The magazine by students of Harrow Bangkok, for students of Harrow Bangkok.

PRIDE

Spring 2025

Empathy & The Arts

Is Democracy Too Equal?

Congo's Silent Suffering



MAE SOT WHEN IT RAINS: A SOJOURN ON THE BORDER

HARROW INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL BANGKOK

Editor's Note

Welcome, dear readers, to our fifth publication of the school's one and only Harrow Pride Magazine!

This year's edition is a notably, although maybe not surprisingly, political one, with turmoil from all over the world; from America to Kenya, Sudan, and even Myanmar right next door being covered within this publication.

If the state of world affairs has got you worrying, then perhaps our film reviews and other creative pieces will serve you better as a much needed distraction from the turbulent reality we find ourselves in. For that, we have a wide range of variety, from Black Swan to Metallica, along with some poems as well.

Lastly, despite how chaotic the world seems to have gotten, I would like to thank you all for sticking with our publication, and for joining me in my second and last year as the magazine editor. It has certainly been hard to keep up with global events when preoccupied with the demands of student life, harder still to also work on this magazine. Despite it all, it's been a lot of fun for me; even the mistakes I have come to see valuable learning experiences at an activity I look forward to continuing elsewhere in the future.

To that extent, I would like to thank the ever-amazing Mr. Jadeja who is the leading staff for this magazine. Between being a teacher, a father, and having to deal with me, he surely has some of the hardest jobs in the world. It's been a pleasure learning from him and working with the wonderful team of writers and designers that we have had.

-Pom So13

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MAE SOT WHEN IT RAINS: A SOJOURN ON THE BORDER

As this is a story about those who have fled the Myanmar Civil War to seek a better chance at life in Thailand, it is also a story of two peoples whose intertwined history runs as long and deep as the Moei River which separates them. Likewise, my experience in Mae Sot had only been possible due to the incredible amount of generosity and hospitality shown to me by all the people, both Thai and Burmese, whom I met during the trip. To this extent, I'd like to thank Dr. Nakorn, Dr. Cynthia Muang, K. Santiphap, K. Ampika, Thet Sein Win, Dr. Bio, K. Norng, K. Sittha, Adam, and many others for making my research possible, and for being mentors to me in so many ways. The extraordinary amount of support I was graciously given by these people greatly compelled me to write this story as a form of thanks. This is dedicated to the migrant students of the border and their fight for education.

As to how this story came to be - there must have been something within the rainy air of July '24 that had suffixed itself onto my conscience like seeds to a whirlwind, a whirlwind that would tear itself right through all of the confidence I'd previously had on my integrity as a student of international relations: the more I probed and interrogated myself on what I truly knew about the subject, the more it seemed that all the fragments of general reading I'd amassed over the years had scarcely come together to form a reflective surface of where my knowledge and ability ought to be; I was severely lacking in practical experience, something to prove that all which I have done up to that point was of any worth. The foggy halo of self-doubt hung heavy over my head all throughout the school break, and the torrential downpour that continued outside forced me to stay shut in with my own thoughts. It was not long, though, before the isolation of the summer had created idle hands; with an irate mind, those idle hands quickly turned into a deluge of emails, letters, and phone calls seeking field opportunities. Soon enough, my desperate errant for practical experience brought me into contact with Dr. Nakorn: A man who professionally gathers information on the Thai-Myanmar border situation to inform relevant authorities, such as the government, and from whom I would learn great many things from.

Dr. Nakorn was about to embark upon a three day information gathering tour in Mae Sot for what was quite a pioneering trip, given the lack of attention Thai authorities had previously paid to developing an effective solution for the border crisis. He had agreed to bring me along with him and together, we formed a program that would expose us to all aspects of the border situation. Although I was anxious about my qualifications for this trip, I was not about to let such a golden opportunity go to waste; I had to prove that I actually knew something and needed field experience to also back it up. Wading my way through the streams of inconfidence, I readied myself for three unforgettable days.



Dr. Nakorn

Perhaps one of the more, if not the most, famous organisations providing healthcare and other forms of social service support to migrants is the Mae Tao clinic - headed by the renowned Dr. Cynthia Muang, who is ethnically Karen. Her record of service to the migrant community here over the past three decades serves as an inspiration to all aid workers, but also as reflection of how the conflict has evolved over its lifetime: three generations of Burmese, Karens, and many other ethnic groups have now been swept up in this terrible nightmare. Where Dr. Cynthia had once run a makeshift clinic in an old, rented warehouse building; using any equipments the clinic could get their hands on, treating victims of landmines and gunfire that had been carried on makeshift stretchers across the jungle mountains of Kawthoolei back in the 90s; she now has moved to a larger location and developed Mae Tao into a proper healthcare complex. The Mae Tao of today has multiple departments - funded by and working in cooperation with many different NGOs - still treating victims of airstrikes, napalm, and other modernised killing tools of the military government, but also now providing services such as vaccination or medical checkups that are vital to the being of the migrant community. It now also has a school under its subdivision called the Child Development Center or the "CDC" school, the largest and most formal of all the 64 migrant schools within Mae Sot.

It was on the second day of the trip that I visited the Mae Tao clinic and the CDC school. It had been raining all night before, and would never truly stop all throughout the day. This, in combination with the busy traffic of the clinic, turned our arrival into a scene straight out of an "Apocalypse Now" parody. We frantically moved from department to department, roof to roof, trying our best to find "Khun Santiphap" while avoiding the rain. Santiphap was the organiser of the clinic and the CDC school who was to be our guide for the day.

MAE TAO CLINIC



His ability to seemingly be everywhere at once, and never in the same place twice, was extremely crucial to the daily go-ons of the clinic, and also painful for those of us who were trying to find him. Once we eventually caught up (more so he found us than we found him) he began by taking us to meet his mother, Dr. Cynthia. Getting to meet Dr. Cynthia was an immense privilege, but technically speaking, this was my second exposure with the legendary doctor. My first had happened a week prior to the trip, where I had seen a picture of her in Phil Thornton's excellent book "Restless Souls" - a book written in the late '90s about the Karens of the Thai-Myanmar border, which I had only finished just a few days before I realised I would actually get to meet her - Though notably much older than the picture from the book, she was still as sharp as ever, methodically responding to all of our questions with great precision. Dr. Nakorn must have sensed my star-struck state and opened the floor for me to discuss the problem of migrant youths' education which I was most curious about. She sent me to meet with Burmese & Karens around my age doing vocational training with the Suvanamit Youth Empowerment Program at the clinic in a nearby building so I can learn from them directly.



Dr. Cynthia Muang

Education then comes to these students mostly in forms of online courses: taught in English and received through the scarce amount of laptops available to them. It is hard to overstate how important and highly regarded these online courses are to students of the border: most migrants that come over have very little chance of receiving formal education, and thus are very reliant on these online GED Programs. Nevertheless, given that many teenagers around the age of 18 have come here fleeing the newly enacted conscription law, they were very enthusiastic about the prospect of education; any amount of portfolio-building they can do is truly invaluable for it may just be their ticket to getting out of the rainy city: education records can be life changing when applying for asylum abroad to countries like Australia, the US, or Canada.

I left her office and was led to the Suvanamit office within the complex. There, I met with six of the students in the program, along with their adviser. We conversed in a mix of English, Burmese, and Thai about how most students lack the opportunity to pursue higher education within Thailand for a myriad of reasons. The large majority faces financial, or documentation problems; most of them simply also are not receiving good enough education at highschool level to be admitted to universities, or are being pressured to work and provide income for the family instead of continuing their study. Furthermore, from the simple fact that they will spend most of their life in Mae Sot exclusively around their own migrant community, having no learning resources that they can develop an understanding of Thai culture from, integration can be a large problem for the community despite how tolerant most of the Thai locals are towards them. I also found that migrant students my age are usually below me in several grades, as their arduous trip from Burman heartlands - places like Naypyidaw, Yangon, and Mandalay - would have taken them through the mountains and jungles of Kawthoolei, home of the Karen State, and strip away from them at least 2-3 years of education as well. Those privileged enough to come by plane might have it better but still, most will have a very hard time integrating into the local community.



Suvanamit Foundation

For now, they do what they can to compensate for the lack of formal education with vocational training, learning soft skills or technical skills in simple fields that may help them with their job/higher education prospects in the future. Every small bit of credentials these students can build for their name tantamount to a large step in their desperate escape from abject poverty; poverty in wealth, in rights, in a sense of belonging. These are students who must work tirelessly every day to justify their worth to receive basic necessities, to strive for a continued existence in the grey line of the law; to earn any piece of paper or writing that is Western or Thai enough to be trusted as proof that they have ever existed at all. Dr. Nakorn and I discussed the idea of creating online courses to teach Thai language and culture whilst on our ride to the CDC school, which we were going to visit next. These were two things that the students themselves expressed great desire to learn that would be immensely impactful in helping long-term migrants integrate or assimilate.



