétien's France, despite *Knight of the Cart's* basis in fiction. Such an analysis is not alien to this study. In a more general sense, however, it can be said that Poststructuralism is responsible for the abundance of new scholarship that has surfaced in recent years regarding *Knight of the Cart*—scholarship that lends itself to such overarching issues as violence, gender, and sexuality. Or, in the case of this study, all three.

Of the existing scholarship on Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart*, two scholars in particular have addressed the elements of masochism present in the text: Jeffrey Cohen and Sandy Feinstein. In "Losing Your Head in Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart*," Feinstein unravels the underlying social implications coded in Chrétien's depiction of decapitation. Her analysis suggests that violence exists in this particular narrative as a point of intersection where issues of gender, sexuality, politics, and religion all converge.

This convergence is identified by Feinstein herself early on in the article. At one point, she directly states, "In Chrétien's *Lancelot*, beheading serves a complex sexual, political, and religious image

⁵ Edward Craig, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (Nihilism to Quantum Mechanics) (Routledge, 1998), 597.

⁶ This tendency is alluded to in such articles as Jonathan Katz's "The Invention of Heterosexuality."

⁷ The term sadism is attributed to the Marquis de Sade, and the term masochism is attributed to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. Both of these men lived during the 19th century.

⁸ Robert S. Sturges, "Chrétien's 'Knight of the Cart' and Critical Theory," *Arthuriana*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1996): 1-2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

representing power, particularly the power of speech.”¹³ Decapitation exists in this narrative as a mirror, a reflection of the power dynamics implicit in the courtly romance tradition. In this tradition, power does not ultimately reside with men; it instead resides with women. Thus, Feinstein’s intervention in the discourse of medieval scholarship is revealed in her linking of women’s agency with depictions of decapitation. The major breakthrough of her study is how she recognizes Chrétien’s depiction of beheading as an indication of male subordination/female domination.

This dominant/submissive dichotomy is not limited to the text. As stated earlier, much of Feinstein’s article is devoted to her exploration of the societal implications at work in *Knight of the Cart*:

Like the controlling image of beheading itself, the ladies of this poem are implicitly powerful and subtextually dichotomous. In this poem written for a woman, beheading serves a sexual, political, and religious metaphor to represent the power of speech. In the context of the culture and its sexual politics, it is a power limited to literary wish-fulfillment, a wish expressed by a real woman to a court poet.¹⁴

Not only does Feinstein identify the implicit agency of women in *Knight of the Cart*, but she also parallels this agency with that of Marie de Champagne, the woman who commissioned the romance. For Feinstein’s purposes, the fact (or rather strong possibility, given the abundance of primary sources) that Chrétien wrote *Knight of the Cart* for Marie de Champagne serves two particular functions. It reveals that Chrétien was willing to submit to Marie’s wishes, and it reveals that Marie had the ability to have those wishes fulfilled. To put it plainly, this fulfillment exhibits her agency and resonates with the agency of the ladies Lancelot encounters in *Knight of the Cart*, whose wishes are also fulfilled by men (namely Lancelot). Because beheading is situated in this romance as the result of a woman’s wishes, it can be seen as a metaphor for Marie’s own wish fulfillment.

Feinstein’s contextualization of Marie de Champagne’s agency within the confines of courtly culture is also noteworthy. Though Marie was able to fulfill her wishes, her power was fundamentally limited by societal factors (limitations which were undoubtedly the product of the patriarchal structures of Europe during the high Middle Ages). The only way she was able to actualize her desires was through the efforts of another: a man. As previously stated, Feinstein argues that decapitation exists in *Knight of the Cart* as a metaphor representing women’s power of speech, namely Marie’s power of speech.¹⁵ This, coupled with the societal limitations of medieval womanhood, suggests that Marie’s power of speech was one that could only be expressed through the actions of a man. This raises a question: how is Marie’s power of speech offset by the context of its expression?

To answer this question, we must dive headfirst into the conceptual framework of (female) authorship, a subject that is not easily overlooked when discussing courtly romance. Feinstein suggests that Chrétien’s submission to Marie de Champagne (and Marie’s associated wish fulfillment) is the avenue through which her power of speech is expressed. But one simple truth cannot be ignored: decapitation may be situated in *Knight of the Cart* as a metaphor for Marie’s power, but Chrétien is ultimately the one responsible for the construction and subsequent transmission of the metaphor. Marie may have exercised agency by commissioning *Knight of the Cart*, but Chrétien is the one responsible for its creation. Where (or rather with whom) does the power of speech truly reside? With the woman whose wishes were fulfilled as a result of a man’s submission, or with the

man who actually put pen to paper as a result? Similarly, if women are dominant over men in *Knight of the Cart*, how is this dominance affected by the male authorship behind the romance?¹⁶ To what extent is the reverence of women in courtly romance an invention of the poets? To what extent was it actually practiced outside of the literature? These are some of the underlying questions that will be addressed in the following pages.

Turning back to Feinstein’s article, her conjecture regarding the dominance of women and the submission of men, as depicted by Chrétien, is based on one particular instance of beheading: after Lancelot defeats a dishonorable knight, a maiden requests the fallen knight’s head. She essentially puts Lancelot to the task of decapitating the knight he has just defeated. He is then torn between his desire to appease the lady, and his desire to satisfy his own, personal sense of justice (Lancelot’s personal sense of justice entails having mercy for his fallen foe). Feinstein recognizes this inner turmoil when she alludes to “Lancelot’s struggle as to how to keep both his promise to give the lady the head of the defeated knight and grant the defeated knight mercy, as is his custom.”¹⁷ In the end, Lancelot submits to the lady’s wishes, and this submission is central to the subordination/dominance that defines male/female relations in this text.

This courtly dichotomy of submissiveness and dominance is integral to Feinstein’s interpretation and overall understanding of courtly romance, and beheading is one of the linchpins holding this dichotomy together. On the surface, the act of a man beheading another man (whether at the behest of a woman or not) would seem to be an immediate expression of masculine power, but this is not how beheading functions in Chrétien’s narrative. Rather, it functions as an example of the lengths to which Lancelot will go to appease a lady. According to Feinstein, “Chrétien’s use of beheading as closure becomes identified with issues of control or authority not as they refer to male rule, but as they relate specifically to women. . . In Chrétien’s romance, love is defined and controlled by women.”¹⁸ In *Knight of the Cart*, Lancelot is ultimately submissive to the wishes of every lady he comes across, and this is especially true of Guinevere. Their courtly love, and courtly love in general for that matter, is defined by this fundamental relationship of subordination and domination.

Again, this notion of female dominion is not limited to the text. Male to female subordination saturates the courtly romance genre on both sides, appearing both on and off the page. Lancelot’s submission to the multitude of ladies he encounters throughout the narrative (namely Guinevere) mirrors Chrétien’s submission to Marie de Champagne. Chrétien’s relationship with Marie has been defined as “submission to the lady’s control” and it has been said that “Chrétien’s service to his implied female public” is “as submissive. . . and as confined as Lancelot’s courtly service to Guinevere.”¹⁹ When taking this into consideration, it becomes apparent that the dominant/submissive dichotomy at the center of courtly romance literature is a reflection of the male/female relations at work in courtly culture. Chrétien’s compliance to Marie’s wishes is reflected in Lancelot’s compliance to Guinevere’s. In this way, *Knight of the Cart* can be seen as a sort of window to the reality behind courtly romance fiction.

In Jeffrey Cohen’s *Medieval Identity Machines*, there is an acute awareness of the “widespread fascination with male masochism” that has surfaced in academia over the last decade.²⁰ Chapter three, “Masoch/Lancelotism,” is the most glaringly relevant chapter to this

¹³ Sandy Feinstein, “Losing Your Head in Chrétien’s ‘Knight of the Cart,’” *Arthuriana*, vol. 9, no. 4 (1999): 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46–48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46–48.

¹⁶ Another prime example is found with the *Canterbury Tales*. Scholars have pondered how the agency of the Wife of Bath is challenged by the fact that she was conceived and written by Geoffrey Chaucer, a man.

¹⁷ Feinstein, “Losing Your Head in Chrétien’s ‘Knight of the Cart,’” 52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 53–54.

²⁰ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 78.

particular study, as it explores courtly romance through the lens of masochism using Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* as a prime example.

Central to *Medieval Identity Machines* is the conceptual framework of the masochistic contract: an unspoken pact between two consenting individuals that dictates the parameters of the subordination and domination to which the masochist willingly subjects himself. According to Cohen, Lancelot "is bound to the missing queen [Guinevere] through the masochistic contract" which he defines as "a consensual agreement that delimits gender boundaries within a predetermined relationship of activity and submission. For the Knight of the Cart, body and identity are not his to construct."²¹ Like Feinstein, Cohen extrapolates a dynamic of male subordination and female domination from Chrétien's writing. Unlike Feinstein, however, Cohen takes things a step further, and speaks directly in terms of masochism. The use of such terminology is noteworthy in this instance, as it illustrates yet again how scholars are keen to impress modern signifiers upon the distant past. As previously stated, this kind of impressment does not implicate a flaw in Cohen's scholarship, but rather a flaw in the underlying linguistic structures at hand.

What sets Cohen's scholarship apart as a major breakthrough in the academic sphere is the connection it draws between *Knight of the Cart* and sadomasochism. Not only does Cohen identify Lancelot as a masochist, but he also implicates Guinevere as his dominatrix and explores what their relations reveal about medieval culture (namely France in the 12th century):

If Lancelot is providing the script that assigns the queen her role as dominatrix, it is a text already inscribed within other, dominating cultural narratives. Lancelot's desire, moreover, is to some extent socially useful, replicating the existing structure of the court of Champagne... In other words, sex is not separable from culture, and desire expands to fill the contours of preexistent social structures, reproducing and solidifying them.²²

This notion of socio-literary inseparability suggests that the reality beyond courtly romance fiction/literature was equally fraught with relationships defined by the masochistic contract. In fiction, it informs Lancelot's relationship with Guinevere, and in the court of Champagne in the 12th century, it informed Chrétien's relationship with Marie de Champagne.

In a general sense, Cohen, like Feinstein, presents Chrétien's relationship with Marie de Champagne as one defined by an unyielding male subordination to female domination/dominion. Once again, this dichotomy mirrors that of Lancelot and Guinevere: According to Cohen, "The gesture of abasement" extrapolated from Lancelot's submission to Guinevere "must also be read within the relationship of patronage that connects Chrétien to Marie de Champagne. The script that Chrétien creates for Marie is uncannily familiar. She is *his* imperious Guinevere, his dominatrix to whom he cannot say no."²³ In the eternal conflict between the world of fiction and the reality beyond that fiction, it can be said that Chrétien's obedience to Marie lends itself to the notion that sadomasochism existed in the Middle Ages, even if it was not directly identified as such. Thus, if we consider the medieval period in accordance with these terms, regarding Chrétien's relationship with Marie as evidentiary to the existence of submissive/dominatrix dynamics in 12th century France, *Knight of the Cart* suddenly becomes enveloped by a secondary function (its primary function being the satisfaction and entertainment of the commissioner, Marie de Champagne, and other literate members of the upper crest): the titillation of individuals with sadomasochistic tendencies, a widely unrecognized

²¹ Ibid, 99.

²² Ibid, 108.

²³ Ibid, 108.

demographic of medieval readership.

When it comes to forming a synthesis of these three branches of scholarship, that is, the scholarship that explores Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* through the respective lenses of Poststructuralism, violence, and masochism, it can be said that each has effectively set the stage for a deeper exploration of *Lancelot* as a work of sadomasochistic erotica. Sturges's scholarship elucidates how a Poststructuralist analysis of medieval literature can be bolstered by historicism and how scholars have started to apply such frameworks as psychoanalysis and semiotics to their textual analyses. Perhaps the most relevant takeaway from Sturges, however, is the notion that medievalists are asking new kinds of questions of courtly romance: questions concerning gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status, among other relevant social issues. In accordance with this trajectory, the following textual analysis lends itself to a series of underlying questions that concern medieval sexuality. It is held together by the application of social history and textual analysis.

The scholarship of Feinstein and Cohen, on the other hand, is crucial to this particular study because it illustrates how gender, sexuality, and power are all interconnected in *Knight of the Cart*. Both scholars recognize this intersectionality, but they do so in slightly different ways. Feinstein's writing reveals a growing realization that violence and sexuality were intrinsically linked in the courtly romance tradition. It also unveils a dynamic of male subservience to women. As previously stated, Cohen recognizes this dynamic as well, but takes things a step further. He attributes the dynamic to the masochistic contract. Cohen's conclusion that the masochistic contract pervades both courtly romance and courtly culture resonates with Feinstein's and speaks to the historical transience of sadomasochism as situated in fiction as well as the reality beyond fiction.

These breakthroughs are all crucial to understanding *Lancelot* as a work of sadomasochistic erotica, but there are questions that remain unanswered: Can the origins of sadomasochistic erotica be traced to Chrétien de Troyes? What were the social circumstances and ramifications of courtly romance literature? To what extent does Chrétien's writing depict sadomasochistic relations? How did it reflect/inform patterns of sexual behavior in medieval Europe? What does it reveal about women's agency in the Middle Ages? How has the world of sadomasochistic erotica evolved/changed over time? To answer these questions, one must dive headfirst not only into the text, but also into the culture from which it disseminates.

