

**Rice
Historical
Review**

**Vol. 5
Spring 2020**

PERCEPTION

Documenting history is a process of discernment and of memory production. Within the framework of perception, we acknowledge the subjective nature of remembering. Our understanding is changed by our individualized way of looking and seeing, veiled by preexisting experience and identity. The way we see parallels the way light is refracted when it moves through space — water, glass, distance. Using the imagery of light and the way it moves — the way it is distorted — we imagine history and our understanding of it as constantly in motion and based in our own personal conditions.



**Rice
Historical
Review**

**Vol. 5
2020**

Editorial Board

Alison Drileck **Laura Li**
Editor-in-Chief Editor-in-Chief

Miriam Wolter **Mikayla Knutson**
Managing Editor Associate Managing Editor

George Elsesser **Katie Nguyen**
Assistant Managing Editor Publishing Director

Sarah Gao **Olivia Daneker**
Director of Copy Editing Art Director

Spencer Moffat **Caroline Siegfried**
Director of Short Form Director of Copy Editing

Frederick Drummond **Victoria Saeki-Serna**
Short Form Copy Editor Director of Short Form

Jordan Killinger **Alex Vela**
Director of Podcasting Director of Media

Riley Meve **Melissa Carmona**
Director of Public Relations Assistant Director of Podcasting

Rachel Lisker **Josue Alvarenga**
Distribution Manager Assistant Director of Podcasting

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Lisa Spiro
Director of Digital Scholarship Services

Undergraduate Studies Committee Members

Dr. Lisa Balabanlilar **Dr. Tani Barlow**
Director of Undergraduate Studies George and Nancy Rupp Professor of Humanities
Associate Professor of History Professor of History

Dr. Daniel Domingues **Dr. Maya Irish**
Assistant Professor of History Associate Professor of History

www.ricehistoricalreview.org
www.facebook.com/ricehistoricalreview
www.twitter.com/RiceHistorical
historicalreview@rice.edu
Rice Historical Review - MS 42,
Rice University, PO Box 1892 Houston, TX 77251-1892

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4** Letter From the Editors
Alison Drileck and Laura Li
- 5** *The Floyd Seyward Lear Prize*
- 7** “Fainting Francis or Weeping Willie”: The Construction of American Perceptions of Mohammed Mossadegh
Allen Sellers
- 31** Translating Theology: A Textual Examination of Akbar’s Religiosity
Akhil Jonnalagadda
- 51** King of the Birds: Making Symbol, Subject, and Science in the Skies of Hindustan
Kristen Hickey
- 73** Seeing Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) Through a Romantic Lens
Carolyn Daly
- 100** About Us and Acknowledgements

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Furthering the future by promoting the past. That is the mission statement the 2018-2019 *Rice Historical Review* editorial board put forward as we pondered over the meaning and the purpose of our journal. As we bring our fifth year of publication to an end, it is important that we reflect on our own past. The *Rice Historical Review* emerged from a conversation between two History majors seeking to share their historical research with fellow Rice students. With the involvement of like-minded history student and the support of the History Department, our founding members actualized their vision into reality. This year marked the first without the founding members' leadership. By continuing to publish the most exceptional essays, we hope we carry on their legacy of showcasing the most outstanding historical research Rice undergraduate students have to offer. More importantly, through expanding the size of our board and publishing short form articles as well as alumni interviews online, we wish to have fostered a sense of community among history enthusiasts both within and outside of Rice.

In this issue, the board is proud to present four outstanding essays. We begin with the Floyd Seyward Lear Prize winner, "Fainting Francis or Weeping Willie" by Allen Sellers. Allen's discussion of the United States's role in the 1953 Iranian coup d'état — specifically how gender, communism, and race worked together to shape American public opinion — provides an unique perspective on a widely-known historical event. Allen's in-depth analysis encourages us to rethink foreign interventions. Next, we shift our attention to "Translating Theology" by Akhil Jonnalagadda. Akhil brilliantly argues that Akbar's initiative to translate Hindu epics into Persian was not merely a political statement, but it served the role of placing the emperor at the absolute center of the Mughal Empire. We are especially impressed by Akhil's choice to delve into a lesser-explored historical issue and successfully render a recondite topic accessible for the general audience. We then move on to Kristen Hickey's "King of the Birds," which explores the function of birds in the Mughal court and culture. There is something rivetingly intimate about the way Kristen describes the emperors and their interactions with birds that enriches our understanding of Mughal identity and symbolism. Last but not least, we conclude with Carolyn Daly's "Seeing Mary Wollstonecraft Through a Romantic Lens." Recognizing the exclusion of female writers in the Romantic tradition, Carolyn's reinterpretation of Mary Wollstonecraft's life and works propels us to re-conceptualize the genre as a whole. The four essays take our readers to a wide range of locations and time periods and explore different ways to perceive our past.

For the past year and half, *Furthering the future by promoting the past* has become much more than a brand position. It is a motto we live by and has carried us through a tumultuous year, reminding us of a historian's responsibility. The global COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with unimaginable challenges. In this difficult time, working through these hardships to publish this issue became particularly crucial. With everything being done remotely and people separated by long distance, life in quarantine is an isolating experience. However, the physical barrier has made us realize the significance of connecting people intellectually to remind them we are in this together. History is the past, but writing history is an unremitting task we should continue to devote ourselves to.

In closing, the editorial board would like to dedicate this issue to our late colleague, Andrew Manias. His passing has been devastating for us all, and we will miss his friendship. As we internalize our current experience, we must also not forget the challenges we have overcome and the people we have lost, for the past is an invaluable part of our present and future.

Laura Li and Alison Drileck
Co-Editors-in-Chief

THE FLOYD SEYWARD LEAR PRIZE

2020 WINNER
“FAINTING
FRANCIS OR
WEEPING
WILLIE”

The Floyd Seyward Lear Prize for Best Essay is an annual prize awarded jointly by the *Rice Historical Review (RHR)* and the Rice University History Department for the best submitted article to the *RHR*. The award is in honor of Dr. Floyd Seyward Lear, who was a member of the faculty at the Rice Institute (later Rice University) in the Department of History from 1925 to 1975, the year of his death. He was Assistant Professor from 1927 to 1945, Professor in 1945, Harris Masterson Jr. Professor of History in 1953 (the first to hold this chair), and Trustee Distinguished Professor from 1965. He served as chairman of the Department of History from 1933 to 1960.



Dr. Floyd Seyward Lear (left) and Dr. Katherine Fischer Drew (right)
Source: Woodson Research Center

All papers submitted to the *Rice Historical Review* were automatically considered for this award. After submissions have been reviewed, nominated articles selected for consideration were reviewed by the *RHR* editorial board. Through consensus, the board narrowed down the pool to three nominees. The Department of History Undergraduate Studies Committee evaluated the final three candidates and decided the winning article. The author of the winning essay received a \$500 scholarship.

This year, the Lear Prize was given to Allen Sellers for his article, “‘Fainting Francis or Weeping Willie’: The Construction of American Perceptions of Mohammed Mossadegh.” The essay has distinguished itself with nuanced arguments, compelling analysis of sources, and in-depth research.

The Rice Historical Review would like to thank Dr. Katherine Fischer Drew, Autry Professor Emeritus, for giving us the possibility to provide this scholarship.

"FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE"



Under the Media's Eye. Chloe Marcheli.

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEEPING WILLIE”:

THE CONSTRUCTION OF AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS OF MOHAMMED MOSSADEGH



The April 1951 election of Mohammed Mossadegh as Prime Minister of Iran and the subsequent nationalization of oil sparked a prolonged crisis that involved both the British and U.S. governments. No agreement could be reached between the British and Iranians. The crisis culminated in the joint U.S. and British effort, called Operation AJAX, which overthrew Mossadegh in August 1953. The seeds of this coup were sewn before the summer of 1953, however, and this article documents American perceptions of Mossadegh and the situation in Iran during the crisis. It contends that American ideas concerning gender, communism, and peoples of the Middle East, formed an ideology which heightened the Soviet threat, justified Anglo-American intervention, and ultimately resulted in the Eisenhower administration’s greenlighting of Operation AJAX. The changes and continuities of this American mindset are reflected in magazines, newspapers, memoirs, and government documents that span from WWII to the overthrow of Mossadegh. These reflections reveal how cultural attitudes informed perceptions of Iran and its people, which in turn shaped American attitudes and policy towards Iran.

Allen Sellers

Written for America in the Middle East

(HIST 436)

Dr. Nathan Citino

The former CIA operative Kermit Roosevelt’s memoir, *Countercoup*, begins by recounting a June 1953 meeting of high-ranking policymakers on a rainy day in Washington, DC. The men gathered included Secretary of State John Dulles, his brother CIA Director Allen Dulles, Ambassador to Iran Loy Henderson, and Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, among others. Roosevelt’s objective was to have these men sign off on what he labeled a

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEEPING WILLIE”

“joint” operation with British and Iranian partners to depose Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Kermit’s logic was simple: he framed Mossadegh as an “unwitting ally” to Soviet ambitions in the region, as his attempts to supplant the Shah had increased communist power in Iran. He had to be removed lest Iran fall to the communists. Roosevelt claimed that a majority of Iranians would follow the Shah’s lead and that the blowback would be no worse than doing nothing and letting Iran, along with the rest of the Middle East, fall to Soviet communism. The gathered men contemplatively listened to Kermit’s proposal, with the Dulles brothers interjecting pointed questions about the operation to overthrow a so-called “madman.” In the end, they all agreed to Operation AJAX. Most succinctly accepted the operation’s necessity, except for Loy Henderson, who gravely looked upwards “soliciting the Deity’s assistance,” declaring that he “did not like this business” but that they had “no choice but to proceed.”¹

Kermit Roosevelt’s account is as revealing as it is misleading. His narrative is hardly trustworthy. For example, he is hardly being objective in describing the coup as a “joint effort”; in reality, the U.S. government twisted the Shah’s arm until he acquiesced to their plan.² Additionally, in meetings and communiqué between departments, the seeds of Operation AJAX had been planted long before the described 1953 meeting. Even so, Roosevelt’s characterization of the stage and the actors involved in the Iranian Crisis reveals the logic that went into the decision to overthrow Mossadegh. The perceptions that Mossadegh’s actions were driven by “madness,” that the Soviets were all too willing to exploit the weakness of a third world leader, and that the U.S. government was obligated to dirty its hands to prevent subversion followed a logic imbued with 1950s American ideology. Roosevelt’s assessment that Mossadegh was an “unwitting ally” and that the Russians were bent on achieving ancient designs for a warm water port exemplifies that type of analysis that thrived in early Cold War America.³ This rationale was weaponized against perceived enemies, both foreign and domestic, in diplomatic communiqués as well as in the press, magazines, and TV. Roosevelt’s proposal achieved unanimous support from his peers in Washington because his paranoia-laden language resonated with the world in which 1950s Americans lived.

1. Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup, the Struggle for the Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 1-19.

2. Shiva Balaghi, “Silenced Histories and Sanitized Autobiographies: The 1953 CIA Coup in Iran,” *Biography* 36, no. 1 (2013): pp. 71-96, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2013.0009>.

3. Roosevelt, *Countercoup*, 1-19.

ALLEN SELLERS

The covert intervention under the Eisenhower administration had its roots in the Truman administration. The April 1951 election of Mohammed Mossadegh as Prime Minister of Iran and the subsequent nationalization of oil sparked a prolonged crisis that involved both the British and U.S. governments. No agreement could be reached between the British and Iranian governments, despite the Truman administration's efforts to mediate terms of nationalization. The British refused to cede control over the refining and transport of oil while Mossadegh, trying to maintain a tenuous unity within the National Front party, could not compromise on Iranian control of its oil. The British refused to transport the oil and Iranian politics became increasingly unstable as government revenue dried up without profits from oil sales. Amid this crisis, U.S. press and intelligence were hyperaware of the Tudeh Party, an Iranian communist organization whose membership numbered in the tens of thousands,⁴ which was considered a serious threat backed by the Soviets. Even so, the Truman administration had largely avoided the use of direct action, but with the ascension of Eisenhower and his CIA director Allen Dulles, who were more willing to resort to covert action, the U.S. government committed itself to Operation AJAX. In concert with British intelligence, CIA operatives such as Kermit Roosevelt directed false flag bombings, political bribes, and propaganda efforts to round up support for the overthrow of Mossadegh. These efforts eventually culminated in the deposition of Mossadegh and the retrenchment of the Shah in August of 1953.

The seeds of this coup, however, were sown before the summer of 1953; perceptions of Mossadegh and the situation in Iran during the crisis, formed prior to the Eisenhower administration, buttressed the logic behind intervention. American ideas concerning gender, communism, and peoples of the Middle East formed an ideology which heightened the Soviet threat, justified Anglo-American intervention, and ultimately resulted in the Eisenhower administration's greenlighting of Operation AJAX. The changes and continuities of this American mindset are reflected in magazines, newspapers, memoirs, and government documents that spanned from WWII to the overthrow of Mossadegh. These reflections reveal how cultural attitudes informed perceptions of Iran and its people, which in turn shaped American attitudes and policy towards Iran.

Among scholars of the 1953 coup, disagreements abound regarding the details of American, British, and Iranian motivations. Ervand Abrahamian argues that too much focus has been placed on Cold War politics and rhetoric.

4. Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 320.

"FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE"

He claims that although officials justified the coup in Cold War terms, the real motivation for the U.S. to participate in the coup did not come from fear of communism, but from fear of oil nationalization in developing countries.⁵ This argument contradicts Mark Gasiorowski, who recently argued that other scholars have not focused enough on American perception of the communist threat. He concludes that American policymakers acted to remove the communist threat without strong evidence that such a threat was real; he does not, however, delve into why Americans policymakers decided on supporting a coup.⁶ Examination of the cultural context surrounding the decisions made by US policymakers will give an explanation for why policymakers took the communist threat so seriously, despite a lack of strong evidence that Iranian communists were capable of successful revolution.

Previous historians that have studied the preparation and execution of Operation AJAX have either sidelined culture as an analytic or limited themselves to one lens of cultural evaluation. For example, Mary Ann Heiss singled out gender while Gasiorowski focused on anti-communism in their analyses of American perception. Both of their contributions are vital in understanding the decision to overthrow Mossadegh, but they fail to capture the multi-faceted way cultural values affect how people view the world around them. The key is to understand how these different lenses built upon one another. The first section of this essay examines how the interplay among American ideas on gender, communism, and race formed an ideological filter through which information was processed and acted upon. Combining these attitudes into an overarching ideology, rather than singling out one concept alone, gives a more holistic sense of the American mindset in the era than previous scholars have attempted. Subsequent sections expand upon how this ideology is reflected in depictions of Iran and Mossadegh both in the general public, through magazines and newspapers, and in government documents. As a whole, this analysis will attempt to reveal how the ideologies of gender, communism, and race influenced perception of Mossadegh and the Iranian crisis among the American public and government, which in turn led to the decision to overthrow Mohammed Mossadegh.

5. Ervand Abrahamian, *The Coup 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations* (New York: New Press, 2013), 1-8.

6. Mark J. Gasiorowski, "U.S. Perceptions of the Communist Threat in Iran during the Mossadegh Era," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 21, no. 3 (2019): pp. 185-221, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00898.

Communism, Gender, and Orientalism: Conceptualizing an Ideological Filter

The entirety of Mossadegh's rise and fall occurred within the era of McCarthyism, when Soviet and communist suspicion was at its highest. This paranoia was not limited to high-profile show trials in Washington, but also existed in the everyday lives of Americans. The domestic manifestation of McCarthyite rhetoric and fears translated into how Americans perceived events around the world. McCarthyism touched all segments of 1950s society; condensing exactly what Americans felt about communism in this era might be a chimera. Even so, exploring the depictions and perceptions of communists that abounded in the era is helpful because McCarthy-style descriptions often appeared in newspapers, magazine articles, and diplomatic documents.

One important aspect of McCarthyism was the tendency to view communists as monolithic puppets of a wider Soviet strategy. Politicians and news writers alike labeled communists as being under the influence of the Kremlin. Their evidence for such a grand conspiracy was limited, forcing them to rely on two pieces of "proof." First, they pointed to the "Duclos letter." The document, written by a French communist and circulated in America in 1945, criticized the leader of the Communist Party U.S.A (C.P.U.S.A.), Earl Browder, for eschewing revolution in favor of working within the existing American political system. The fact that Earl Browder was removed from his position after circulation of the document was proof in McCarthyite trials and hearings that the C.P.U.S.A. was under foreign influence.⁷ Second, politicians and columnists often referenced a 1930s communist manual that contained an oath pledging undying loyalty to the party. Ex-communists also helped to support the construction of a grand conspiracy, attesting that violence was "central to the curriculum" and no act was too heinous as long as Moscow demanded it. These arguments were easy to advance in this time, as Americans were hyperaware of the deadly political intrigue and human rights abuses that typified the Stalinist era. In short, American communists were seen as a committed part of a worldwide conspiracy directed from Moscow: puppets in Stalin's game.⁸ This stereotyping of American communists as cogs in a violent conspiracy was translated and built upon in American perception of the communist Tudeh Party in Iran. In the

7. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Michigan*, 83rd Congress, 2nd session, 1954, 5647-5649.

8. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 131-139.

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEEPING WILLIE”

world of McCarthy, there was no room to be on the political left without getting lumped in with the larger geopolitical goals of the Soviet Union.

During the crisis over oil nationalization in Iran, American policymakers' views on the Cold War in the third world were shifting. In the years following World War II, Washington usually refused to support European allies when their colonies rebelled against them. National Security Council Report 51, which examined American relations with Southeast Asia and set recommendations for how to approach revolutionary conflict in Indonesia and Indochina, is a prime example of post-war American attitudes towards the Third World. The document argues that inducing “the Dutch and the French to adapt their policies” towards their subjects was of utmost urgency and that support for

“In the world of McCarthy, there was no room to be on the political left without getting lumped in with the larger geopolitical goals of the Soviet Union.”

Dutch or French imperialism was out of the question.⁹ With the beginning of the 1950s, however, Americans increasingly came to view geopolitics as a crusade against communism. The Korean War, the loss of China, and the rise of McCarthyism hardened U.S. feelings towards third world revolutionaries. Anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements were gradually seen as a risk for communist subversion; Joseph McCarthy himself warned against coziness with third world nationalists.¹⁰ Mossadegh's premiership began during this shift in America's relationship towards third world revolutionaries and communists. The logic for Mossadegh's coup d'état required this shift for its justification.

As the Cold War intensified into a crusade, Americans progressively began to perceive events relating to communism, both domestic and abroad, in gendered terms. One of the most emblematic and influential examples of gendering of the Cold War conflict was the Long Telegram, an analysis of Soviet government,

9. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949, The Far East and Australasia, Volume VII, Part 2* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1976), Document 317.

10. Patrick Glenn and Bryan Gibson, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions And The Making Of Our Times* (Macat Library, 2017), 110-124.

motives, and methods drafted by the Deputy Chief of Mission to Moscow George Kennan in 1947, sent to the State Department, and later published in *Foreign Affairs*. In his examination of the document, historian Frank Costigliola argues that Kennan painted an emotionally laden picture of the Cold War by utilizing language which cast the Soviets as hypermasculine predators of weak and unwitting peoples. This rhetoric simplified the debates about the Soviets in Washington and helped crystallize the strategy of containment.¹¹ The telegram featured McCarthy-esque paranoia about the Soviets' intention to "stimulate all forms of disunity" around the world and the gendering of Cold War geopolitics in the larger American crusade against communist subversion. The fact that the analysis was not just circulated within foreign policy circles of the government, but also in *Foreign Affairs* shows that this type of ideological framing was not limited to the government. The Long Telegram, with its gendered language and dire tone, served as part of the foundation of American ideology that would later amplify concern over Soviet penetration in Iran.

The Soviet Union was not the only country or people that were described in gendered terms. Americans were accustomed to simplifying the complexities of international relations and foreign societies into the reductive rhetoric of gender. For example, columnists and officials alike criticized India's Cold War neutrality in gendered terms. Because the Indian government did not tow the American line by urging mediation in the crises caused by the split of Korea, Indians were regarded as fickle and effeminate.¹² In essence, they lacked the masculine "firmness" and "vigor" that the Long Telegram argued was necessary to combat communism. Furthermore, Indians were supposedly "beguiled by the spiritual" as opposed to the firm and rationalized American approach. At the same time, Americans viewed India's neighbor, Pakistan, in a much more favorable, masculinized manner. The Pakistani leaders were described as virile in their commitment to anti-communism.¹³ In short, Americans were well-versed in translating the international relations into gendered terms in order to make sense of foreign governments. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the American perception of Mossadegh was also colored by this ideological filter

11. Frank Costigliola, "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War," *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (1997): p. 1309, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952904>.

12. Andrew Jon Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: the United States and India, 1947-1964* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), 211-219.

13. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds*, 212-213.

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE”

and produced a highly gendered interpretation of his personality and actions.

Domestic culture primed the general public to presume that effeminate men were the most susceptible to communist subversion. In the early 1950s, idyllic home life was considered under siege by communists from within. Any man exhibiting non-conforming traits, such as promiscuity, homosexuality, or femininity, was a possible target for communists to prey upon. Academics helped to craft a symbol of the virile and tough “family man” and his nuclear family in resistance to communism and effeminate weakness.¹⁴ Anyone or anything outside of this paradigm was suspect.

Orientalist stereotypes and images regularly made appearances in analyses of Middle Eastern geopolitics, both in the government and in the public sphere. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations both exhibited Orientalist and paternalistic attitudes towards the peoples of the Middle East. Arabs were seen as having an inferiority complex that contributed to their irrationality. This characterization extended to Iranians as well because of their shared Islamic faith. Despite the fact that Egyptian leader Gamel Abdel Nasser was Arab and Mossadegh was Iranian, the two were often painted with the same brush as fanatical nationalists that were irrationally overcompensating for colonial humiliation.¹⁵ This racial examination that portrayed Middle Eastern nationalism as an unsound overreaction was a shift from the immediate post-World War II attitudes towards Arab nationalism, which characterized Arab nationalism as a potentially positive force. Historian George Antonius’s 1938 book *The Arab Awakening* became a foundational textbook for scholars and foreign policy officials and painted a more positive, albeit paternalistic, picture of Middle Eastern nationalism. Antonius argued that Arab nationalism owed its origins to American missionaries and suggested that the upper-class and educated leaders of such movements could be supported by the U.S. government. The rise of men like Nasser and Mossadegh presented a challenge to the ambivalent paternalism of the post-war era and caused policymakers to revert to more dichotomous and less charitable interpretations. Leaders like Mossadegh were seen as ignorant and neurotic while their supporters were seen as fanatics.¹⁶

14. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 97-101.

15. Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (United States: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

16. Matthew F. Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: the Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 106-117.

These interpretations carried with them a long history of racial construction of peoples of the “orient” as ignorant, fanatical, overly emotional, and infantile.

The threads between American anti-communist, orientalist, and gendered attitudes weaved a mesh through which information passed and was understood by the public and policymakers alike. These ideas were often so tightly bound together they were impossible to parse from one another. A single line from a single source might contain elements of all three. Thus, images and descriptions of a weak Mossadegh contained gendered and Orientalist elements which further fed into fears of communist forces. Armed with a conception of American ideology, it is possible to make sense of the wide variety of sources and grasp the underlying ideology which connects them. In doing so, the U.S. government’s decision to commit to Operation AJAX can be further comprehended.

“Fainting Francis or Weeping Willie”: The Popular Conceptualization of Mossadegh

Mossadegh as feeble, emotional, and irrational was the most potent image because his tendency to faint, weep, and utilize emotionally charged rhetoric flew in the face of what Americans thought of as characteristics of a competent leader. They viewed these peculiarities as a danger, especially when considering the threat of the Tudeh Party. These uncharitable and inaccurate interpretations of Mossadegh’s actions were not limited to his moments of supposed weakness; even when noting his craftiness, political maneuverability, and persuasiveness, analysts and writers often portrayed him in unflattering terms. These representations produced a distorted picture of Mossadegh that would be used to justify his overthrow.

From the onset of Mossadegh’s premiership to his eventual removal, the press painted a picture of him that emphasized weakness and neuroticism, traits which contemporaries conflated with femininity. Many reports used neutral language to describe Mossadegh and instead placed their focus on the rise of nationalism in Iran, but accounts still abounded which painted him in questionable terms. One writer reporting on the first weeks of the nationalization crisis noted Mossadegh’s “emotional belief in neutrality” that the author argued would “benefit only the communists and the Tudeh Party.”¹⁷ Early descriptors

17. “Iran Shah Gives In, OKs Oil Grab Bloc Leader as Premier,” *Houston Post* (Houston, TX), April 30, 1951.

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEEPING WILLIE”

of Mossadegh included words like “wispy”¹⁸ and accused him of locking himself in his chambers in fear of leftist mobs.¹⁹ Readers of these newspapers would have had an easy time drawing connections between his purported weakness, cowardice, and emotionality with reported government warnings about the communist threat of the Tudeh Party.

Some journalists reported on Mossadegh’s efforts to appeal to American sensibilities. In the fall of 1951 Mossadegh visited the United States to speak at the UN, to negotiate with the U.S. government as a broker, and to entreat American sympathy. Journalists acknowledged his petition that Americans remember their past struggle to “release their homeland from the fetters of economic and political imperialism” and find common ground with Iran.²⁰ In essence, Mossadegh hoped to conjure the image of an independent-minded American revolutionary in the American mind.

Mossadegh’s attempts to ingratiate himself with Americans fell flat because in the months following the 1951 tour his propensity for weeping and fainting – a deliberate tactic Mossadegh employed to demonstrate his passion and devotion for the cause of Iranian independence that Americans failed to understand²¹ – became a focal point for ridicule. One columnist joined in this mockery in a short article imploring readers to express gratitude during Thanksgiving for a variety of things, such as living outside communist China, Bulgaria, or Yugoslavia. He also stated that everyone should be happy not to be “governed by a Fainting Francis or a Weeping Willie like Dr. Mossadegh” or have to govern Iranians who would “assassinate you at the drop of a turban.”²² Although set in a sarcastic tone, the underlying message was clear: the world was full of communistic upheaval and Mossadegh represented a weak leader beset by communists and faceless Iranians whose murderous frenzy meant chaos.

This idea was seen not just in text, but also in comics accompanying articles following the 1951 visit. One article in *The New York Times* was critical, albeit respectful, of Mossadegh. The article notes his ability to rally the various classes of Iranian society to the cause of securing independence and argues

18. “Oil Company Makes Conciliatory Move,” *Houston Post*, May 28, 1951.

19. “Iran Mob Threatens Holy War,” *Houston Post*, May 22, 1951.

20. “Mossadegh, Here, Appeals to Americans to Back Iran,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 1951.

21. Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: the United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 230-234.

22. Paul Gallico, “Several Good Reasons for Being Thankful,” *Houston Post*, November 18, 1951.

ALLEN SELLERS

that British diplomats failed to see the futility of maintaining control of Iran. However, the accompanying comic, "Oily Baba," features a frail and shaking Mossadegh surrounded by orientalized agents of subversion with labels such as "unemployment" and "chaos."²³ The more balanced examination of the geopolitical situation was undermined by this comic which framed him as a weak coward trying to contain a situation out of his control. This sort of undercutting was common in how Americans were exposed to Mossadegh. For every neutral or nuanced article analyzing the crisis, another negatively charged depiction existed, which played to the cultural perspectives of American readers.

Popular magazines followed a similar trend in their reporting of Mossadegh in the months prior to and following the visit. Reporting on hospital visits while on the tour, a *Time* article acknowledges that "every newspaper reader knows" of his fainting and asks "What Ails Mossadegh?" The answer was not any medical condition, as the article mentions hospital visits did not find any significant problems, but instead laid the blame on his "tantrum-my temperament" and "excitability."²⁴ All of these narratives culminated in *Time*'s Man of the Year "honor" at the end of 1951. In line with other sources, it highlights his "tantrums," calls him "peculiar," and compares him to a "willful little boy."²⁵ The article paints a picture of an infantile, neurotic, and thoroughly foreign leader who has the entire world worriedly watching his shifting and unpredictable will. Man of the Year was no honor for Mossadegh and instead solidified a negative image in the American mind beyond redemption. The writers of newspapers and magazines filtered away any notion of Mossadegh exhausting himself navigating a complex political game against the forces of colonialism. Instead, in the months following the 1951 visit, they promoted a caricature that endangered not only his people, but the world. This type of portrayal dominated until the end of Mossadegh's premiership, with one article branding him the "weeping strong man" while describing the political turmoil caused by the initial failure of Operation AJAX.²⁶ Thus, it was difficult, if not impossible, for Americans to perceive Mossadegh without conjuring images of fragility and femininity.

In his fall 1951 visit, Mossadegh had hoped to be viewed as a revolutionary

23. Michael Clark, "Iran's Crisis Deepens, But Premier Stays On: Oily Baba," *The New York Times*, September 23, 1951.

24. "What Ails Mossadegh?" *Time* 58, (October 29, 1951), 43.

25. "1951 Man of the Year: Mohammed Mossadegh," *Time* 59, (January 7, 1952), 18-21.

26. "Mossadegh in Control of Iran as Shah Ouster Plot Fails," *Houston Post*, August 19, 1953.

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE”

akin to the founding fathers of American past. In fact, Mossadegh’s popularity rose largely because of Iranian will to secure independence from Britain and Russia. In the cultural context of the 1950s, Mossadegh could have been portrayed by journalists, comics, and analysts as a sympathetic fighter against imperialism and communism. The 1951 visit might have been a turning point in creating a positive narrative by which Americans perceived Mossadegh. This idea was *sometimes* reflected in sources more sympathetic to the Iranian plight, but these interpretations were far less potent than those that used anti-communist, gendered, and Orientalist rhetoric to construe Mossadegh as weak-willed, irrational, and foolish. As a result, Mossadegh’s appeals to American revolutionary spirit were largely forgotten in the early half of 1952, leaving largely negative views of Mossadegh until his eventual removal.



The Price of Being 'Man of the Year.' Chloe Marcheli.

American perceptions of Mossadegh as effeminate, indecisive, and naïve would have been benign without the additional hyperawareness of so-called anarchy on the streets of Tehran. Iranian politics were certainly characterized by mob violence, riots, and assassinations brought on by political turmoil, unemployment, and occasionally foreign — sometimes U.S. government sponsored — subversion. In the McCarthyite era, American reaction to exposure to images of turmoil was almost anaphylactic in nature. Newspapers and magazines built on this fear and created a feeling that Iran was close to communist takeover. Americans, who were chasing communist ghosts at home,

ALLEN SELLERS

believed that Iran, along with much of the world, was in the process of burning. This conviction, in conjunction with the perception of an incapable and fainting Mossadegh, provided the United States with justification for intervention.

Newspapers were more blatant in their depiction of Iranian chaos than they were of Mossadegh's weakness. Just glancing at headlines written by *New York Times* contributor Michael Clark, one got a sense of disorder: "Iran Kept in Turmoil by Oil and Communism,"²⁷ "Terrorism Called Silent Ally in Triumph of Mossadegh,"²⁸ and "Mossadegh, Home Again, Faces Growing Crisis," to name a few.²⁹ A common theme was to conflate nationalism with turmoil. One *New York Times* article contended that, like Arab nationalism, Iranian nationalism was conceptually unlike western nationalism or patriotism. Instead, the author espoused that Iranian nationalism was fanatical, religiously motivated, and prone to violence. Mossadegh, therefore, was painted as stirring forces over which he had no control.³⁰ This article fit within the larger trend of growing American antipathy toward third world nationalism as a dangerous and chaotic force. Mossadegh was typed as unwittingly playing with a dangerous fire which he would not be able to extinguish.

Magazines also contributed to the sense of chaos in Iran. In the wake of Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, *Life* published an article headed by "False God Dies, Crisis is Born." The subsequent pages featured pictures of contenders for Soviet leadership, leftist agitation across the world, and communists executing landlords in China. Iranian political violence was included with photographs labeled with "confusion brings conflict" and "blood to Iran." American fears would have undoubtedly been aroused by the photographs. The subsequent article, "The Anglo-American Job," argues that Washington and London had to work together with "energy and political resourcefulness" to solve worldwide instability and prevent collectivist domination.³¹ To most readers, the situation did not require a nuanced understanding; the world was in danger and action had to be taken. The positioning of the Iranian pictures next to those of communist subversion around the world forced a connection between Tudeh-inspired violence and the monolithic danger of world communism. *Life* magazine's call for

27. "Mossadegh in Control of Iran as Shah Ouster Plot Fails," *Houston Post*, August 19, 1953.

28. Michael Clark, "Iran Kept in Turmoil by Oil and Communism," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1951.

29. Michael Clark, "Terrorism Called Silent Ally in Triumph of Mossadegh," *The New York Times*, November 29, 1951.

30. Michael Clark, "Mossadegh, Home Again, Faces Growing Crisis," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1951.

31. Edward Crankshaw, "False God Dies, Crisis is Born," *Life* 34 (March 16, 1953), 20-33; and Walter Lipman, "The Anglo-American Job," *Life* 34 (March 16, 1953), 20-33.

"FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE"

cooperation between the two powers, directly following images of Mossadegh and riots in Tehran, was almost prophetic considering the MI6 and the CIA were sowing the seeds of the coup at the time of publishing.

A dominant narrative, holding that Mossadegh was an incompetent leader and Iran was in chaos, established itself in the first year of the crisis. Alternate, less alarming, and more neutral descriptions existed, but they were subsumed in the months following Mossadegh's visit, so that by 1952 Americans thought of him as a threat to security. The most powerful and impactful representation was of the type presented in "Oily Baba" and the Man of the Year article.

"Prisoner of the Streets": Official Perception of Communist Chaos in Iran

The descriptions found in memoirs, magazines, and newspapers would be irrelevant to discussions of Operation AJAX if diplomatic documents did not use the same language and narratives. But there are striking similarities, as U.S. policymakers carried the same ideological-driven assumptions as their domestic counterparts. CIA, State Department, and White House documents all sketched a similar portrait of Mossadegh as unpredictable, naïve, and emotional. The post-facto memoirs of officials involved in the negotiations with and overthrow of Mossadegh, such as George McGhee and Kermit Roosevelt, also exhibited comparable attitudes. Because these mindsets were held by a wide variety of people within the government and domestic society, they could be classified as coming from the same cultural context.

"Mossadegh had all three qualities of being racially inferior, effeminate, and lacking in anti-communist resolve."

Just as with domestic media sources, the American tone when describing Mossadegh in diplomatic contexts varies from neutral to denigrating. In a report sent from the embassy in Iran to the State Department in the first month of his premiership, he was initially cast as a "experienced politician" whose "shrewd" and cautious balancing of support had effectively granted him significant powers. This relatively positive assessment was subsequently undermined when the report cautioned that "the character of the man himself," his "emotions under stress," his fainting at the sight supporters throwing flowers, and lack

ALLEN SELLERS

of a “clear perception” jeopardized stability in Iran. Despite the indicated shortcomings of Mossadegh, the report did not call for his downfall. On the contrary, it suggested U.S. support in the hopes that he could be steered in the right direction.³² This document is emblematic of policymakers’ initial feelings towards Mossadegh. Neutral or even positive descriptions existed, but were dispersed among narratives with highly charged rhetoric that called into question Mossadegh’s ability. American paternalism and exceptionalism also made an appearance, as officials hoped to steer him in the right direction and prevent communists from taking advantage of the situation. Documents also demonstrated that Americans were critical of the British and that Americans thought anti-communism was of higher priority than appeasing British interests.

For the most part, officials were resigned to the fact that he was in a strong political position and should not be overthrown.³³ Even so, not all officials saw an opportunity for compromise at this early stage in 1951. In the minutes from a CIA meeting, Allen Dulles stated that the only solution was to have the “Shah throw out Mossadegh” and “temporarily rule by decree”; he also stated that he wanted to discuss this matter with oilman turned diplomat George McGhee. In subsequent meetings, George McGhee, Allen Dulles, and Kermit Roosevelt discussed who would talk to the Shah.³⁴ Within the first months of Mossadegh’s premiership, a divide over support for overthrow appeared within the government. The source of this divide was not in how officials perceived Mossadegh – the assumption that he was weak and ineffectual remained consistent among the groups – instead, this divide existed due to differing opinions on the feasibility of overthrowing Mossadegh.

Just as in the press, Mossadegh’s visit in 1951 proved to be a turning point in solidifying opinion on Mossadegh for U.S. government officials. George McGhee met with Mossadegh during his tour with the goal of facilitating a deal between him and the British. He introduced Mossadegh in his memoir as “the crying premier” in line with popular sources. McGhee called his behavior “erratic,” noticed his “delightfully childlike way of sitting in a chair,” and stated that he had trouble understanding “a few facts of life about the international oil business.”³⁵ McGhee’s words show that he was influenced by the same

32. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 2017), 23.

33. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 30.

34. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 26.

35. George Crews McGhee, *I Did It This Way: from Texas and Oil to Oxford, Diplomacy, and Corporate*

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE”

sort of ideological filtering that the press was. Although he was critical of British actions, he never described them in such denigrating terms. Ultimately, he was unable to broker a deal due to inflexibility on both sides. From that point on, reports did not critique the British position as much as they criticized Mossadegh for his supposed irrationality, stubbornness, or naivety.

As nationalization negotiations stalled and the state of chaos seemed to continue into 1952, policymakers became increasingly weary of encouraging democracy through Mossadegh. The machinery of U.S. foreign relations churned out further evaluations of alternatives for leadership of Iran. The scrutiny of other potential candidates for leadership of Iran reflected the same ideological approach that was applied to Mossadegh. The Shah, who Dulles had wanted to rule by decree, had a mixed reputation — one embassy dispatch branded him as “indecisive and weak though well-intentioned” and another examined his “passivity” towards necessary political intervention — and therefore necessitated a strong premier to replace Mossadegh in the minds of decision-makers.³⁶ American and British diplomats met in May 1952 to discuss possible candidates for prime minister in the event that the Shah requested Mossadegh’s resignation. Discussion of those who were rejected included similar denigrating language as was used against Mossadegh. Hasan Arfa was called “unstable” and a “wild man.” Matin Daftari was nicknamed “Neutralist Joe” and considered “moderate, although ineffective.” Ali Shayegan called a “narrow and bigoted man” who purportedly shared Mossadegh’s belief in “restricted royal prerogatives.”³⁷ In essence, these men were faulted with being overly emotional, weak-willed, and unreasonable, respectively.

Meanwhile, the men whom the British and Americans described positively displayed authoritarian streaks that officials believed would be useful in combating communism. Ahmad Qavam was seen as susceptible to “nepotism” and “corruption,” but had the important upside of being a “strong man” who could “check the drift toward anarchy.” Fazlollah Zahedi, who rose to power after the 1953 coup, supposedly had “interest in practical problems” and would make a solution to the oil crisis on a “realistic basis.” Ali Soheili was highly regarded as the “most useful and practical” of the choices.³⁸ Approval did not exempt these men from receiving stereotypical accounts; Qavam’s “extremely oriental

Boards (Danbury, CT: Rutledge Books, 2001), 184-197.

36. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 55; FRU.S., Iran 1951-1954, 75.

37. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 73.

38. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 73.

ALLEN SELLERS

manner” reportedly made him difficult to understand.³⁹ These descriptions taken together show that American decision-makers wanted a strong man, a stark contrast to previous calls that democratic government ought to be encouraged.

What mattered to Americans then was whether the contenders exhibited traits of irrationality, neutrality, or naivety that were associated with Mossadegh; despots would be tolerated if they had the will to carry out programs which Americans thought of as rational. This rationale had consequences for American action: in July 1952 Mossadegh resigned from his post after a dispute with the Shah. Qavam took his place and Americans immediately sought to arrange for aid to Iran to buy time for a negotiated settlement. Qavam, however, resigned within a matter of days. American enthusiasm for Qavam could only be understood as a consequence of heightened paranoia of 1950s America. Qavam might have been old and un-westernized, but at least he would neutralize the communist threat. It was paternalistically assumed that leaders willing to toe the American line were more virile and could be guided in the right direction, even if they exhibited “Oriental” tendencies. Meanwhile, Mossadegh had all three qualities of being racially inferior, effeminate, and lacking in anti-communist resolve. By this point in 1952, the ideological track which conflated neutrality with effeminacy had been laid, leading straight to the overthrow of Mossadegh in August 1953.

American officials were concerned about the temperament of Mossadegh and his potential replacements because they viewed Iran as embroiled in chaos, similar to how the press portrayal. A litany of documents stressed street fights and expressed concern over how much control Mossadegh had over the conflicts taking place in the country. An October 1951 document, written the same month as the 1951 tour, labeled him as a “prisoner of the ‘streets.’”⁴⁰ Analysis regularly referred to street violence and expressed concern over the level of control the government had. Feelings that Mossadegh was weak in the face of communism combined with fear of the streets put policymakers into a highly paranoid frame of mind.

In a report on Iranian elections in April 1952, Kermit Roosevelt lamented that the government was “blind” to “subversion” and that the Tudeh Party was exploiting nationalistic “anti-American sentiment.” In the same document,

39. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 68.

40. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 51.

“FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEEPING WILLIE”

Roosevelt called for a prompt policy clarification on how to deal with the threat.⁴¹ Not every forecast was so gloomy. One document pointed out that Mossadegh should not “be accused at the present moment of softness towards alliance with communism.” But Secretary of State Dean Acheson apparently did not trust the evaluation and placed a question mark in the margins of his copy.⁴² Allen Dulles also either ignored or disbelieved that positive news and instead focused on alarmist updates that indicated the “communist threat was considerably enhanced by Mossadegh’s present attitude.”⁴³ These sources together show us that non-alarmist opinions existed within the government – not all diplomats and analysts saw the Tudeh threat as particularly pressing – but these optimistic assessments were filtered away because grim forecasts were far more compelling in light of prevailing McCarthyite anxiety. By 1952, actors like Dulles were set on the path to intervention because their mindsets naturally pointed them in that direction.

It is important to note that even American experts and officials who were not supportive of hardline intervention, such as a coup, still espoused paternalistic beliefs about Iranians and advocated for intervention, albeit in the limited form of assistance to the government. Previous experiences in Iran had led others to reach the conclusion that intervention was necessary for the advancement of democracy. American general Patrick Hurley, writing to President Roosevelt after the successful 1941 invasion of Iran to secure its oil supplies and prevent Axis takeover, made clear that the United States should prioritize building a government that respected the “rights of man as set forth in the Constitution.” He contended that through a program of “self-help” assisted by American expertise and Iran’s abundant resources, Iranians could achieve independence in the face of European imperialist advances.⁴⁴ Arthur Millspaugh, who was tasked with providing financial expertise to the Iranian government during WWII and in decades prior, was far more skeptical of Iranians’ ability to govern themselves. In his 1946 memoir *Americans in Persia* he argued that the result of Russian and British interference was that “Persia [could not] be left to herself.” Furthermore, he stated that the road to civilization has not been “good for all regions and races” and therefore the United States would have to

41. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 71.

42. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 97.

43. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 102.

44. U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1943, The Near East and Africa, Volume IV*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1964), Document 440.

ALLEN SELLERS

support initiatives to democratize the country.⁴⁵ Americans at the time harbored and built upon such paternalistic sentiments. For example, one February 1952 dispatch from the Iranian embassy cites Millspaugh and is, for the most part, grudgingly respectful of Mossadegh's efforts to gain independence.⁴⁶ There was a current in early official accounts that indicated a desire for American-inspired democracy in Iran, but prejudice against Mossadegh's eccentricities eventually subsumed these democratic aspirations and caused Americans to forget Millspaugh's and Hurley's calls for the support of democracy.