This is not to say that assimilation is always the most viable option in face of a refugee crisis, however. In many ways, this trip has taught me a lot about the delicate balance between practicality and ideology, and I have certainly come to believe that the moral high ground means nothing - even being dangerous to a certain point - if you do not have the means to get up there. Although locals within Mae Sot and other areas accustomed to high numbers of migrants are generally tolerant, the overall societal perception of Thailand on its neighbors still suffer from instilled xenophobia that is inherent in how we have constructed Thai nationalism in our nation building process. The lack of political will wouldn't be the most damning issue, however, as the lack of capability to take care of these migrants, even if applications for citizenship are to be opened again, would probably result in no one truly being better off while all existing problems are perpetuated by an increase in the affected population. Not to absolve the Thai government of their responsibility to correct these issues, of course, and I believe that they are entirely capable of doing so, but one must learn to also accept that - when presented with limit capabilities to be balanced with potentially infinite ambitions - a government must take priority on certain issues: wherein domestic problems will always come before others, such as this one, which are deemed external. This problem is becoming less and less ignorable each day, however - for better and for worse - and I have no doubt the damning consequences of inaction will become apparent soon. It is only a shame that the Thai government never learns to act proactively.

The trip continued on a country dirt road where we bumpily rode to our next destination, trailing a mud-worn truck with no license plate that seemed a fitting sight for this part of the country. Once we arrived, we were presented with a truly impressive sight of the CDC school. Like a proper government-funded Thai school, it was made out of concrete in a U-shape with three stories to the building and a multipurpose courtyard which it curves around. The small parking lot out front was packed with a shocking amount of motorcycles, presumably almost one per every student, representative of the roughly 1,100 regular attendees and the 44 teachers there to teach them. We were taken to talk with the school's administrators and three student representatives. I first ask about the incredible amount of motorcycles and what kind of distance these students have to travel to come to school. CDC receives students from both those on the Thai side of the border, but also Burmese & Karens who cross the border each day to come learn at the school. Most also live in the school's boarding houses, which were humble but necessary, for many were separated from their parents either as a result of fleeing the Civil War or by the fact that their parents have gone to find work elsewhere in bigger cities like Chiang Mai or Bangkok. The school does have a kitchen which serves 2 meals a day. "It's important to give them food. Even if they're only here to have food, it will at least motivate them to attend school regularly instead of going off to help their parents work or do who-knows-what-else", they told me. The three student representatives spoke very good Thai (maybe even better than me) which was a surprise. Inquiring further, I learnt that they all study the Thai "Kor Sor Nor" curriculum, equivalent to an IGCSE, and are looking for higher education within Thailand.

Like all other students I met during the trip, they were my age but several years behind, losing much time in their escape here which is not helped by the mismatch of curriculums. 70% of the students study the Burmese curriculum because of that is what they would have had previously studied before coming here. This means that, for around 70% of the students, there were no ways in which they could have pursued higher education at all whatsoever for it is not an admissible curriculum, nor could the school offer any qualification certificate given that it is technically unregistered with the state. Around 20% then study the Thai "Kor Sor Nor" curriculum, and they perhaps stand the best chance of further education in Thailand. Across the 64 migrant schools, there are about 18,000 students competing over 40-50 places offered to migrants from Myanmar by Thai universities with dedicated programs in total. The most popular destination seems to be Chiang Mai University which has good relations with these migrant schools and are always doing what they can to assist the admission of these migrant students. They are mostly only able to help those with documentation, however, which makes up a tragically small minority of all the migrant students. There is also the Mae Sot Scholarship Hub which helps find scholarship opportunities for students from universities like the CMU and Rangsit University.



CDC School

Around this point in the conversation, I was taken by the student reps to tour the school. Each classroom was very cramped though the state of equipment was better than most other migrant schools I have been to, a small saving grace from the fact that teachers literally have to run from class to class to teach different subjects to different year groups. The style of learning was also very traditional, focusing on repetition, call, and response. I took notice of their class schedule, and was enormously impressed with the fact that they study Thai Language for 2 hours every day. To this point, it is also worth mentioning that every student I was able to talk to during the trip greatly appreciated their lives here; whatever adversity they have living on this side of the Moei is pitifully dwarfed by the alternatives that were waiting for them on the other side. They also spoke of seeking more opportunities to be helpful towards the local community and proving to the Thai locals that they're here to work hard and make contributions. The general animosity that Thai people have against Burmese - mostly a result of our school curriculum having nationalist tendencies - is nowhere to be found in how the migrant community feels about us at all, and most have stated much gratitude for the second life which they have been given here.

While most would probably go back to Myanmar once the conflict ends, a sizable portion would probably remain. There is still around 10% of the school, however, which are able to study the GED program. This group, while being the smallest, are most likely to find higher education due to the versatility of the GED. They are also most likely to be able to apply for asylum in Western countries, like the United States and Australia, although the process is very slow and arduous with the quotas being very low as well. Dr. Cynthia herself could have gone to Australia, to live a life of comfort with her family as a practising doctor, but instead she chose to stay and help the restless souls of the border. I then asked further about what the GED program is like, which K. Santiphap was able to answer in intricate detail. Afterall, there was no one in that room more suitable to take my questions than him, given that he had been birthed within the very clinic he now manages, and had grown up studying GED in the CDC too.

Over lunch, after we left the CDC, we discussed just how beneficial extracurricular activities like music and sports could be for these students, “better than to let them get up to cheap drugs and hard crimes”, someone said. Still, it did not leave my mind how unfair it is that the vast majority of these students simply never had a chance to pursue education above grade 9 to begin with. Worse yet were those who had been given birth here without a birth certificate, who essentially have their future snuffed out ever since they came into this world. Whilst regretting such a tragic loss of human resources, the irony was not lost on me that my coffee was being served by someone who had once been an engineer in Naypyidaw, that my table was then cleaned by a professor from Mandalay. Eating at a Burmese owned restaurant made me feel rather guilty: my table had ordered a couple burgers, some fries, with milkshakes - the total bill came to just under 200 baht. It tasted just like any other roadside restaurant, only that it was far cheaper because they had to charge an affordable price for Burmese people out of a sense of communal responsibility.



At night, back in my hotel room, I had much to reflect on. Perhaps the funniest thing about this visit and the conversation I got to give with the CDC students was how woefully unaware of myself I had been. It was only after the tour of the school that I found time to casually chat with the students who made me realise how sheepishly funny I had been in failing to consider how unfathomable the purpose of my visit must have been for the locals. “Everyone’s really surprised to see a teenage student from Bangkok”, they said “We would have never expected you”. Identity matters so much to a diverse place like Mae Sot, where everyone there is only there for a specific reason, or they might be in some other place if it weren’t for the things that were keeping them there. As for me, who never considered myself a Bangkokian, Mae Sot felt like an old home that I had forgotten, half lost to the twilight of my memories. I wasn’t the only one to express this sentiment either, as on the Harrow charity trip that had exposed me to the quaint town, everyone else said the same thing. For such a unique place, it has many things that make it truly cosmopolitan in its most morbid way. No wonder, then, is the town so strange - given its ability to make every misplaced soul that ends up wandering there feels a little like somehow they have always belonged there.



It was at the tail end of this rumination that my conscience was pulled straight out of this reverie and back into the life of the “kid from Bangkok” with the bittersweet sound of an Outlook email ping. To have been so immersed within this world, only to then be reminded of my other one back in Bangkok and back at Harrow, definitely gave me a new perspective on life and education that has definitely stuck with me to this day.

On the final day I visited one last school which would turn out to be a far more tragic and unfortunate site than all others. By then, a flood had already begun to take shape. Writing in hindsight, it is no wonder why the Northern flood had gotten as bad as it did given how heavily it was raining over my short stay up there “There used to be times in Mae Sot where the sky would be dark with rain for seven days and seven nights” A local told us. Worst yet was the rain’s effect on places like this school where, instead of concrete buildings and paved walkways that greeted us at CDC, they only had muddy, uneven paths guarded by a run-down, rusty fence. The “Huay Kaloke” school was rather small; most structures were made out of unlaminated wood with only makeshift corrugated tin roofs guarding overhead. Sparse amounts of light tubes and old, cheaply made fans were installed in each room with simple, makeshift methods; its rudimentary construction really allowed observers to imagine how NGO workers and locals must have put it all together with a shoestring budget. Little children in Thai school uniforms run around the front of the classrooms, energetically forming a line as they get ready to sing the national Thai anthem at - for some reason - 9AM instead of the usual 8. Despite being majority Karen, then Burmese, they stood proudly for the Thai flag and sung the anthem with pride, knowing the words better than most of my friends do.