WITHIN AND WITHOUT: THE BILATERAL PERMEATION OF CULTURE AND MEDIA

"Love is a stranger who'll beckon you on" - Leslie Bricusse

To understand courtly romance is to understand courtly culture, which is an admittedly daunting task: one scarcely taken up in modern academia. This reluctance is identified by Joachim Bumke in *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*. In this text, he states, "In the newer works on social history the courtly society of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries rarely appears at all."²⁴ What is it about the endeavor to reconstruct courtly culture that repels so many capable literary scholars and historians? One possible explanation lies within the evasiveness of the subject. Despite the recent shift in focus from material culture to "the 'cultural ideals' that supposedly determined the social life of that age," there is still a lack of consensus that cannot be ignored.²⁵ Even the conceptual framework of chivalry

²⁴ Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: The Overlook Press, 2000), 5.

²⁵ Ibid, 7.

leaves scholars divided to this day.²⁶ To put it simply, it is difficult to pinpoint the social behaviors of an antiquated cultural phenomenon when historical distance, abstraction, and subjectivity stand between the scholar and a comprehensive, underlying terminology. Unlike chivalry, however, courtly love was propagated as a systemic code of conduct with explicit rules.

Another answer to why so few scholars have endeavored to reconstruct courtly culture in the academic sphere lies with the reluctance of historians to regard literary texts as valid sources:

The question as to the value of literary texts as historical sources cannot be answered theoretically. It is difficult to contend with the view that fundamental methodological problems do not permit us to draw inferences from fictional statements about the reality beyond literature... Important aspects of social as well as literary history in the Middle Ages will, however, remain hidden if one rejects out of hand the use of texts based on aesthetic principles. It is therefore preferable to accept the difficulties and limitations that attach to poetic sources, and to try and counterbalance them by making certain that one's conclusions at all times reflect the methodological uncertainties.²⁷

With the recent focus on medieval social behaviors also came the emergence of literary analysis as a historian's tool. There may be limitations to utilizing poetic sources as historical evidence of courtly cultural identities, practices, etc., but these limitations must be countenanced in order to better understand the reality beyond the fiction. In fact, it has been argued that literature may be the only reliable way to achieve such an understanding.²⁸

This reassessment of literary analysis as a valid mode of socio-historical inquiry has slowly but surely made its way into the realm of practical application. Scholars like Bumke and Sturges have begun to reconcile historicism and literary analysis, and scholars like Feinstein and Cohen demonstrate this reconciliation through their marriage and utilization of historical and textual evidence. For example, Feinstein and Cohen both allude to the historical context of Chrétien's writing, citing the submissive/dominant relationship between Chrétien and Marie de Champagne as an analogue for the submissive/dominant relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere. Evidence derived from history is used to support evidence drawn from literature. Evidence derived from literature is used to support evidence drawn from history. It is a two-way street that works especially in scholars' favor when the focus of their inquiry relates to social behavior: "The more we focus on the norms of social behavior, the greater the evidentiary value of literary texts... The ideals of courtly society are reflected almost exclusively in literature. The new concept of courtly perfection in knighthood and love can be drawn directly from an analysis of the literary texts."²⁹ As such, one can learn a great deal about courtly culture from the poetry of Chrétien de Troyes.

This brief preamble began with the notion that to understand courtly romance is to understand courtly culture. When taking the revelations of courtly romance into consideration, it is perhaps more accurate to state that to understand courtly culture is to understand courtly romance.

One of the crucial facets of courtly culture is the concept of the courtly lady. According to Bumke, "In opposition to deeply embedded notions of the inferiority and wickedness of the female sex, the

courtly poets created a new picture of beauty and perfection."³⁰ In courtly romance fiction, the courtly lady is venerated as the source of a knight's strength; she is the quasi-divine female figure who commands male subordination. But, as Bumke suggests, this status was created by the troubadours: "The courtly image of women was an invention of the poets. The idea that noble lords adoringly looked up to the ladies because they owed them all their knightly ability and social renown turned the relationship between the sexes upside down."³¹ Courtly romance literature may offer a window to the reality of courtly culture, but the reverence of ladies was by and large the result of poetic fabrication. It was little more than a fantasy, but the implications of that fantasy resonate with the idea that sadomasochism was a ritual practiced in the Middle Ages (in both reality and fiction).

Another important thing to consider when analyzing courtly culture is the dichotomy of women-worship and misogyny. As previously stated, the notion of female wickedness and inferiority was deeply rooted in medieval society (no small part due to the spread of Latin Christendom throughout Europe in the years leading up to the 12th century). In response to this misogyny, it would seem that the reverence of ladies propagated by courtly romance fiction offers a sufficient challenge to the overwhelming sexism of the period: "The image of women constructed by the courtly poets seems like a counter-projection to the predominant tradition of Christian misogyny, which was rooted in the fundamental Christian rejection and contempt for the world and its hostility to the body and the senses."³² However, it can be said that the courtly poets were often just as guilty of sexism as the Christian misogynistic tradition.

At a glance, the efforts of courtly poets to revere courtly ladies appears as just that: reverence. Where the Christian misogynistic tradition condemned "a woman's pride, arrogance, quarrelsomeness, deceitfulness, [and] thirst for power"³³ the courtly romance tradition seemingly did the opposite by speaking to women's idealized traits.³⁴ But let us not be fooled: In courtly romance fiction, the courtly lady is simultaneously exemplified and objectified. She is put on a pedestal and judged according to her physical attributes and her "virtue" as determined by the overarching patriarchal power structures of medieval Europe. According to Bumke, "Condemnation and praise of women was not as far apart as one might think... In fact, even in courtly poetry the negative sides of the image of women played a greater role than one would suspect at first glance."³⁵ All of this is to say that despite the sadomasochistic implications of courtly poetry and despite the literary wish fulfillment enjoyed by individuals like Marie de Champagne, women were still objectified and condemned in courtly romance. Even though the breadth of this particular study explores how the dynamic of male subordination and female domination pervades courtly romance fiction, it also endeavors to recognize the reality of women's oppression in this pursuit. It is important, however, to reiterate that courtly romance literature did provide women like Marie de Champagne a means to fulfil their wishes, and this wish fulfilment does suggest a degree of male subordination, but to truly understand whether or not Chrétien's submission to Marie was typical of courtly culture, one must wade even deeper into the subject of courtly love.

In these last few pages, we have explored the gender relations implicit in courtly culture, but this does not address the obvious:

²⁶ For a more detailed exploration of the scholarly debate on chivalry, consult Craig Taylor's "Alain Chartier and chivalry: debating knighthood in the context of the Hundred Years War."

²⁷ Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, 10.

²⁸ "The more we focus on the norms of social behavior, the greater the evidentiary value of literature" Ibid, 11.

²⁹ Ibid, 11-13.

³⁰ Ibid, 325.

³¹ Ibid, 326.

³² Ibid, 327.

³³ The Christian misogynistic tradition instituted this condemnation through the handbook of canon law, the *Decretum* of Gratia c.1160, which stated that "woman shall be subject to man in all things." Ibid, 328.

³⁴ Ibid, 328.

³⁵ Ibid, 329-330.

What exactly is courtly culture? We often take this phrase for granted, but what exactly is at the heart of this cultural phenomena, and what are the defining terms? For starters, it can be said that courtly culture is deeply tied to the idea of courtly love. For a definition of courtly love, we turn once again to Bumke:

The phrase 'courtly love' [or amour Courtois]... was not coined until the nineteenth century. Its creator was the French scholar Gaston Paris, who in an 1883 essay on Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot* highlighted four characteristics:

1. Courtly love is illegitimate, illégitime, and therefore necessarily secretive. It includes total physical surrender.
2. Courtly love manifests itself in the submissiveness of the man, who considers himself the servant of his lady and seeks to fulfill her desires.
3. Courtly love demands that a man strive to become better and more perfect in order to be more worthy of his lady.
4. Courtly love is 'an art, a scene, a virtue' with its own rules and laws that lovers must master.³⁶

These four characteristics perfectly encapsulate the sadomasochism that lies just beneath the surface of courtly culture and its literature. For the purposes of this study, we will focus primarily on the first and second characteristics, as their terminology is fraught with notions of physical surrender and male submissiveness to female domination. If *Lancelot* is bound to Guinevere (the way Chrétien is bound to Marie) through the masochistic contract, then these four characteristics are the literal stipulations of that contract. They exist to codify the expectations of conduct between the masochist and his dominatrix, between the dominatrix and her masochist.

Needless to say, Paris's definition of courtly love has incurred a great deal of scholarly debate over the years. One important thing to consider, however, is that although courtly love existed "within the framework of the poetic conception of courtly society," it was often grounded in real relationships.³⁷ Chrétien's relationship with Marie de Champagne effectively captures the essence of the second characteristic of courtly love: the notion of male subservience to women. Chrétien was not alone in this. Evidence that courtly love was practiced outside courtly romance fiction can also be found in the statements of minnesingers (the German equivalent to a French troubadour): "It is very painful when someone loves deeply in those lofty ranks..." "She rules and is mistress in my heart and is nobler than I am." "I cannot resist her power: she is above and I am below."³⁸ These statements illustrate the existence of courtly love outside courtly romance fiction. They also provide further support for the notion that love and pain were intrinsically linked in the courtly tradition.

What is most telling, however, is the tendency among minnesingers to regard their lady lovers as mistresses who hold absolute power. If we look at courtly love through the lens of sadomasochism, the romantic proclivities of the courtly poets begin to reflect the same gravitation towards the masochist/dominatrix paradigm observable in their literature. Thus, the fictional and nonfictional interpersonal relations of courtly culture are both informed by the same dynamic of male subordination and female domination. If we regard courtly romance literature in this way, as a reflection of high medieval culture, Chrétien's work suddenly appears drenched in a sea of social implications, and at the epicenter of these implications lies medieval sexuality.

Similar to the study of courtly culture, medieval sexuality has also been traditionally neglected in the academic sphere. Recent generations of academics have reversed the trend, however, and today there exists a vast wealth of knowledge on medieval sexual practices. This wealth is exemplified by James A. Brundage and Vern Bullough's *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. In their book, Brundage and Bullough point to confessional literature³⁹ as a potential source of information on medieval sexuality: "The confessional literature of the later Middle Ages offers a marvelous opportunity to study the sexual beliefs of the period. . . Pastoral manuals and handbooks for confessors often dealt at such great length and in such detail with sexual sins that it is difficult to escape the conclusion that these behaviors flourished rather vigorously among medieval people."⁴⁰ As revealing as this statement is, it offers little more than conjecture. We need something more concrete.

A study of confessional literature may be sufficient to clarify late medieval, ecclesiastical canon law (i.e. laws forbidding fornication, masturbation, sodomy, etc.), but it fails to capture the actual behavioral patterns of the age in a reliable way. The existence of laws against certain sexual behaviors does not prove the abundance of said behaviors in the public sphere. This begs the question: how does one go about reconstructing the sexual habits of a bygone age? According to Brundage and Bullough, "One source for such information would be the accounts of confessors themselves."⁴¹ The exempla collection of Thomas of Chantimpré, for example, tells us a lot about medieval notions of homosexuality. More specifically, his writing reflects a concern for male homosexuality. This concern (based on Thomas' own experiences of hearing confessions) seems to imply a modicum of ubiquity in late medieval society.⁴² With this, we arrive yet again at the subject of modern versus medieval terminology.

In the last paragraph, the term "homosexuality" appears twice. In both instances it is used to describe the sexual practices of medieval society. However, it is a term utterly alien to the Middle Ages. This temporal space is also devoid of terms like "sex" and "sexuality." According to Brundage and Bullough, "There are no treatises entitled 'on sex,' not even any Latin counterparts for our terms 'sex,' 'sexuality,' and 'sexual.' Studies of medieval beliefs about sex must pay attention to medieval contexts and categories if they want faithfully to reflect those beliefs."⁴³ With this in mind, is it ignorant to impress modern signifiers/modern understandings upon the distant past? In most cases, the consensus among academics is a resounding "yes," but to what extent is the application of modern terminology unavoidable? Every major title on the socio-cultural history of medieval sexuality refers to its subject matter in those modern terms: "medieval sexuality." In short, the limited use of modern signifiers must be sanctioned for the sake of clarity and consistency.

Turning back to behavioral patterns, scholars have argued that the conceptual framework of sin offers another avenue for exploring medieval sexuality. It is often held that the medieval period was an era of sexual modesty and repression: a time when sex was only practiced for the purpose of procreation. A deeper look at the relationship between the clergy and the masses, however, reveals an entirely different narrative: "The energetic efforts of the clergy to convince ordinary people that sexual pleasure was inherently sinful seem to have made little impression on the great mass of medieval Christians. Ample evidence suggests that a great many medieval people rejected the more rigorous theological prohibitions of common sexual

³⁹ Literature derived from the reinvigorated pastoral function instituted in the wake of the Third Lateran Council.

⁴⁰ Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York: Garland, 2000), 13 & 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 360.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 361.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 363-364.

practices.”⁴⁴ All of this is to say that Chrétien’s writing would have been received by a widely sexually active readership, an audience that would have been receptive to the sadomasochistic, erotic subtext of *Knight of the Cart*.