Culture and American Power Abroad

The argument that the United States undertook Operation AJAX primarily to secure its oil access in the Middle East seems to contradict the evidence which demonstrates the importance of American fears concerning communist subversion. Certainly, concerns for oil nationalization factored in, but the overwhelming amount of evidence points to communism as the primary concern of Americans. Deeper consideration of the wider context and American priorities weakens the conclusion that the communist threat was secondary to concerns for oil in Americans' minds. The threat of losing oil revenue or supply was not nearly as terrifying to Americans as the threat of communist takeover. Headlines usually warned in dire tones that the communist threat was real in Iran. *Foreign Relations of the United States (F.R.U.S.)* documents are filled with references to leftist inspired violence. In separate TV interviews Charles L. Harding and Henry Grady downplayed the importance of Iranian oil on domestic supply⁴⁷ and focused on the risk of Soviets snatching the oil,⁴⁸ respectively. Fear of communism, exacerbated by feelings that Mossadegh was not the *man* to meet the challenge, was the primary motivator for U.S. intervention.

Another important revelation is that the roots of Operation AJAX lie in the Truman administration. Previous scholarship points to the change in administrations, with the Eisenhower administration's beginning in early 1953 as a turning point. The Eisenhower administration was undoubtedly more comfortable with covert operations and Eisenhower's CIA organized other

45. Arthur Chester Millspaugh, *Americans in Persia* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1946), 242-251.

46. U.S. Department of State, *F.R.U.S., Iran 1951-1954*, 65.

47. "Longines Chronoscope with Charles L. Harding," Youtube.com, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb76BOo3j4g>.

48. "Longines Chronoscope with Henry F. Grady," Youtube.com, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb76BOo3j4g>.

"FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE"

regime changes across the world. Even so, it would be unwise to pinpoint administration change as the turning point in U.S.-Iranian relations. The critical months of Mossadegh's early premiership were more important in establishing how the U.S. was going to relate to Iran. The visit and failed negotiations in late 1951 and early 1952 mark the critical period in which the seeds of intervention were sown. After failures to negotiate a settlement, Americans became increasingly hostile, and negative interpretations of Mossadegh, which were informed by American prejudice and paranoia, reigned. This cultural lens reveals the shifts in American attitudes and tentative covert plans during the Truman administration which were necessary for the commitment to Operation AJAX once Eisenhower assumed office. The attitudes solidified in the Truman administration were instrumental in the Eisenhower administration's decision to throw its weight behind covert action in concert with the British.

These trends together reveal how information was interpreted, ignored, or reacted to in the cultural context of the era. On a day-to-day basis, decision makers had to process amounts of information too large to make complete sense of. The information they chose to focus on regarding Iran and their reaction to that information reflects the paranoia of McCarthyism and the prejudice of racial and gendered thinking. This conclusion does not necessarily reject scholarship, which does not place its focus on culture. Instead, cultural analysis, in this case, qualifies previous arguments and reminds that decisions are not made in a completely rational manner. This qualification is important if we are to fully grasp the reasons American decision makers decided to take such drastic action. Operation AJAX was a defining moment in America's relations with the Middle East. The same methods would be reused, and the arguments reiterated, in future interventions across the region and globe.

Exploring the relationship between culturally-influenced ideology and government actions reveals a wider trend. Culture and rhetoric help to shape the lens through which policymakers consume information. This filtering, in turn, limits the range of "reasonable" options available to leaders. The anti-communist, gendered, and orientalist rhetoric of the 1950s rationalized the 1953 coup through the same process that Islamophobia and counter-terrorist ideology has come to justify various forms of violent intervention in the recent past across the Middle East. This method of history is not the most clean or easy to follow, but it reveals a far more nuanced view of how American power materializes abroad.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Coup 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. New York: New Press, 2013.
- Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Ansari, Ali M. *The Politics of Nationalism in Modern Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Balaghi, Shiva. "Silenced Histories and Sanitized Autobiographies: The 1953 CIA Coup in Iran." *Biography* 36, no. 1 (2013): 71–96. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bio.2013.0009>.
- Clark, Michael. "Mossadegh, Home Again, Faces Growing Crisis." *The New York Times*, November 25, 1951.
- "Iran's Crisis Deepens, But Premier Stays On: Oily Baba." *The New York Times*. September 23, 1951.
- "Iran Kept in Turmoil by Oil and Communism." *The New York Times*. April 29, 1951.
- "Terrorism Called Silent Ally in Triumph of Mossadegh." *The New York Times*. November 29, 1951.
- Costigliola, Frank. "'Unceasing Pressure for Penetration': Gender, Pathology, and Emotion in George Kennan's Formation of the Cold War." *The Journal of American History* 83, no. 4 (1997): 1309–1339. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952904>.
- Crankshaw, Edward. "False God Dies, Crisis is Born." *Life* 34. March 16, 1953.
- Elm, Mostafa. *Oil, Power, and Principle : Iran's Oil Nationalization and Its Aftermath*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992.
- Gallico, Paul. "Several Good Reasons for Being Thankful." *Houston Post*. November 18, 1951.
- Gasiorowski, Mark J. "U.S. Perceptions of the Communist Threat in Iran During the Mossadegh Era." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 21, no. 3 (2019): 185–221. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/731287>.
- Glenn, Patrick, and Bryan Gibson. *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions And The Making Of Our Times*. Macat Library, 2017.
- Heiss, Mary Ann. *Empire and Nationhood: the United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950–1954*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- "Iran Mob Threatens Holy War." *Houston Post*. May 22, 1951.
- "Iran Shah Gives In, OKs Oil Grab Bloc Leader as Premier." *Houston Post*. April 30, 1951.
- Jacobs, Matthew F. *Imagining the Middle East: the Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918–1967*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Jacobs, Seth. *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Klein, Christina. *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*. Berkeley, CA:

"FAINTING FRANCIS OR WEeping WILLIE"

University of California Press, 2009.

Lippman, Walter. "The Anglo-American Job." *Life* 34. March 16, 1953.

Little, Douglas. *American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945*. Durham, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

"Longines Chronoscope with Charles L. Harding." Youtube.com, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb76BOo3j4g>.

"Longines Chronoscope with Henry F. Grady," Youtube.com, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb76BOo3j4g>.

Love, Eric T. L. *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

May, Elaine Tyler. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 2017.

McAlister, Melani. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2007.

McGhee, George Crews. *I Did It This Way: from Texas and Oil to Oxford, Diplomacy, and Corporate Boards*. Danbury, CT: Rutledge Books, 2001.

Millspaugh, Arthur Chester. *Americans in Persia*. Washington: Brookings Institution, 1946.

"Mossadegh, Here, Appeals to Americans to Back Iran." *The New York Times*. October 9, 1951.

"Mossadegh in Control of Iran as Shah Ouster Plot Fails." *Houston Post*. August 19, 1953.

"1951 Man of the Year: Mohammed Mossadegh." *Time*. January 7, 1952.

"Oil Company Makes Conciliatory Move." *Houston Post*. May 28, 1951.

Roosevelt, Kermit. *Countercoup, the Struggle for the Control of Iran*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981.

Rotter, Andrew Jon. *Comrades at Odds: the United States and India, 1947-1964*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Schrecker, Ellen. *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.

U.S. Department of State. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*. Washington, DC: GPO, 2017.

— — Foreign Relations of the United States, 1949. *The Far East and Australasia*, Volume VII, Part 2. Washington, DC: GPO, 1976.

U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities. *Investigation of Communist Activities in the State of Michigan*, 83rd Congress, 2nd session, 1954.

"What Ails Mossadegh?" *Time* 58, October 29, 1951.

Zubok, Vladislav. "Stalin, Soviet Intelligence, and the Struggle for Iran." *Diplomatic History*. 44, no. 1 (2020): 22-46. <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhz049>.



ALLEN SELLERS (AUTHOR)

Sid Richardson College, '21

Allen Sellers is a junior from Sid Richardson college majoring in History and Political Science. When not reading or writing about the history of U.S. foreign policy, he can be found photographing Rice athletic events for The Rice Thresher. After graduation, Allen hopes to attend law school.



CHLOE MARCHELI (ARTIST)

Will Rice College, '21

Chloe is a rising Senior at Will Rice College majoring in History. She enjoys drawing, photography and dance. When she's not working on history papers and art projects she can be found dancing and choreographing for the Rice Dance Theater.



Four Horses. Abigail King.

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY: A TEXTUAL EXAMINATION OF AKBAR'S RELIGIOSITY

This paper examines the translation movement of Hindu epics from Sanskrit to Persian spearheaded by the sixteenth century Mughal emperor Akbar. Many historians understand this phenomenon as a cultural accommodation by the emperor to attain legitimacy amongst a heterogeneous populace. This paper, in contrast, seeks to locate this effort within a broader theological project by Akbar to unite Hindu and Sufi thought in order to imbue a corporeal divinity within himself. To do so, this paper explores the religious milieu in which the texts were translated through courtly histories and through recorded commentary by the emperor's contemporaries. Despite the indisputable political expedience of the translations, one can argue that an experimental impulse to reconfigure Mughal theology was the foundational term of the initiative. This argument would thus dismantle a popular perception of a rigid, strictly defined empire and instead offer one of a notably porous and assimilatory Mughal identity.

Akhil Jonnalagadda
Written for Ruling Hindustan
(HIST 494)
Dr. Lisa Balabanlilar

Introduction

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, have presented an enduring backdrop for the cultural imagination of the region. Since their creation, thought disputably to have occurred between the third and fifth centuries B.C.E., the two stories have been retranslated, reinterpreted, and reintroduced into the social consciousness of India and, later, the surrounding Asiatic regions.¹ It is no secret that, in this time, the South Asian subcontinent bore witness to explosive cultural diffusion through the ceaseless flow of trade, migration, and conquest. What we are left with today is a region with seemingly remarkable continuities and inexplicable contradictions that have charged historians with the duty of careful study and elucidation. In this effort,

1. John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 25.

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY

the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* reveal themselves to us as a sort of cultural palimpsest: if we were to peel back the layers of their perpetual refashioning, we may locate within them how ideology has ebbed and flowed in the region.

In this paper, we will examine the role played by the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* within the Mughal Empire as repurposed vehicles of ideology under Akbar's rule. Emperor Akbar, who reigned over the Mughal Empire during the latter half of the sixteenth century, oversaw a colossal project of translation that resulted in the courtly production of Hindu epics in Persian. Combined with his theological interests, his governing ideologies, and his personal idiosyncrasies, this movement was situated within a complex matrix of Akbar's deeply enigmatic beliefs. We may, however, explore the efforts of translation to excavate an ideological impulse and derive a better understanding of the movement's intent. Many eminent scholars of Mughal history maintain that the translation of Hindu epics into Persian was a sort of cultural accommodation in order to minimize factionalism and promote Hindu-Muslim relations in a religiously variegated society. Rather than a theological exploration that retains the religiosity of the texts, the translations are understood instead as a mix of political and aesthetic modes of discourse produced to reflect the empire's diversity and entrench the emperor firmly within the cultural bedrock of Hindustan.

However, a deeper consideration of the religious milieu of Akbar's reign, of the emperor's own spiritual conception of his corporeality, and of the longstanding dynamism of the Mughal identity may force us to complicate this prevailing conclusion. I aim to argue that the translation of these epics, rather than being done with the excision of their intrinsic theology, was *driven* by a spiritual impulse that sought to unite Hindu and Sufi thought which only then suffused into the empire's political orientation. We can locate the translation within a broader attempt to reconfigure the inner logic of Mughal theology in order to imbue a corporeal divinity *within* the emperor himself, a strategy that— while inherently political— can hardly be dismissed as one of simple political expediency. Finally, in studying how this theological reformulation permeated into the Mughal character, we can perhaps construct an understanding of the empire's cultural identity as not one that was rigid yet tolerant to its diverse subjects but rather as one that was inherently fluid, creative, and assimilatory of its myriad influences.

Razmnamah & Akbari Ramayana: A Context

Before confronting the intricate political calculus embedded within their

translations, we should first understand the texts themselves and their extensive interpretative capacity. The appropriative power of South Asian folklore cannot be understated. The folklorist A.K. Ramanujan explained how “stories about stories, frame stories, and nested ones, as well as various self-referential devices like plays within plays,” are plentiful within the Indian classical tradition.² Because folk literature rarely remains crystallized and untouched, “whole epics tend to be repeated, remembered, reworked, and renewed, not just translated but transmuted utterly, in the many languages of India.”³ Therefore, we must not gloss over this aesthetic mimesis as a simple predilection for referential anachronisms; every recurrence of a poem or story intervenes into an existing cultural system as abound with refashioned signifiers or, as Ramanujan poetically put it, as “mirrors again that become windows.”⁴

The two epics at hand have cemented their persisting import within the Indian literary canon. Ramanujan famously wrote that “a text like the *Mahabharata* is not a text but a tradition,” and that “it used to be every poet’s ambition to write a *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata*.”⁵ Furthermore, both texts embody the incessant metamorphosis of Indian folklore and present themselves as ever-evolving nuclei of Indian political and cultural logic. Sheldon Pollock asserted that the *Ramayana*, for example, has “supplied, continuously and readily, if in a highly differentiated way, a repertory of imaginative instruments for articulating a range of political discourses.”⁶ Pollock went as far as questioning whether any other South Asian text has “ever supplied an idiom or vocabulary for political imagination remotely comparable in longevity, frequency of deployment, and effectivity.”⁷

It is in this context that we arrive at Akbar’s project of translating these epics to Persian, the language of the Mughal court. Akbar’s religious policy during his reign would be described today as notably tolerant of non-Muslim religion and culture. His “maintenance of power depended upon the success of his strategy to incorporate Hindu and other religious and political factions into the imperial bureaucracy, and to allow a degree of autonomy in various regions of the empire,” which manifested in his admission of non-Muslims into the royal administration, his abolition of a Hindu pilgrimage tax, and his marriages to daughters of several

2. A.K. Ramanujan, *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 21.

3. Ramanujan, *The Collected Essays*, 21.

4. Ramanujan, *The Collected Essays*, 25.

5. Ramanujan, *The Collected Essays*, 162.

6. Sheldon Pollock, “*Ramayana* and Political Imagination in India,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 1993): 262.

7. Pollock, “*Ramayana* and Political Imagination,” 262.

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY

high-ranking Hindus.⁸ In 1574, Akbar established a translation bureau within which his top scribes and secretaries were tasked with translating a range of Sanskrit texts, including the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.⁹

In 1582, Akbar had the latter translated as an abridgment entitled *Razmnamah* (Book of War) that was evidently intended for more than private consumption amongst the royal court. Abu'l Fazl, the emperor's grand Vizier, wrote the following in the translation's preface:

Some biased, irreligious (یتن اید یب) people and leaders of derivative practice (دی لوت لھا نایاوش یپ) in India think their beliefs are the best ever. Therefore, they consider their ridiculous views as free from any defect, and they keep imitating others and instructing the gullible with their own teachings without pursuing any further study; resulting in the distribution of false notions. They regard the true followers of Muhammad's religion, whose respectable views and the true essence of their sciences they know nothing about, as owners of mere vain and senseless words and discredit them completely. Due to his great wisdom, the king asked for the *Mahabharata* to be translated in the best way possible, since it contains many points about these types of people. Translating this book will enable those extreme sceptics to adopt a moderate attitude and it will also make the gullible feel embarrassed about what they believed and therefore be led to the actual truth.¹⁰

Thus, we can presume that the translation effort was made for the purpose of propagation throughout the empire's populace. The Persian-translated *Akbari Ramayana* was completed in 1588, and while it was not as widespread as its textual counterpart, it still became quite popular amongst elite circles; the manuscript was said to have "passed down through the line of Mughal sovereigns, and flyleaf inscriptions confirm that it was viewed frequently," even during the reign of Akbar's grandson, Shah Jahan.¹¹ The sheer longevity and widespread consumption of the translated texts reveals an emergent need to understand the project's purpose: what was it done for, and what did Akbar and his court stand to gain from it?

8. Yael Rice, "A Persian Mahabharata: The 1598-1599 Razmnama," *Manoa* 22, no. 1 (2010), 125-31.

9. Rice, "A Persian Mahabharata," 125.

10. Raziheh Babagolzadeh, "Understanding the Mughal *Book of War*" (MA diss., Simon Fraser University, 2015), 49.

11. Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 209.

Truschke & The Politics of Translation

Modern scholars of the Mughal Empire have taken this issue up with due enthusiasm. Despite the complexity with which the question presents itself, a consensus appears to have emerged regarding the motives of Akbar's translation efforts. Audrey Truschke argued that religion featured less prominently in how the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were received, and that the translations were viewed by the Mughals not as theological works but as opportunities to acculturate these stories for a predominantly Islamic audience.¹² This position was best encapsulated in Truschke's interpretation of the *Razmnamah* in her groundbreaking book, *Culture of Encounters*, and can be summarized by the following: the *Razmnamah* drastically rewrote the religious framework of the *Mahabharata*, as evidenced in its truncation of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a spiritually dense chapter of the original poem, and in its repositioning of the Hindu deity Krishna. These changes then indicate that cultural intelligibility — rather than theological interest — motivated the translation project.

Truschke wrote that “the Mughals indicate discomfort with the perceived Hindu message of the *Bhagavad-Gita* by drastically shortening and altering this section;” while the original Sanskrit chapter extends to a little over seven hundred verses, it occupied a “mere few pages of the *Razmnamah*.”¹³ Even within the scanty reproduction of the *Gita*, the abstract reflections on Hindu philosophy and yoga embedded in the original text were displaced. Instead of providing an ethical climax as it does in the original, the focus in the translation seemed to be fixed solely on the chapter's plot content.¹⁴ Additionally, Akbar's translator truncated “other religiously tinted portions of the text, such as a segment on pilgrimage locations in book nine.”¹⁵ While Truschke maintained that the translators retain much of the *Mahabharata*'s Hindu religious framework with a discernible infusion of Islamic theological concepts, she concluded that the diffusion represents a “series of uneven attempts to remain faithful to the *Mahabharata* while producing a culturally intelligible story for an Islamicate audience.”¹⁶ In doing so, she dismissed any internal theological experimentation as being done merely to

12. Audrey Truschke, “The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 515.

13. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 116.

14. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 116.

15. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

16. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

accommodate the work to a diverse readership.

Truschke solidified her argument by exploring how the deity Krishna, who offers divine advice to the warrior Arjuna in the *Gita*, is depicted in the *Razmnamah*. The Persian *Bhagavad-Gita* “opens like the Sanskrit with Arjuna instructing Krishna to position their chariot between the two armies ready for war,” but when Arjuna has his famed crisis of conscience, “the Persian Krishna speaks to him as a wise teacher but not as a divine incarnation,” revealing a conspicuously Islamic positioning of Krishna as a messenger, distinct from God, rather than as a divine being himself.¹⁷ This posturing, curiously enough, is inconsistent elsewhere in the *Razmnamah* where Krishna is “portrayed as an Indian *deva* and alternatively equated to *khuda*, the Islamic God.”¹⁸ Truschke found this as confirmation that the *Razmnamah* purposefully retooled the source material to be less theologically incongruent and that the varying representation of Krishna reveals the “treatment of religious elements in the *Razmnamah* as reaching toward cultural accommodation for a predominantly Islamic audience rather than tied to any calculated theological objectives.”¹⁹

In this vein, Muzzafar Alam described the Persian rendering of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as simply efforts to “make the major local texts available and thus to dispel the ignorance about the Hindu traditions” in a desire to build an empire where “both Shaikh and Brahman could live with minimum possible conflicts.”²⁰ We can then conclude that both Truschke and Alam, despite the latter’s marginal emphasis on this argument, would agree that the translations were purely political and aesthetic projects of legitimacy by Akbar’s court that sought to culturally accommodate religiously diverse communities within the empire. It is important to note a significant presupposition within this claim: if Akbar’s courtly translations were intentionally exclusionary to any particular theological bent, an emergent implication is that the Mughals’ own Islamic religious sensibilities were rigid, strictly defined, and impermeable. Furthermore, to deem the project as one of tolerance and “cultural accommodation” is to also then assume that the Mughal court possessed a sharp discernment of religious communities as distinct within the empire. In order to examine the validity of these implications, we can begin by studying the theological milieu of Akbar’s rule.

17. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

18. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

19. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

20. Muzzafar Alam, “Pursuit of Persian,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (May 1998): 335.

Religion & Universalism Under Akbar

Akbar's reign can be fairly characterized as one marked by strident religious iconoclasm. The spiritual terrain under his rule was steeped in creative experimentation of theological beliefs, much of which was driven by the emperor himself. Despite the empire's ostensible identification with being nominally Islamic, Akbar frequently assumed the license to diverge from what would have been understood as orthodox ritual and belief. For instance, Akbar "forbade Islamic prayers, fasting and the pilgrimage and allowed the day of resurrection and judgment to be openly doubted and ridiculed at court," replaced the Islamic calendar with a Persian solar one, promoted the study of philosophy in lieu of religious studies, and even "suggested that ablution be performed before having sex" rather than after (as is sanctioned by normative Islamic law).²¹ Akbar's disaffection with orthodox Islam coincided with a deep engagement with contemporary Sufi doctrines of unityism — which asserted that "to worship Allah, there are many ways and foundation of each religion is on the truth" — and with regular interaction with Hindu philosophers and practitioners.²²

Abdul Qadir Al-Badaoni, Akbar's courtly historian and translator, wrote extensively — and often bitterly — about Akbar's interaction with Sufi and Hindu thought. In Volume II of his court historical account, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh*, Al-Badaoni wrote the following:

Samanas and Brahmins (who as far as the matter of private interviews is concerned gained the advantage over every one in attaining the honor of interviews with his Majesty, and in associating with him, and were in every way superior in reputation to all learned and trained men for their treatises on morals, and on physical and religious sciences, and in religious ecstasies, and stages of spiritual progress and human perfections) brought forward proofs, based on reason and traditional testimony, for the truth of their own, and the fallacy of our religion, and inculcated their doctrine with such firmness and assurance, that they affirmed mere imaginations as though they were self-evident facts, the truth of which the doubts of the sceptic could no more shake.²³

21. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 237.

22. Cemil Kutlutürk, "A Critical Analysis of Akbar's Religious Policy: Din-i Ilahi," *International Relations and Diplomacy* 4, no. 6 (June 2016): 409.