Many of these third generation migrants are fluent in Thai, meaning that if given the chance, they could integrate into the local community and use their education to earn an honest living within Thailand. Yet, one must remember that those who receive education on the border are still a small minority. Sad truth is, no matter how impoverished and unfortunate these migrant seems, they are still the lucky ones who have managed to make it across, in contact with their family; they were able to find a stable source of income - no matter how little the pay is - that could afford some level of schooling for the children. When considering the alternatives, this should be seen as a tremendous achievement. For the vast majority, education was never in the picture in the first place: when basic sustenance can only be grasped by toiling away everyday through the hot and humid days of Thailand, it is hard for one to still be able to afford such an optimistic investment into the future that education represents; it is hard to know if that tomorrow will even arrive.

Upon arriving at the school I was led into a room - made up of only the barest essential characteristics of what could be considered a room - I was received with the privilege of meeting some selected students, along with the headmaster of the school. This time, I was speaking through an interpreter, a Mae Sot local who had volunteered with Rights Beyond Border, the NGO providing primary support to this school. The head of the NGO, Khun Ampika, was also there with us - seeing the “boots to the ground” approach that she takes to her work allowed me to see clearly why she has since been chosen to lead the border task force team founded by MP Rangsiman Rome.



“This school has only 320 students” she explained to me “of which 160 live in boarding.” referring to the rudimentary longhouses built next to the classroom that had a concrete floor and half-walls, supplemented with a wooden roof and bars that were filled in the stead of windows. These longhouses (no doors to them), of which there were 2 for boys, and 2 more for girls, were small and very cramped. The students sleep on opposing bits of elevated concrete floors on old sleeping mats, having some privacy via the small plastic movable cupboards that separated the small house into a couple sections. Along the roof’s supporting ramparts hung clothes, towels, mats, and other similar items. The place had no running water of course - they would have to go to an outside toilet to relieve themselves or go to the local well for their shower. “Most of these kids in boarding, their parents are either still working in Myanmar or are sending money in from Bangkok, and so they can’t be up here with their children” Khum Ampika told me. We asked the headmaster, who was also Burmese or Karen, more about the life of the boarders here and he chimed in with his own anecdote “back when I was in better health, I would ride into the market and buy meats and eggs to cook for them myself” I was most impressed and honored by his presence at the table given his age and apparent declining health. Despite the visible frailty of his form and the nasal cannula attached to his nostrils, he was very willing to show us around the place, guiding us through all the mud and the rain on the incredibly uneven grounds of the school.







Food was another problem with this place. There was barely enough to go around, to the point that they could only serve one rudimentary meal per day, only being on some days, for most of the year. Ever since Rights Beyond Border has been able to fund and create a small farm of some vegetables and chickens for the school, however, the situation has gotten slightly better. Around times of harvest, the school could actually give out somewhat proper meals - being rice, small bits of an omelette, and a sliver of meat "if they are first in line" (with no exaggeration), but the small size of the farms means produce often runs out quickly and they have to return to the tragically desperate rationing soon after. Despite all this, I was still very impressed by the farming that the school was doing, and it seems as though the impact of the morale boost that the farm provides to all the 17 teachers and few other staff here should not be underestimated. It gave them another thing to do and to look after together, which undoubtedly helped foster unity and gives more purpose to their lives here within these desperate situations. This is especially crucial given the pay that these staff were living on. Although I could not recall the exact figure, it seems as though what they get in a year only comes somewhat close to what we would consider a month's worth of basic subsistence within Bangkok.







Talking to the selected students, much of the same problems were expressed as that heard at CDC: lack of equipment, textbooks, quality of teaching, opportunities, and extracurriculars. Rights Beyond Border was looking into funding a small library for the school as well, something I discussed with Khum Ampika as potential fundraising project back at Harrow, but given the grey legality of the Huay Kaloke's existence and the lack of pre-established relationship with the NGO, I suspected support from outsiders like us would be hard to send. Nevertheless we discussed other ways to support extracurricular activities here, for even some footballs or volleyballs would go a long way in improving the quality of life for these students. We covered practically every field within our conversation, even the creative arts.

"Would you like to do anything like drama or music?" Dr. Nakorn asked.

"Dancing would be nice" The student replied.

"Oh, like Thai dancing?"

"No, K-pop"

It is in these places and the exchanges you have with the locals where the globalising beauty of the internet is most apparent. Despite it all, I find it encouraging that they are still able to access the outside world through modern technology, a lifeline of theirs which we have come to take for granted. Donations of laptops are also important for schools like these for their reliance on online learning, and if somebody is looking to make a difference there is certainly a lot of impact one could make by just uploading educational courses online for they are everything to the life of students on the border.

The K-pop answer had us laughing for a bit, and for sure made me give up on pretending that I could construct a holistic image of what the average migrant of the border is like. In truth, in such a place like this, there is no “average”, and I certainly could never grasp all the subtle facets of their lives with just a three-day trip as I had foolishly thought I would be able to. In so many ways are their story incommunicable for they will be better off in some ways than you thought they were, and be worse off in many ways than you thought they were. Their lives will be so different yet so accurate to all the presumptions you would have about them that one simply can not pretend to “know”. Even after everything I have done since this trip, I can not truly claim to know what it is like to be in their position, for I don’t think we are ever supposed to know. The best one can do is to talk to them, eat lunch with them, be stuck under the same roof as them, waiting for the rain to pass. By allowing your perspective to be blank, you are opening yourself up more to real understanding than if you were pretending to have perceived the situation.





By that afternoon, when we were driving to the airport for our flight, we were so genuinely concerned that the flooding would somehow affect the flight that Dr. Nakorn had already called the airport twice and looked into the possibility of getting a van back to Bangkok instead. Despite all that mankind has made of itself; all of our sciences, civics, or staples of modern life like commercial air travel, everything ultimately is subjugated under the heavens when it rains. The torrential castigation, without fail, always manages to bring all human activity to a complete halt, even when mankind is at its most active - that is to say when we are trying to kill each other. Just as Ukraine’s Kursk offensive had slowed in that same rain season a whole world over, the siege of Miyawaddy came to a standstill too. In that sense, the rain presents a blessing in disguise; nature’s cease fire that cools the simmering heat of napalm. Of course, like any other cease fires, it is most often a trap. But instead of being a fake illusion of peace that allows belligerents to re-arm and perpetuate the conflict like human cease fires often are, the rain season perpetuates suffering in a different manner. From all the diseases that fester within the warzones to the destruction of human habitats; Burmese villagers escaping flash floods into military airstrikes, the rain brings both relief to the conflict but also much torment to its victims at the same time. Although my flight was fortunately still on, I couldn’t fathom how the places I just had been to were about to weather the things to come, nor could I even begin to imagine - as I was taking off - just how much the conflict would change once winter comes to darken the fronts. This trip, for all that it taught me and for all that it would lead me to, was definitely life changing for me. Only now writing this do i realise how lucky I have been to be at such an interesting place at such an interesting time. Today, Mae Sot has become closed off to me due to the increasing danger of the area, along with the threat of an epidemic onslaught, already having manifested in the recent cholera outbreak. I plan to go back as soon as I am able, for within such a town as this where there beats a lively heart, there are always new things worth experiencing. For now, I try to remember all that I have learnt from my sojourn, my newfound perspective on education, doing what I can to always penetrate through the smog that clouds the perspective of my Bangkok life, remembering the shared connection that all students have, even those on the border; remembering what it was like to be in Mae Sot when it rains.

What Trump's Presidency Means for Women and LGBTQ+ Rights



Introduction

The US recently faced a choice: electing Kamala Harris as their first female president or re-electing Trump, a former president with numerous controversies, including criminal convictions. Trump won the election with 312 electoral votes, representing 52% of all voters, reflecting the deep divide within the country. For Trump supporters, his victory represented a restoration of "traditional American values." For Harris supporters, it was a setback for social progress. Millions of Americans worry about the effect Trump's presidency will have on women and LGBTQ+ rights. With a policy plan heavily favouring conservative and patriarchal values, the future for these marginalised groups is uncertain. Trump's return to power could exacerbate existing gender divides, threatening the rights of women and the LGBTQ+ community of America.