Once again, the relationship between literature and its readership is crucial to this particular study, as it illustrates how courtly romance fiction was informed by the sexual practices of the late Middle Ages, and vice versa. The fact that “medieval culture had room for a broader sense of sexual pleasure and experience” elucidates how Chrétien’s writing, with all its sadomasochistic, erotic implications, is actually a product of its time.⁴⁵ Thus, literary texts like *Knight of the Cart* can be used to better understand the sexual practices of France in the 12th century. This is supported by Brundage and Bullough, who argue that “literary and artistic materials. . . may provide better evidence about particular beliefs and practices than texts devoted to medicine or natural philosophy.”⁴⁶ With this in mind, it stands to reason that the presence of sadomasochism in Chrétien’s *Knight of the Cart* may be a reflection of its presence in late medieval society, if not simply a reflection of the author’s own life experiences (i.e. his relationship with Marie de Champagne). It also stands to reason that the erotic content of Chrétien’s writing may have had a direct impact on the sexual behaviors of its readership.⁴⁷

The last important thing to consider when exploring medieval sexuality is the relevance of patriarchal structures to the gender/sexual relations of the high Middle Ages. As previously established, the reverence of ladies in courtly romance fiction effectively inverted the male/female relations of medieval culture: a culture dominated by overarching patriarchal structures (i.e. the clergy of Latin Christendom) and misogynistic practices (laws governing inheritance, for example). For the most part, ideas about gender in Europe during the high Middle Ages were by and large sexist and oppressive to women, and this is supported by medieval medical theory: “Medical theory. . . exercised an important influence on the development of medieval ideas about sexuality and supported the evaluation of men as the dominant and active force.”⁴⁸ This understanding of men as dominant and women as submissive also made its way into the realm of sexuality. The medieval understanding was that “men were sexually active and women were sexually passive, dependent, and ultimately subordinate.”⁴⁹ But this is not what we see in both the relationship between Lancelot and Guinevere and the relationship between Chrétien and Marie de Champagne (with the expressed caveat that there are no records that indicate Chrétien and Marie engaged in any sort of physical relationship). It is also not what one finds when they begin to explore the psychology behind sadomasochism.

In 2016, Joris Lammers and Roland Imhoff conducted a study in which they surveyed 14,306 participants in an attempt to determine the psychological circumstances behind sadomasochistic tendencies. Their findings were published in the journal of *Social Psychological and Personality Science* later that year:

Results showed that power increases the arousal to sadomasochism, after controlling for age and dominance. Furthermore, the effect of power on arousal by sadistic thoughts is stronger among women than men, while the effect of power on arousal by masochistic thoughts is stronger among men than women... The effect of power is driven through a process of disinhibition that leads people to disregard sexual norms in general, and disregard sexual norms associated with gender in particular. These results

add to an emerging literature that social power changes traditional gender patterns in sex.⁵⁰

Before these findings can be applied to medieval sexuality, it is important to note the glaring issues of the study: biological sex and gender are equated, there is an assumption of a gender binary, and it is aimed at modern sexuality, not medieval sexuality. Despite these issues, Lammers and Imhoff’s findings are widely relevant to the sexual history of Europe.

The main takeaway here is the notion that traditional patterns in sex are informed by social power. In courtly culture, an abundance of socially powerful poets gave rise to the notion of courtly love, propagating male subordination to female domination. Socially powerful men (like Chrétien) fanaticized about being at the mercy of women and began to submit themselves to a projected dominatrix (like Marie de Champagne). Both their writing and their interactions with ladies went against the traditional beliefs of gender/sexual behavior at the time, and it is from this relationship, the relationship between social power and traditional gender patterns, behaviors, etc. that the historical trace of male masochism originates. This is exemplified by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, a socially powerful man who went against traditional patterns and beliefs regarding sexual behavior by submitting himself to the domination/sexual power of women. This dynamic also illustrates how courtly romance literature offers a reflection of the sexual power women wield over men, which brings us, once again, to the study of sadomasochism.

As Peter Tupper’s quotation from the beginning of this analysis suggests, it is common practice to place sadomasochistic sexual practices within the parameters of the modern age. Even those who trace its origins often fail to recognize the connections between sadomasochism and its cultural significance. Rather, there is often a tendency among scholars to regard sadomasochism on a small scale, in a strictly pathological sense, if they regard it at all. From a cultural standpoint, the notion of voluntary suffering at the hands of a higher power is not only paramount to sadomasochism, but it was very much embedded in the medieval subconscious: from Latin Christendom, to fiefdom, to courtly romance. This suffering plays out in Chrétien’s writing, as Lancelot suffers at the hands of a quasi-divine figure (Guinevere) and to a much larger extent, love. More specifically, Lancelot suffers as a result of the courtly love in which he willingly indulges. Within the parameters of the narrative, it functions as a higher power, a contract, that cannot be denied or broken.

In this particular study, sadomasochistic erotica is defined as any media that sexually arouses or titillates based on its representation of sadomasochism. But what is sadomasochism? What it essentially boils down to is the ability to consensually derive pleasure from inflicting or receiving pain/humiliation. Sadomasochists are typically divided into two categories: dominants and submissives or sadists and masochists. When it comes to regarding sadomasochism as a ritual, it is important to note that the “Ritual is a powerful force in human affairs... in some rituals, individuals transition from one social role to another. . . In the liminal phase of the ritual, participants inhabit a social space with new social rules that can be inversions of normal society.”⁵¹ In courtly culture we see men (be them courtly poets, lovers, or fictional characters) transition from the dominant role to the submissive role. We also see women transition from the submissive role to the dominant role. The understanding of courtly love as a (masochistic) contract is also noteworthy in this instance, as it constitutes a social space with very specific rules. These rules are

⁴⁴ Ibid, 42.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 57.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 53.

⁴⁷ The impact of Chrétien’s writing on medieval sexual practices is certainly recognized by Dante, who cites the love affair between Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta as the result of the two having read *Knight of the Cart*.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 127.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 131.

⁵⁰ Joris Lammers and Roland Imhoff, “Power and Sadomasochism: Understanding the Antecedents of a Knotty Relationship,” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* vol. 7, no. 2 (2016): 1.

⁵¹ Peter Tupper, *A Lover’s Pinch: A Cultural History of Sadomasochism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2018), 17-18.

very much an inversion of the norms of medieval gender relations. In short, because courtly love emulates the crucial elements of the sadomasochistic ritual, it is essential to regard courtly romance literature as part of the cultural history of sadomasochism.

So we return to the text, to that bridge of sharpened steel where pain and pleasure become one:

Love, which led and guided him,
Comforted and healed him at once
And made his suffering a pleasure⁵²

As previously stated, there is a masochistic association between love, pain, and pleasure throughout this text. Because the suffering Lancelot endures is facilitated by Guinevere, and the two are bound by the masochistic contract, she is situated as his dominatrix. According to Cohen, this is “the role of the woman of cold pleasure who enjoys the negation of her lover rather than of her self. . . the role of domina/dominatrix whose distant delectation Lancelot’s own suffering is predicated upon.”⁵³ However, Lancelot’s excursion on the sword bridge is not the only instance in *Knight of the Cart* where suffering and satisfaction are conflated.

Another precedent of pleasurable pain is set early on in the narrative. As with Lancelot’s experience on the sword ridge, this scene also establishes a direct connection between love and wounding:

Love frequently reopened
The wound it had dealt him;
Yet he never wrapped it
To let it heal or recover,
For he had no desire or thought
To find a doctor or to bandage it,
Unless the wound grew deeper.
But willingly would he seek that certain one⁵⁴

This passage is especially noteworthy, as it illustrates how Guinevere (Lancelot’s “certain one”) is viewed as the disseminator of both pain and remedies. Lancelot does not want to consult a doctor: the only remedy he desires lies with his queen. Yet it is at her behest that Lancelot has received his wounds in the first place. Thus, love is responsible for injuring Lancelot while simultaneously holding the key to his recovery. This discrepancy between hurting and healing plays a big role in sadomasochism, wherein the application of aftercare is often overseen by the same dominant party that subjects the submissive party to physical pain. It is also important to note that Lancelot intentionally leaves his wounds unbandaged; he has no desire for them to heal. In other words, he is content enduring the pain of his injuries. It is as if Lancelot enjoys the pain and would only consult a medical professional if absolutely necessary.

Along with the masochistic association between love, pain, and pleasure, Lancelot’s quest is fraught with elements of sadomasochistic ritualism. According to Peter Tupper, sadomasochistic erotica often appears with an air of spiritual resonance: “Sacher-Masoch [*Venus in Furs*] explicitly drew connections between. . . desires, Catholicism, and paganism, which give his novel suggestion of a personal religious rite.”⁵⁵ Chrétien’s writing establishes the same connections. For example, as Lancelot pursues the missing queen, “Mundane objects acquire great symbolic value” while he wades deeper and deeper into the sadomasochistic ritual.⁵⁶ One example of this can be seen

when Lancelot discovers a piece of Guinevere’s hair. What follows is nothing short of worship:

Never will the eye of man see
Anything so highly honored
As those strands, which he began to adore,
Touching them a hundred thousand times
To his eyes, his mouth,
His forehead, and his cheeks.
He showed his joy in every way
And felt himself most happy and rewarded.
He placed them on his breast near his heart,
Between his chemise and his skin.
He would not trade them for a cart loaded
With emeralds and carbuncles;
Nor did he fear that ulcers
Or any other disease would afflict him;
He had no use for magic potions mixed with pearls,
For drugs to combat pleurisy, for theriaca...
No use for prayers to St. Martin and St. James!
He placed so much faith in these strands of hair
That he had no need of any other aid.⁵⁷

Not only does this passage illustrate Lancelot’s association between mundane objects (strands of hair) and a greater allusive value, but it also elucidates Lancelot’s worship of Guinevere as a quasi-divine figure. The strands of hair are cherished as a relic that eclipses all other remedies (both spiritual and secular). In tandem with this worship, Lancelot seems to take an erotic pleasure in rubbing Guinevere’s hair all over his body. This pleasure plays out in such vivid detail that it resembles a scene of sexual gratification. Guinevere’s hair acts as a stand-in for the queen herself, and when Lancelot comes across these strands, he projects his sexual desires onto them. It is a scene ripe with the potential for titillation, one that foreshadows Lancelot’s subsequent sexual union with the queen.

Lancelot’s worship of Guinevere is fully realized when the two consummate their physical relationship. The scene plays out as a religious rite turned sexual romp:⁵⁸

He came next to that [bed] of the Queen;
Lancelot bowed and worshiped before her,
For he did not have that much faith in any saint.
The Queen stretched out
Her arms toward him, embraced him,
Hugged him to her breast
And drew him into the bed beside her.⁵⁹

In this passage, Lancelot’s adoration of Guinevere is actualized in religious, albeit sexual, terms. He literally bows before her in worship. In this moment, Lancelot’s submission to Guinevere is at its most overt. The use of the word “worship” is especially noteworthy to this end, as it expresses in literal terms the subordination Lancelot willingly endures for his dominatrix. In this scene, Lancelot’s masochistic desires play out as a religious rite: this is supported by Cohen, who argues that “Lancelot’s reverence [of Guinevere] translates the sexual into the spiritual.”⁶⁰ The spiritual resonance of this scene along with the titillation implicit in their sexually charged embrace help cement this work as a piece of sadomasochistic erotica.

⁵² Troyes, *Lancelot*, 131.

⁵³ Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 102-103.

⁵⁴ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 59.

⁵⁵ Tupper, *A Lover’s Pinch*, 137.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 18.

⁵⁹ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 195.

⁶⁰ Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 104.

This religious connection also thrusts Lancelot into the role of the masochistic martyr. When Lancelot makes his way to Guinevere's chambers, he receives yet another injury:

Lancelot prepared and readied himself
To loosen the window.
He grasped the bars, strained, and pulled,
Until he bent them all
And was able to free them from their fittings.
But the iron was so sharp
That he cut the end
Of his little finger to the quick
And severed the whole
First joint of the next finger⁶¹

Once again, this scene suggests a connection between pain and pleasure, as Lancelot receives these injuries as he makes his way to Guinevere's bed: as he makes his way to sexual gratification. He must enter a world of pain to enter a world of pleasure. For Lancelot, pleasure always entails pain, and vice versa. In this particular instance, however, Lancelot becomes a martyr for love. More specifically, he "suffers and bleeds, his martyrdom for love."⁶² This notion of martyrdom provides yet another connection between love, pain, and pleasure. It also supports the notion that Lancelot's masochism plays out in spiritual terms.

When it comes to sadomasochistic erotica, it can be said that Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* bears striking similarities to other works in this literary tradition. In Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, for example, the sadomasochistic ritual is "performed with contracts, disguises, whippings, masks, cuckolding, and role play."⁶³ Similarly, Lancelot is bound to Guinevere through the masochistic contract, through the rules of courtly love. Also, disguise plays a major role in Lancelot's quest; he bares the moniker of knight of the cart for a lengthy period, his true name left unknown until Guinevere restores his identity:

she [Guinevere] rushed forward and called to him,
Shouting for all to hear
In a very loud voice: 'Lancelot!
Turn around and behold
Who is watching you'⁶⁴

The connections between Lancelot and the sadomasochistic ritual do not stop here, however.