23. Abdu-L-Qadir Ibn-I-Muluk Shah Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, trans. W.H. Lowe (Patna: Academica Asiatica, 1973), 264.

Al-Badaoni, who made no hesitation to repudiate the “reviling attacks against our pure and easy, bright and holy faith,” unveiled the unyielding enthusiasm with which Akbar approached Hindu thought and practice.²⁴ On the next page of his text, Al-Badaoni wrote:

At one time a Brahman, named Debi who was one of the interpreters of the *Mahabharata*, was pulled up the wall of the castle sitting on a *charpai* till he arrived near a balcony, which the Emperor has made his bed-chamber. Whilst thus suspended he instructed his Majesty in the secrets and legends of Hinduism, in the manner of worshipping idols, the fire, the sun and stars, and of revering the chief gods of these unbelievers, such as Brahma, Mahadev, Bishn, Kishn, Ram, and Mahama (whose existence as sons of the human race is a supposition, but whose non-existence is a certainty, though in their idle belief they look on some of them as gods, and some as angels). His Majesty, on hearing further how much the people of the country prized their institutions, began to look upon them with affection. He became especially firmly convinced of the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, and he much approved of the saying: “*There is no religion in which the doctrine of Transmigration has not a firm hold.*” And insincere flatterers composed treatises in order to establish indisputable arguments in favor of this thesis.²⁵

Evident in his embittered description was Akbar’s growing desire to assimilate what he found alluring within Hinduism, regardless of its incompatibility with Islamic philosophy, into his own theological framework. Al-Badaoni continued by deriding arguments nascent within Akbar’s spiritual practice concerning “the Unity of Existence, such as idle Sufis discuss, which eventually lead to license and open heresy” and which were to become “a chief cause of the weakening of the Emperor’s faith in the commands of Islam.”²⁶

This exploratory impulse — urged on by the emperor himself — to problematize orthodox Islamic practice and coalesce discrete theologies into a unified cultural system was a hallmark of Akbar’s religious discourse. Court histories, some accounts written by Al-Badaoni himself, attested that “Akbar engaged in certain

24. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 264.

25. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 265.

26. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 266.

Sanskrit-inspired religious practices, like sun veneration” against the counsel of Islamic doctrinal scholars.²⁷ As explicated above by Al-Badaoni, the emperor was influenced strongly by the theory of transmigration, a cornerstone within traditional Hindu doctrine. Akbar was also said to have “appreciated the value of Hindu gods and goddesses” and once even “observed some rites which were customary among the Hindus.”²⁸ This practice was simply a personal manifestation of what was to become a wider imperial ideology of universal peace (*sulh-i kull*) that preached open-minded engagement between disparate belief systems. While scholars have “frequently conflated *sulh-i kul* with modern concepts of toleration,” it is better understood as a spiritual orientation that “enjoined individuals to seriously weigh ideas from different traditions and adopt perspectives that superseded those espoused by their own communities.”²⁹

The internal logic of *sulh-i kul*, hence, eclipses that of a pragmatic political strategy to circumvent sectarian strife; it was instead one of incessant theological reflection and reconfiguration intended to locate a perennial “truth” and subsequently suffuse through the cultural milieu of the empire. From this quest emerges Akbar’s own spiritual enterprise, *Din-i-Ilahi*. The term *Din-i-Ilahi* was used by Al-Badaoni—translated as “Divine Religion”—in his *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh* with regards to a declaration of conversion made by Mirza Jani Beg, a ruler of the city Tattha, who was said to have signed the following record: “I who am so and so, son of so and so, do voluntarily, and with sincere predilection and inclination, utterly and entirely renounce and repudiate the religion of Islam, which I have seen and heard of my fathers, and do embrace the ‘Divine Religion’ of Akbar Shah.”³⁰ The tradition, manicured carefully by Akbar himself, marked a “disassociation from traditional and imitative Islam” and sought to engender a “universal peace and religious freedom” founded upon a shared theological architecture.³¹

Akbar’s Immanent Sacrality

The actual principles and practices of the *Din-i-Ilahi* are certainly of consideration, but the tradition’s significance here lies rather in what it asserted about Akbar himself. The steady invalidation of traditional Islamic belief can fairly

27. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 131.

28. Kutlutürk, “A Critical Analysis,” 410.

29. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 152.

30. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 314.

31. Kutlutürk, “A Critical Analysis,” 415.

be recognized as a calculated siphonage of power from the courtly orthodox establishment to the emperor himself. Truschke quoted Abu'l Fazl, who refers to this power struggle by declaring that “Akbar will no longer allow the supposedly learned of Islam undeserved authority” and will instead offer “himself as a superior replacement,” thereby supplanting the role of theologians by “recalibrating the

“...the imperial system was consolidated within the emperor himself—to challenge his authority was to debilitate the empire.”

nature of knowledge” itself.³² This is contextualized within a broader attempt by Akbar to reformulate Mughal power so as to implant it within himself. Through a wide array of political and symbolic acts, Akbar “built upon his personal appeal to establish animate or metaphor of the Emperor’s person as an embodiment of the Empire.”³³ In other words, the imperial system was consolidated within the emperor himself — to challenge his authority was to debilitate the empire.

This ideological inflection towards an embodied dominion did not, however, remain within a plane of political materiality. Within Akbar’s religious experimentation was a concerted effort to lift theology from doctrine and scripture and locate divinity itself as *immanent* within the emperor. Pervasive through Abu'l Fazl’s historical panegyric, the *Ain-i Akbari*, was an attempt to “demonstrate either openly or subtly with every possible rhetorical device, his master’s superiority to ordinary men.”³⁴ For example, he elevated Akbar above other kings by imbuing the emperor with a sublime resplendence that was tantamount only to that of the divine — “Although kings are the shadow of God on earth, he is the emanation of God’s light.”³⁵ However, this imperial construction of a corporeal divinity — in notable continuity from Akbar’s active engagement with perennialist unityism — cannot be distilled into an immutable, pre-existing theological framework. What we find instead is an assimilation of heterogeneous notions of divinity into a unified conception that privileged Akbar as a universal embodiment of sacrality.

32. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 128.

33. John Richards, “Formulation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir,” in *The Mughal State 1526-1750*, ed. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 129.

34. Richards, “Formulation of Imperial Authority,” 129.

35. Abul Fazl-I-Allami, *Ain-I-Akbari Vol. I*, trans. Colonel H.S. Jarrett (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society), 631.

Azfar Moin's *The Millennial Sovereign* laid much of the groundwork for this argument. Moin noted that Akbar's claims of sacred kingship were made "in an idiom of messianism and enacted with rituals of sainthood" that exploited the then-oncoming Islamic millennium to proclaim his innate sacrality.³⁶ The completion of a millennium since the Prophet's death unfurled the possibility of a new dynastic cycle, the founding of which would necessitate a sacred presence or, as Akbar professed himself to be, a "Renewer of the Second Millennium (*Mujaddid-i Alf-i Than*)."³⁷ This sovereign declaration was predicated upon a deeply embodied sacrality; the millennial Renewer was said to have been reborn to inaugurate the oncoming millennia, reestablish his link with divinity for the next thousand years, and pivot the new era "not on a new doctrine or interpretation of law but on taking the place — bodily and spiritually — of a sacred entity."³⁸ This claim was buttressed by chronicled stories of "divine light" finding its perfection within Akbar after multiple reincarnations through history and even of "infant Akbar's ability to speak Jesus-like in the cradle."³⁹

Widespread recognition of Akbar's immanent spirituality led to his hesitant but eventual acceptance of the role as the era's designated spiritual mediator. Thus, Akbar assigned himself the responsibility to "to end the unquestioned following of tradition (*taqlid*) which had only caused dissension and confusion and in its place offer reasoned judgment (*ijtihad*)."⁴⁰ From this context emerges a lucid understanding of Akbar's sacrality and its resultant devotional movement. As Moin wrote, Akbar "openly acknowledged his patronage of radical and antinomian Sufi groups who venerated him as divine; his support for the arguments of the Jesuit priests against their Muslim adversaries; his impatience with traditional Islamic law; his need to recruit and patronize men from all creeds and castes across India, Iran, and Transoxania; and, finally, his thinly-veiled performance as the saintly guide and spiritual master of all humanity."⁴¹ Akbar was disinterested in the subversion or replacement of any religion; by asserting himself as a sacred sovereign, the heralded saint of the era, Akbar postured himself as not *against* any religion but rather *above them all*.

36. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 203.

37. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 206.

38. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 210.

39. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 213.

40. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 218.

41. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 223.

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY

The appropriation of myriad philosophical systems (i.e. metempsychosis, reincarnation, illumination theory, and so on) to undergird messianic claims discloses Akbar's intent to position himself as not only the rightful arbitrator of all traditions but also as a universal figure of divine immanence. Akbar's reign bore witness to an active ontological restructuring; the supramundane descended, much to Al-Badaoni's dismay, from a position of exteriority that ineluctably transcends man and flowed instead from a sublimated reconceptualization of the emperor himself. In doing so, the authority of the orthodox Islamic order steadily diminished, and the Mughal emperor's expansive political and theological power was made indistinct from his corporeality. There is undoubtedly room to suggest that this was a result of political arithmetic to crystallize imperial legitimacy. However, Akbar's theological orientation exists as the foundational term upon which such political implications emanate. Codes of religious tolerance supersede the function of political efficacy. They are better understood, their inherent political import notwithstanding, as demonstrations of a fluid personal religiosity that was only *then* translated into imperial strategy.

We can then perhaps dismantle the notion that "religious tolerance" was enforced as an exclusively political objective. An ideology of tolerance, divorced from any interest in theological diffusion, presupposes sharp distinctions

“Akbar was disinterested in the subversion or replacement of any religion; by asserting himself as a sacred sovereign, the heralded saint of the era, Akbar postured himself as not against any religion but rather above them all.”

between the religiosity of the imperial court and that of the empire. In that model, a lenient emperor may detachedly accommodate cultural minorities through policy while firmly maintaining his own theology. However, the cultural identity of the Mughal empire, especially under Akbar's reign, failed to retain any strictly defined religious sensibility. The incessant flow of multicultural influence through the empire's borders and an imperial assimilatory predisposition forced its identity into a state of perpetual flux that allowed for radical experimentation at the highest level. Akbar's determination to arbitrate all religious sensibilities in

his domain emerged from a campaign to *destabilize religious distinctions* as a whole, and it manifested in an assertion of his own universal divinity and of the universality of spiritual truth. Therefore, arguments of pure political utilitarianism become untenable; which populations in particular was Akbar pandering to with his policies, and how can we unerringly extricate such policies from his theological project of universalism?

Locating Theology Within Translation

Understanding Akbar's theological formulations as beyond *exclusively* political accommodations suggests a more expansive way of also approaching courtly cultural productions. If we were to embed the translation movement within Akbar's broader project of fashioning a universal imperial religiosity, we may find ourselves arriving at a different conclusion than did Truschke who, once again, contended that the translations of Hindu epics were done with the purposeful excision of their intrinsic theology. A broader examination of the translation project as a whole, however, unveils an indisputable attention devoted by the Mughal translators to Hindu theology. Abu'l Fazl, for example, wrote freely in the *Ain-i Akbari* about the tenets and practices of Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist philosophical schools.⁴² Furthermore, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the spiritually dense chapter abbreviated from the *Razmnamah*, was rendered into Persian "as a freestanding text several times during Mughal rule, and the first translation may have been in Akbar's court."⁴³ Its diminution within the *Razmnamah*, therefore, becomes an isolated incident — albeit a notable one — that may perhaps be negligible within the larger context of Sanskrit-to-Persian translation.

In order to properly situate the translations of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* within Akbar's theological enterprise, we must also account for his personal involvement with the project. Official court histories presented the *Mahabharata* as closely connected with the Mughal sovereign by describing how Akbar employed "some of the chief literary stars of his time to participate in the translation and retranslation processes" and consulted "with the *Razmnamah* translators regularly."⁴⁴ Truschke remarked on Akbar's eager participation in the movement by stating that he "never devoted equivalent resources to another translation and rarely to another manuscripts (the Akbari Ramayan being a

42. Abul Fazl-I-Allami, *Ain-I-Akbari Vol. III*, trans. Colonel H.S. Jarrett (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society).

43. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 117.

44. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 102.

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY

notable exception).⁴⁵ We can find evidence of Akbar's intervention within the following passages in Al-Badaoni's *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh*:

Among the remarkable events of this year is the translation of the *Mahabharata*, which is the most famous of the Hindu books, and contains all sorts of stories, and moral reflections, and advice, and matters relating to conduct and manners, and religion and science, and accounts of their sects, and mode of worship, under the form of a history of the wars of the tribes of Kurus and Pandus, who were rulers in Hind, according to some more than 4,000 years ago, and according to the common account more than 80,000. And clearly this makes it before the time of Adam: Peace be upon him! And the Hindu unbelievers consider it a great religious merit to read and copy it.⁴⁶

Accordingly, he became much interested in the work, and having assembled some learned Hindus, he gave them directions to write an explanation of the *Mahabharata*, and for several nights he himself devoted his attention to explaining the meaning to Naqib Khan, so that the Khan might sketch out the gist of it in Persian. On the third night the Emperor sent for me, and desired me to translate the *Mahabharata*, in conjunction with Naqib Khan. The consequence was that in three or four months I translated two out of eighteen sections, at the puerile absurdities of which the eighteen thousand creations may well be amazed...Nevertheless, I console myself with the reflection, that what is predestined must come to pass.⁴⁷

Hence, the translations were not as a dispassionate courtly endeavor conducted in the lower ranks; Akbar, in the midst of his creative religious reformulations, closely oversaw the project. While the degree of collision between his metaphysical musings and the translations is unclear, it is unlikely given his oft-exerted influence that the two were wholly disconnected.

Abu Fazl's preface to the *Razmnamah*, in detailing the imperial intent behind the text's production, indicates that the translation was even meant to aid Akbar's quest to resist theological sectarianism and seek "the divine truth."⁴⁸ In the same text, Abu'l Fazl refers to Hindu conceptions of cyclical time to refute Islamic

45. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 102.

46. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 329.

47. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 330.

48. Babagaolzadeh, "Understanding," 48.

contentions on the age of the universe (“common Muslim people...believe that human origin dates back seven thousand years...therefore, it was gracefully decided to translate this precious book, which includes age-old facts about the universe”), thus imbuing the *Mahabharata* with the remarkable authority to displace traditional Islamic theology.⁴⁹ The Persian text itself, contrary to Truschke’s interpretation, is a site of abundant theological entanglement as it “reproduces much of the *Mahabharata*’s theological framework intact, including the concept of *avatāras* (incarnations of gods), Sanskrit terms for god, and many specific deities and their stories.”⁵⁰ The translators simultaneously overlaid the entire story “with a monotheistic Islamic deity” (the translators frequently placed “Allah alongside his Hindu counterparts” and, at one instance in the story, recast Hindu gods as “intermediaries between humans and Allah”).⁵¹

This active blending of theological landscapes suggests — in striking resemblance to Akbar’s own religiosity — a purposeful engagement between otherwise discrete theological frameworks. Akbar’s incision into the Hindu text and infusion of Muslim concepts should not be seen as an Islamization of the *Mahabharata*. On one instance recorded — with notable disdain — in the *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh*, Akbar publicly chastised Al-Badoani, the text’s chief translator, for including a line in the text that denoted a strict application of traditional Islamic theology:

Two days before the entrance of the Sun into Aries, the Emperor called to me to come from the window in the public and private audience-chambers; and said to Shaikh Abu-l-Fazl, “we thought that so and so” (meaning the writer of these pages) “was an unworldly individual of Sufi tendencies, but he appears to be such a bigoted lawyer that no sword can sever the jugular vein of his bigotry.”⁵²

The line in question, as Al-Badaoni continued to say, referred to “the general Resurrection, and the Last Judgement, and things contrary to his own fixed tenets, who never talked of anything but metempsychosis, and so suspected me of theological bias and bigotry.”⁵³

49. Babagaolzadeh, “Understanding,” 49.

50. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 115.

51. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 115.

52. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 413.

53. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 413.

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY

Here we are faced with evidence of textual excision of theology that, unlike that of the *Bhagavad Gita*, was not targeted towards Hinduism. When considered in conjunction with Akbar's personal theology and his creative license on the translations, we can argue that the selective exclusion of religious philosophy may have been driven by a determination of whether its inclusion would have fit within the emperor's universalist theological framework — hence the wholesale rejection of Al-Badaoni's "bias and bigotry" — rather than *purely* in an attempt to make the text "intelligible to a new readership."⁵⁴ The Hindu-Muslim theological binary presupposed by an interpretation of the texts as "accommodating" is rather collapsed in the translations and replaced instead with symbolism stemming from Akbar's unique politico-religious ideology.

We can discern further proof of Akbar's theological calculus being latent within the translations by locating his claims to sacrality within the texts. The Hindu epics, once again, offered an immensely appropriative infrastructure that is constitutive of certain exploitable narratives that mediate "the religious, that is, the divine or numinous, and the political," or life within the human polity.⁵⁵ The *Ramayana*, for example, presents a "powerful — because direct and unequivocal — imaginative formulation of the divine king as the only being capable of combating evil."⁵⁶ When examined as such, the Mughal translation of the *Ramayana* as an attempt to appropriate this meaning system in its projection of Akbar as King Rama within its miniatures.⁵⁷ In the *Razmnamah* we bear witness to a similar fashioning of likeness of Akbar to the character Karna, whose conception by the Sun-God paralleled Akbar's claims of descent from divine light.⁵⁸

Abu'l Fazl's preface to the *Razmnamah*, as suggested before, also denoted a theological intervention into the Islamic orthodoxy and explicitly lauded the superlative, divine character of the emperor as the "lord of the age."⁵⁹ Interestingly enough, when asked to write a similar preface for the *Akbari Ramayana*, Al-Badaoni unsurprisingly declined in a tirade against "that black book, which is naught like the book of my life."⁶⁰ The emperor's identification with divine — or at least divine-adjacent — Hindu characters and the attempts of self-fashioning his sacrality in the texts' peripheral accompaniments seem superfluous within

54. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 118.

55. Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination," 281.

56. Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination," 282.

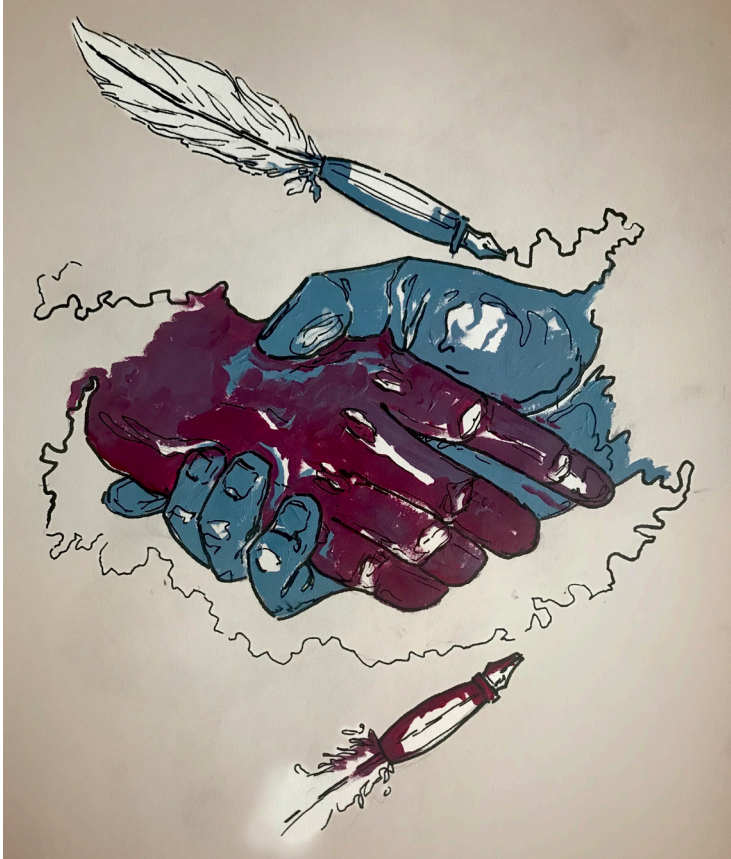
57. Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination," 287.

58. Truschke, *Culture of Encounters*, 122.

59. Babagaolzadeh, "Understanding," 90.

60. Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*, 378.

Truschke's conception of the translation movement as a cultural accommodation. Additionally, the theological *mélange* suffused through the texts disputes any notion of a rigid Mughal theology that distinguishes itself from the *other*. Instead,



What is "the Unity of Existence" Under Sulh-i kul. Abigail King.

we begin to find space to interpret the project as an assertion of Akbar's ceaselessly evolving, organismic theological configuration.

Conclusion

The translations of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* into Persian under Akbar's reign cannot be seen solely as isolated acts of political pragmatism. Akbar's intricate weaving of a polyvalent, permeable, and self-embodied

TRANSLATING THEOLOGY

religiosity embedded the translation movement within a moment of theological creativity that imbued the effort with a more nuanced texture than that of utilitarian strategy. The translations may have perhaps signified an inflection point in the empire's trajectory. Akbar's ideology of multicultural assimilation and universalism threaded itself through his descendant lineage without displacing its inner spiritual logic. Akbar's son and successor, Jahangir, "assumed the same universal spiritual status as his father, a status that placed him above all religious traditions and made him the ultimate arbiter of religious truth" as is evidenced by multi-religious symbolism of divinity, renewal, and transcendence within his own courtly cultural productions.⁶¹ Most notably, Jahangir's grandson, Dara Shikuh, immersed himself in Sufi conceptions of universalism and, not unlike his great-grandfather Akbar, interpreted Hindu philosophy as hermeneutically continuous with Islamic doctrine.⁶²

The endurance of interest in Akbar's ideas exists within its latent spirituality. Theology exists as a foundational term of any subsequent ideological reproductions by Akbar and his successors. If we reconcile the unmistakable spiritual substance within Mughal ideology with a conception of Mughal identity as one of fluidity and unremitting recalibration, it becomes problematic to conceive of the translation project as a pragmatic accommodation-from-above rather than as an organic product of experimental theological reformulation. If this is the case, the translated *Razmnamah* and the *Akbari Ramayan* must be recognized within the broader genealogies of the perennial epics for their concealed creativity and momentous historical import.

61. Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 272.

62. Muhammad Dara Shikuh, *Majma-UI-Bahrain*, trans. Mahfuz-UI-Haq (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1929), 38.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alam, Muzaffar. "Pursuit of Persian." *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 2 (May 1998): 317-49.
- Al-Badaoni, Abdu-L-Qadir Ibn-I-Muluk Shah. *Muntakhabu-T-Tawarikh Vol.II*. Translated by W.H. Lowe. Patna: Academica Asiatica, 1973.
- Babagolzadeh, Razieh. "Understanding the Mughal *Book of War*" MA diss., Simon Fraser University, 2015.
- Brockington, John. *The Sanskrit Epics*. Leiden: Brill, 1998.
- Fazi-I-Allami, Abul. *Ain-I-Akbari Vol. III*. Translated by Colonel H.S. Jarrett. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1896.
- Kutlutürk, Cemil. "A Critical Analysis of Akbar's Religious Policy: Din-i Ilahi." *International Relations and Diplomacy* 4, no. 6 (June 2016): 407-17.
- Moin, Azfar. *The Millennial Sovereign*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Pollock, Sheldon. "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 1993): 261-97.
- Ramanujan, A.K. *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Rice, Yael. "A Persian Mahabharata: The 1598-1599 Razmnama." *Manoa* 22, no. 1 (2010): 125-31.
- Richards, John. "Formulation of Imperial Authority Under Akbar and Jahangir." In *The Mughal State 1526-1750*, edited by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanyam, 126-67. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Shikuh, Muhammad Dara. *Majma-Ul-Bahrain*. Translated by Mahfuz-Ul-Haq. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1929.
- Truschke, Audrey. *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- — "The Mughal Book of War: A Persian Translation of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*." *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 506-20.



AKHIL JONNALAGADDA (AUTHOR)

Hanszen College, '20

Akhil Jonnalagadda is a senior studying History and Religion. He can usually be found watching low-rated movies, gardening, or lounging under the sun. He isn't sure what's next after graduation, but it will undoubtedly include those three things.



ABIGAIL KING (ARTIST)

Wiess College, '22

Abigail King, from Austin, Texas, is a sophomore at Wiess College. She is majoring in Biochemistry and VADA with a concentration in Studio Art. She is also the current marketing manager of The Hoot and Vice President of the Wiess merchandise committee.



Print of a peacock. Catherine Hettler.

KING OF THE BIRDS: MAKING SYMBOL, SUBJECT, AND SCIENCE IN THE SKIES OF HINDUSTAN

When the Mughals founded an empire in Hindustan, they sought to legitimize their budding dynasty through diverse sources of power. In the texts and art produced by emperors and their courts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these performances of power constantly featured birds. Birds, enfolded and imagined, were used as motifs that positioned the Mughals as the cultural descendants of a long Islamic tradition of storytelling and spirituality. Wild and captive birds became an extension of the imperial court as emperors strove to model the legendary rule of King Solomon, who was renowned for his just power over all creatures. During this age of scientist-kings, avians also became catalysts for experimentation and the production of knowledge. This intricate relationship between birds and power reveals a Mughal conception of empire, defined by fluid boundaries between the human and animal kingdoms.

Kristen Hickey
Written for Ruling Hindustan
(HIST 494)
Dr. Lisa Balabanlilar

In the Hindustani empire of the Mughals, birds were companions, partners in the hunt, playthings, and sources of great entertainment. They were fascinating airborne creatures, worthy of great scientific attention. The subject of unimaginable hours of artistic labor, they appeared in countless folios, with their feathers adorning the jeweled turbans of only the most powerful emperors.¹ The presence of birds illuminated and defined the seat of the Mughal emperor as a ruler in an ancient tradition of powerful kingships.

The Mughal empire eventually covered much of the South Asian region, though its borders shifted regularly with each king's attention to the empire's internal and external conflicts. The founding of the empire is generally attributed to Babur in 1526, but the influence and lineage of his predecessors stretched

1. Stephen Markel, "The Use of Flora and Fauna Imagery in Mughal Decorative Arts," in *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, ed. Som Prakash Verma (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 26.

KING OF THE BIRDS

back as far as the Turko-Mongols. During the successive rules of Babur (r. 1526-1530), Humayun (r. 1530-1540, 1555-1556), Akbar (r. 1556-1605), Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), and Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658), the empire endured war, peace, expansion, and contraction; most significantly, however, the Mughals fostered a flourishing of culture, resulting in the art, architecture, and autobiographical memoirs that allow for a glance into the world in which these early modern kings lived.

With the diverse and far-reaching terrain over which they ruled, Mughals pulled from numerous constellations of ideas, traditions, values, and symbolism in order to further bolster their rights to rule. Often, this meant identifying and adopting metaphors from varied traditions in order to craft a sustainable cultural identity for the dynasty and each of its individual rulers.² As conquerors and governors of such wide swaths of land, emperors found that conscious and tenable legitimization was a necessary component of the emperorship — a legitimization performed not only for the court and those competitors within the empire, but also for the emboldened rulers of abutting territories and the interested entities at the far reaches of extensive trade networks. Performances of legitimacy took many forms for the Mughals throughout the dynasty's duration: these included reconstructed lineages, traditions of religious rituals, courtly etiquette, hunting parties, demonstrations of knowledge, and patronage of the arts. Legitimization efforts elevated the emperor to a near-divine status, endowing him with the right to rule via descent and a unique set of practically supernatural skills and responsibilities. Legitimizing the dynasty was a conscious effort that required a variety of practices; as such, it is unsurprising that for the Mughals, birds acted as direct conduits to more than one domain of legitimacy. Mughal relationships with birds simultaneously wove the empire into a broader Islamic spiritual and artistic fabric, articulated claims of the emperor's dominion over the natural world, and validated the wisdom and intellect of those scientifically-minded emperors.

The Mughal emperorship held a great and curious concern for the natural world since its founding. The very roots of the Mughal dynasty laid deep within the Mongolian tradition, one bound by the natural landscapes, and the Mughals never quite moved away from this connection with nature. The peripatetic court progress, with its sturdy tents and marvelous journeys, surely bore testament to this regard for the natural world. While the foundation of the dynasty indicated

2. Philippa Vaughan, "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions," in *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, ed. Som Prakash Verma (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999).

that the Mughals were always well-attuned to the environment, the standards of kingship that the dynasty strove towards highlighted the importance of their relationships with animals.

The Bird as a Symbol: Ties to Islam and Beyond

The model of King Solomon was responsible for much of the structuring of Mughal attention towards animals and, more specifically, birds. Solomon's kingship in the Quran was the reference model for rulers in many Muslim kingdoms.³ The Quran presents King Solomon as a just ruler and maker of laws. The king was a calm arbiter of justice who brought peace to those around him in his every engagement. Beyond such mortal kingly abilities, Solomon is also described as having the ability to communicate with the animal world, and through these interactions he fostered a peace that contested the natural laws of the world. At Solomon's will, predator and prey coexisted peaceably. The theme of "pacified animals" became a barometer for kingliness: if an emperor had the power to soothe even the wildest creatures, his kingship might bear the same Solomonic blessing of divine providence.⁴ In weaving themselves into the natural world, emperors could easily mark themselves as descendants of the Solomonic model, and position themselves as ideal sovereigns that carried on the legacy of the good king himself.

References to the Solomonic model were not subtle. In the *Qanun-i-Humayuni*, Humayun is eulogized as if he were Solomon reincarnate himself. The author writes, "under the protection and shelter of his justice, deer sleep carelessly in the lap of panthers, and fish fearlessly take rest near crocodiles; pigeons become friends of falcons and sparrows chirp fearlessly in front of eagles."⁵ Humayun is remembered as a "just" administrator who equalizes and protects his subjects, bringing an impenetrable peace to his lands. Both Jahangir and Shah Jahan furthered an artistic program that depicted them as Solomonic models, too, aligning the dynasty firmly with the stewardship and rulership of the natural world.

Certainly, then, for the Mughals, an attention to and appreciation for the natural

3. Ebba Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 3 (2009): 293–338.

4. Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 336.

5. Khwandamir, *Qanun-i-Humayuni of Khwandamir*, trans. Beni Prasad (Calcutta, 1940), quoted in Ebba Koch's "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature."

KING OF THE BIRDS

world was not incompatible with the emperorship. In fact, a conscious affiliation with nature became nearly synonymous with the emperorship. Of course, each man brought with him a directionality and intensity in his floral and faunal interests, but the presence of these natural themes and passions in every emperor's rule is apparent.⁶ Emperors kept aviaries, in addition to squadrons of trained cheetahs, lions, elephants, and ungulates; remarkably, Akbar's cheetahs were considered members of the royal court, adorned in golden collars and miniatures of Akbar himself. Mughal elites hunted nearly every class of creature in the empire, and the new acquisition of any exotic animal was cause for celebration. Within this broader context of the animal kingdom, however, the constant presence of birds in Mughal art, poetry, memoirs, hunting expeditions, and the court aviary stands out as conscious and multifaceted extensions of the emperors themselves. The Mughals were surrounded by, and surrounded themselves with, birds of every species — even those birds that we might now consider imaginary.

In Mughal tradition, the realm of imagined birds was a wide one, and one that must be addressed thoughtfully. The imagined was not the counterpart to the real: indeed, in the Mughal Empire, the imagined was often embodied — if not in the living, breathing sense, then through extensive poetry and art.⁷ Here, the concept of the “imagined” bird references birds that existed without physical bodies, acting as motif, symbol, or allegory in the Mughal tradition. The kingdom of imagined birds included those that were mythical and magical, in addition to depictions of scientifically-recognized birds that were recreated primarily to symbolize a virtue or trait, rather than to represent some innate physicality. This trope of bird as motif was born far earlier than the advent of the Mughal empire, and exists far beyond it. In this remarkable longevity, birds became an easy symbol for the relationship that Mughals sought to construct between their own relatively new empire and the ancient traditions of the broader Islamic world.

In Islamic poetry particularly, birds have long symbolized souls — both human and divine.⁸ Nowhere is this better-represented than in Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*, one of the most famous and beloved works of poetry in the Sufi tradition. The twelfth century poem is oriented around the birds of the world, guided by the hoopoe, on a quest to find the *simurgh*, a monarchical, phoenix-like bird, to rule them. The bulk of the poem, while beautifully lyrical,

6. Markel, “The Use of Flora and Fauna Imagery in Mughal Decorative Arts,” 25.

7. Vaughan, “Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions,” 56.

8. Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, Penguin Classics (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011), 56.

KRISTEN HICKEY

operates largely on a much deeper, allegorical level. Like the practice of Sufi mysticism itself, “the meaning does not lie on the surface, but must be dug for; the surface is merely a symbol of the meaning.”⁹

Each bird exists in the poem as an allegorical representation of a human archetype. The hoopoe, as the guide of the flock, “is therefore the equivalent of a sheikh leading a group of religious adepts...along their path.”¹⁰ The nightingale is the lover, obsessed with the temporal thorned beauty of the rose, to the hoopoe’s chagrin. The falcon is desperate for freedom, nervous around the ties that would bind it to God. Attar characterizes the rest of the birds similarly, defining their allegorical identities as the poem proceeds. Over the course of the tale, the majority of the birds find some excuse to fall away, losing sight of their journey, until only thirty birds remain. When the hoopoe and what is left of the flock finally reach Qaf, the home of the *simurgh*, they do not find the great bird. Instead, they see their own faces in a shining mirror of a lake, the representation of that long-desired Sufi goal of unity with God.

The poem establishes allegorical characters for a number of properly embodied birds, but the bird that the Mughals primarily adopt to represent their own kingship is the *simurgh*, which seems to reside firmly in the realm of the imagined.

Attar’s *simurgh* is the sovereign, the king by whom to fix the problem that the birds first gathered to address:

“All nations in the world require a king;
How is it that we alone have no such thing?
Only a kingdom can be justly run;
We need a king and must inquire for one.”¹¹

Here, the *simurgh* represents God, the king of all domains. Understandably, the mythological bird is the symbol that the Mughals were drawn to.

Representations of the *simurgh* often visualize her as a phoenix-like mother-bird. She appears throughout Arabian, Iranian, and Indian poetries, as an aid

9. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, “Introduction,” *The Conference of the Birds*, Penguin Classics (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011), xiv.

10. Darbandi and Davis, “Introduction,” xv.

11. Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, 42.

to heroes and confidante to kings.¹² She appears in some renderings of King Solomon's court as a companion and conversation partner.¹³ In Firdausi's *Shahnama*, the pre-Islamic Iranian epic, the simurgh gifts one of her feathers to Zal, the protagonist, and promises that if he finds himself in need, he only needs to burn the feather to call her back to him. Firdausi's *simurgh* is "large enough to carry human beings, held either in its strong beak or by its powerful talons; and had glorious plumage and flowing tail feathers which reflected the color spectrum of the divine."¹⁴ 'Aufi's *simurgh* in *Lubab al-albab* holds "energy from the falcon, power of flight from the *Huma*, a long neck from the ostrich, a feathery collar from the ringdove, and strength from the [unicorn]."¹⁵ Sufi master Shihabuddin as-Suhrawardi's "The Incantation of the Simurgh" treats the *simurgh* with reverence: "Know that all colours derive from Simurgh," he writes. "All knowledge derives from the incantation of this Simurgh. The marvelous instruments of music... have been produced from its echo and its resonances...The morning breeze stems from her breath. This is why the loving tell her the mystery of their hearts."¹⁶

Beyond poetry, the *simurgh* is widely represented in paintings, architectural details, and carpets. Jahangir had the *simurgh* depicted in the Kala Burj residential tower. Under his reign, the *simurgh* began to appear on carpets as well, which was significant for the opportunity for public viewership that far outnumbered that of many of the paintings.¹⁷

In all of her incarnations, the *simurgh* is known to have a brilliant ability to reason, deep fount of wisdom, and passionate commitment to the victory of that which is morally good. Her body appeared cobbled together from various entities — much like the Mughal empire itself — and she was an immensely powerful force, imbued with the righteousness of divinity.

On the carpet in Figure 1, the *simurgh* is pictured attacking the *gaja-simha*, an evil mythical creature that preys upon elephants. As the *simurgh* subdues

12. Som Prakash Verma, *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, vol. 50 (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999), 6.

13. Sâqib Bâburî, "The Curious Tale of Solomon and the Phoenix," British Library Asian and African Studies Blog, January 16, 2017, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2017/01/the-curious-tale-of-solomon-and-the-phoenix.html>.

14. Vaughan, "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions," 58.

15. *Lubab al-albab* excerpt quoted in Vaughan, "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions," 57.

16. "The Incantation of the Simurgh" excerpt quoted in Vaughan, "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions," 56.

17. Vaughan, "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions," 62;66.

the beast, she prompts the return to palatial order that is depicted at the top of the carpet and protects the emperor and his court.¹⁸ The *simurgh* was a significant symbol within Mughal self-expression for such desirable imperial and intellectual traits. Beyond these particular values themselves, however, the *simurgh* also stood as a symbol of Islam and, more specifically, Sufism. With all their tendencies to lead decadent lives, the Mughals struggled to follow the spiritual laws of Islam, which made their public displays of piousness all the more important to maintain. By publicizing their affinity for the *simurgh*, the Mughal emperors were also able to signal a broad support for Islamic spirituality that extended beyond their personal pieties.

Of course, the *simurgh* was not the only imagined creature that bolstered Mughal claims to power. Of the scores of other imagined creatures in their cultural milieu, the Mughals were deeply drawn to another great and mythologized bird called the *huma*. In the Mughal tradition, the *huma* was a large bird that rarely touched the ground and was known to be reclusive. It would feed on dry bones alone, and its “shadow was so full of blessing power that over whomsoever it fell would become king.”¹⁹ The *huma* became a well-known symbol of a kingship that was bestowed by some higher and deterministic power. To declare selection by the *huma* was to indicate a sort of inevitability of destiny, or a promise from these allegorical birds that represented extensions of the Divine. The *huma* appears in a number of stories and poems, including *The Conference of the Birds*, but the *huma*’s most charming — and powerful — appearance in Mughal courtly culture came during Humayun’s rule.

In the midst of Humayun’s mid-life exile, he sought refuge for a time at the Safavid court of Shah Tahmasp, a court which boasted an inherited Persian literary tradition full of vibrant mythologies. While at the Safavid court, Humayun reflected upon his rule and his less fortunate circumstances of the present. In 1540, he composed a brief verse that holds within it his own ambitions, expressed through the flight of the imagined bird.

All the princes seek *Huma*’s shadow—behold this *Huma*
(me, Humayun) who enters under your shadow.²⁰

18. Vaughan, “Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions,” 64.

19. Vaughan, “Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions,” 55.

20. The *Diwan* of Emperor Humayun quoted in Vaughan, “Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions,” 55.

KING OF THE BIRDS

The verse's sing-song quip almost obscures the profundity of Humayun's declaration that his rule was mandated by the same divinely fortune'd circumstances that decided upon whom the *huma's* shadow would fall. Here, Humayun imagines himself simultaneously as the king-choosing *huma* bird and as a man, declared once-again emperor by a greater *huma*. He blurs the lines between the powerful, mysterious bird and his own individual being, even as the bird exists as an allegory for a flying destiny set by God.

For the Mughals, the language of avian symbolism was a tool used to justify their reigns. As they aligned themselves with the most desirable of the imagined birds, they presented a powerful empire emblazoned with divine blessings and a rule that bordered on godly.

The Bird as Subject: Companion and Courtier

As noted earlier, the Mughal understanding of empire was never limited to purely human or realistic components. The Mughals were deeply attentive to the flora and fauna that enlivened their landscapes, considering these bodies essential to the empire. This dominion over the natural world was well-documented and expressed in the core tenets of a courtly culture that thrived on cushioned, wealth-mediated interactions with the broader, non-human world. As the court became more stationary, the relationships that emperors were able to build with individual birds in their care became ever more significant. Birds like falcons, pigeons, and the cranes of the aviaries were valued for their roles within the emperor's court, with each contributing to the emperor's claims of rulership over the avian world.

The proliferation of hunting in the Mughal tradition allowed the emperor to interact frequently with nature, exerting his own will upon the animals he encountered. Hunting paintings of the time display the emperor's role "not only as divine king, moral exemplar, and dispenser of justice, but as a ruler profoundly attuned to the subtle ecological balance of the land and its people."²¹ These scenes show a "merging" between the realms that the emperors ruled over, colliding the spiritual, human, and animal worlds. It was in this all-encompassing kingdom that the emperor found himself imbued with the "moral obligation to subdue wild nature in order to protect his people," a role which many emperors relished.²² The

21. Rosalind O'Hanlon, "Kingdom, Household and Body History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007), 898.

22. Shaha Parpia, "The Imperial Mughal Hunt: A Pursuit of Knowledge," in *Ilm: Science, Religion, and Art in Islam*, ed. Samer Akkach (University of Adelaide Press, 2019), 47.

sport of falconry embodied the intricate web of relationships between the Mughal court and the natural world during the hunt. Birds played the role of both predator and prey for the structured entertainment of the emperors. There was, on the one hand, the raptor, the living extension of imperial control; on the other, the preyed-upon bird, under a less direct form of control, but a player in the imperial hunting theater nonetheless.

Well-trained hawks and falcons were highly regarded in the Mughal court. Jahangir recorded a number of exchanges of beautiful predatory birds as gifts between prominent rulers. Moreover, his son Shah Jahan, encouraged by the elder emperor, also shared Jahangir's love for hawking. The father and son hunted together during long marches, with Jahangir marveling at the power and

***“These scenes show a ‘merging’
between the realms that the emperors
ruled over, colliding the spiritual,
human, and animal worlds.”***

training of his son's hawks: “what a wonderful bird the hawk is to be able to catch such a massive [stork] and bring it down with its talons,” he remarked.²³ In the Mughal theater, hunting birds appeared almost elevated to the status of human courtiers. They were adorned with extravagant accessories, well-cared for by a team of experienced falconers, and celebrated and mourned upon death as individuals. These predatory birds acted much as an extension of the royal body, participating in spectacular hunts that emperors embarked on to elevate their own power.

In portraits, many hunting birds are depicted in royal trappings and symbols of luxury. Figure 2 illustrates a common composition of a barbary falcon perched on a golden bird-rest, tethered with a silken cord, and bedecked in golden lockets and anklets.²⁴ There are several such portraits of the court's birds of prey; in the style of Akbar and Jahangir's courts, these paintings preserved the individuality

23. Jahangir, *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (New York: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1999), 289.

24. Asok Kumar Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, vol. 64, 2 vols. (Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 2012), 107.

KING OF THE BIRDS

and temperaments of the birds. Each hunting bird was managed by a team of renowned falconers, who worked to raise, train, and care for the birds. Jahangir had four chief falconers in his employ — his own chief falconer, the Kashmiri falconer, Shah Jahan's falconer, and Shah Abbas' falconer.²⁵ Each falconer was attached to certain birds with whom they would travel and experience the royal hunt.

Birds were recognized as individuals, and mourned as such, as well. As a gift, in 1619 Shah Abbas of Safavid Persia sent a gyrfalcon and accompanying falconer to Jahangir's court. Before the falcon arrived at the Mughal court, however, a cat attacked the bird so violently that it died a week later. "What can I write of the beauty of this bird's color?" Jahangir wrote. "Every feather on its wings, back, and sides was extremely beautiful...I ordered Master Mansur...to draw its likeness to be kept."²⁶ After this incident, Jahangir dismissed the falconer whose negligence had caused the bird's demise, clearly unwilling to leave someone so careless with his other birds. This event rather tragically parallels the demise of Jahangir's friend Inayat Khan, whose near-dead, skeletal form was drawn at the behest of the emperor in a dual-purposed act of curiosity and memorialization. "It was so strange I ordered the artists to draw his likeness," Jahangir writes, reflecting on the toll that Khan's opium and alcohol dependencies took on both his body and spirit.²⁷

The relationships between Mughals and their birds were not isolated to hunting parties. Training pigeons caused great joy for — and the demise of — Babur's father, Umar Sheikh Mirza, who died after a pigeon-house collapsed on him.²⁸ His love for pigeons passed on to his descendants, blooming into Akbar's widely-professed love for the birds. Abu'l Fazl wrote that Akbar found immense amusement in "the tumbling and flying of pigeons [that] remind[ed him] of the ecstasy and transport of enthusiastic dervishes."²⁹ Imperial pigeon-keepers — whose ranks occasionally included passionate emperors — were responsible for training and tending to the pigeons. Deep relationships were built between

25. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 54.

26. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 314.

27. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 280. Jahangir was, in fact, so adamant that Inayat Khan be sketched before his death that he delayed the man's return to his family, such that Khan died along the route home.

28. Abu'l-Fazl, *The Akbarnama Of Abu'l Fazal*, trans. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1907), <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.469729> 220, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.469729>.

29. Abu'l-Fazl, *The A'in-I Akbari*, trans. Henry Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), 298, <http://archive.org/details/ainiakbarivolum00mubgoog>.

individual pigeons and their keepers — of Akbar's 20,000 pigeons, he remarked that his favorite was a well-trained, bluish-gray pigeon named Mohana.³⁰ In the training of pigeons, emperors not only found companionship, but also articulated the boundaries of their kingly abilities, which included control over even the flight of birds.

The Mughal dominion over the bird world was also manifested through the aviaries kept in pleasure gardens. These were enclosures of birds maintained by eunuchs and used by emperors and their courtiers; moreover, they were spaces of entertainment, education, and controlled interaction with the animal world. Birds were generally kept long-term not for conservation or rehabilitation purposes, but largely to impress and amuse courtiers. Aviaries marked, again, the Solomonic ideal of animals made peaceful neighbors under the watchful eye of the emperor. In 1618, Jahangir wrote of a pair of wild cranes that descended upon his courtyard and began to attack his own tamed cranes. None of his courtiers made any note of it, but Jahangir himself separated them and calmed them. "With my own hand I put rings in their noses and on their feet...[they] quieted down," he wrote, asserting the power of his presence over even wild birds.³¹

Another example of the relationships that emperors developed with individual birds plays out across a series of entries on saras cranes in the *Jahangirnama*. There are a great many popular stories that revolve around the mating style and emotionality of saras cranes, resulting in a human-esque personality complex that enchanted Jahangir. He recounted stories of saras cranes that seemed to melt into "just a handful of feathers and a few bones" after the death of their partners, imagining how devastating a sorrow must be that would result in a crane's death by heartbreak.³² These ruminations were caused by the capture and taming of a mated pair of saras cranes. Jahangir named the birds Layli and Majnun, after the famous Persian lovers, and they remained in the gardens for over five years before Jahangir witnessed their mating. Jahangir wrote that "it is often said among the people that no one has ever seen it...[but] one day one of the eunuchs told me they were going to mate again...I immediately ran out to watch."³³ The female crane lay two eggs. "Whenever it was possible, they were to be brought to me," Jahangir wrote.³⁴ In moments like this, Jahangir's enduring

30. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 105.

31. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 279.

32. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 266.

33. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 274.

34. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 274.

KING OF THE BIRDS

concern for his cranes and the other birds of his aviary reflects an emperor's concern for his subjects.

The birds of the Mughal court were well-kept companions for the emperor. They were named as individuals, and their unique personality traits and personal histories were understood and remembered. Though not human, they were enfolded into the court much as human courtiers were — always at the beck and call of the emperor, provided for by the empire, and kept within the garden or palatial walls of the court itself. For the Mughals, kept birds represented an extension of the Mughal kingship over the wild world itself, blurring the boundary between the natural and human dominions and allowing the emperor to claim a more profound rulership over the land and skies of his territory.

Bird as Science: Acquiring Knowledge & Producing Art

In addition to their places as imperial symbols and subjects of the Mughal court, birds were studied intently by ornithologist-emperors, constantly contributing to the court's ever-growing body of knowledge.

Ebba Koch sketches a model of the kingship derived from the proclamations of Solomon, defined in Francis Bacon's England, and paralleled in Jahangir's India. For Bacon, Solomon becomes "not only the just and wise ruler but also an investigator of nature...the glory of God is to conceal a thing but the glory of the king is to find it out."³⁵ In the vein of Solomonic investigations, Mughal emperors used the hunt to observe behavioral patterns of the birds they encountered, build a stunning repository of scientifically accurate avian portraits, and construct experiments in order to further solidify the emperor as the most knowledgeable and inquisitive figure in the region. Salim Ali, one of India's foremost ornithologists, once remarked that Jahangir's "memoirs reveal him not only as remarkably observant but also as an extraordinarily rational student of birds."³⁶

Even from the founding of the dynasty, the Mughals used a profoundly developed sense of observation to explore and interpret the physical world as they interacted with it. In Babur's autobiographical memoir, he recorded his travels,

35. Proverbs 25:2, quoted in Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 296.

36. Salim Ali quoted in Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 15.

KRISTEN HICKEY

wars, conquests, and relationships. It is, however, largely in Babur's musings on the natural world as it existed and changed about him that he became a poet, a scholar, a thoughtful emperor against a backdrop of skull towers and brutal warfare. In a later portrait, he is represented as a young man seated outside, flocks of birds littering the skies and his complete attention given to the book in his hands — a soft, worldly painting that seems a far cry from the stately, wealth-centric portraits that so often define monarchs (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. *Portrait of Babur on a chair*. Ca. 1605-1615. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 33 cm x 22.9 cm. London, The British Museum.

During his travels, Babur carefully noted the diversity of avifauna in the Hindustani landscape, sparing no detail in his descriptions. In his consideration of the peacock, he counted and measured head and tail feathers, at the same time wondering how the bird survived in its forest. He wrote, “with a tail a fathom

“For the Mughals, kept birds represented an extension of the Mughal kingship over the wild world itself, blurring the boundary between the natural and human dominions...”

long, how can it run from forest to forest and not fall prey to the jackals?”³⁷ Babur also compared the features of a series of parrots, discussing which could be taught to speak, and which had the most pleasant voices. He recorded the cries of various partridges, which ranged between calls that seem to sound like “I have milk and a little sugar” in Persian, to “quick, they have seen me” in Turkish.³⁸ For consummate observers like Babur, the interest in the natural world could not be contained, even when one might expect his mind to be elsewhere. “When I made a bridge across the Ganges and crossed to rout my enemies, in the vicinity of Lucknow and Oudh a kind of starling was seen that had a white breast, spotted head, and black back,” he wrote, barely differentiating between his role as a leader in war and an avid birdwatcher.³⁹

Babur’s intense observational interest in birds was certainly inherited by his successors. Humayun’s chronicler once wrote of a bird that flew into Humayun’s tent while Humayun was resting. Intrigued by the unexpected visitor, “the emperor trapped the bird by closing the tent’s flap and had an image of it drawn by an artist present in his entourage before releasing it.”⁴⁰ Jahangir, too, kept detailed notes and ordered intricate paintings made to keep record of those birds he encountered. He noted that the black cuckoo would lay her own eggs in the nest of a raven after destroying the raven’s young. “I have seen this strange thing myself in Allahabad,” Jahangir wrote, recording his knowledge of the world in the *Jahangirnama*.⁴¹

37. Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, trans. Wheeler Thackston (Washington, D.C.: Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1996), 337.

38. Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, 337.

39. Babur, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*, 338.

40. Excerpt from *Tezkereh al Vakiyat* quoted in Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 13.

41. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 260.

To facilitate the materialization of imperial knowledge, the Mughal emperors developed a workshop of prolific painters and artists, ready at any given moment to recreate that which the emperors deemed worth immortalizing. The Mughal artistic style developed along with the individual traditions of the empire. Most early Mughal art was influenced by stylized Chinese or Persian landscapes, brightly colored and with an eye to the composition rather than the individuality of those people or creatures represented therein. Over the course of Akbar's reign, however, artists began to make noticeable shifts towards creating more specific portraiture that closely represented individuals. Das writes that the paintings featured in the *Akbarnama* were the "forerunners of a new genre... in which individual specimens or groups were selected as subjects of special attention."⁴² Akbari paintings sought representations of the natural world using more realism than in Persian, Timurid, or Deccani traditions.⁴³ During Akbar's reign, artists defined the future direction of artistic stylizations.⁴⁴

One of the most prolific artists of his time, Ustad Mansur was lauded for his distinctive approach to floral and faunal portraiture. He first entered Akbar's court in the early 1590s, illustrating the *Baburnama* and *Akbarnama*, then continued to flourish in Jahangir's court as he pursued more complex studies.⁴⁵ Under Jahangir, Mansur and his peers began to perfect the representation of individual birds and animals. Mansur's ability to capture the personality and traits of animals and birds led Jahangir to entitle him *Nadir-al-'Asr*, or Wonder of the Age.⁴⁶ Mansur was usually present in Jahangir's court, ready at any moment to paint a scene or animal that Jahangir directed him towards.⁴⁷ It is through Mansur's portraits that we retain such delightful representations of Jahangir's dodo and turkey, exotic birds that Jahangir collected from the port at Goa. "I both wrote of them and ordered the artists to draw their likenesses in the *Jahangirnama* so that the astonishment one has at hearing of them would increase by seeing them," Jahangir wrote.⁴⁸ In the realm of bird-based artwork, the creations of Mansur and his peers is striking — of the 17th century bird portraits that survive today, a great many are identifiable by ornithologists down to species and sex. Some of the avian portraits in the *Jahangirnama* are, in all likelihood, the very first pictorial

42. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 14.

43. Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 299.

44. Parpia, "The Imperial Mughal Hunt," 45.

45. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 12.

46. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 21.

47. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 22.

48. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 133.

depictions of the species in the world.⁴⁹

The focus of these bird portraits is obvious — the individual bird is usually centered in the foreground, with the landscape in which it was discovered sprawling in the background.⁵⁰ When possible, the birds were painted while they were alive. An artist might spend hours with their subject, noting the energy, color, behavior, and personality of the birds that sat before them. These portraits became an externalized visual repository of the birds that the emperor himself had seen and understood. Beyond its beauty, artwork represented a physical embodiment of the emperor's understanding of his natural dominion and the acumen of his artists. As Koch writes, a Mughal emperor would claim "nature as his own...[by] mark[ing] his territories with artistic means."⁵¹ This was a conscious assertion of ownership over and insight into the landscape and its independent entities, creating a tradition of animal-focused art that would further "the legitimacy that was engendered by a continuity of older traditions."⁵²

In the pursuit of an all-encompassing knowledge of the world, emperors became active scientists within their courts. Akbar's experiments were largely human-driven, oriented towards learning more about how men came into their religions and languages.⁵³ Jahangir's attention, however, was focused on animals and the origin of their diverse behaviors. Jahangir developed a personal methodology that he used to collect information about the world around him. The knowledge that Jahangir created was tied explicitly to his imperial personage. Parpia notes that Jahangir's methodologies were selective and the attention of his scientific interests was bound to what he alone deemed interesting, as Jahangir — and the scientist-Mughals in general — did not "feed the results of [their] empirical research into a theoretical framework...[their] observations do not lead to a systematic body of knowledge."⁵⁴ The emperors, then, commanded much of knowledge production; they not only retained control over the directionality of investigations, but also, through each emperor's individual methodological styles, centered themselves as the creators and holders of great — yet scattered — worldly knowledge.

49. Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 317.

50. Das, *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*, 22.

51. Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 327.

52. Parpia, "The Imperial Mughal Hunt," 40.

53. Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 327.

54. Koch, "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature," 328.

There are dozens of examples of an inquisitive Jahangir's experimental interactions with the avian world recorded within the *Jahangirnama*. Jahangir weighed and measured individual birds, noting the habitat in which they were found, their dietary habits, anatomical details, and behavioral expressions.⁵⁵ Often, these birds were found unexpectedly during imperial hunts, during which Jahangir was in direct contact with the natural world. Hunts became a source of knowledge production in the field, wherein Mughals recorded anatomical, taxonomical, and psychological traits of those individual birds which they encountered.⁵⁶

Through the records he kept in the *Jahangirnama* on his experiments with birds, the way Jahangir both perceived and portrayed himself as an imperial fount of knowledge is clear. Jahangir often had birds dissected in order to learn what each had eaten and how their anatomical systems compared to other species.⁵⁷ In the case of one black quail, Jahangir found a whole, undigested mouse still in the bird's crop. "Really," he wrote, "if anyone else had told the story it wouldn't have been possible to believe it, but since I saw it myself it has been recorded for its strangeness."⁵⁸ Jahangir was also a proponent of tasting the meat of the birds that he caught. He held tastings of the meat of black and white quails, as well as large and small quails. "Purely as an experiment," Jahangir had each bird "cooked in the same manner so that a real discerning comparison could be made. Therefore it is recorded."⁵⁹

In a final telling excerpt, Jahangir encountered a quail with a spur on only one leg. When questioned as to the bird's sex, Jahangir declared that it was a female, which was confirmed with a dissection. Jahangir noted that "those who were in attendance asked in disbelief, 'How did you know?' 'The female's head and beak are smaller than the male's,' I said, 'and with much observation and perseverance one gets the knack.'"⁶⁰

In each excerpt, it is clear that Jahangir's natural interpretations and knowledge were central within the court. That which he declared strange was recorded, and that which he recorded became the truth. In this particular example, his

55. Parpia, "The Imperial Mughal Hunt," 43.

56. Parpia, "The Imperial Mughal Hunt," 39.

57. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 371.

58. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 412.

59. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 411.

60. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 416.

immediate understanding of the quail's sex elevated the sense of his individual relationship with the environment. He explained his knowledge by the longevity of his natural studies, not by an innate sort of knowledge defined by his kingliness. It was the experiment-based, scientifically-mindedness of the king that brought him to knowing the avian world, and knowing the nature of birds bolstered his claim to a power that resonated with the models that Solomon set forth so long before.

“Beyond its beauty, artwork represented a physical embodiment of the emperor’s understanding of his natural dominion and the acumen of his artists.”

The three spaces in which Mughal emperors interacted with birds are not so clearly defined as the theoretical model put forth in this essay. Often, physical birds were understood as symbols, too: Jahangir writes of an owl, which appears often in poetry as a bearer of evil. Upon seeing the bird, Jahangir reached for a gun and aimed over the roof of a nearby building. “The ball hit the ill-omened bird like a decree from heaven and blew it to pieces,” he wrote. The symbolic nature of birds was, then, understood to be embodied in physical individuals, and not isolated to literature or art alone.⁶¹

The fluidity of the imagined and the embodied, too, was encapsulated in the records of emperors. In 1625, Jahangir recorded the discovery of a bird in the Pir Panjal Mountains that fed on bones and rarely landed on the ground — a bird that perfectly fit the mythological descriptions of the *huma*. A local huntsman shot the bird at Jahangir’s request and brought it to the emperor, who examined it: “when the crop was opened, small bones came out of its gullet, just as the people of the mountains had said...it always flew in the air with its gaze upon the earth, and wherever it spotted a bone it would pick it up in its beak.”⁶² He weighed and measured the bird, described its feather patterning and colors, and recorded the encounter with no small excitement:

61. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 201.

62. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 435.

KRISTEN HICKEY

“In this case, the prevailing opinion was that this was the famous *huma*, as is said, ‘The *huma* is superior to all birds because it eats bones and harms no creature.’”⁶³ Ornithologists today believe that this *huma* is what we have since named the bearded vulture — an odd bird that cracks open bones for their marrow and far prefers the skies to the land.⁶⁴ The formerly imagined mythologies of the *huma* bird were embodied, then, and the Mughal emperor was responsible for the collection and classification of the bird itself, drawing the imagined and the embodied as one into the court of the knowledgeable Mughal emperors.

Amongst all its sprawling interests, the Mughal dynasty was steadfast in its association with birds. The imperial body was replete with the motifs, companionships, and observations of birds, using each thought of and interaction with a bird to further ongoing efforts to sculpt the emperor in the shape of Solomon. Emperors tied themselves to imagined birds like the *simurgh* or *huma* that represented divine kingships, hoping to draw from powerful spiritual allegories. Emperors surrounded themselves with both trained birds and wild birds kept in aviaries, creating loyal and dependent flocks that acted as an extension of the human court. And as rulers explored the birds of the empire, they expanded their personal foundations of knowledge, positioning themselves as the wisest men in any room. As the Mughals used birds to elevate the kingship, they defined the dynasty as one inextricably intertwined with the natural world, where the boundaries of the human kingdom and animal kingdom were not so clear-cut as imagined today, and where the dominion of the emperor encompassed every last starling.

63. Jahangir, *Jahangirnama*, 435.

64. D.C. Phillott, “Note on the Huma or Lammergeyer,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 2 (1906): 532–33.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu'l-Fazl. *The Ain-I Akbari*. Translated by Henry Blochmann. Calcutta : Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873. <http://archive.org/details/ainiakbarivolum00mubgoog>.
- Abu'l-Fazl. *The Akbarnama Of Abu'l Fazal*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Vol. 1, 1907. <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.469729>.
- Attar, Farid ud-Din. *The Conference of the Birds*. Translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis. Penguin Classics. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2011.
- Babur. *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor*. Translated by Wheeler Thackston. Washington, D.C. : Freer Gallery of Art : Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1996.
- Bâburî, Sâqib. "The Curious Tale of Solomon and the Phoenix." British Library Asian and African Studies Blog, January 16, 2017. <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2017/01/the-curious-tale-of-solomon-and-the-phoenix.html>.
- Das, Asok Kumar. *Wonders of Nature: Ustad Mansur at the Mughal Court*. Vol. 64. 2 vols. Mumbai: Marg Foundation, 2012.
- Jahangir. *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India*. Translated by Wheeler Thackston. New York: Freer Gallery of Art, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 1999.
- Khwandamir. *Qanun-i-Humayuni of Khwandamir*. Translated by Beni Prasad. Calcutta, 1940.
- Koch, Ebba. "Jahangir as Francis Bacon's Ideal of the King as an Observer and Investigator of Nature." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 3 (2009): 293–338.
- Markel, Stephen. "The Use of Flora and Fauna Imagery in Mughal Decorative Arts." In *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, edited by Som Prakash Verma, 25–35. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999. https://www.academia.edu/4034805/The_Use_of_Flora_and_Fauna_Imagery_in_Mughal_Decorative_Arts.
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. "Kingdom, Household and Body History, Gender and Imperial Service under Akbar." *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 5 (2007): 889–923.
- Parpia, Shaha. "The Imperial Mughal Hunt: A Pursuit of Knowledge." In *Ilm: Science, Religion, and Art in Islam*, edited by Samer Akkach, 39–58. University of Adelaide Press, 2019. www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvb4bt41.11.
- Phillott, D.C. "Note on the Huma or Lammergeyer." *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 2 (1906): 532–33.
- Vaughan, Philippa. "Mythical Animals in Mughal Art: Images, Symbols, and Allusions." In *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*, edited by Som Prakash Verma, 55-68. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999.
- Verma, Som Prakash. *Flora and Fauna in Mughal Art*. Vol. 50. 3 vols. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 1999.

FIGURES

Due to copyright restrictions, not all figures referenced were reproduced within this journal.

Figure 1: *Lahori Pictorial Carpet*. Ca. 1590-1600. Cotton warp with wool knotted pile, 243 cm x 155 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

Figure 2: Ustad Mansur. *Barbary falcon perched on a rest*. Ca. 1618-1619. Opaque watercolor on paper. Jaipur, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum.

Figure 3: *Portrait of Babur on a chair*. Ca. 1605-1615. Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, 33 cm x 22.9 cm. London, The British Museum.



KRISTEN HICKEY (AUTHOR)

Jones College, '20

Kristen Hickey is a senior at Jones College studying Anthropology, History, and Medieval & Early Modern Studies. In her spare time, she writes fiction, much of which is inspired by her academic research on landscapes and medieval Europe. She plans to take a gap year before pursuing a graduate degree in some convergence of her majors.



CATHERINE HETTLER (ARTIST)

McMurtry College, '22

Catherine Hettler is a sophomore from McMurtry College studying Psychology and Visual and Dramatic Arts with a concentration in Studio Art.

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT



Nature, beauty, and romanticism. Ashna Karpe.

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT (1759-1797) THROUGH A ROMANTIC LENS

This paper analyzes Mary Wollstonecraft's life and fourteen major literary works. It argues that her legacy should be considered in the context of romanticism. Romanticism is usually defined in a traditional, masculine sense: as an emotional escape from repression and rationalism. Eighteenth-century societal norms, however, categorized women as purely emotional and did not allow them to express their rationality. This paper uses Wollstonecraft's work to argue for an expansion of the traditional Romantic canon that includes female romantics' focus on reason, sense rather than sensibility, women's rights, and gradual societal change. Wollstonecraft's works demonstrate she was a romantic by both the masculine and feminine definitions. It is unfortunate that until recent years, literary historians did not consider Wollstonecraft or other female writers part of the canon of romanticism. Wollstonecraft and writers like her added important ideas to the canon; their ideas should take their place alongside those of traditional romantics.