LGBTQ+ Rights





Agenda 47 is the Republican Party's manifesto outlining policies that would be implemented during Trump's presidency. It places heavy emphasis on education — specifically eliminating racial and gender related content from curricula and restricting medical and emotional care for queer and transgender students.

Trump has proposed a law severely limiting or banning essential healthcare procedures for transgender youth. According to Trump's administration, gender-affirming care, including both medical treatment and psychological support, would be labelled as "child sexual mutilation." Under Trump's policies, federal agencies would be forced to "cease all programs that promote the concept of sex and gender transition at any age," eliminating the rights of transgender children to receive the care they need.
Trump's policies on LGBTQ+ rights are deeply problematic as his intention is to restrict discussions on gender and sexuality in schools, remove racial and gender-related content from curricula, and deny medical and emotional support for queer and transgender students. Congress would be asked to pass a bill recognising only male and female genders, determined at birth. For many children, this would mean living in environments where their identities are neither acknowledged nor accepted, potentially leading to increased levels of depression and suicide among LGBTQ+ youth — contradicting Trump's claims of wanting to protect American children.





Abortion Rights

Abortion rights have long been a key topic of debate, and Trump's presidency poses a significant threat to the gradual progress made over the past years in protecting women's reproductive rights. Following the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022, which Trump strongly supported by nominating three conservative justices to the Supreme Court, the fight for abortion access has shifted to the states. However, Trump has hinted at supporting a nationwide abortion ban.

Additionally, Trump's Vice President, J.D. Vance, has previously opposed supporting women's reproductive rights, and has shown support for banning abortion, even in cases of rape and incest. This combined with Trump's uncertain stance on abortion potentially could lead to stricter state-level restrictions, if not a federal ban, leaving millions of women without access to safe and legal abortion services.
Trump's attitude towards women's rights and gender roles are deeply rooted in conservative ideals about traditional family roles, promising to "celebrate" the traditional nuclear family by promoting "positive education about the nuclear family, the roles of mothers and fathers, and celebrating rather than erasing the things that make men and women different and unique." However, Trump's personal history, having five children across three wives, raises questions about the authenticity of his commitment to these values.

Trump's adherence to a patriarchal, gendered vision of society is reflected in Project 2025, a 900-page document created by the Heritage Foundation, outlining a plan to enforce rigid gender roles that undermine the rights of women and LGBTQ+ individuals. This advocates for the elimination of gender-neutral policies in education, healthcare etc, labelling gender-affirming care as "experimental" and unnecessary. This is not only discriminatory but also dangerous, as it dismisses the real needs of transgender and non-binary individuals, contributing to higher rates of mental health issues and suicide rates within these communities.

Trump's Outlook on Women's Rights

Trump refers to himself as a "protector" of women, though he has faced 26 public sexual assault allegations, and uses derogatory language towards women. This paints a picture of a man who has little regard for women's dignity or rights, not one who respects, let alone protects women.

Trump's controversial history, combined with his restrictive policies, like ones that restrict access to healthcare, education, and civil rights, are likely to have a devastating impact on women's autonomy and LGBTQ+ rights.

Pallak B13

HOW

CONSUMERISM IS KILLING CONGO



KEZIA N13

THE Democratic Republic of Congo has remained as one of the five poorest countries in the world for decades. Surprisingly, the DRC is declared to be the richest country in the world in terms of natural resources - in fact, GSP Hub estimates their mineral reserve is worth a staggering $24 trillion due to the possession of precious materials such as copper, cobalt, zinc, manganese and diamonds. If this is the case, why is it that out of a population of 110 million, approximately 73.5% of Congolese people live under the International Poverty Line of $2.15?



Congo may seem to be a far away country with not much influence over the world, however, more than 70% of the world's cobalt production occurs in the DRC, making it the largest cobalt producer by far. Cobalt is an extensively important element - especially in the digital age of today - as it is a crucial component in rechargeable lithium ion batteries which are used in smartphones, laptops, electric vehicles and practically every other electronic device. Understandably, the global demand for cobalt is extremely high which leaves suppliers taking any means necessary to meet the demand - including human rights violations.



Out of the estimated 255 thousand people that work in cobalt mines, at least 40 thousand are children. Despite being unethical and illegal, mining companies aren't opposed to child labour as it is a cheap means to increase productivity without having to increase wage costs as minors are impressionable and less likely to demand what they deserve. However, adult workers also face inhumane conditions and criminally low wages for the exceedingly long working hours and many safety hazards such as exposure to high concentrations of toxic metals and waist-deep submersion in acidic water.



Consequently, upwards of 2 thousand people die a year from cobalt mining accidents alone, 67% of miners have reported symptoms of illness and 10% have witnessed a child die. In an attempt to bring about justice for Congolese workers, in December of 2019, International Human Rights Advocates filed a lawsuit against the major tech companies Apple, Google, Microsoft, Tesla, Dell and more for encouraging their suppliers, including UK mining firm, Glencore, to use wage-slavery and child labour to keep costs low and maximize profit. As expected, the US Court of Appeals favoured the rich and found the tech companies not guilty by circuit judge Neomi Rao in March 2024. Therefore, the terror in Congo still remains with little to no legal regulations.





In order to keep up with the ridiculously high productivity levels mining corporations demand, there are several mines in the DRC - many of which are built in place of residential areas. The most notable destruction of people's homes is occurring in the Kolwezi district, where long-established communities are driven out by soldiers to make room for expansion of a vast, open-pit copper and cobalt mine that was reopened in 2015. An estimated 400 households were evicted in only the month of October in 2023, exclusively due to cobalt mining. This mining project is conducted by COMMUS, which is a joint venture between a Chinese company, Zijin Mining Group Ltd., and the DRC state mining. As a result of foreign conglomerates forcefully evicting Congolese natives from their own homes in their own country, 7.2 million people are internally displaced in the DRC and this number appears to only be growing along with cobalt mine production - with an annual growth rate of 20%.

Additionally, over 26 million people are in need of humanitarian aid due to insecurity which researchers at Northwestern University have closely linked to mining of cobalt and other minerals. This is partially due to the environmental damage caused by mining operations that disobey environmental laws. Not only does mining contribute to global warming via emission of carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides, it also contributes to deforestation and contamination of water bodies. As the metals extracted from deep underground are toxic, fish within contaminated water bodies get poisoned. This poison is easily spread to humans through consumption, adding to the health complications people already face from the mining process itself.



The devastation in Congo begs the age-old question:

HOW MUCH DOES A DOLLAR REALLY COST?

The people of Congo are not just collateral damage or 'production costs', so is it really necessary to subject them to such atrocities just to have a new iPhone each year that is indistinguishable from the last? It is no debate that using technology is inevitable in today's world but the rate at which it is used is unnecessarily high. The staggering increase of consumerism in the modern day is costing Congolese men, women and children their lives.





KEZIA N13

The Importance of Preserving Empathy in Our Society

"WHAT WAS THE FIRST SIGN OF CIVILIZATION?"

Anthropologist Margaret Mead answered: a healed femur. The general rule of the wild is that if you are unable to flee from predators, or find sustenance for yourself, you are left to succumb to the elements. The healed femur shows that someone - anyone - cared about another person enough to help them when they were not able to help themself. "Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilisation starts." While this is a beautiful answer, myself, being an artist, would say: cave paintings. The world's oldest known cave painting was found in Indonesia and is believed to date back to 50,000 years ago. Before, there were rock carvings, of course - but these cave paintings depict the world around the people who painted it. Do I agree with what Mead said? Maybe not. Nonetheless, I do believe there is merit in both of our answers, for the reason that they both show evidence of soul. That is what I will be advocating for in this piece - for the human spirit, with all its inherent compassion and creativity, to thrive in our own lives.

Schools often focus on science and maths and computing. Of course they do, right? Innovation is the future of our society, after all, and a lot of you may be feeling that it's either adapt or die. Budding scientists are revered as geniuses - the artists of our age labelled as 'having their head in the clouds'. Despite this, the arts are a vital part of our society that often goes overlooked. A heart transplant patient may have been given a second chance at life thanks to the innovations of science, but what will make that heart thrum faster in excitement, or ache with emotion, is movies, music, and books.

The alarming apathy our generation has suddenly developed is an issue with a multitude of consequences that have gone overlooked, because so many of us struggle to care in the first place. Oftentimes against our will, the internet has its ways of overloading us with upsetting or controversial content that is often posted and never addressed in a serious way. Empathy decreases as our stress increases, and with the large amount of negative news we consume via social media on a daily basis, it is no wonder why we struggle to connect with the distress that may arise with every piece of news we see.