The imagery Chrétien employs also lends itself to the literary tradition of sadomasochistic erotica. The most iconic and enduring among these images is that of a powerful woman holding a whip. This image is not foreign to *Knight of the Cart*:

There came a girl riding
Across the heath
On a tawny mule,
With her mantle unpinned and hair disheveled.
She had a whip⁶⁵

As previously stated, whips and whippings are very crucial to sadomasochistic ritualism. They are symbolic of the dominatrix's power over her subordinate masochist. Likewise, this whip-wielding woman demands satisfaction from Lancelot, and like a good masochist, he submits to her wishes. Specifically, she demands

the head of an individual Lancelot has just defeated in combat. As Feinstein suggests, Lancelot endures a "struggle as to how to keep both his promise to give the lady the head of the defeated knight and grant the defeated knight mercy, as is his custom."⁶⁶ In the end, Lancelot submits to the lady's wishes, and this submission is central to the submission/domination that defines male/female relations in this text.

Cuckolding and role play are also central to *Knight of the Cart's* status as a work of sadomasochistic erotica. In one particular instance, a lady puts Lancelot in a situation where he has the potential to be made a cuckold:

Help! Help!
Sir knight – you who are my guest --
If you do not pull this other knight from off me,
I'll not find anyone to pull him away;
And if you do not help me at once
He will shame me before your eyes!
You are the one to share my bed,
As you have sworn to me!
Will this man forcibly have his will
With me before your eyes?⁶⁷

In this moment, the lady is not in any real danger. She is role playing with her personal guards to create the illusion that she is being assaulted. This illusion places Lancelot in a position where he believes he will be made a cuckold if he does not intervene. The role play and cuckolding may not disseminate from Guinevere, Lancelot's primary dominatrix, but it is still a widely relevant narrative device that helps situate Chrétien's writing as sadomasochistic erotica.

Another important thing to consider is the role that public humiliation plays in Lancelot's quest. Throughout the narrative, the knight endures a thorough social stigmatization. The stigma itself stems from his status as the eponymous knight of the cart. According to Cohen, "The cart is described as a space wholly outside of chivalric identity. To enter its ignoble confines is to become a mere subject of the law rather than its agent."⁶⁸ Therefore, Lancelot's decision to enter the cart is understood as a willing act of self-emasculation that effectively strips him of his social clout and renders him a pariah in the public eye. No longer is he regarded with renown as an executor of the King's laws; he is regarded as a common criminal. In fact, Lancelot remains symbolically branded throughout a bulk of the narrative and is subject to mass ridicule on several occasions. In one instance, a group of revelers actively avoid him:

Look at that knight, look!
It's the one who was driven in the cart.
Let no one dare continue
His play while he is among us.⁶⁹

In another instance, he is directly admonished: "The one who was watching him reproached him / Bitterly for having ridden in the cart."⁷⁰ Both cases illustrate the ramifications of Lancelot's decision to ride in the cart. His quest to rescue Guinevere leaves him marked, and the lasting effect of this mark is ridicule in the public sphere.

Lancelot's ridicule is essential to understanding him as a masochist. In the world of sadomasochism,⁷¹ the dominant party

⁶⁶ Feinstein, "Losing your Head," 52.

⁶⁷ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 47.

⁶⁸ Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 93.

⁶⁹ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 71.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 95.

⁷¹ The general information on sadomasochism used throughout the breadth of this academic inquiry is based, in part, on the personal accounts of members from the BDSM community (who will remain anonymous for the purposes of this particular study).

⁶¹ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 193.

⁶² Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 104.

⁶³ Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, "Venus in Furs," in *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 137.

⁶⁴ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 153.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 117.

(the dominatrix, master, etc.) often takes great pleasure in leaving marks on the submissive party (the masochist, slave, etc.). These marks are widely superficial (bruises, hickies, etc.), but they can also be of symbolic nature. In any case, they are meant to denote the dominant party's complete and total ownership over the submissive party. Lancelot's experience with the cart allows Guinevere to leave a lasting, albeit indirect, mark on her subordinate rescuer. To secure her favor and affection, Lancelot must receive this mark willingly⁷² and endure every modicum of humiliation that comes with it.⁷³ This brings us to the point where the existing scholarship on *Knight of the Cart* ends and the intervention of this particular study begins.

Cohen and Feinstein may recognize the male subordination/female domination, the various elements of masochism, and the resulting psychological implications within and without the text, but they fail to recognize the role and importance of humiliation to Lancelot's quest and subsequent relationship with Guinevere. According to *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, "sadism and masochism refer to taking pleasure in others' or one's own pain or humiliation."⁷⁴ In other words, humiliation is just as crucial to sadomasochism as pain. This is why we find Lancelot's entire identity cloaked by the veil of social disgrace. Another connection Cohen and Feinstein fail to make is the connection between Lancelot, Guinevere, and modern BDSM. In modern BDSM, the dominant party dominates "through spanking, flogging, verbal humiliation, bondage, cross-dressing, and other tactics."⁷⁵ This verbal humiliation is central to Guinevere's domination of Lancelot throughout the narrative.

As previously stated, along with pain, humiliation is a condition of the masochistic contract. It may be delivered, overseen, or set in motion by the dominatrix, but it must always entail some degree of shame or emasculation. Similarly, Guinevere subjects Lancelot to public humiliation on several occasions. In one particular instance, she chides him during his engagement with Maleagant: "Ah, Lancelot! What could it be / That makes you act so foolishly?"⁷⁶ This question has a profound effect on Lancelot. It leaves him retreating inward, into the realm of introspection. Lancelot's self-reflection is made evident in the following passage: "Lancelot was most ashamed / And vexed and hated himself."⁷⁷ Even after he endures the pain and humiliation of his quest, successfully rescuing Guinevere from her imprisonment, she chastises him.

When Lancelot is victorious in his battle against Maleagant, Guinevere denies any and all gratitude towards him. She publicly and intentionally embarrasses him at the very moment when he believes his suffering is at an end: "to pain and embarrass him further / She refused to answer him a single word / And passed into another room instead."⁷⁸ This process of denying satisfaction is another crucial element of sadomasochism. It involves the dominatrix withholding pleasure from her submissive partner until she believes they have suffered to an appropriate degree or for an appropriate amount of time. This brings us to the subject of titillation.

To assess how titillation functions within Chrétien's larger poetic design, one must take a closer look at the imagery of *Knight of the*

Cart. Not only do we find images of dominatrices with whips, but we also find images of cuckoldry and sexual union. Let us return to that moment where Guinevere embraces Lancelot, and accepts him as her lover:

The Queen stretched out
Her arms toward him, embraced him,
Hugged him to her breast
And drew him into the bed beside her.⁷⁹

This is a viscerally sensual moment for Guinevere and Lancelot, and Chrétien spares no linguistic expense in playing up the provocative nature of his subject matter. The titillation here is multifaceted: Not only does Guinevere press her breast against Lancelot, but she is also the one to initiate the movement from one social space to another. The contextual parameters of Guinevere's bed constitute a sexual space, and when she brings Lancelot into this space, their status as lovers is solidified. As such, the imagery of Guinevere drawing Lancelot into bed with her could be construed as sexually stimulating because of the potential sexual energy implicit in the act. It is also erotic because of the power Guinevere holds over Lancelot. She is in control, and when she pulls Lancelot into bed with her there is an anticipation that she will retain this control throughout the sexual engagement. Images like this may be titillating, but what do they say about Chrétien's relationship with Marie de Champagne?

As the aforementioned synthesis of Feinstein and Cohen's scholarship suggests, the reality beyond Lancelot's masochistic submission to Guinevere is not particularly divergent from the fiction. By Chrétien's own admission, he is "one who is entirely at her [Marie de Champagne's] service / In anything he can undertake in this world."⁸⁰ By that same token, he wrote *Knight of the Cart* at her behest, presenting himself as her humble servant in the prologue. Like Lancelot, Chrétien is a slave to "Love's commands" who willingly submits himself to the rule of a dominatrix.⁸¹ Chrétien's masochistic proclivities resonate through Lancelot, and vice versa. They speak to the existence of male masochism in both courtly culture and its fiction. According to Cohen, "The story of Lancelot's passionate submission to Guinevere as told by Chrétien de Troyes is no doubt visible as a historical trace within that critical discourse that reified male masochism and attached its painful pleasures to a specific sexuality. . . Chrétien's well-known narrative established a trajectory for masochisms to come."⁸² Inciteful words, to be sure, but they fail to capture the role Chrétien played in developing a new kind of fiction. *Knight of the Cart* may have established a trajectory of masochistic behavior, but it also established a trajectory of sadomasochistic erotica.

THE DAWNING OF A GENRE

"Women's power lies in man's passion"

- Leopold von Sacher-Masoch

The legacy of Chrétien's eroticism lives on in the literary endeavors of two particular authors: Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and Marquis de Sade. The first of these authors, Sacher-Masoch, is the result of the masochistic trajectory Cohen cites in relation to *Knight of the Cart* and the circumstances of its conception. One of his works, *Venus in Furs*, explores the masochistic proclivities of a man called Severin, who fantasizes about being dominated by women adorned with garments of fur. The notion of male subordination/female

⁷² This notion of willingness is supported by Cohen, who argues that "masochism belongs to a willing victim."

⁷³ That being said, it is important to note that although Lancelot willingly endures public humiliation, he derives no direct satisfaction from the humiliation itself. In this way, Lancelot's public humiliation does not carry the same degree of masochistic pleasure associated with his frequent woundings.

⁷⁴ Ali Hébert and Angela Weaver, "An examination of personality characteristics associated with BDSM orientations," *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* vol. 23, no. 2 (2014): 106.

⁷⁵ Danielle Lindemann, "Will the Real Dominatrix Please Stand Up: Artistic Purity and Professionalism in the S&M Dungeon," *Sociological Forum* vol. 25, no. 3 (2010): 588.

⁷⁶ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 155.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 155.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 167.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 195.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁸¹ Ibid, 155.

⁸² Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 78-79.

domination is central to Severin's desire: "If I were faced with the choice of dominating or being dominated, I would choose the latter. It would be far more satisfying to be the slave of a beautiful woman."⁸³ What emerges in Sacher-Masoch's writing is an eroticism more overt, more self-aware than the titillation present in Chrétien's writing. No longer is the masochistic contract stipulated in terms of lady and servant; it is stipulated in terms of master and slave. Despite this fundamental development, the similarities between Sacher-Masoch's literature and Chrétien's literature abound.

One such commonality can be found with the implementation of fur and whips to establish erotic imagery. In the case of *Knight of the Cart*, the two images appear separate. In one instance, a woman on a mule comes riding up to Lancelot holding a whip. In another instance, Guinevere herself is depicted in fur:

the queen came up
In a spotless white gown;
She had no tunic or coat over it,
Only a short mantle
Of rich cloth and marmot fur⁸⁴

This motif of dominatrix figures in fur and wielding whips has become firmly cemented in the world of sadomasochistic erotica. In Sacher-Masoch's writing, the two images are delivered in tandem: "She goes over to the mantelpiece, takes the whip off the ledge and, watching me with a smile, makes it whistle through the air; then she slowly rolls up the sleeves of her fur jacket."⁸⁵ The innovation of Sacher-Masoch's contribution to the sadomasochistic erotica is not with the genesis of fur and whip imagery, as Chrétien committed these images to the genre hundreds of years before *Venus in Furs* was written, but rather with their proximity. Not only does Sacher-Masoch bring these images into close association with one another, but he does so in an unabashedly erotic fashion. No longer is the dominatrix figure simply a vehicle for male subordination/female domination. In this text, the fur-clad dominatrix holds a whip and has no qualms with using it on her masochistic slave in scenes directly intended to titillate.

Another similarity is found with the socio-cultural transgressions of both texts. As we have established, the male subordination/female domination behind Chrétien's writing (and his relationship with Marie de Champagne) effectively inverted the normative gender roles of the Middle Ages. Also noteworthy is the presence of class transgression in *Knight of the Cart*. As Lancelot jumps into the cart and reaps the associated social consequences, he effectively abandons his previous status as an upstanding knight and willingly assumes the social stigma of a common criminal. This kind of class transgression is also found in *Venus in Furs*: "When Severin abandons his life as a privileged aristocrat to become Wanda's servant in *Venus in Furs*, this class cross-dressing carries a potent eroticism, but the desires it performs are also economic, nationalistic, and historical."⁸⁶ Again, the presence of female mastery/male servitude undoes the typical gender assignments instituted by both Sacher-Masoch's environment (19th century France) and the social climate of his text.

In fact, Sacher-Masoch's ideas of masochistic eroticism were such an inversion of the normative gender roles and values of his time that his name became forever associated with a certain breed of "perversion." According to Cohen, Sacher-Masoch was "horrified to learn that Krafft-Ebing had named a perversion after him in the *Psychopathia Sexualis*, wholly missing the point of the 'folklore,

history, politics, mysticism, eroticism, nationalism' condensed around the scenes of flagellation in his narratives."⁸⁷ In the end, masochism is the legacy of Sacher-Masoch. Despite his sincerest efforts to break convention, he has been pigeonholed by clinical psychoanalysis. This raises the question, does lumping all these authors into such categories as masochistic and sadomasochistic fundamentally undermine their achievements? Is it a limiting factor? Is it yet another example of language's limitations? According to Cohen, "for masochism to be useful in philosophical inquiry it must be depathologized, stripped of the stigma of perversion and rewritten as a phenomenon simultaneously social, epistemological, and sexual."⁸⁸ Categorization may reflect the limitations of language, but for the purposes of academic inquiry, a name must be employed to account for such a unique and illustrious sexuality/literary tradition. So long as we recognize masochism in its own terms, in a non-stigmatizing fashion, the terminology need not negate the socio-cultural transgressions achieved by both Chrétien and Sacher-Masoch. This brings us to Marquis de Sade.