Carolyn Daly
Written for European Romanticism
(HIST 375)
Dr. John H. Zammito

Mary Wollstonecraft is perhaps the most well-known female author of the eighteenth century. The public primarily knows her from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and sees her as an early feminist. However, even feminists and the educated public forget about her numerous other works and do not consider her legacy in the context of romanticism. Mary Wollstonecraft, nonetheless, was a romantic — although not in the traditional, masculine, and oversimplified definition of the word. Generally, her works have a stronger focus on reason, sense rather than sensibility, women's rights, and gradual rather than rapid societal change than the works of male romantics do. Societal norms of the era forced men to suppress their passions, limiting their emotional side. Romanticism offered an emotional escape from repression and rationalism

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

for men. Eighteenth-century societal norms, however, categorized women as purely emotional and did not allow them to express their rational side. Thus, Wollstonecraft's work, as a female romantic, advocated for using reason, while male romantic works often advocated for the opposite. Both male and female romantics, in promoting differing ideas, fought against the dehumanizing nature of gender roles and argued that men and women should be able to develop themselves as a whole person. However, very few romantics — and very few people — consistently advocate for the same ideas. Wollstonecraft was no exception. A few of her works conform to traditional societal ideas regarding education, and do not advocate for change. Further, some excerpts of her work are romantic in the traditional, masculine sense. Mary Wollstonecraft's life ultimately mirrors her work — it was romantic, in both the traditional and more nuanced definitions of the word. She was a feminist, traveled, and wrote for a living, but also married for practical reasons and to avoid ostracization in society. She enjoyed nature and reflection, but often connected her reflections to society as a whole and women's issues. She did not have the same freedom

“Masculine romantics gendered nature as female, as other male authors had for centuries. They often portrayed nature as something that should be dominated and appropriated for men’s use, implying the same thing about women.”

to pursue passions, to isolate herself from society and social reform activity, and to ignore her family as male romantics did.¹ Yet, at times, she struggled deeply with her mental health and focused on her own personal tragedies, as male romantics did. Contextualizing Mary Wollstonecraft's life and work through the lens of romanticism clarifies her complex, rich, and difficult life and the important contributions of her work. It is unfortunate that until the last two decades, literary historians did not consider Mary Wollstonecraft or any other female writer a part of the canon of romanticism. This categorization was an oversight. Wollstonecraft

1. Marilyn Butler and Janet Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

and other writers like her added important ideas to the canon; their ideas should take their place alongside those of traditional romantics.

Traditionally, British romantic scholars have defined British romanticism based on the work of six male romantic authors: William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and John Keats. In *Romanticism and Gender* (1993), Anne K. Mellor identifies this traditional definition as the masculine definition of romanticism. She relies on past scholars, notably Meyer Abrams, to summarize the work of prominent male British romantics and outline the characteristics they deemed central to masculine or traditional romanticism. Masculine romanticism stressed the importance of feelings and emotions and the idea of a fall from innocence. This fall led to an upward spiral that eventually led to a higher form of consciousness — a paradise lost and then regained. Masculine romantics gendered nature as female, as other male authors had for centuries.² They often portrayed nature as something that should be dominated and appropriated for men's use, implying the same thing about women.³ Further, most male romantics did not have important female characters; those present were often silent, dominated by males, or portrayed as frail, inferior, and lacking a rational mind.

Mellor proposes a new interpretation of British romanticism that includes the contributions of over two hundred female writers between 1780-1830. Mellor argues that the scholarly approach to British romanticism is gender-biased and ignores the contributions of feminine romanticism. She acknowledges that her interpretation is not the only valid one, and notes that the creation of separate categories for masculine and feminine romanticisms poses potential problems. She speculates that it might be better to define masculine romanticism as romanticism and use another term for feminine romanticism altogether. In the end, nonetheless, Mellor holds that for both curricular and pragmatic reasons, scholars should continue to use the word romanticism. More importantly, Mellor defends the term by drawing on the origins of the meaning of romanticism, which come from "romaunt," or the novel, and are associated with the ideas of the ideal, utopian, revolutionary, and imaginative.⁴ Both feminine and masculine romanticism have utopian, revolutionary, and imaginative ideas, and thus they are both a form of romanticism.

2. Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (Oxon, Great Britain: Taylor and Francis, 1993), 13-14, 18.

3. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 18.

4. Mellor, *Romanticism*.

Although she does highlight the utopian, revolutionary, and imaginative nature of both feminine and masculine romantic works, Mellor denotes the differences between the two new categories she has created. She points out that feminine

“... feminine romantics viewed the sublime as creating self-knowledge, dialogue with others, and participation in the human community, in contrast to the more individually focused male interpretation of the sublime.”

romanticism celebrated the rational minds of both women and men, advocated for gender equality, promoted gradual rather than rapid social change, and viewed the concept of “self” in context of community and family. Mellor, primarily by analyzing Wollstonecraft’s work, argues that feminine romanticism called “not for sensibility but sense, not for erotic passion but for rational love, a love based on understanding, compatibility, equality, and mutual respect” and stressed “the evils of a patriarchal culture which oppresse[d] [women].”⁵ Mellor also suggests that feminine romantics advocated for gradual social change grounded in the family-politic. She defined the family-politic as the idea of a state that develops “gradually and rationally under the mutual care and guidance of both mother and father.”⁶ Mellor provides a close reading of Wollstonecraft’s works and traces their emphasis on the mother’s central role in children’s development. Rather than reducing the mother’s role to a biological one, as many male romantics did, feminine romantics saw how enlightened mothers could bring about gradual political change in shaping their children’s views.

Mellor, additionally, argues that feminine romantics differed from male romantics in a number of other ways. First, feminine romantics argued that women were rational and deserved education and equality. They saw women acting rationally and reason as a way to gain equality and respect. They argued for the repression of the feeling and emotion that masculine romantics promoted. Second, feminine

5. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 59.

6. Mellor, *Romanticism*.

CAROLYN DALY

romantics viewed the sublime as creating self-knowledge, dialogue with others, and participation in the human community, in contrast to the more individually focused male interpretation of the sublime.⁷ In addition, Mellor contends that “assertion of a self that is unified, unique, enduring, capable of initiating activity, and above all aware of itself as a self” characterizes masculine romanticism.⁸ In contrast, feminine romanticism connects the self to a significant other, nature, human society, and the environment around the self. Mellor, therefore, clearly delineates differences between feminine and masculine romantics; and in doing so, she convincingly advocates for an expansion of the canon.

Since the crux of Mellor’s evidence is Wollstonecraft’s work, Mellor makes it clear that analyzing Mary Wollstonecraft’s life and work through the lens of feminine romanticism is useful. One must remember, however, that feminine and masculine romantics had many similarities. In the third and final part of her book, Mellor adds complexity to the concept of feminine and masculine romanticism, providing an important caveat to her argument – feminine and masculine romanticism are not polar opposites. She maintains that neither group can fully identify with or represent the opposite gender, as implicit differences always remain in male and female romantics’ writing. Mellor uses the work of Emily Bronte, often considered a masculine woman, and John Keats, often considered a feminine man, to indicate that female romantic authors can embrace part or all of masculine romanticism, and male romantic writers can embrace part or all of female romanticism.⁹ Thus, when analyzing Wollstonecraft’s life and work, it is not as important to categorize her as a masculine romanticist or a feminine romanticist, but rather to see her as a romantic. The definition of romanticism should be expanded to include the ideas of feminine romantics that Mellor outlines, but scholars should not focus on the distinctions between male and female romantics. Rather, they should focus on how romanticism as a whole is useful in analyzing male and female writers’ lives and work.

Viewing Mary Wollstonecraft’s life through the lens of romanticism highlights how she paved the way for other feminists, as well as the nuance and importance of her short life. Mary Wollstonecraft was born in 1759 in London to Edward and Elizabeth Wollstonecraft. Edward Wollstonecraft was a brutal man who took out his anger on his wife and children. Mary Wollstonecraft disliked him, and his

7. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 101-103.

8. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 114.

9. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 183.

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

treatment of her mother likely helped to form her negative views about marriage.¹⁰ She saw firsthand how women and men can become trapped in marriage, either suppressing their passions and emotions, or taking them out violently on their spouses.

Growing up, Wollstonecraft was closer to her two friends, Jane Arden and Fanny Blood, than her family. At age nineteen, Wollstonecraft moved away from home against her family's wishes, following her own passion and desires and showing her independent, feminist spirit at a young age. In doing so, she pioneered a new model of what young women could do. However, when her mother passed away in 1782, she returned home to help take care of her sisters, demonstrating the reason, rationality, and connection to society that she had as a female romantic. While at home, Mary continued to challenge societal expectations about marriage by helping her younger sister, Eliza, leave her husband. Afterwards, they set up a school with Fanny Blood and another one of her sisters. Although Wollstonecraft left the school in 1785 to go to Portugal and help Blood during her pregnancy, education remained a focus throughout her life. Sadly, Blood and her baby died slightly after the child's birth. This tragedy later inspired Wollstonecraft's novel *Mary, A Fiction* (1788), an early example of romanticism in her writing.¹¹ The book was largely based off of Wollstonecraft's real life.

After Blood's death, Wollstonecraft returned to her struggling school. Although she had to close it, she continued to focus on education in her book, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787). She wrote the book to support herself and Blood's family, showing a unique mix of practicality, feminism, and desire to create gradual social change. Shortly afterwards, she became a governess, and while working, wrote *Mary, A Fiction*. Her book was published, and her publisher hired her to work for *The Analytic Review*, a journal.¹² Working for the journal, Wollstonecraft knew she was a woman in a man's job and was proud of it. She enjoyed the status the job brought, and was confident in her ability, despite the doubts most people in society likely had.¹³ Her possession of this job demonstrates how she embodied romanticism in her life well – she was being practical and reasonable by supporting herself, she was helping to support her friend's family, indicating her connection to society, and she was being feminist

10. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

11. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

12. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

13. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.



Portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft. Ashna Karpe.

and advocating for equality of the sexes by serving as an example of what women could do.

While working, Wollstonecraft wrote, compiled, and translated a number of works that focused on educating women and children. These works included *Original Stories from Real Life*, *The Female Reader*, *Of the Importance of Religious Opinions*, *Elements of Morality for the Use of Children*, and *Young Grandison*. Wollstonecraft also became a part of the radical literary circle in London. The views she learned in this circle led her to write the first reply to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, called *A Vindication*

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

of the *Rights of Men*. This work is what first made her famous. It created the audience for *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's most important work.¹⁴

After writing *A Vindication of Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft began to explore her sexuality. Wollstonecraft fell for a man she knew named Henry Fuseli. He was a married man, avant-garde painter, and political radical from Switzerland. She proposed moving in with Fuseli and his wife, so that "[his] wife [could] enjoy the man's body, Mary his conversation."¹⁵ Her proposed partner sharing was ahead of its time. Wollstonecraft, in falling for a radical, avant-garde artist and married man, and then acting on her desire, demonstrates she was romantic not only in thought but also in action. She refused to conform to societal expectations of gender and marriage, and followed her passions instead. However, society was not ready for her radical ideas yet, and neither were Fuseli and his wife, who refused her offer.¹⁶

Rejected, she traveled to Paris, where she wrote *A Historical and Moral View of the Progress of the French Revolution*. More significantly for her personal life, she met up with Gilbert Imlay, an acquaintance who was much more attainable than Fuseli. Wollstonecraft lived with him, as if they were married. She had her first child with him in Paris, an extremely important development in any woman's life, and one that made Wollstonecraft even more attached to Imlay. When Imlay was unfaithful to her, Wollstonecraft was devastated and attempted suicide for the first time after following him to London.¹⁷ Her relationship with Imlay, and her reaction to it, was similar to many characters in romantic works, such as *Young Werther*. Although scholars debate whether the affair was an embarrassment, most agree that it contributed to Wollstonecraft's intellectual development and her understanding of the sublime.¹⁸

Imlay responded to Wollstonecraft's attempted suicide by taking her to Scandinavia. In Scandinavia, Wollstonecraft's response became more characteristic of Mellor's feminist romanticism — she wrote *Letters Written During*

14. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

15. Eva M. Pérez Rodríguez, "Rewriting and Reinterpreting: Godwin's 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft,'" *Atlantis* 20, no. 2 (1998): 186.

16. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

17. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

18. Cynthia D. Richards, "Romancing the Sublime: Why Mary Wollstonecraft Fell in Love with That Cad, Gilbert Imlay," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 25, no. 1 (2006): 71–91.

CAROLYN DALY

a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, inspired by travel writers.¹⁹ Her letters are marked by grief, and perhaps served as a way to sublimate her feelings. Her trip was a dark time in her life and Imlay was not very present or attentive.

After returning to her literary life in London, she was reintroduced to William Godwin. He was a writer who she previously had met at a dinner party in which she tried to solicit his opinions, despite his lack of interest in her. Godwin, who admired Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, fell for Wollstonecraft, and she for him. They became lovers, and after she became pregnant, eventually married. She and Godwin kept separate households, but supported each other, both in their writing and in life. This practical marriage allowed Wollstonecraft to follow the societal expectation of marriage after she became pregnant. Her second child, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (later Mary Shelley), was born soon after their marriage. Wollstonecraft died about a week later from complications due to childbirth.²⁰ She left a rich literary legacy behind, but one her husband inadvertently tarnished in creating the controversial *The Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. His blunt, and at times brutal, account of her life, especially his mention of her suicide attempts, her proposal to Fuseli, and her child out of wedlock, prevented most of her works from being republished, read, and celebrated because of a moralistic public response to her life.²¹

The public knew her name, but had not read her work, and was not aware of what she had published besides *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Tragically, the public did not immediately get the opportunity to read Wollstonecraft's work or fully appreciate her life. She was an incredible woman who managed to create a path for herself in which she was able to be a whole person, as romantics desire. She was able to be passionate, emotional, rational, and reasonable. She was able to have a career as a writer and have children. Childbirth complications cut Wollstonecraft's life short, and her husband tarnished her legacy, but the way she lived her life demonstrated she was a romantic who supported greater freedom for women. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft's most famous work, also demonstrates she wanted more freedom for women. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is romantic in the traditional sense in key few

19. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

20. Butler and Todd, "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*.

21. Rodríguez, "Rewriting and Reinterpreting," 183-191

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

ways. First, Wollstonecraft references the idea of genius, imagination, and the sublime frequently. Second, Wollstonecraft refers to Rousseau and Milton, two authors that romantics often praise as good examples of writing. Wollstonecraft, nonetheless, does not interpret them in the same way as many other romantics did. Wollstonecraft states that “Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her NATURAL cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a SWEETER companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself.”²² She ridicules this statement and goes on to argue that women can be independent and that the institution of marriage should not enslave them to men. The traditional romanticism in Wollstonecraft’s work is highlighted in the way she is trying to reform society to bring it closer to a utopian paradise. For example, Wollstonecraft states that

in the infancy of society, when men were just emerging out of barbarism, chiefs and priests, touching the most powerful springs of savage conduct — hope and fear — must have had unbounded sway. An aristocracy, of course, is naturally the first form of government. But [then]...monarchy and hierarchy break out...and the foundation of both is secured by feudal tenures...[and next,] the people acquire some power in the tumult, which obliges their rulers to gloss over their oppression with a show of right.²³

Wollstonecraft, in short, suggests not only that society has improved and should continue to do so, but that it has improved in a cyclical pattern. Society starts in a state of innocence, then falls, and then redeems itself somewhat, and continues to improve in this spiral pattern. This spiraling cycle is exactly what Mellor mentions Meyer Abrams describes in his book *Natural Supernaturalism*.²⁴Wollstonecraft’s references to the sublime, imagination, genius, Rousseau, and Milton, as well as her support for the romantic model of innocence, the fall, and redemption, indicate that Wollstonecraft’s romantic work shares some of the ideas of traditional romantics. Viewing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* through the lens of romanticism, then, improves the understanding of the work.

Without Mellor’s extension of the canon, however, much of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* would not be considered romantic, as Wollstonecraft also

22. Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 5 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

23. Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.”

24. Mellor, *Romanticism*.

breaks away from Abram's idea of innocence, fall and redemption. She asserts that "Girls and boys... would play harmlessly together, if the distinction of sex was not inculcated long before nature makes any difference... most of the women, in the circle of my observation, who have acted like rational creatures, or shewn any vigour of intellect, have accidentally been allowed to run wild — as some of the elegant formers of the fair sex would insinuate."²⁵ Wollstonecraft holds that girls have the most freedom when they are very young, and the older they get, the more constraints society puts on them. She contends that without these constraints, they would have the same intellect and the same ability to fall and become redeemed as men. Wollstonecraft notes that in reality, however, women's choices are limited. They are never able to fall because they don't have freedom, and thus they never are redeemed, or gain the experience and ability to use their intellect that men do. Women, therefore, experience the opposite of the typical innocence, fall, and redemption cycle; they spiral downward. This argument demonstrates that Wollstonecraft, as a romantic, was willing to pioneer new ideas and stand apart from traditional authors. Reading her work through the lens of the expanded definition of romanticism highlights how the societal change in women's roles that Wollstonecraft advocates for is romantic.

Wollstonecraft's argument that women are rational and deserved equality and education fits into Mellor's expanded definition of romanticism. In arguing that educating women to transform the family is a better way to increase women's rights, rather than demanding full equality, Wollstonecraft advocated for gradual social change, instead of rapid change.²⁶ Wollstonecraft's argument for change is even more gradual because it is partly based on the fact that educated women would make better mothers.²⁷ By rationalizing the idea of female education by linking education to motherhood, Wollstonecraft placed the idea of the self within the family and community structure, as many other female romantics did. Without the expanded definition of romanticism, scholars might ignore how romantic linking women's rights to the community and family is. The expanded definition also allows us to see that Wollstonecraft, by tying in female rationality with repression of sexual passion and emotions, was trying to give a perspective of women as whole beings, rather than the typical portrayal of women as only passionate or emotional.

25. Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

26. Catriona MacKenzie, "Reason and Sensibility: The Ideal of Women's Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft," *Hypatia* 8, no. 4 (1993): 35–55.

27. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 33.

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Wollstonecraft's advocacy for women's rights supports a key tenet of Mellor's definition of feminine romanticism, making her a romantic. In the conclusion to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft states that "we shall not see women affectionate till more equality be established in society."²⁸ Scholars contend that Wollstonecraft, while clearly disliking the women of her day, blamed women's faults on men and suggested that equality for the sexes would result in better men and better women.²⁹ Wollstonecraft, hence, criticizes men for creating an unattainable "imaginary ideal" for women that ultimately ended up ruining the marriages of both women and men.³⁰ Viewing Wollstonecraft's work through the expanded lens of romanticism, therefore, reveals the romantic nature of her argument about equality.

Wollstonecraft is also a romanticist in her call for the use of sense, reason, and rationality to enable women to become more whole. Wollstonecraft, instead of advocating for informal education, or more arts and poetry in education, advised that individual education should be "attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the senses, form the temper, regulate the passions, as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; so that the man may only have to proceed, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason."³¹ Traditionally, advocating for reason and regulation of passions would not seem romantic, but Mellor's expanded definition shows that Wollstonecraft, in advocating for suppressing passion, simply suggests that women become more whole – just as men were doing for themselves by arguing they should express emotion.

Wollstonecraft advocates the application of a similar rationale in marriage. She asserts that "in order to fulfil the duties of life, and to be able to pursue with vigour the various employments which form the moral character, a master and mistress of a family ought not to continue to love each other with passion... they ought not to indulge those emotions which disturb the order of society, and engross the thoughts that should be otherwise employed."³² Wollstonecraft contends that passion is not the most important aspect of marriage, but rather that being moral and not disrupting society are more important. The idea

28. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 33.

29. Mellor, *Romanticism*, 37.

30. Naomi Jayne Garner, "Seeing Through a Glass Darkly: Wollstonecraft and the Confinements of Eighteenth-Century Femininity." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009): 85.

31. Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

32. Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

of suppressing passion for societal good is an idea present in the expanded definition of romanticism that includes Mellor's ideas. Wollstonecraft elaborates upon this idea later and suggests that passion is one reason that marriage

“Although trying to avoid writing primarily about herself, considering others’ struggles, using different language to describe nature, and writing the book out of practicality would not have been considered romantic, the expanded definition of romanticism shows that these ideas of Wollstonecraft were rebellious and romantic.”

doesn't always work well – people often commit adultery because of passion, as Imlay did to her, and this destroys marriages. In other words, “Passions are spurs to action, and open the mind; but they sink into mere appetites, become a personal momentary gratification, when the object is gained, and the satisfied mind rests in enjoyment.”³³ Adultery, Wollstonecraft asserts, is committed by men and women and results in consequences for both sexes. Following passion and emotion results in adultery, but it had roots in societal flaws as well. Wollstonecraft claims that if women are “only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, [they will be led to] shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they [will] plump into actual vice.”³⁴ If women, therefore, are taught by their families, their education, and society to focus only on love, marriage, their appearance, and sensuality, they will ultimately not be productive, effective, or happy members of society. If women are not happy and interesting, their husbands won't be happy either, and both sexes will feel trapped in marriage, potentially committing adultery.

33. Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.”

34. Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.”

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Although both sexes have vices, Wollstonecraft blames men for women's vices, stating that they should "let woman share the rights and she will emulate the virtues of man, for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty."³⁵ Thus, although women and men both are flawed, women are more trapped than men because they do not have rights and the freedom to make their own rational choices and have a life outside of the family. By using reason and rationality to argue that women's rights will improve society as a whole, Wollstonecraft cements herself as a romantic in this work – and demonstrates that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is better understood through the lens of romanticism.

Wollstonecraft builds her identity as a romantic in *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, a novel that was an attempt to fictionalize *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Mary Poovey, a respected romantic scholar, states that Wollstonecraft attempted to recreate the "insights of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in a genre she felt could articulate her own emotion and attract a female audience – the sentimental novel."³⁶ Therefore, *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* articulates the same romantic concepts as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, yet in a genre that attracted more women. This makes the novel even more characteristic of romanticism, since it strived to focus even more on emotion and cater to women. The similarities of *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman* to George Sand's feminine romanticist novel *Indiana*, are striking as well, particularly the discussion of women's romantic relationships and sensuality.³⁷ *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, therefore, is a strong example of feminine romanticism according to the expanded definition.

Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, another one of Wollstonecraft's more famous works, and the work that made Godwin fall in love with her, also is romantic according to the expanded definition. In this work, Wollstonecraft focuses on nature, reflection, and her own emotions, which is typical of masculine romanticism. Despite her focus on nature, Wollstonecraft notably uses language that is very different from that of male romantics. She opens "her bosom to the embraces of nature" and her "soul rose to its author"

35. Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman."

36. Mary Poovey, "Mary Wollstonecraft: The Gender of Genres in Late Eighteenth-Century England." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 15, no. 2 (1982): 111.

37. Mary Wollstonecraft, "Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

while most male romantics describe nature as “other,” or something to be usurped or controlled, not a friend.³⁸ Wollstonecraft, furthermore, distinguishes herself from male romantics because even in her reflections — she considers society, the communities she is in, and other people. Additionally, both her journey and the book “were motivated by her desire for financial independence,” which shows practicality and reason that was not advocated for by male romantics, such as Rousseau in his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*.³⁹ He reveled in doing nothing, not contributing to society, and not focusing on having a job. Wollstonecraft, in contrast, made no attempt to rebel against the useful as male romantics did.