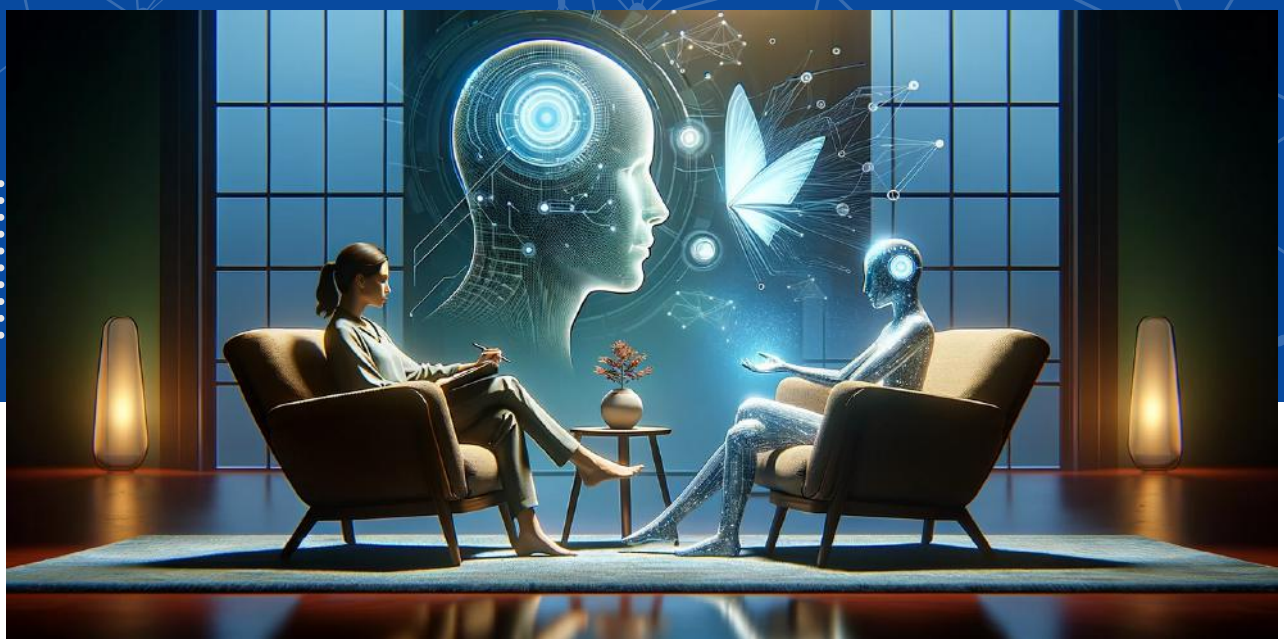
However, the storytelling experience of art is scientifically proven to increase empathy. All art mediums are brimming with emotion, making it easy for audiences to understand the messages it conveys; music can evoke certain emotions through its lyrics and tempo; even simply watching a movie and trying to make sense of why the characters are doing what they are doing is an exercise in empathy. As for creators: actors need to become the person they are playing; writers aim for their works to leave a mark, which can only be done through having different and unique characters that they can make come to life. The only question that remains is, how are we supposed to go about reconnecting with artistic expression, when the creative industries only grow more clinical and covetous? I believe that education, which often shapes the lives we lead, is where the revival of the human spirit should start.

From the privileged standpoint we all share here at Harrow Bangkok, the assail creative arts subjects are under may not seem like a concern. On the other hand, in many schools, the victims of budget cuts are often the creative arts departments. England has some of the most disheartening examples: last year, the former minister of education instructed the Office of Students to freeze grants meant to facilitate undergraduates in pursuing arts courses such as music, drama, and fashion, meaning that most students who relied on such offers may no longer be able to pursue their degree. As someone who aspires to study in England, the last thing I want is to study in an environment that inhibits rather than encourages the pursuit of artistic passions.

In conclusion, I urge all readers to take this as a call to action. Even if you are pursuing STEM (whether it be because you genuinely enjoy it, or find there is no other path for you), the importance of art - whether it be creating it, consuming it, or learning about it - must not be forgotten for the sake of our society.

Venice N11

THE ROLE OF AI IN THERAPY



How is AI used in Therapy?

AI models like ChatGPT are designed to have conversations that feel natural and intuitive. They do this by analysing huge amounts of data collected from texts, images, and more, and generating responses that fit the flow and context of a discussion.

In the context of therapy, this technology can be revolutionary - providing instant, personalized support for those who might not otherwise have access to professional help

How AI enhances mental healthcare:

Chatbots: These AI-powered chatbots use techniques inspired by cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to help people manage issues like anxiety or depression. They're always available, making them incredibly useful for those who might not have access to a therapist or who are hesitant to try traditional therapy.

AI tools can assist therapists by performing mental health assessments or tracking how a patient is doing over time. They're also being explored as tools for identifying early signs of mental health conditions by analysing speech patterns or other behaviour's in patients.

Virtual Reality: Patients can safely face their fears in a virtual environment, while the AI adjusts the experience based on their reactions, offering real-time feedback and control. This can be helpful in treating conditions like phobias, anxiety and PTSD.



POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF AI TO THERAPY

Increased Accessibility

One of the greatest advantages of AI in therapy is its ability to make mental health support more accessible. AI tools are available any time, anywhere, and they cost significantly less than traditional therapy sessions. This is revolutionary for people in remote areas or those with limited financial resources who may not be able to access in-person therapy.

For instance, Replika and Woebot are AI tools that can offer support for individuals struggling with anxiety, depression, or loneliness using psychological approaches, providing feedback, validation, and coping strategies.

In addition, AI can help reduce the stigma around therapy. The anonymity of interacting with an AI system can feel less intimidating than opening up to an in-person therapist, thus making it easier to seek help without the fear of judgment.



Improving Therapeutic Practices

AI doesn't just help patients, it helps therapists too. By handling routine tasks like note-taking or tracking progress, AI allows therapists to focus on what really matters: building trust, understanding, and empathy with their patients.

In some cases, AI can also enhance therapy sessions themselves. For example, virtual reality tools create immersive experiences that are impossible to replicate in a traditional office setting.



THE RISKS OF AI IN THERAPY

Lack of Empathy and Human Connection

Therapy isn't just about strategies or solutions. It's about connection, trust, and empathy. While AI can mimic conversational patterns, it can't truly understand the complexity of human emotions like love, grief, or fear. This makes it hard for AI to replace the deep connection that a patient and therapist build over time.

For example, some people who use tools like Replika report feeling attached to their AI "companion." While this might seem harmless, it raises concerns about emotional dependence. AI can't feel or understand in the way a person can, which makes it an unreliable substitute for real human interaction.

Ethical and Safety Concerns

AI tools rely on massive amounts of data to function. This raises questions about how personal information is stored, shared, and protected. Without strict safeguards, there's a risk that sensitive information could be misused or leaked.

There's also the issue of AI systems making mistakes. An AI chatbot might not recognize the signs of a mental health crisis, or it could give advice that's inappropriate, or even harmful. This is why regulation and oversight are so important when it comes to using AI in therapy.

Over-Simplifying Complex Issues

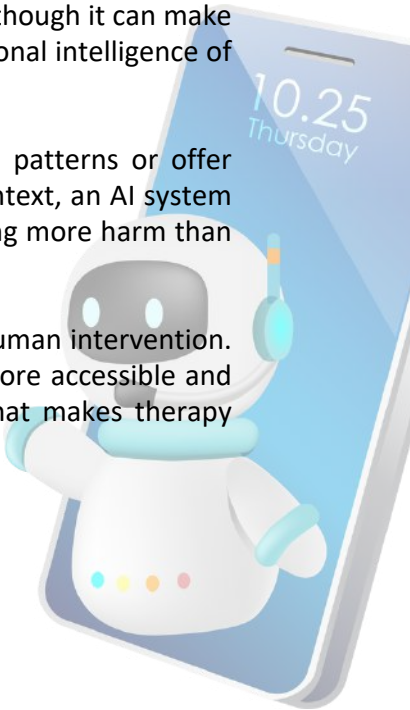
AI might work well for mild or temporary mental health concerns, but it's not equipped to handle more serious or complex challenges. Without the intuition and depth of a human therapist, AI could miss underlying causes or fail to address the root of someone's distress.



While AI has the potential to transform mental health care, it simply can't replace the role of a human therapist, especially for those facing complex psychological struggles. Although it can make therapy more accessible and efficient, it lacks the empathy, intuition and emotional intelligence of a trained therapist.