When it comes to Marquis de Sade, it can be said that his writing was equally integral to the evolution of sadomasochistic erotica. One of his texts, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, reifies the association between pain and pleasure propagated throughout *Knight of the Cart*: "It has pleased Nature so to make us that we attain happiness only by way of pain."⁸⁹ Along with this association between pain and pleasure, it can be said that there are many similarities between Sade's writing and Sacher-Masoch's writing. *Philosophy in the Bedroom* and *Venus in Furs* both make repeated allusions to Venus. In a more general sense, however, Marquis de Sade and Sacher-Masoch made integral contributions to what Tupper has called "the evolving form of sadomasochistic erotica."⁹⁰ The evolution of sadomasochistic erotica from Chrétien, to Sade, to Sacher-Masoch reveals how eroticism has become more overt and more self-aware than the titillation present in Chrétien's writing/era. Our modern understanding of sadomasochism lends itself to the developments these two authors contributed to this particular genre. Their writing was an elaboration on the themes present in Chrétien's writing.

Another important thing to consider is the spatial register of France with respect to sadomasochistic erotica. All three of the aforementioned authors exist as part of the larger French literary tradition. Even Sacher-Masoch, a natural born Austrian, was "the literary darling of France in the 1880s."⁹¹ In any case there seems to be a connection between this particular brand of erotica and French culture. However, some scholars have noticed an even larger correlation between France and erotic literature. According to Henry L. Marchand, "it is an indisputable fact that France has for many centuries been renowned as the home par excellence of eroticism" and this fact is "buttressed by numerous phenomena, historical and social."⁹² But how is all of this relevant? *Knight of the Cart* and the larger French tradition may have spawned some of the first, fully realized works of sadomasochistic erotica, but how is this lineage relevant in light of recent cultural developments? To answer these questions, we must shift our gaze to the present, to that so-called "modern" age.

When it comes to sadomasochistic erotica in the modern age, the first work that comes to mind is E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Although the presence of such works as the *Fifty Shades* series

⁸⁷ Ibid, 90.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁸⁹ Marquis de Sade, *The Marquis de Sade: Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press, 1990), 202.

⁹⁰ Tupper, *A Lover's Pinch*, 136.

⁹¹ Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 90.

⁹² Henry L. Marchand, *The Erotic History of France* (New York: The Panurge Press, 1933), 16.

⁸³ Sacher-Masoch, "Venus in Furs," 163.

⁸⁴ Troyes, *Lancelot*, 191.

⁸⁵ Sacher-Masoch, "Venus in Furs," 185.

⁸⁶ Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 90.

illustrates the enduring relevance of sadomasochism in popular culture, it also reflects a departure in the realm of sadomasochistic erotica. According to Tupper, “The *Fifty Shades* phenomenon does not mean that the mainstream has embraced mainstream BDSM. Instead, the popularity indicates a redrawing of the borders between vanilla and kink. BDSM sexuality is acceptable to the mainstream as long as it is contained within a traditional monogamous heterosexual romance plot, reactionary gender roles, [etc.].”⁹³ In this way, the integration of sadomasochistic erotica into the realm of popular culture has effectively forced normative gender roles into a genre that has always existed to subvert them. The very nature of courtly love and courtly romance literature is found in its inversion of medieval gender roles. Viewing Chrétien’s *Knight of the Cart* as the progenitor of sadomasochistic erotica allows us to see how people have historically disregarded the sexual norms associated with gender and how a trajectory of male masochism surfaced and influenced subsequent patterns of sexual/literary exploits.

This subversion of gendered sexual norms raged onward in the writings of Sade and Sacher-Masoch, the latter of which based his entire erotica on the premise of men submitting themselves to the domination of women. This transgression of normativity is at the heart of sadomasochistic erotica, and it is sorely lacking in the *Fifty Shades* series. According to Tupper, criticisms against *Fifty Shades of Grey* included that “the BDSM depicted was too soft and tame... this is the unresolvable dilemma of the mainstreaming of kink. For BDSM to appear in the beer commercial or the Hollywood romance, it must, by definition, have lost nearly all its transgressive, authentic edge.”⁹⁴ Because the *Fifty Shades* series represents such a vast departure from the boundary-breaking⁹⁵ efforts of Chrétien, Sade, and Sacher-Masoch, it stands to reason that it may not be a veritable entry in the genre to begin with.

In fact, one could even argue that the *Fifty Shades* series fails to capture the essence of sadomasochism completely: “The trilogy’s blatant misunderstanding of consent shows that the mainstream wants the toys and the glamour of BDSM, but not the ethos of negotiated roles.”⁹⁶ Even in Chrétien’s writing, the dominant and submissive roles are clearly spelled out in the masochistic contract that binds Lancelot and Guinevere through rules of courtly love that establish male subordination and female domination. This is not to say that all modern depictions miss the mark, however.

A Knight’s Tale (2001) may not exemplify sadomasochism as overtly as Sade or Sacher-Masoch, but it does pay homage to the roots of the masochistic trajectory established during the Middle Ages with courtly romance. In one particular sequence, the protagonist, a peasant by the name of William who is posing as a knight to compete in jousting tournaments, submits to his lover Jocelyn’s wish to have him lose a number of matches until she is satisfied. What follows is a montage of William being battered and struck repeatedly by enemy lances, intercut with close-up shots of Jocelyn’s face as she seems to take an erotic pleasure in watching her lover suffer. This sequence functions on multiple levels: It conflates pain and pleasure, it illustrates William’s complete submission to his lover, and it elucidates the public humiliation he willingly endures for her (however, much like Lancelot, William does not derive an overt pleasure in the humiliation itself, which admittedly calls his degree of masochism into question). Where the *Fifty Shades* series affirms normative gender paradigms, *A Knight’s Tale* (2001) subverts them. It is no coincidence that one of the only modern depictions of sexually

charged male subordination/female domination appears in a film set in the Middle Ages, as this dichotomy permeates the poetic endeavors of Chrétien de Troyes. By including scenes like this, *A Knight’s Tale* (2001) effectively pays homage to courtly culture and to the social and temporal parameters of the high Middle Ages.

In a general sense, the film recognizes the historical trace of male masochism instituted during the medieval period by drawing direct inspiration from Chrétien’s writing in its representation of male subordination/female domination. In fact, the character Geoffrey Chaucer directly identifies the similarity between the protagonists of the film and the protagonists of *Knight of the Cart*. In one particular sequence, he notices Jocelyn approaching William’s bed chamber in the night. In response to this sight, Chaucer says to himself, “Guinevere comes to Lancelot.”⁹⁷ The film recognizes the similarities between Jocelyn and Guinevere and between William and Lancelot. Like Lancelot, William submits himself to a dominatrix figure and consents to her every wish, even when it results in his own physical pain. Representations like this in modern media speak to the relevance of *Knight of the Cart* and the sadomasochism it eroticizes. Both transgress. Both titillate.

At this juncture it is important to note that although the Middle Ages spawned some of the first fully realized works of sadomasochistic erotica (*Knight of the Cart* acting as an important, pre-modern precursor to modern sadomasochism as we know it), the historical trace of sadomasochism itself arguably goes back even further, to the classical period. In Ovid’s *Amores*, men who fall in love are struck with Cupid’s arrow, and when they become enamored, they are “miserably in love.”⁹⁸ This conflation of love and misery is the exact same conflation observable throughout *Knight of the Cart*. Furthermore, in Ovid’s writing, the impetus of love is the receiving of a wound via Cupid’s bow and arrow. Love and pain are inextricably linked, and this link is virtually indistinguishable from the link Chrétien creates in his own writing. Also noteworthy is the fact that any individual struck with Cupid’s arrow becomes an “abject slave of love” thereafter.⁹⁹ This association between love and servitude is strikingly similar to the male subordination/female domination observable throughout Chrétien’s writing. With these similarities in mind, it is possible that Chrétien may have been inspired by Ovid’s writing to some degree when he wove his tale of masochistic love. As a result, sadomasochism may have been embedded in the public consciousness as early as the classical period, with authors like Ovid readily using it as a motif. Despite Ovid’s masochistic depiction of love, there is one crucial difference between *Amores* and *Knight of the Cart* that cannot be ignored.

The major difference between these two depictions of masochistic love is found with the impetus of said love. In Ovid’s writing, male lovers are struck by Cupid’s arrow, an outside force completely beyond mortal control. Thus, the sadomasochistic romance is thrust upon the lover without his own consent, and he becomes a slave to his lover without having made a prior decision to become her willing servant. The masochistic contract never enters into the equation. In Chrétien’s writing, however, the masochistic lover wades into his servitude with complete submission. He willingly consents to the masochistic contract: He is not struck by some overwhelming force beyond his own control, and he willingly chooses to be a slave to his mistress. This is the key difference between the

⁹³ Tupper, *A Lover’s Pinch*, 258.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 261.

⁹⁵ As Cohen states, masochism is “an inherently boundary-smashing phenomenon” that “potentially undoes the world” Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines*, 90.

⁹⁶ Tupper, *A Lover’s Pinch*, 258.

⁹⁷ *A Knight’s Tale*, Directed by Brian Helgeland, Columbia Pictures, 11 May, 2001.

⁹⁸ Ovid, *Amores (Book 1)*, trans. William Turpin (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 22.

⁹⁹ Phyllis Katz, “Teaching the Elegiac Lover in Ovid’s ‘Amores,’” *The Classical World* vol. 102, no. 2 (2009): 163.

depiction of masochistic romance observable in the classical period and the medieval period. This difference places Chrétien's writing a step closer to modern sadomasochistic erotica, as it illustrates a consensually masochistic depiction of romance. *Knight of the Cart* may only be a precursor to modern sadomasochistic erotica, but unlike Amores, it is a fully realized entry in the genre.

THE GREAT COALESCENCE

"The questions we ask of a text determine, in part, what that text says to us. That is to say, our critical approaches, methods, or theories will contribute to the interpretation or meaning that emerges from any text."¹⁰⁰

The critical approaches of this particular study have involved the social, historical, and literary factors responsible for sadomasochistic erotica and its subsequent evolution in popular culture. Therefore, the conclusion that Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* exists as a progenitor of this genre reveals just as much about courtly romance literature as it does about courtly culture. In the text, we see the masochistic association of love, pain, and pleasure, elements of sadomasochistic ritualism, and iconography that has endured for centuries. We see women in fur and women with whips: elements central to Sade and Sacher-Masoch, the individuals responsible for sadism and masochism as we know them today.

Scholars like Cohen and Feinstein have extrapolated these elements from Chrétien's writing, but there has yet to be a complete recognition and universal acceptance of *Knight of the Cart* as a work of sadomasochistic erotica in the academic sphere. Not only does Lancelot play on S&M in order to titillate, but it was among the first to do so in a way that is recognizable with other works in the genre. Scholars have also overlooked the presence and importance of public humiliation to Lancelot's masochism, the sexually stimulating imagery, and the connection to modern BDSM that permeates the text. Even the historical trace of male masochism Cohen alludes to does not encompass the trace of eroticism that has also resulted from Chrétien's poetic endeavors.

This brings us to the titular question: How did Venus get her furs? The answer only comes through the marriage of multiple disciplines. It cannot be extrapolated from the text alone, nor can it be plucked from the annals of history with equivalent shortsightedness. In the end, the social history of medieval France tells us as much about their literature as their literature tells us about the social history of medieval France. They form and inform one another in an endless cycle of cultural expression and re-expression. In the case of sadomasochistic erotica, it is a cycle that became palpable with courtly romance fiction: a cycle that lives on in popular culture. The answer to the question, then, is quite simple: How did Venus get her furs? She inherited them from Guinevere.

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¹⁰⁰ Sturges, "Chrétien's *Knight of the Cart* and Critical Theory," 2.

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“Finished knowing – then –”: The Destruction of Certainty in Dickinson’s Death Poems

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the ways in which Emily Dickinson’s death poems challenge romanticized nineteenth-century and Puritan conceptions of death, undermining the idea of death as a meaningful, knowable phenomenon. As Dickinson’s poems place pressure on Puritan logic—indeed, on the idea that logic might be applied to death at all—they rupture syntactically and semantically, rendering futile the search for certainty in death. This destruction of certainty, as I argue, allows Dickinson’s death poems to explore a variety of philosophical and spiritual perspectives on death and dying, taking on a renewed “life” of their own as they engage in forms of poetic play. By examining Dickinson’s poems within the context of the Civil War era and New England Puritanism, I argue that they offer a crucial rebuttal to systems of belief that were eager to bring false certainty to the unknowable.

KEYWORDS: Puritan, death, certainty, Emily Dickinson

Mr. Higginson, – Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?