Being useful was a rebellion for women. When Wollstonecraft discussed nature and herself too much, she would realize that in her letters and reprimand herself, stating, for example, that her reader would say “enough...of inanimate nature...let me hear something of the inhabitants.”⁴⁰ She also examined others in her reflections. After she discussed nature in Gothenburg, she mentions that had she traveled farther into Sweden, “she imagined that she should have seen a romantic country thinly inhabited, and these inhabitants struggling with poverty. The Norwegian peasantry, mostly independent, have a rough kind of frankness in their manner; but the Swedish, rendered more abject by misery, have a degree of politeness in their address, which, though it may sometimes border on insincerity, is oftener the effect of a broken spirit, rather softened than degraded by wretchedness.”⁴¹ Wollstonecraft, in considering the peasants in each country, indicates that she is not blind to others’ struggles, despite having her own. She, moreover, realizes that even if a country is romantic, it might not be a good place to live. These reflections about society distinguish her from male romantics. Although trying to avoid writing primarily about herself, considering others’ struggles, using different language to describe nature, and writing the book out of practicality would not have been considered romantic, the expanded definition of romanticism shows that these ideas of Wollstonecraft were rebellious and romantic.

In addition to having ideas that only fit into the expanded definition of romanticism, Wollstonecraft discussed topics included in both the traditional and expanded definitions – nature and self-reflection. Wollstonecraft discusses

38. Mary Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 6 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

39. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

40. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

41. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

nature as being beautiful and charming her, but also hurting her, “Why has nature so many charms for me — calling forth and cherishing refined sentiments, only to wound the breast that fosters them?”⁴² For Wollstonecraft, nature evokes strong emotions, as it does for many romantics. However, she does not see nature as something to be usurped, or controlled, traditional romantics do. Rather, she recognizes the power of nature to both cause harm and wonder — and to cause both life and destruction. Wollstonecraft marvels at the beauty and elegance of the scene when

The spiral tops of the pines are loaded with ripening seed...the profusion with which nature has decked them, with pendant honours, prevents all surprise at seeing, in every crevice, some sapling struggling for existence... The grey cobweb-like appearance of the aged pines is a much finer image of decay; the fibers whitening as they lose their moisture, imprisoned life seems to be stealing away. I cannot tell why — but death, under every form, appears to me like something getting free.⁴³

Mary Wollstonecraft, like male romantics, appreciates the beauty of nature and enjoys solitude. Walks in nature allow her to reflect and consider the sublime. Despite feeling the awe-inspiring and sublime characteristics of nature, Wollstonecraft also sees its dark side — likely because she is caught up in her own emotions and is upset about Imlay’s adultery. Her recent attempt at suicide made it more likely for her to consider death and destruction in nature more than the average person. Wollstonecraft sees death as a way of escape. In death she searches for a new path, one in which she is able to “get free” from personal and societal problems, and projects this desire onto nature.

Wollstonecraft, in being primarily concerned with herself and overwhelmed by her emotions, is similar to male romantics who concentrated on passion and emotions. In particular, Wollstonecraft is comparable to Werther in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, as he commits suicide and spends much of his time in solitude wallowing.⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft is also comparable to male romantics in that she views nature as a space in which she can escape her problems. She states that “[she] reasoned and reasoned; but [her] heart was too full to allow [her] to remain in the house, and [she] walked, till [she] was wearied out, to purchase...

42. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

43. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

44. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

CAROLYN DALY

forgetfulness.”⁴⁵ Walking in nature allows her a respite from real life and allows her to consider the sublime and forget about her own problems. Many male romantics, notably Rousseau, also went into nature to forget about society and their real life. Wollstonecraft is most similar to male romantics when she happily reflects in nature, appreciating the sublime. She notes that a “vague pleasurable sentiment absorbed me...the grey morn, streaked with silvery rays, ushered in the orient beams, — how beautifully varying into purple! — yet, I was sorry to lose the soft watery clouds which preceded them, exciting a kind of expectation that made me almost afraid to breathe, lest I should break the charm. I saw the sun — and sighed.”⁴⁶ Here, Wollstonecraft clearly describes nature as majestic, sublime, and beautiful. Male romantics usually spoke of nature similarly, contrasting it with cities and urban landscapes, which they thought were inferior and related to society’s transition towards science, technology and reason, and away from the arts.

Wollstonecraft is similar to Rousseau in that she does not want her thoughts and feelings interrupted by other people and seeks solitude in nature. Wollstonecraft says of one of her favorite places to visit, “I seldom met any human creature; and sometimes, reclining on the mossy down, under the shelter of a rock, the prattling of the sea amongst the pebbles has lulled me to sleep — no fear of any rude satyr’s approaching to interrupt my repose.”⁴⁷ Clearly, Wollstonecraft, like Rousseau, finds pleasure in being alone by herself in nature and values nature. In summary, Wollstonecraft’s writings about happily reflecting alone in nature, fit her into the traditional definition of romanticism well. Comparing her writing with romantics validates and contextualizes her thoughts.

The majority of Wollstonecraft’s works, however, do not focus on nature. Most of her works focus on education and society. Wollstonecraft’s works focusing on education and society include *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, *The Female Reader*, *Elements of Morality*, *The Cave of Fancy*, *Young Grandison*, and *Original Stories*. These stories are partially works of romanticism according to the new definition, but also conform to societal norms.

Wollstonecraft’s ideas in *The Female Reader* and *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* are characteristic of feminine romanticism. In *The Female Reader*,

45. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

46. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

47. Wollstonecraft, “Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.”

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Wollstonecraft writes that “far too much of a girl’s time is taken up in dress...The body hides the mind, and it is in its turn obscured by the drapery...dress ought to adorn the person, and not rival it.”⁴⁸ Wollstonecraft advocates for women to be valued for their minds, not their bodies. She proposes a gradual change to society — a decrease in the focus on women’s attire — in order to increase the respect given to women. In short, she advocates for women and for gradual societal change, which is typical of feminine romanticism. Later, she reminds her readers that “our feelings were not given us for our ornament, but to spur us on to right actions.”⁴⁹ Wollstonecraft, by connecting the practical and the emotional, demonstrates that she is a feminine romanticist. She cannot afford to ignore society or focus solely on emotions; she feels that she, and other women, have a responsibility to act as well.

In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* Wollstonecraft focuses on the fine arts, a very romantic topic. She mentions that art is a good way to sublimate passions, which is an idea in both feminine and masculine romanticism. On writing in particular, Wollstonecraft states that it should be “termed a fine art; and...a very useful one” but that young people often “substitute words for sentiments, and clothe mean thoughts in pompous diction.”⁵⁰ She laments that the young do not write well, and proposes that they should be taught how to, as it “is of great consequence in life as to our temporal interest, and of still more to the mind; as it teaches a person to arrange their thoughts, and digest them...[and] forms the only true basis of rational...conversation.”⁵¹ Wollstonecraft values the fine arts and connects her thoughts on fine art to rationality and educating young girls. In emphasizing the importance of writing in teaching young girls how to be rational and present themselves as rational, Wollstonecraft holds that her sex is rational, not just emotional, and that arts can teach reason, just like math and science. Her assertion is both romantic and feminist.

Wollstonecraft’s opinion on marriage in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* is also feminist, and by extension, romantic. Wollstonecraft disparages early marriages, stating that they are “a stop to improvement” and that women were not born only to “to draw nutrition, propagate and rot” but have souls,

48. Mary Wollstonecraft, “The Female Reader,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

49. Wollstonecraft, “The Female Reader.”

50. Mary Wollstonecraft, “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 4 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

51. Wollstonecraft, “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.”

CAROLYN DALY

which “ought to be attended to.”⁵² Women, hence, should not only “endeavor to please the other sex” in youth, but become educated, so their passion does not influence them too much, and they do not “marry a man before they are twenty, whom they would have rejected some years after.”⁵³ Wollstonecraft, an advocate for later marriage, supports a gradual change in society that would give women more choices and more time to become educated, rational, and not easily influenced by their passions. In summary, Wollstonecraft connects education, the fine arts, and reason in order to argue for gradual, feminist societal change. The expanded definition of romanticism includes these ideas, and helps us to contextualize her work.

However, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* and *The Female Reader* also conforms to bourgeois societal norms, as do Wollstonecraft’s other works focused on education, *The Cave of Fancy*, *Young Grandison*, *Elements of Morality*, and *Original Stories*. These works solely focus on teaching lessons and making children follow rules, emphasizing reason, duty, and suppressing passion and idleness without arguing for a cause or change to society. The preface of *Young Grandison*, for example, states that people’s “temporal as well as eternal welfare is only to be secured by a constant attention to [their] duty.”⁵⁴ The guiding principle of *Young Grandison*, hence, is very non-romantic because it focuses on duty and following societal rules instead of working towards reform in society and allowing individuals to express themselves and their emotions. The lessons in *Young Grandison* also support bourgeois societal norms. For instance, Wollstonecraft provides a lesson, told in the form of a story about Edward and his brother Charles, who are both young men. Edward sees a broken plate and thinks it is a servant’s fault. He wants to tell his aunt about it and get the servant in trouble, but Charles points out that not only is that immoral, but that it was Edward’s fault the plate got broken, since he carelessly left it on the chair. Edward then changes his mind and doesn’t want to tell his aunt about the broken plate. Charles points out how immoral this is.⁵⁵ This story is fundamentally a lesson about abiding by rules and teaches children to be responsible, respectful of property, forgiving, and slow to blame other people — ideas common in middle and upper class society.

52. Wollstonecraft, “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.”

53. Wollstonecraft, “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.”

54. Mary Wollstonecraft, “Young Grandison,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 02, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

55. Wollstonecraft, “Young Grandison.”

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Wollstonecraft further promotes adherence to reason and duty in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, stating that “it is our duty to lay down some rule to regulate our actions by, and to adhere to it, as consistently as our infirmities will permit. To be able to follow Mr. Locke’s system...parents must have subdued their own passions, [but] it does not always happen that both parents are rational...”⁵⁶ Wollstonecraft, in summary, holds that parents are responsible for acting rationally and giving their children rules to abide by, and that children have a duty to follow those rules, which is an emerging middle class as well as traditional societal idea.

Wollstonecraft, moreover, argues that idleness is bad in *Original Stories*. In doing so, she deviates from the ideas of romantics, who believe that there is too much focus on work and contributing to society. *Elements of Morality* builds upon the idea that children should be taught to have good judgement and obey their parents. The book is broken into sections, each with a different story from a young boy named Charles’ life. The stories all advocate for children to follow their parents’ rules and fulfill their duties. In the beginning of the book, for example, little Charles doesn’t listen to his parents and wanders far into the woods without telling them; he becomes scared, faces consequences, and then learns this lesson.⁵⁷ The book recounts countless similar stories, and ends with a chart detailing everyone’s duties to themselves, to others, to animals, to events, and to things.⁵⁸ The emphasis on conforming to societal norms, such as the duty to obey one’s parents, is present in all of these works, and demonstrates that although Wollstonecraft was romantic, she held some traditional ideas typical of her class status, gender, and era.

The Importance of Religious Opinions is another work of Wollstonecraft’s that is primarily not romantic, although the work discusses nature, the sublime, and imagination. The work is very concerned with religion and following its teachings, so it has the same focus on abiding by rules and moral codes as some of Wollstonecraft’s texts about education. The text does not support the traditionally romantic idea of striving for an ideal society. However, *The Importance of Religious Opinions* is a translation she made of another person’s work, and thus, it does not have significant implications about Wollstonecraft’s life and work.⁵⁹

56. Wollstonecraft, “Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.”

57. Mary Wollstonecraft, “Elements of Morality,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft Electronic Edition* Volume 02, ed. by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

58. Wollstonecraft, “Elements of Morality.”

59. Mary Wollstonecraft, “Of the Importance of Religious Opinions,” in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*,

Mary Wollstonecraft's works *On Poetry*, *The Cave of Fancy*, and *Mary, A Fiction* are all primarily romantic works in the traditional sense of the word. All three works discuss nature, reason, sensibility, sense, genius, imagination, the sublime, and feminist topics. The opening paragraphs of *The Cave of Fancy* discuss nature and the sublime, "One mountain rose sublime, towering above all, on the craggy sides of which a few sea-weeds grew, washed by the ocean, that with tumultuous roar rushed to assault, and even undermine, the huge barrier that stopped its progress."⁶⁰ Since the work starts by discussing nature as sublime, Wollstonecraft makes it clear that the sublime and nature, and by extension romanticism, are central to *The Cave of Fancy*. The rest of the work follows up on these expectations and focuses on the romantic themes.⁶¹ Since Wollstonecraft is familiar with other romantic texts, her frequent use of the words "sublime," "genius," and "imagination" are not coincidental – she intends for her work to be romantic, and it should be designated as such, so it can be fully appreciated and contextualized.

Similarly, *On Poetry* discusses the sublime and imagination, as well as feminist ideas. Wollstonecraft mentions that boys who "have received a classical education...load their memory with words" and do not fully grasp the concept of the sublime or the beauty of nature.⁶² The themes of disparaging classical education and promoting nature and the sublime are characteristic of many romantics. Wollstonecraft describes cities as crowded and rural scenes as pleasant, beautiful, and full of nature, again reinforcing the ideas of many romantics who believed in the importance of nature, and rural areas, as opposed to cities, industrialism, mechanization, and the corresponding decrease in the value of the arts.⁶³

Mary, A Fiction alludes to the sublime, genius, and imagination present in *On Poetry*. Wollstonecraft, in this novel, also focuses on love, relationships, and nature, and the emotional journey and relationships of Mary, the main character in the book. When Wollstonecraft mentions books Mary reads, she

ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 3 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

60. Mary Wollstonecraft, "The Cave of Fancy," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

61. Wollstonecraft, "The Cave of Fancy."

62. Mary Wollstonecraft, "On Poetry," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 5 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

63. Wollstonecraft, "On Poetry."

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

highlights *Paradise Lost*, a book typically lauded by romantics.⁶⁴ Wollstonecraft, in short, consistently and effectively alludes to romantic ideals and uses romantic vocabulary in *Mary, A Fiction*, *The Cave of Fancy*, and *On Poetry*. Since these works are romantic in both the traditional and expanded sense, they should be read through the lens of romanticism to be better understood.

In conclusion, I argue Mary Wollstonecraft should be considered a romantic according to the expanded definition of romanticism that accounts for gender. The overwhelming majority of her works are shining examples of romanticism or have significant excerpts that focus on topics central to romanticism. Although Wollstonecraft places a higher value on reason, sense rather than sensibility, women's rights, and gradual rather than rapid societal change, this is typical of many female romantics; and Mellor argues that their works should be added to the canon, as they have valuable, romantic ideas. Practicality and reason constituted radical and rebellious stances for women in the Eighteenth Century in ways they did not for men. Further, female romantics, in advocating for reason, parallel male romantics advocating for passion in that both groups are arguing for the development of the whole person. Wollstonecraft proves herself as a romantic with her focus on topics such as nature, the sublime, and imagination - all of which are central to both the traditional and expanded definition of romanticism. Nevertheless, very few people hold absolutely no culturally conservative ideas, and Wollstonecraft is no different. Her work conforms to middle and upper class societal norms by arguing that women should raise children, and that children should follow societal bourgeois rules and obey their parents. Mary Wollstonecraft's life, like her work, demonstrates that she is a romantic. She was a feminist, traveled, and wrote for a living, but also married for practical reasons and to avoid judgement from society. She did not have the same freedom to pursue her passions and to ignore her home life as many male romantics did, but she struggled with her mental health and focused on her own personal tragedies, as male romantics did. Contextualizing Mary Wollstonecraft's life and work through the lens of romanticism clarifies her incredibly complex, rich, and difficult life and the important contributions of her work. If scholars do not consider Mary Wollstonecraft a romantic, not only do they miss out on contextualizing some of the strengths of her work and her as a person, but the canon of romanticism is less nuanced. Mary Wollstonecraft was undoubtedly romantic – the fact that she was a woman and carved her own path only makes that more impressive.

64. Mary Wollstonecraft, "Mary, A Fiction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Badowska, Ewa. "The Anorexic Body of Liberal Feminism: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 17, no. 2 (1998): 283–303.
- Butler, Marilyn and Todd, Janet. "Introduction," in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, vol. 1. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- Garner, Naomi Jayne. "Seeing Through a Glass Darkly: Wollstonecraft and the Confinements of Eighteenth-Century Femininity." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (2009): 81–95.
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- MacKenzie, Catriona. "Reason and Sensibility: The Ideal of Women's Self-Governance in the Writings of Mary Wollstonecraft." *Hypatia* 8, no. 4 (1993): 35–55.
- Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender*. Oxon, Great Britain: Taylor and Francis, 1993.
- Poovey, Mary. "Mary Wollstonecraft: The Gender of Genres in Late Eighteenth-Century England." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 15, no. 2 (1982): 111–126.
- Richards, Cynthia D. "Romancing the Sublime: Why Mary Wollstonecraft Fell in Love with That Cad, Gilbert Imlay." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 25, no. 1 (2006) 71–91.
- Rodríguez, Eva M. Pérez. "Rewriting and Reinterpreting: Godwin's 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft.'" *Atlantis* 20, no. 2 (1998): 183–191.
- Wollstonecraft, Mary. *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Electronic Edition. Volume 1. Edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "The Cave of Fancy." In *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Electronic Edition. Volume 1. Edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "Elements of Morality." In *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Electronic Edition. Volume 2. Edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "The Female Reader." In *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Electronic Edition. Volume 4. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "A Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution." In *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 05. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark." *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 06. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "Mary, A Fiction." *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 01. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "Of the Importance of Religious Opinions." *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 03. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- "On Poetry." *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 07. Todd, Janet and

SEEING MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.

- —“Original Stories.” *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 04. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- —“Thoughts on the Education of Daughters.” *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 04. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- —“A Vindication of the Rights of Men.” *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition. Volume 05. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- —“A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.” *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition Volume 05. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- —“The Wrongs of Woman: , or Maria.” *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* Electronic Edition. Volume 01. Todd, Janet and Marilyn Butler, London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.
- —“Young Grandison.” in Vol. 2 of *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*. Electronic ed. Edited by Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler. London: Pickering and Chatto, 1989.



CAROLYN DALY (AUTHOR)

McMurtry College, '21

Carolyn Daly is a junior at McMurtry College double majoring in Social Policy Analysis and History with a CLIC Certificate in Spanish. She loves studying 20th century social movements, human rights issues, and feminism in the United States, Latin America, and Spain. When she's not studying, you can usually find Carolyn at a Civic Duty Rice or McMurtry government meeting, exploring Houston, trying new food, or out on the soccer field.



ASHNA KARPE (ARTIST)

Duncan College, '22

Ashna Karpe is a psychology major from Duncan. She loves sketching and painting with watercolor in her free time. Ashna gets most of her inspiration from Instagram and if you want to follow some cool art pages she recommends: @noelbadgespugh, @cocobeeart, and @kelogsloops.

EDITORIAL BOARD



Alison Drileck
Editor-in-Chief
Sid Richardson College, '21



Laura Li
Editor-in-Chief
Sid Richardson College, '20



Miriam Wolter
Managing Editor
McMurtry College, '20



Mikayla Knutson
Associate Managing Editor
Duncan College, '21



Katie Nguyen
Publishing Director
Sid Richardson College, '22



Olivia Daneker
Art Director
Wiess College, '21



George Elsesser
Assistant Managing Editor
Wiess College, '21



Caroline Siegfried
Director of Copy Editing
McMurtry College, '20



Sarah Gao
Director of Copy Editing
McMurtry College, '20



Spencer Moffat
Director of Short Form
Baker College, '21



Victoria Saeki-Serna
Director of Short Form
Baker College, '22



Frederick Drummond
Short Form Copy Editor
Duncan College, '21



Alex Vela
Director of Media
Lovett College, '21



Jordan Killinger
Director of Podcasting
Will Rice College, '23



Melissa Carmona
Assistant Director of Podcasting
Lovett College, '23



Josue Alvarenga
Assistant Director of Podcasting
Baker College, '22



Riley Meve
Director of Public Relations
Will Rice College, '23



Rachel Lisker
Distribution Manager
Martel College, '20



The *Rice Historical Review* is a student-run, open access journal published online and in print. It features outstanding historically focused papers written by Rice undergraduates. All Rice undergraduates, regardless of major, are welcome to submit their work to the journal.

With this journal, we seek to emphasize the diversity of study within Rice's History Department. We hope to foster discussion of historical topics on campus and in the greater Rice community.

ABOUT US

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Peter C. Caldwell

Samuel G. McCann Professor of History
Chair of the History Department

Dr. William E. Skidmore

History Department

Dr. David Cook

Associate Professor of Religion

Dr. Diane Wolfthal

Professor of Art History
David and Caroline Minter Chair of Humanities

Dr. Farshid Emani

Assistant Professor of Art History

Dr. Kerry R. Ward

Associate Professor of History

Cyma S. Farah

Graduate Student, History

Dr. Melissa Weininger

Associate Program Director, Jewish Studies

Dr. Moramay López-Alonso

Associate Professor of History

Dr. Lora Wildenthal

John Antony Weir Professor of History

Dr. W. Caleb McDaniel

Associate Professor of History

Dr. Fay Yarbrough

Associate Professor of History

Organizational Support

Rice University Department of History
Office of Undergraduate Research and
Inquiry

Rice University School of Humanities
Fondren Library

Special thanks to...

Erin Baezner

History Department
Coordinator

Dr. Katherine Fischer Drew

Lynette S. Autrey Professor
Emeritus History

Beverly Konzem

History Department
Administrator

Dr. Lisa Balabanlilar

Associate Professor of History
Director of Undergraduate
Studies, History

Dr. Peter C. Caldwell

Samuel G. McCann Professor
of History
Chair of the History Department

Dr. Caroline Quenemoen

Associate Dean of
Undergraduates
Director of Inquiry Based
Learning