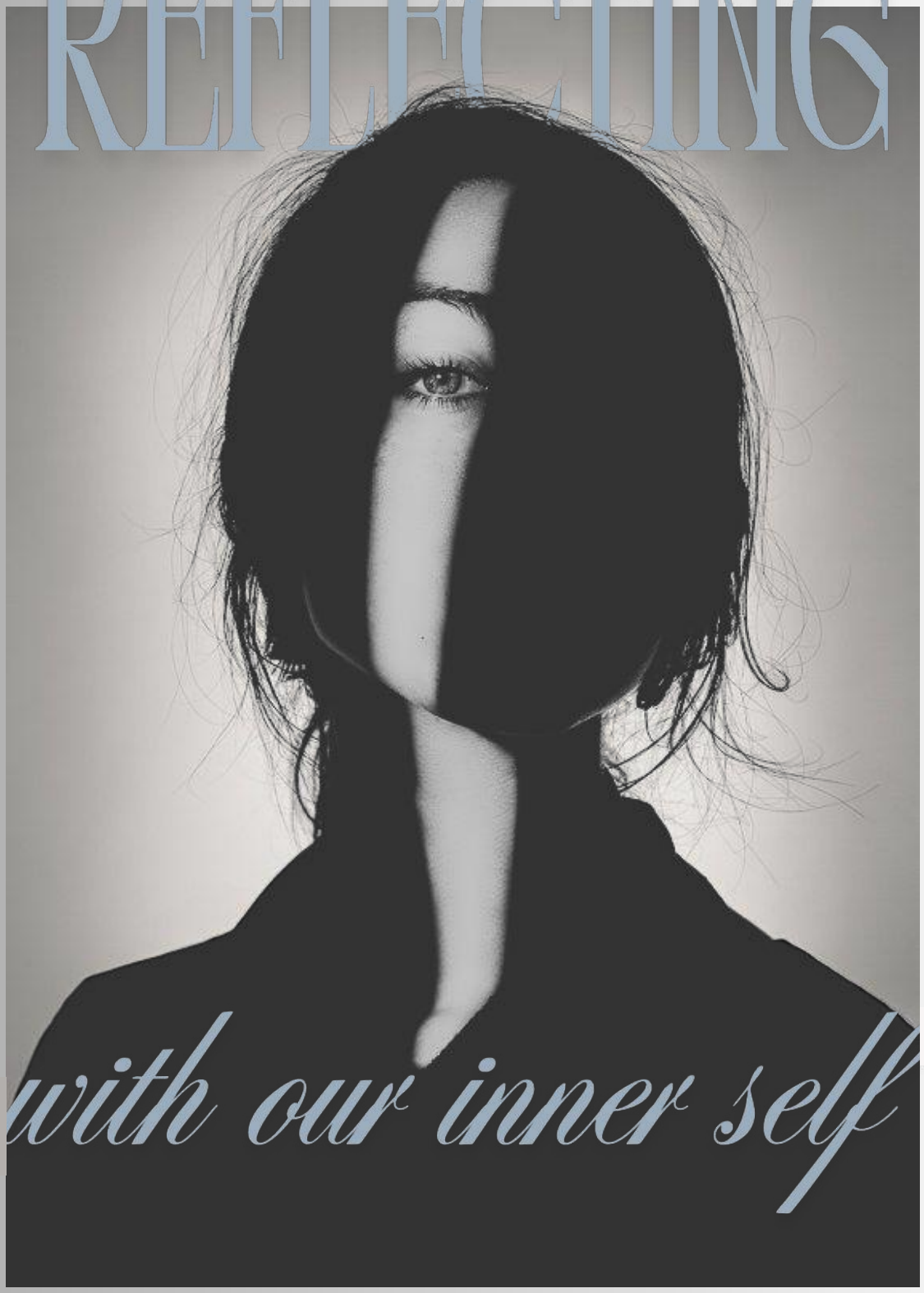
There's also the risk that AI could unintentionally reinforce harmful thought patterns or offer overly simplistic advice. Without the human ability to interpret nuance and context, an AI system might miss out on the underlying causes of someone's distress, potentially doing more harm than good.

The future of mental health care will likely rely on a balance between AI and human intervention. When integrated ethically and with care, AI has the power to make support more accessible and personalized, while still holding on to the fundamental human connection that makes therapy effective.



Written by Pallak B13

REFLECTING



with our inner self

[connecting with the shadow]

vicky so11

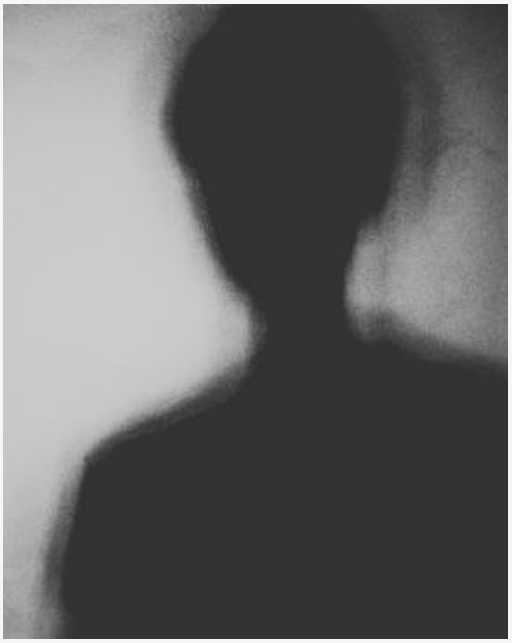
CONNNECTING WITH THE SHADOW

vicky so11



In the real world, many of us are quick to judge others. This is often called the fundamental attribution error, where we blame others' actions on their personality and our own actions on external factors. You yelled because you were tired - they yelled because they're hateful people. Online, this behavior is even more obvious. We join communities that collectively scapegoat and ridicule the other, and many of us find ourselves addicted to an endless stream of egos bouncing drama off of one another.

As John Pistelli argues, we live in a state of chronic virtuousness, where social media has encouraged us to project the universality of evil onto our enemies, and simultaneously, to simply wish away or ignore the irrational and sometimes darker tendencies of ourselves. We have willingly entered our digital chambers, creating a social ecosystem of bickering and shaming for the desire of always being good.

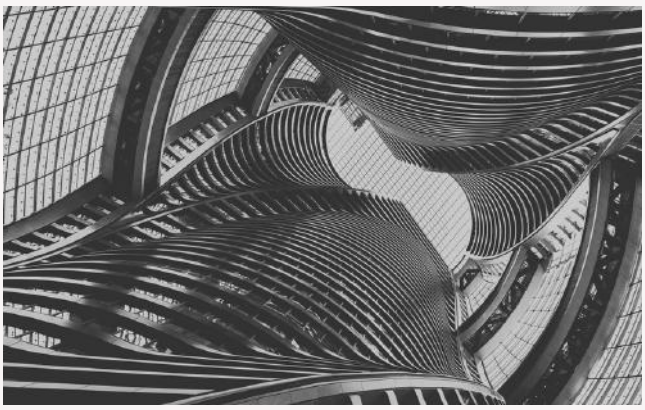


Jung, in his construct of the human self, develops a useful framework in which we can both avoid the darker consequences of our repressed impulses, and at the same time harness the unused and creative energy of such impulses. Jung devised the self as containing multiple aspects: the persona, for example, is our social mask. It filters out who we are in order to survive and even thrive.

On the note of thriving, some may even fall in love with their persona at the suffering of their ego. To put it simply, they may live an entirely performative life. The issue here, according to Jung, is that inevitably all that we have repressed in the service of the persona will come out in some way.

This collection of repressed impulses, darker tendencies, which our ego or society may label as shameful or harmful is called the shadow, the interface between the ego and inner self. The shadow wishes to remain out of sight, deep underground, where it can become stronger.

Of course, the shadow cannot stay hidden for long. This is evident when we look at those who have crafted attractive personas, such as artists and entertainers.





These are individuals who have brilliantly designed a social mask to the point where they are admired for who they are, or at least appear to be. However, as Nietzsche notes, everything profound loves masks. In other words, a profound shadow requires a persona that can match its depths and so we may observe that wild scandals, substance abuse, and a history of trauma follow the brightest of stars. Being in the public spotlight for too long, in a state of constant observation and judgment, can lead to a breaking down of the persona and the strengthening of the shadow.

Where exactly does the shadow appear? The most obvious instance is in the case of projection. Upon visiting our family for the holidays, we might feel a deep disgust for our relative's gluttony, ignorance, cruelty, or coldness - Jung would argue that these are merely reflections of that which we dislike about ourselves, especially illuminated in how close we are to our family.