—Emily Dickinson, letter to Thomas Higginson, 1862

INTRODUCTION

Summaries of Emily Dickinson’s life read as a series of contradictions. At the age of thirty-eight, she permanently confined herself within her family’s property, and yet maintained a broad network of letters to friends and family¹; she “did not see any of her almost 1,800 poems through the process of publication”² and yet committed to her own practice of binding book-like “fascicles” and, indeed, striving for publication through her communication with author Thomas Higginson³; she was raised in the Puritan tradition and yet, according to Mary Loeffelholz, her “unprofessed faith was a matter of public fact in Amherst.”⁴

It is the third point in particular that gives Dickinson’s death poems a similar sense of insurmountable tension, a noticeable pull between faith and disillusionment, comfort and terror. Her own faith dictated an immense awe and fear of death, conceiving of life as merely the process of waiting for death: “much of the average Puritan’s life was centered about and predicated on the vision of death, the afterlife, and the expected manner in which the passage from this world to the next should be made,” notes Stannard in “Death and Dying in Puritan New England.”⁵ Stannard describes a vision of religion in which religious beliefs, called “world view,” confirm and are confirmed by religious practices, or “ethos”; “the two phenomena,” he writes, “ethos [e.g.,] the prescribed way of dying) and world view (the vision or concept of death) reinforce one another and thus fused give meaning, order, and stability to their cultural source.”⁶ Dickinson’s death poems, however, flip this process on its head; they present a variety of “world views,” many of which refute and destabilize the Puritan “ethos” of death. This

destabilization is rendered visible through the poems’ own syntactical and semantic ruptures, suggesting the ultimate futility of our search for certainty in death.

BACKGROUND: TRENDS IN DICKINSON ANALYSIS

Dickinson’s death poems are a frequent subject of literary analysis. Though several critics acknowledge the poems’ nontraditional portrayals of death, few explore, as this essay aims to, the unique intersections between their form, poetic subjectivity, and sociohistorical and religious contexts. By marrying a literary historical approach with close readings of key poems in Dickinson’s oeuvre, I aim to explore the ways in which the poems arrive at *their own* deaths—of logic, of philosophy, of the very ideas on which they are grounded—on a structural and syntactic level. This unique process, I argue, works twofold, simultaneously dismantling the Puritan structures within which Dickinson was raised *and* offering the reader a playful poetic experience through which to confront questions of life and death.

Recent literary scholarship has explored the ways in which Dickinson’s death poems challenge traditional conceptions of identity. Michael Clune’s “How Poems Know What It’s Like to Die,” for instance, analyzes Dickinson’s treatment of sensory experience in “I Heard a Fly Buzz,” concluding that the poem ultimately separates experience from subject, challenging “the literary historical view that equates descriptions of first person experience with individualist ideology.”⁷ Clune argues that, rather than attempting to convince the reader that the poem is the testimony of someone who has died, Dickinson aims to create “a convincing experiential analogue for death.”⁸

Much critical analysis has also been dedicated to Dickinson’s varying poetic treatments of Puritanism. In “The Glimmering Frontier: Emily Dickinson and Publication,” Martin Greenup is quick to note how wildly Dickinson’s stances vary across her poems: “aspects of Puritanism feature prominently in her poems,” he notes, “either because she is challenging its assumptions and tradition, or because she is evoking its theology.”⁹ Throughout the essay, Greenup examines the tensions between Dickinson’s desire for religious immortality (achieved in faith) and literary immortality (achieved in

¹ Wendy Martin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.

² Cristanne Miller, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them* (London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 1.

³ Martin Greenup, “The Glimmering Frontier: Emily Dickinson and Publication,” *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 33 (2004): 351.

⁴ Mary Loeffelholz, *The Value of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 110.

⁵ David E. Stannard, “Death and Dying in Puritan New England,” *The American Historical Review* 78.5 (Dec 1973): 1305.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1307.

⁷ Michael Clune, “How Poems Know What It’s Like to Die,” *ELH* 83.2 (Summer 2016): 635.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 636.

⁹ Martin Greenup, “The Glimmering Frontier: Emily Dickinson and Publication,” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 33 (2004): 349.

publication), musing, “it is as though Dickinson’s desires for lasting literary success are cast into doubt by Puritanism.”¹⁰ Greenup’s analysis of these apparently contradictory impulses is typical of other Dickinson criticism, centering more on the internal paradoxes of the poet herself than the contradictory structures and philosophies crafted in her poems.

This is not to say that close readings of Dickinson’s poems on the syntactic level are lacking; there are, to be sure, many and varied investigations into her nontraditional uses of language and syntax, all of which note her uniqueness among her nineteenth-century contemporaries. Espousing a perspective consistent with other Dickinson theorists, Mary Loeffelholz observes,

Dickinson’s diction favors the colloquial middle registers of American English, hoarding multisyllabic Latinate words—such as “Provincially”—for emphasis, wrenching plain German monosyllables into new grammatical places, as in “Miles of Stare,” and eschewing the kinds of classical literary references and lumbering poetical stage-sets that conventionally advertised nineteenth-century poets’ elite learning and demanded similar learning from their readers.¹¹

Loeffelholz, too, is quick to note Dickinson’s religious malleability:

Dickinson never fixed herself permanently in the posture of the lonely skeptic superior to the “deluded” believers. Her many and memorable blasphemies almost always take the part of human solidarity with the things of this earth against divine absence or vindictiveness, returning time and again to their starting point in “The Fact that Earth is Heaven— / Whether Heaven is Heaven or not.”¹²

Rather than the philosophical stances Dickinson’s poems espouse, however, this essay is most interested in examining the process of arriving at those stances. By analyzing the ways in which the poems themselves outline and follow (or, indeed, diverge from) a process of sense-making, I offer a new interpretation of Dickinson’s poems: not as means to philosophical ends, but rather experiments unto themselves, in which the dissolution of the speaker’s voice, rhythm, central imagery, or syntax are as instructive as the conclusions at which they arrive.

A TRADITION OF ROMANCE

Though Dickinson’s death poems vary widely—indeed, in many, even the references to death are implicit or allegorical—they are united in their refusal to embody romantic nineteenth-century and Puritan ideals of death. As critic Wendy Martin notes, Dickinson’s era popularized a number of rituals surrounding death: “nineteenth-century America’s widespread fascination with death and immortality was exemplified by the massive popularity of mourning manuals, the growth of the rural cemetery movement, and the near-meteoric rise of such sanitizing rituals as embalming.” Death itself, meanwhile, was increasingly romanticized: “often,” Martin notes, “death was depicted as a gentle angel, or a lover, conducting the faithful to a blissful new home.”¹³

Puritanism, meanwhile, viewed the end of life as the beginning of an eternity in heaven—but only for the few chosen for ‘salvation’ by God. In the Puritan view, salvation is predetermined (a philosophy called ‘unconditional election’): one cannot change one’s likelihood of being saved through prayer or confession of sins, as in other denominations. Since one’s earthly life did not determine salvation, it

was seen, according to David E. Stannard, “as but a ‘vapour,’ a fleeting pilgrimage” on the way to salvation or eternal damnation.¹⁴ Though the Puritan faith could not be said to romanticize death in the manner of nineteenth-century literary tradition—indeed, as Stannard notes, ‘doubt of salvation was essential to salvation and that Puritan who, for so long as he breathed, became at any time secure and comfortable in the knowledge of his salvation, was surely lost’¹⁵—it nonetheless treated death as a clear end after which lay two knowable (and known) possibilities: eternal paradise, or eternal hell.

Dickinson challenges such neat—and, in the case of nineteenth-century tradition, romanticized—conceptions of death in an 1862 poem that begins with the line “Because I could not stop for Death—.”¹⁶ To appreciate the poem’s divergence from poetic tradition at the time, it is helpful to compare it with Robert Browning’s “The Last Ride Together,” an 1835 poem that Dickinson quoted in a letter, and a later “elegy commemorating the death of a family friend, Jacob Holt.”¹⁷ As Browning’s speaker rides on horseback towards his death, he enjoys the companionship of a female lover: “My last thought was at least not vain,” he says: “I and my mistress, side by side / Shall be together, breathe and ride, / So, one day more am I deified.”¹⁸ The speaker sees himself as “deified”—treated as divine—by virtue of his connection to the human world. This connection exists in the form of his living “mistress,” whom he must leave when they no longer “breathe and ride” together—that is, when the carriage arrives at his death.

Dickinson subverts this romantic image by pairing her speaker not with a human lover, but rather “Death” personified. Though a startling departure from Browning’s living “mistress,” Dickinson’s chauffeur nonetheless offers the speaker a dignified form of companionship: “He kindly stopped for me—” the speaker notes, later underscoring “His Civility.” With such a description, Dickinson initially appears to align herself with romantic nineteenth-century conception of death: as the poem progresses, however, Dickinson begins to call this romance into question.

“The Carriage held but just Ourselves—” the speaker notes, “And Immortality.” Such a description unites the speaker and Death into a unified “Ourselves,” and opposes both to “Immortality,” who is excluded from the group. Described in such a way, “Immortality” becomes a vague, faceless force, while Death is personified all the more, cementing his role as the speaker’s companion: “We slowly drove— He knew no haste,” says the speaker. “Immortality” could be read as representative of the Puritan belief in the soul’s immortality and the afterlife; by widening the division between the speaker and Immortality, Dickinson begins to disrupt the Puritan vision of life after death, suggesting that the speaker must confront a death without “Immortality,” accompanied by the fact of Death alone.

As their carriage progresses, Dickinson again imbues the scene with hints of romance that align with traditional nineteenth-century depictions; the speaker observes,

We passed the School where Children strove
At Recess—in the Ring—
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain—
We passed the Setting Sun—

¹⁴ Stannard, “Death and Dying in Puritan New England,” 1317.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Emily Dickinson, in *Emily Dickinson’s Poems*, ed. Cristanne Miller, 239, Fascicle 23, Sheet 1, c. late 1862.

¹⁷ “The popular death-journey metaphor appears in Robert Browning’s “The Last Ride Together” (1835), which ED quoted in a letter (1885), and in an elegy commemorating the death of a family friend, Jacob Holt.” Miller, note to p. 239, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems*.

¹⁸ Robert Browning, “The Last Ride Together,” in *English Poetry III: From Tennyson to Whitman* (Harvard Classics, 1904-14), lines 19-21, <https://www.bartleby.com/42/665.html>. All subsequent references are to this edition and incorporated into the body of the essay.

¹⁰ Ibid., 352.

¹¹ Mary Loeffelholz, *The Value of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 85.

¹² Ibid., 105.

¹³ Martin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson*, 99.

The anaphora of “We passed” brings a regularity and familiarity to the lines, which is expanded upon with the alliteration of “Recess. . . Ring,” “Gazing Grain,” and “Setting Sun”; further, the transition from the human world of “Children. . . At Recess” to the natural world of the “Setting Sun” suggests that the speaker’s death is a natural process, her life ending as the day does in the glow of a “Setting Sun.”

In the dash that ends the stanza and the empty space of the stanza break that follows, we hang in the beauty of the “Setting Sun –”. Unbeknownst to us, however, the speaker is reevaluating, as she abruptly reveals at the start of the next stanza: “Or rather – He passed Us –.” Here, Dickinson calls for a renegotiation of our understanding of the “Sun” in relation to the carriage’s movement, effectively uprooting our idyllic end scene. The finality bestowed upon us by the “Setting Sun” is thus proven to be a false one; so, too, Dickinson suggests, is the ease with which we assume the conclusiveness of death. Our attention is turned inward once more as the speaker asserts both her physicality and selfhood; “The Dews” bring her a “Chill,” which her clothing (“only Gossamer, my Gown”) is insufficient to withstand. This reminder of the speaker’s body functions as another rude awakening; she is not laid to rest, but is rather alert, still attuned to her surroundings and bodily sensations.

This false ending is the first of many throughout the poem, all of which guide us towards a vision of death not as a neat end to earthly troubles, but rather an uneasy “Eternity” stretching on without the resolution that nineteenth-century Americans were so eager to apply to it. The poem’s first stanza ends with a period, while all others end in inconclusive dashes; fittingly, the poem begins with a supposed finality—the speaker’s death—and then disproves it, situating her within an “Eternity” of waiting notably distinct from either Heaven or Hell. Likewise, the first stanza is the only one that follows the proper hymn rhyme of ABCB (“me” / “Immortality”), and thus the only stanza with a sense of sonic finality. Even the poem’s ending resists its own conclusion:

Since then – ’tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity –

By positioning the “Horses’ Heads” “toward Eternity,” Dickinson endows “Eternity” with spatiality, calling upon the Christian conception of the afterlife as a place one reaches after death. Such an afterlife proves unreachable, however; though the carriage seems aimed “toward” this place, the speaker passes “centuries” in the carriage, trapped in an unending journey akin to a species of purgatory. Dickinson’s use of the term “Eternity” further highlights the purgatorial qualities of the speaker’s environment; “eternity” is principally defined as “infinite time. . . which has neither beginning nor end,”¹⁹ opening the possibility of a carriage journey not toward a spatially-fixed Christian heaven, but rather one destined to continue ad infinitum—progressing “toward,” but no closer to, a distinct spatial environment with each additional “Century” that passes. This infinite carriage ride is a sinister echo of the poem’s first line, “I could not stop for Death –”; now it is the carriage that cannot stop, that appears to bring the speaker ever closer to her death even as it traps her in purgatory. The horror of this non-ending is made all the more salient in contrast to Browning’s speaker, who longs for such an infinity: “What if we still ride on, we two,” he muses, “The instant made eternity,— / And heaven just prove that I and she / Ride, ride together, for ever [sic] ride?” (105-10).

RUPTURES IN LOGIC AND MEANING

In confronting these contradictions inherent to any conception of death, Dickinson’s poems reach levels of tension that lead to the obliteration of logic, and indeed, what might be called the destruction of the poems themselves. The poems’ search for logic ends in nothingness; so too, Dickinson suggests, might life. With this shift in reasoning, Dickinson calls into question the Calvinist conception of life as the process of waiting for death; life is indeed a process of waiting, she argues, but waiting for “nothing” to happen. In a poem that begins with the line “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,”²⁰ Dickinson once again addresses our artificial tidying of death:

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through –

The word “Sense,” described here as a physical entity capable of “breaking through,” opens up a realm of semantic possibilities, the most salient of which is “meaning, intelligibility, or coherence.”²¹ A funeral is, in effect, a way of making sense of death—of attempting to find coherence and intelligibility in the immense and sudden lack of a life. Dickinson portrays such an attempt as violent, even painful, to the speaker’s brain. “A Service, like a Drum –,” she insists, “Kept beating – beating – till I thought / My mind was going numb –.” This “treading,” crescendoing to a “breaking,” foreshadows the destructive effects of searching for a logical conception of such an ultimately unknowable, and logic-resistant, concept as death.

Dickinson amplifies the scope of this destruction in the image “Then Space – began to toll,” which recruits the vast cosmic “Space” to sound a funeral bell of its own.²² In the following stanza, cosmic forces intertwine with humanity in complex and shifting power dynamics:

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here –

“Heaven” and “Space” are recruited to honor human suffering, to join in on the funeral by sounding a “Bell”; meanwhile, however, “Being”—the collective action of humanity—acts only as an “Ear” to these cosmic forces, relegating humanity to a decidedly inferior position. Next, however, arrives the speaker’s “I,” the individual; this arrival brings with it a “Silence,” which pushes against this cosmic scale of sounding and listening: in a Heaven full of sound, where can “Silence” exist? In a “Being” full of people, where can “I”? The poem’s ambiguity escalates to new heights: does “some strange Race” refer to the union of the “I” with “Silence,” the outliers in this heavenly sounding board? Is it a new addition to Dickinson’s ever-expanding list of actors, an alien “Race” found “wrecked” and “solitary” in empty space?

In this radical absence of intelligibility, we begin to wonder whether the funeral bell is tolling for the life of the poem itself. Indeed, destruction soon arrives in metrical form: the a-assonance in the phrase “strange Race” lends each word equal emphasis, creating a spondaic foot that disrupts the poem’s steady iambic meter. Further, in the enumeration “Wrecked, solitary, here,” the comma after “wrecked”

²⁰ Dickinson, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems*, 179, Fascicle 16, Sheet 2, c. summer 1862.

²¹ “sense, n.1,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/175954?rskey=BPnUCR&result=1#eid>.

²² The OED defines “toll” as (def. v2.1a) “To cause (a great bell) to sound by pulling a rope” (def. v2.2b) “on the occasion of a death or funeral.” “toll, v.2,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/203011?rskey=svxZPE&result=6>.

¹⁹ “eternity, n.2.,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.proxyiub.uits.iu.edu/view/Entry/64704?redirectedFrom=eternity#eid>.

demands a pause before “solitary,” rendering “wrecked” an accented syllable; the resulting spondaic foot disrupts the poem’s meter yet further, effectively wrecking itself against the structure of the poem.

Dickinson builds upon this metrical wreck in the next stanza’s image:

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down –
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing – then –

The destruction begins with the rupturing of “Reason”—slight, but enough for the speaker to “drop down” and “hit” a number of “Worlds,” suggesting the existence of a variety of worlds (and thus worldly beliefs and rituals) beyond the one to which our own experience is limited. In *Poets Thinking*, Helen Vendler similarly reads “the speaker’s collapse” as a rebuttal to the comforts of death rituals: “although ritual and other such exhaustive chromatic orderings have in the past kept existence intelligible for her, this rupture, persistently reasserting itself by repetition of static moves, is stronger than reassuring ritual.”²³

It is the ambiguity of the last line, however, that truly spells the death of logic: does the phrase “Finished knowing” suggest that knowledge is of no use anymore—that the speaker is “finished” with the act of knowing—or has she somehow, via her mental fall through “Reason,” reached the end of knowledge, “Finished knowing” the mysteries of human life and death?²⁴

To “Finish knowing” is a kind of death of the mind, and the speaker’s mind is the sole location of the poem (as we are invited, from the start, into her “Brain”); this alone could certainly constitute the poem’s death. The real breaking point comes, however, when the poem confronts its own attempt to conceive of death: how can one truly “know” that which is inescapably physical through entirely mental reasoning (as we cannot, as it were, think our way out of death)? With its fundamental logic broken beyond repair, the poem cannot continue on; the speaker’s attempted segue into what happens next, “then –,” is the final word on the page, cut short and jagged with a dash. We, too, “Finish knowing”; death remains a mystery.

Martin Greenup notes a similar kind of destruction in Dickinson’s “Safe in their Alabaster chambers –”: he reads the poem’s first stanza as an allegory of immortality, and the second as representing the passage of time. The two are incompatible, he argues: “undeniably, the poem ends in oblivion. The movement of time does not sit well with the eternity/immortality of the first stanza.”²⁵ Such radical denials of conclusiveness, however, do not preclude Dickinson from exploring a range of possible descriptions of death; on the contrary, each of her death poems confronts a different philosophy of death, tracing through its possible implications as if enacting a lyric experiment. In a discussion of Dickinson’s revisions, Miller envisions the variant versions of Dickinson’s poems as “multiple performance options for a single production: variation is potentially unlimited, but when performing—in Dickinson’s case, reading a poem aloud or circulating a text to a friend—the artist chooses a single version.”²⁶ Each of Dickinson’s death poems, too, might be called a singular “performance” of death, crafted to illustrate, and then reveal the limitations of, a different perspective of death. Dickinson’s destruction of the Protestant teleology of living in constant anticipation of death thus opens up a realm of philosophical and spiritual possibilities, enabling her to manipulate different conceptions of death in a form

of creative play.

DEATH AS PLAY

And indeed, akin to a number of experimental monologues from different characters, Dickinson’s poems espouse a number of contrasting views on death and immortality. In “’Tis so appalling – it exhilarates –”²⁷ [sic], she urges the reader away from contemplation of death, claiming “Looking at Death, is Dying – / Just let go the Breath – / And not the pillow at your cheek”; “The Blunder is in estimate,” however, paints death as a constant and inescapable presence, one that the speaker does indeed “look” at: “No friend have I that so persists / As this Eternity.” “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –”²⁸ is an experiment, Michael Clune argues, in the complete erasure of selfhood as an analogue for death²⁹; in “I felt my life with both my hands,”³⁰ however, the speaker finds herself in “Heaven” and examines all aspects of herself: “I held my spirit to the Glass...I turned my Being round and round...I judged my features – jarred my hair –.” Each new contemplation of death yields a new conclusion, allows Dickinson to step into a new philosophy as if donning play-clothes. By readily encapsulating these contrasting depictions of death within her oeuvre, Dickinson effectively lowers the stakes of this death-reflection, and, indeed, converts death into a tool for her own—and perhaps, too, the reader’s—poetic play.

POETIC CONTEXTS: NEW ENGLAND PURITANISM & THE CIVIL WAR ERA

Dickinson’s near-performative modes of poetic engagement with death are rendered all the more striking when considered within the contexts in which she wrote—namely, the American Civil War and New England Puritanism. The poems’ destructions of certainty bring the tensions inherent to Puritanism to their logical conclusion, rupturing, as discussed above, the momentous picture of death perpetuated throughout the religion. Stannard, noting such tensions, asserts that:

By clinging to the rhetorical tone and style (the ritual) of a Christianity equipped with a variety of mechanisms whereby man might affect his fate and secure his own salvation, a Christianity that had little application to their own deterministic concept of reality, the Puritans trapped themselves between conflicting belief systems—more specifically, in this case, between conflicting schemes of ethos and world view.³¹

Dickinson’s death poems, then, may place pressure on the breaking points of Puritanism beliefs—the call, for example, for both “a serene deathbed acceptance” and a “concept of death and its attendant and deserved terrors”³²—and act as a demonstration of the incompatibility of these conflicting ideals. Through these poems’ logical breakdowns, Dickinson highlights the impossibility of living under such a contradictory ethos on death.

In the context of the Civil War, Dickinson’s poetic explorations of death offered a jarring rebuttal to the consolations of religion, calling attention to the injustices of massacre at a time when impossibly

²³ Helen Vendler and Helen Hennessy, *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²⁴ In this interpretative scenario, the dashes before and after “then” read as rhythmic pauses rather than signifiers of interruption; “then” thus functions as a marker of time, suggesting that the reader “finished knowing [at that moment].”

²⁵ Greenup, “The Glimmering Frontier: Emily Dickinson and Publication,” 355.

²⁶ Miller, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*, 6.

²⁷ Dickinson, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems*, 179, Fascicle 16, Sheet 3, c. summer 1862.

²⁸ Dickinson, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems*, 270, Fascicle 26, Sheet 1, c. summer 1863.

²⁹ Clune, “How Poems Know What It’s Like to Die,” 633–54.

³⁰ Dickinson, *Emily Dickinson’s Poems*, 189, Fascicle 17, Sheet 5, c. summer 1862.

³¹ Stannard, “Death and Dying in Puritan New England,” 1328.

³² Martin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson*, 99; Stannard, “Death and Dying in Puritan New England,” 1329.

frequent and widespread deaths blunted onlookers' ability to conceive of the magnitude of each life lost. Dickinson's own vision of the role of poetry in the Civil War discourse reveals itself in her poem "My life had stood – a Loaded Gun –" (1863).³³ The politics of the Civil War are inextricable from the poem; the central conceit, a comparison of the speaker's life to a gun owned by a master, allows Dickinson to pull apart the act of killing from the perspective of a weapon, forcing the reader to confront the humanity present (and lost) in every death: "To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –" says the speaker-as-gun; "None stir the second time –."

Yet more explicit references to the Civil War are to be found in the "Sovereign Woods." The speaker and master "roam in"; one definition of "sovereign" in use in the nineteenth century was "A free citizen or voter of America."³⁴ Questions of who was a "free citizen" in America were central to the Civil War; by pairing "sovereign" with "woods," Dickinson calls into question the arbitrary human boundaries on both natural spaces and other humans: Who has the freedom to traverse "sovereign woods"? Where did this ownership come from?

However, the poem does not hold exclusively political resonances; Dickinson also opens up the interpretive possibility that the "gun" might be the poem itself. Within the original 1863 fascicle copy, Dickinson includes an alternative to the poem's penultimate line ("for I have but the power to kill"): "art" is written next to "power" as a potential substitute. Starting in 1861, Dickinson frequently included alternative words on her pages, "usually marking," as Cristanne Miller notes, "with a small plus sign the word or phrase potentially being replaced."³⁵ This alternative seems to encourage the reader to consider the "gun" not only as a conceit for the speaker's life, but also an allegory for writing. Another hint at this allegory takes places in the lines "every time I speak for Him / The Mountains straight reply –." A poem, too, might be said to "speak for" its owner, deepening its association with the gun. According to an allegorical reading of the poem, poetry might thus be said to "kill"; like the gun, however, it lacks "the power to die," as it will continue to exist long after its creator has passed—and, indeed, perhaps find new owners in future readers.

Dickinson's inclusions of alternative words, however, also suggests a desire to control—or perhaps thwart—the interpretive process. "That she retained the poem with this alternative (and others)," notes Miller, "suggests that she wanted to keep a range of possible interpretations open, at least at the time she copied the poem."³⁶ By keeping the end in a state of flux, Dickinson demands that the readers hold at least two distinct interpretive possibilities within their minds, resisting (perhaps, indeed, killing?) readers' search for a stable conclusion. Such a gesture might be said, at the same time, to keep both the poem and the poet herself "alive": while the poem refuses to exist in one finite, bounded state of being, the poet asserts her power over its future interpreters by demanding that they consider and re-consider the poem in all of its varied and indeterminate forms.

The political implications of this poetic "play" are immense, not least within the context of the Civil War. Wars are founded upon absolute conviction; one would not endanger their life and that of others unless they are certain that their perspective is morally right, and that it alone must prevail. At a time when Americans in both the North and South likely consumed media primed to confirm their pre-existing beliefs, Dickinson's refusal to draw conclusions about killing, death, and sovereignty places the reader in a wholly revolutionary state:

uncertainty. The role of the poet in political debate, Dickinson's poems suggest, is to act as a challenging space for self-critique, for the slow unraveling of one's own systems of beliefs and processes of conclusion.

CONCLUSION

All poems remain "alive" long after their creator dies through their distribution, publication, and readership. Just as a performance may be repeated, so too may Dickinson's poems act as repeated experiments on the threshold of life and death, carrying various conflicting beliefs through to their conclusions to test their viability. Though critics such as Greenup assert that "Dickinson's work does not seem to evolve" and find "no trajectory of progression over time from one position in her work to another,"³⁷ the poems present a wide range of dynamic "positions," entering into dialogue with each other and themselves in an ever-"evolving" negotiation of tensions. Such discussions of death—nuanced, admitting their own flaws and inconsistencies—offered, and continue to offer, a crucial rebuttal to nineteenth-century and Puritan discourses eager to bring false certainty to the unknowable. In destroying historical conceptions of death, Dickinson's poems instead give birth to a realm of new perspectives that continue to hold revolutionary power long after her own passing.