IF THE SHADOW CANNOT BE DENIED,

SHOULD WE THEN FULLY INDULGE IN ITS DARKNESS?

This question is somewhat flawed. Firstly, the shadow isn't entirely dark or evil, rather it is merely a reflection of that which we have repressed. Yes, this could mean our violent impulses, jealousies, and vanity, but it can also mean the creative impulses we were denied in childhood. Rather than denying our shadow, or fully identifying with it, Jung argues that we should consciously incorporate it into who we are.



Simply put, we need to engage in the process of intermixing with the thing a person has no wish to be. Jung recommends observing how we feel about those who we dislike the most, whether that be ideological opponents, enemies, or rude strangers. For example, you may grow up with the belief that being assertive means to be selfish, and so with time you come to live in a state of submission, peacefully complying with others and acting as friendly as possible. As Jung would note, it is not the shadow that harbours evil, but rather that which evades light. Once the shadow is brought into consciousness, so too can it help us in becoming, in some sense - whole.

TERROR IN SUDAN

Sudanese civilians are currently being held hostage in their own country by a war between two power-hungry men who will go to the greatest lengths to win. The leader of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Abdel Al-Burhan and the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Mohamed Dagalo are employing the most brutal war tactics to secure victory in Sudan, even at the expense of everyday people who just want to peacefully live in their homes. Now, over 7.1 million people are internally displaced in Sudan, which breaks the record of the largest number of displaced people from any conflict.



How could such a catastrophe even occur? The answer is in Sudan's extensive history of military plots to overthrow democracy. Militias have plagued the country since it was under Anglo-Egyptian rule, and continued to do so after independence was gained on January 1st 1956. A series of power struggles between armed forces and a civilian-led government took place up until 30th June 1989, when Colonel Omar Al-Bashir of the SAF staged a coup against the democratically elected prime minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi and president Ahmed Al-Mirghani. This event was the beginning of the hell that Sudan is now trapped in.









Unfortunately for citizens, Bashir was not like the military leaders that overthrew the government before him. He knew all too well of Sudan's pattern of short-lived regimes, and carefully curated a plan to retain power for as long as possible. Bashir used a tactic known as coup-proofing in which he surrounded himself with numerous groups to protect him, but never gave any of them enough authority to be able to seize power from him. One of these groups was the SAF, which Bashir maintained a strong relationship with. Thus, Bashir heavily relied on the SAF to diminish the southern Sudanese people's fight for self-determination that had been ongoing since 1983. The SAF quickly took to brutalising civilians on command as they ravaged the region. In 2003, as the army was preoccupied in the south, rebel groups advocating for the historically marginalised non-Arab population of Darfur state launched an insurrection against violent SAF troops in the west. Instead of sending the SAF to attack these groups, Bashir chose to support an Arab militia in the region, Janjaweed - the precursor of the RSF. Janjaweed was determined to wipe out Darfur, and managed to destroy over 3000 villages and kill an approximated 200,000 civilians from 2003 to 2005. Pleased with these results, Bashir made Janjaweed one of his protectors, with Mohamed 'Hemeti' Dagalo as the leader.

After decades of conflict, southern Sudan finally gained independence in 2011, establishing itself as a separate country. Due to many oil reserves being in the south, this took a large toll on Sudan's economy, hitting civilians the most. Janjaweed was especially effective at intimidating citizens in Darfur which, in 2013, made Bashir grant the militia official status as a paramilitary group named the RSF, under the authority of Sudan's intelligence agency, NISS, another protector. In 2017, Bashir passed a law to make the RSF's main goal to protect him and to promote Hemeti to be directly under his command. With this new title, Hemeti was given financial autonomy, ownership of some gold mines in Darfur and was able to trade weapons, minerals and troops to other countries. Bashir also continued to allow the SAF to control major industries such as weapon production and telecommunication. The fact that by December 2018, 60-70% of government spending was allocated to Bashir's security whilst civilians were barely able to afford basic needs sparked the biggest revolution in Sudan's history in which protests were taken to the capital, Khartoum, where Bashir resided. Despite

The conflict intrigued foreign countries, including the US, UK, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and the African Union, who clumsily attempted to fix the situation by pressuring the military and the protestors of Sudan to agree to share power in a transitional council. The deal was that the military would be granted rule for 21 months, followed by 18 months of civilian rule. However, despite warnings from citizens, the aforementioned countries made Burhan the chair of the council and Hemeti the vice chair. The two deceitfully promised they would respect the agreement and feigned compliance by installing a civilly elected prime minister, Abdallah Hamdok. Although, after enduring many attempts to be overthrown, such as a coup in October 2021, Hamdok resigned from being prime minister in January 2022. As a result, Burhan became de facto leader of Sudan with Hemeti as vice de facto leader. During this rule, Burhan formed personal alliances with powerful countries in the Middle East, Asia and Europe, provoking Hemeti to use his riches from the gold mines to do the same. Throughout this period, the protests still prevailed and in turn, the US, UK, UAE and Saudi Arabia yet again coerced Sudan to share power. On the 5th of December 2022, Burhan, Hemeti and democratic political parties signed the new deal - seemingly a victory for Sudan. Lamentably, Burhan and Hemeti disagreed on one fundamental aspect of the deal: when the RSF would become part of the SAF. Burhan wanted this to happen within 2 years, whereas Hemeti wanted it in 10 years - as his power would be limited. It is this disagreement that caused the fully-fledged war between the two groups, with civilians suffering the most casualties.





Due to both parties' wealth and power, Sudan is being hit at full force. Burhan's SAF has access to and utilises its aerial forces whereas Hemeti's finances enables the RSF to arm an abundance of men on the ground. It is no help that Sudan is rich with natural resources and is positioned in a coveted area, next to the Red Sea, making it a valuable trade location. This incentivises other countries to take advantage of the war by promising one group support in exchange for gold or pieces of land. The UAE is especially guilty of this as it depends on exploitation to keep expanding its national gold reserves - which were worth $5.79 billion as of July 2024 - despite having no gold mines of its own. In fact, 90% of Sudan's gold is smuggled to the UAE - resulting in the UAE's gold reserves rising 12.6% each year. Thus, in exchange for minerals and access to the Red Sea, the UAE sends the RSF weapons and recruits soldiers and mercenaries from around the world to add to the man-power. Many more countries are involved, for instance, Russia supported the SAF in exchange for a spot near the Red Sea and in retaliation, Ukraine sent soldiers to join the RSF. The foreign factors at play have only exacerbated the war since April 2023 to the point it is at now. The death toll is estimated to be 62,000 in only one city, more than half of the population - 25.6 million people - are malnourished, and war crimes are committed daily.

It is incredibly unfair that Sudan is caught in the midst of two savage leaders, only motivated by power and profit, and instead of providing relief, the international community ignores the extreme humanitarian crisis for their own financial benefit. As you can imagine, Sudanese civilians are understandably left with little to no hope, stuck between a rock and a hard place.

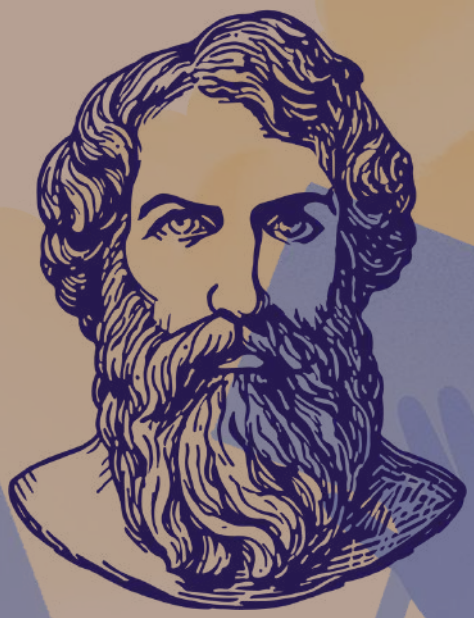
Kezia N13

Is Democracy too Equal?