Dickinson's unique approach to the "revolutionary" may be, indeed, why her poems continue to hold such power over a century after their conception. Though Dickinson spent most of her life confined to her family's property, she would not have been a stranger to rebellious social action: The Evergreens, her brother Austin Dickinson's home and one of the two places Dickinson frequented, regularly hosted abolitionists and suffragists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and abolitionist and suffragist Wendell Phillips.³⁸ What sets Dickinson's poems apart from other forms of revolutionary literature, however, is their refusal to embody a stable or measurable political, religious, or philosophical stance. Her poems demonstrate a remarkable malleability of content as and with form, even as they challenge religious and social tradition.

Perhaps this is why Dickinson's poems appear to transcend the boundaries of time and space: they rebel, but not along the traditional pathways or modes we have come to expect from modern political upheavals. Her poems are worlds unto themselves, reconciling apparently contradictory ideals and constraints in never-ending processes of performance, destruction, and mystery. When we encounter an artistic voice so radical, so deeply challenging, as Dickinson's, it is tempting to expect from it a species of lyric heroism: we want a rallying cry, a clear delineation of what is wrong with our way of life and how we might fix it. Dickinson offers no such heroics; indeed, her selfhood does not present itself through any stable lyric "I," but rather through the structure—and destruction—of her poems. What might it mean to re-approach the process of seeing, and knowing, through poetry? This reevaluation is one aspect, certainly, of what Dickinson's poems demand from us. In a Dickinson poem, we are asked to make our own way with her words, questioning them, but also ourselves, as we experience and experiment along with the poet herself. The only way to access a Dickinson poem is to be willing to change your perspective—to accept the unknowable, the ambiguous, the strange. So too, with these challenging death poems, might Dickinson be offering us a better way to access the world.

³⁷ Greenup, "The Glimmering Frontier: Emily Dickinson and Publication," 362.

³⁸ Martin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson*, 28.

³³ Dickinson, *Emily Dickinson's Poems*, 354, Fascicle 34, Sheet 4, c. late 1863.

³⁴ "sovereign, n.1d.," Oxford English Dictionary Online, <https://www.oed-com.proxyub.uit.edu/view/Entry/185332?rskey=uWcnsV&result=1>.

³⁵ Miller, introduction to *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

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The image features a dense canopy of trees with leaves in various shades of orange, red, and brown, set against a pale, overcast sky. The branches are dark and intricate, creating a complex web of lines. A semi-transparent, light-colored horizontal band runs across the middle of the image, serving as a background for the text.

social sciences



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A Proposed fMRI Study: The Role of Self-Generated
Object Formation in Novel Object Category Learning

A Proposed fMRI Study: The Role of Self-Generated Object Formation in Novel Object Category Learning

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ABSTRACT

Recent research indicates that the self-produced visual-motor nature of handwriting provides variable visual output that better facilitates symbol understanding (Li & James 2016). In addition, viewing novel objects/hearing novel verbs that were learned through active manipulation resulted in greater motor activation in the brain than learning through passive viewing (James & Swain 2011). The proposed study will investigate the understanding and neural underpinnings of novel objects when learned in a self-production condition similar to handwriting: forming objects with clay. Seven- and eight-year-old participants will learn novel object categories through three conditions: a high active condition in which participants form objects with clay, a low active condition in which participants actively hold/explore pre-made objects, and a passive condition in which participants watch the experimenter hold pre-made objects. Following this training session, an object-sorting task will be used to assess the participants' knowledge of the object categories. Finally, an fMRI session will attempt to investigate motor and whole-brain activation differences between the two active conditions.

KEYWORDS: *active condition; novel objects; object categories; passive condition; self-production*

INTRODUCTION

Knowingly or unknowingly, we interact with our environment every day in hundreds of meaningful ways. In day-to-day life, initial sensory interaction with objects leads to subsequent neural encoding, and thus alters mental representations of object categories. The manner of the interaction itself, though, is crucial to subsequent object recognition and neural representations. The role of active learning methods and passive learning methods in object and symbol recognition have been the subject of intense study over the past twenty years. At the turn of the century, the focus narrowed to manipulating objects in virtual space. With the advent of advancing computer technology, more and more avenues for exploring the relationship between learner and object have been opened. In an experiment done in 1999, Harman, Humphrey, and Goodale found that observers who actively rotated novel three-dimensional objects performed better in object recognition than observers who passively viewed the objects. It was concluded from this result that control was key for the learner; if a participant had more control over how they learned about an object, they would be able to more quickly recognize it later (Harman et al 1999b). A separate experiment also found that active learners performed better on a perceptual match task that involved mental rotation. One potential variable introduced to the mix when manipulating objects is the impact of the preferred view/angle of the object on subsequent recognition. It was found that the "plan" views (side and front views of the object) were preferred over the intermediate views, and learning limited only to the plan views led to better performance in object recognition (James et al 2001). The use of virtual technologies to study object learning has its benefits; in particular, the researcher has a high level of control over the programming. Additionally, learning in schools is transitioning to heavy reliance on tablets and computers, making a research methodology involving technology more appropriate now than ever before. However, the major inherent drawback of these virtual technologies is the difficulty of applying the results of a virtual study to the real world.

Within the past ten years, researchers have turned to physical objects in a laboratory setting when comparing active and passive learning methods. To investigate the neural activation patterns between interacting with objects actively and passively, a 2011

fMRI study exposed young children to novel verbs and objects by having them either actively explore the object or passively watch the experimenter interact with the objects. Each novel verb, which was given a name such as "sprocking," was paired with a 3D object which had a natural associated action, such as pulling out a retractable cord. Within the active and passive groups, participants either heard a verb or saw a photograph of the associated object while in the scanner. Participants who actively explored the objects were found to have greater motor activation in the left precentral gyrus both when hearing the novel verbs and when seeing the objects (James & Swain 2011). Other studies have focused on the various factors that influence object recognition. For example, 18-24 month old children with more expansive vocabularies performed better on object recognition than those with smaller vocabularies. Additionally, object view is once again an important factor: children preferentially opted for planar views of objects when holding them (James et al 2014).

One area of research that could shed light on some of the facets of passive and active object learning is handwriting. A comparison between symbols and objects is apt; symbols can be interpreted as two-dimensional versions of objects. Additionally, when studying symbol learning, there are clear active (writing the symbols) and passive (viewing the symbols) counterparts to object learning. A 2016 study investigated different learning techniques (visual-motor and visual-auditory) for learning novel Greek symbols. Regardless of visual-motor production, all conditions that involved learning highly variable instances of the symbols led to better symbol categorization. Because the act of handwriting produces variable forms of a letter or symbol, it helps the writer to develop a wider letter/symbol category, thus learning the letter/symbol better (Li & James 2016). The visual-motor production of handwriting has also been shown to change visual processing in the brain. Increased BOLD activation in the visual association cortex occurred during letter perception of previously handwritten letters (James 2010).

In cognitive psychology and neuroscience experiments thus far, the most active form of learning objects has been to hold and explore an object in one's hand. However, in much the same way that during handwriting one self-produces a symbol/letter, might there be a way to experimentally examine the self-production of objects? In other

words, is it possible to “learn-by-doing” with objects (James 2010)? There could be direct analogs between symbol studies and object studies. Symbol studies have handwriting; the direct comparison to object studies may be producing objects with molding clay. With molding clay, a participant can actively create an object themselves by either using an existing object as a template or by forming a new object that might fit in an already-existing object category. How will an active object-forming condition compare to the previously-accepted active condition of holding an object in one’s hand? This proposed experiment tests the hypothesis that forming objects with molding clay might lead to a wider mental representation of the object category than holding objects or passively viewing objects. Furthermore, the proposed experiment seeks to examine the differences in motor or whole-brain activation between the two active conditions.

PROPOSED METHODS

We hope to test 36 participants between the ages of seven years and eight years. All participants will be right-handed with normal or corrected-to-normal vision, and with no neurological compromise.

General Procedure

Participants will undergo a training session, followed by a test session, and then a fMRI session. The training and test sessions will be performed outside of the fMRI environment. The training session will have three conditions: two active, one passive. Because the study is a within-subjects design, all participants will be exposed to all three conditions. Only the order of the training conditions will differ among subjects.

The first active condition involves low visual-motor interaction in which participants are first exposed to the objects by viewing the objects and saying the category names of the objects as an experimenter holds the objects and rotates them, spending an equivalent amount of time in each planar view. Then participants will actively interact with the objects by holding and feeling the objects, given an equal amount of time for each object. The second active condition involves high visual-motor interaction in which participants are first exposed to the objects in the same way as the first condition (through observing the experimenter hold and rotate the objects) but then they are allowed to actively create and form an object with molding clay that they think would fit into the object categories. The third condition is a control condition in which participants only have an audio-visual interaction with the objects; they simply view and say the category names of the objects as the experimenter holds the object and rotates it.

After the training session, participants will be tested on their knowledge of the object categories using an object-sorting task. This task will aim to assess how participants in different conditions view the object categories. During the sorting task, participants will be asked to sort cards with pictures of objects different from the training objects into the three learned categories. There will also be cards with objects from a fourth, unlearned category, with a corresponding option for “does not belong.”

After the test session, an fMRI session will be performed to test (1) whether the motor cortex will be active when the object category name is heard (auditory perception) and/or when the object is seen (visual perception); and (2) how the motor system activations differ between the two active conditions. As a control condition, participants will be exposed to pictures of novel objects without categories not seen during training, and audio clips of random words.

Stimuli

The training stimuli consist of novel three-dimensional dried clay objects, painted in monochromatic primary colors (see Figure 1). There are three learned object categories, and five physical objects in each category, making for a total of 15 clay objects for training. In each learning condition, participants will encounter all five objects from a category. Objects in the different learning conditions will be counter-balanced among participants. All the participants, regardless of condition, will learn the three categories in the same order. The order of conditions assigned to each category will be randomized.

The testing stimuli consist of cards with pictures of novel three-dimensional objects, which are instances of the learned categories. There will also be pictures of objects from an additional, unlearned category. Each category will have five objects, making for a total of 20 cards.

The fMRI stimuli consist of pictures of the training objects; there will be 15 pictures for the 15 clay objects. Participants will also be shown 5 pictures of unlearned, uncategorized objects, as a control. There will also be audio recordings of five people saying the object category names, for a total of 15 recordings. Finally, there will be an additional five recordings of random words read by the five people, also as a control.

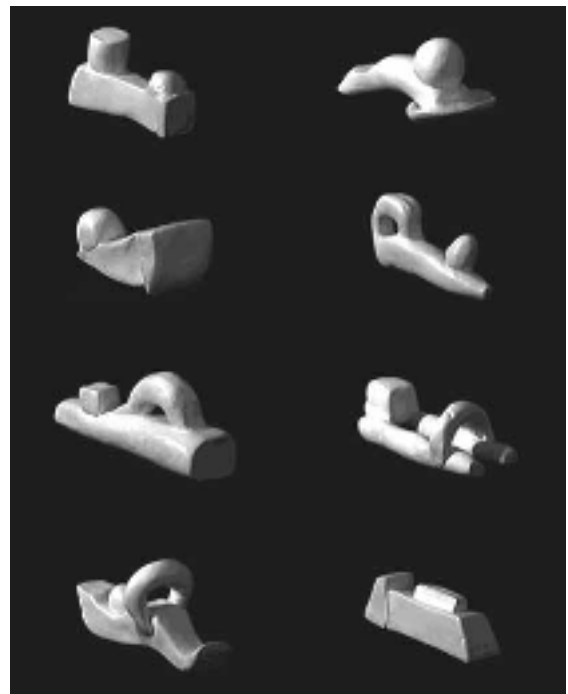


Figure 1.
Examples of the novel objects used in the proposed study (Harman & Humphrey 1999a)

EXPECTED RESULTS

The proposed study has not been run and thus no data is available. However, based on current literature, there is a set of predictions that can logically be inferred. Because reproducing a symbol through handwriting yields several variable instances of that symbol, and learning through studying variable forms of symbols leads to more accurate symbol categorization (Li & James 2016), it is expected that in the proposed experiment the clay-forming condition will have the widest and most accurate view

of the object categories. The clay-forming condition will generate the most variable visual output, and thus will lead to better performance on the sorting task than the other two conditions. In terms of fMRI activations, the present study is entering uncharted territory. One might expect forming objects with clay to have similar neural activations as the self-produced action of handwriting, but there are several inherent differences between the two actions that might indicate otherwise. In regard to active object interaction when compared to passive object interaction, there has been shown to be greater activation in the right superior frontal gyrus, the left middle frontal gyrus, the inferior parietal lobule (bilaterally), and the left precentral gyrus (James & Swain 2011). Because these activations apply to a condition in which participants actively explored objects in their hands, the clay-forming condition, a more involved active interaction, may have augmented activations in these areas and/or activations elsewhere in the frontal cortex.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If the same principles governing handwriting as a self-produced action also apply to forming objects as a self-produced action, and both lead to better understanding of categories, then there are strong implications for education. If self-produced actions lead to better category understanding, regardless of what category it is, there must be a greater emphasis placed on active learning in the classroom, especially for younger children. When learning new symbol/object categories, new hands-on learning techniques like molding objects with clay or using interactive applications on tablets and computers should be emphasized. An interesting future direction for this research might be investigating the differences in word learning for young children between passive learning (seeing or hearing the words) and active learning conditions like writing the words on paper or on tablet. In the learning process, some minds have more of an inclination towards hands-on activities and some lean more towards analytical activities; however, handwriting and object research indicate that active learning leads to better understanding of symbols/objects (Li & James 2016). Self-generated actions while learning may maximize motor activations in the brain and solidify category knowledge.

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