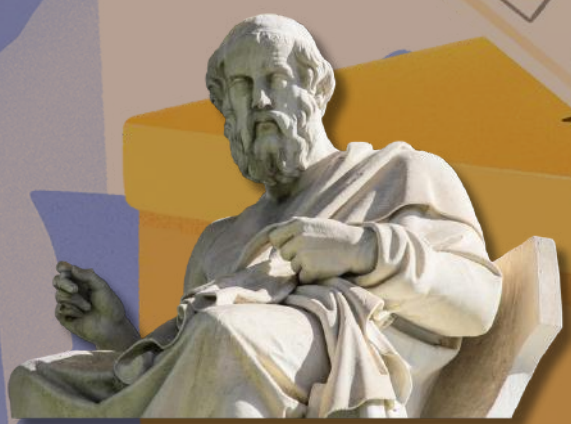
"Plato's Theory"

Imagine a ship that was run by a captain who surpasses the crew in height and strength, but he's slightly deaf, his vision is impaired, and his knowledge of navigation isn't even the best. The crew on that ship thinks that they can do better, so they say things like, "Anyone can run a ship". They try to take over, they fight and scheme to become captain but of course, navigation isn't easy. Not everyone can become captain, especially when they don't even know that the craft of navigation existed. The ship ends up sinking and the crew meet their horrible fate of being swallowed by the sea. This was Plato's comparison of democracy.

Democracy emerged from when the poorer class revolted against the wealthy minority. An example of this was the French revolution of 1789, which abolished the monarchy, and France then declared the constitutional system of the democratic government. He argued that democracy would only risk bringing dictators or tyrants to power as the leader may not be properly equipped with the right skills or even morals to rule. According to Plato, most people are merely guided by their own emotions and impulses. His skepticism stemmed from his belief that the majority of society lacks the knowledge and required wisdom needed to make decisions for the greater good. Simply, people who lack education would be bound to be swayed and influenced by their personal emotions. Plato feared that in a democracy, those who excel in charming and persuading the crowd would ascend to leadership rather than those truly capable of guiding society with justice. Democracy's emphasis of equality in decision-making risks using the opinions of the uninformed over the knowledgeable which could lead to chaos.



Although Plato's critique may seem harsh, it does raise a valid question: should leadership really be left to the whims of the majority, or should it be reserved for those with proven expertise and ethical grounding? Should there be restrictions to decision making that affect the whole country? Going back to the French Revolution, although it brought liberty and equality, it also spiraled into the Reign of Terror – a period marked by chaos and the rise of power-hungry individuals.



In conclusion, democracy's values lie in its inclusivity and representation as it strives to balance power and prevent the concentration of authority in the hands of a few. However, Plato's warnings remind us democracy functions best when its citizens are not only free to choose but also equipped with the knowledge and critical thinking needed to make wise decisions for their country. Overall, his judgments help us reflect on how we can refine democracy to ensure that it not only serves the majority's desires but also the long-term well-being of society.

Khao Hom So11







Itchy ECZEMA

Have you ever had that **itch you just can't stop scratching?** You just might have eczema! Eczema, also known as atopic dermatitis, is a **chronic inflammation of the skin**, resulting in itchy, red, swollen, and cracked skin. These symptoms usually come in "flare-ups", which are **prolonged periods** where eczema conditions become increasingly severe.

WHAT CAUSES ECZEMA.

In the UK, the criteria to be diagnosed with eczema involves having **itchy skin** or evidence of **rubbing** or **scratching**.

There are several leading causes of eczema; some notable examples include :

- Immune system
- Genetics
- Climate conditions
- Emotional triggers

The immune system plays a heavy role in Eczema, overreacting to the slightest stimuli, causing unnecessary skin inflammation. When your skin is exposed to one of your 'triggers' of eczema, your immune system assumes that these small triggers are imminent threats entering your body; in retaliation, your immune system causes inflammation, a defense mechanism leading to one of the significant symptoms of eczema.

Your genetics also play a significant role in battling eczema. If eczema is **present in your lineage and ancestry**, you are **more likely to have it**. If you have any **other allergic diseases**, such as asthma and hay fever, you are also more likely to develop eczema at some point.

The climate may also significantly contribute to developing "flare-ups." Examples include rapid changes in humidity or temperature, air pollutants, soap, fabrics, and, depending on the person, further possible climate-based allergens. **Temperate climates** (e.g. South Western Europe and Continental USA) would be **optimal for eczema patients**, as they experience **minimal extreme temperature changes** throughout the year.

Finally, eczema can also be triggered by hi**gh levels of stress, anxiety, and depression**, consequently leading to more frequent and violent "flare-ups." This, personally, is one of the main factors leading to eczema that I often experience from circumstances such as exam stress, hormonal shifts, and considerable other everyday stress-causing experiences.

HOW TO TREAT ECZEMA.

It's no secret that **living with eczema is an absolute pain**, and what makes it even worse is that **there is no confirmed cure**. Even so, treatment and other remedies are still readily available, such as topical, systemic, or oral medicines.

Topical medicines most commonly come in the form of a moisturising, antimicrobial emollient, a lotion with a consistency similar to regular hand lotion that is supposed to be **applied around the body** or just **around patched areas of skin**. It also **acts as a soap substitute** for showering and hand washing. It is crucial to note that the **consistency and viscosity of the lotion are paramount** when choosing and sticking to a brand of emollient lotion, as some other branded lotions may not offer the same relief as an eczema patient's regular branded emollient.

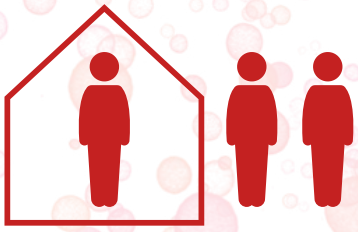
Systemic medicines, while less common than topical medicines, also exist. Renowned examples include immunosuppressants such as mycophenolate or methotrexate, just to name a few. These immunosuppressants are **used to tame the itchiness** someone with eczema may experience during a "flare-up." However, newer medications involving monoclonal antibodies have also come out recently and appear to be more effective in managing eczema than the other medication discussed.

There are many **straightforward ways** to treat eczema, such as meditation to soothe oneself, a diet to avoid foods containing allergens, or even maintaining the climate conditions in your room by setting the A/C to a cooler temperature.

IMPACTS OF ECZEMA.

Physically, those who suffer from more severe eczema **struggle to perform even the most mundane daily tasks**. Those with intense atopic eczema usually have the urges and sensations of rashes later during the day. As a result, it is **harder to fall asleep and maintain sleep.** According to patients, they repeatedly wake up in the middle of the night with the sensation of having **'1000 paper cuts'** across their bodies.

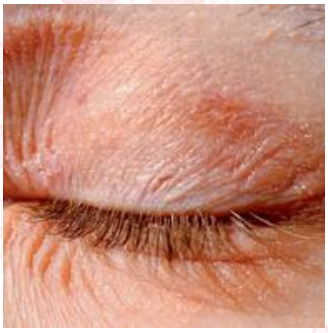




Additionally, it makes other aspects of life harder, such as **social life**. Just imagine having to talk to people when your skin looks like dry, cracked ground, with red, irritated patches scattered across the surface. Due to this, people with eczema **tend to face more social isolation from society**, either due to **disgust** or the **fear that the condition is infectious.**







What can YOU DO?

Eczema affects **223 million people** (2022), accounting for **less than 3% of the global population**. This means eczema affects only a tiny minority of people. It should be our responsibility to make sure that the reality of how eczema patients live daily is **understood by ourselves and others around us.**

LOOKING OUT FOR THOSE WITH ECZEMA.

Supporting someone with eczema involves **being mindful of their needs and offering help where possible.** Here are some ways to look out for them:

1. **Be empathetic**: Understand that their skin condition may cause discomfort or irritation, and avoid making them feel self-conscious about it.

2. **Avoid triggers:** Help them avoid known irritants, such as certain soaps, perfumes, or fabrics, that may worsen their eczema.

3. **Offer moisturising products:** If they are open to it, provide gentle, fragrance-free lotions or creams to soothe their skin.

4. **Create a comfortable environment:** Keep rooms well-ventilated and maintain a moderate temperature, as heat or cold can aggravate eczema.

5. **Be patient:** Scratching can be hard to resist when their skin flares up, so offer support without judgment if they struggle.

6. **Encourage care:** Gently remind them to follow any prescribed skincare routines or medical advice, especially during flare-ups.

BY EDDIE S12

LUCKI

EVERY ARTIST'S FAVORITE ARTIST.



THE START

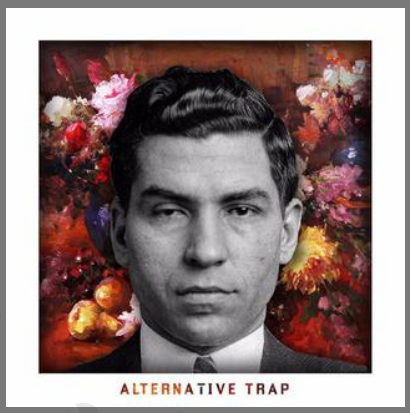
LUCKI CAMEL JR., OTHERWISE KNOWN AS **LUCKI**, IS AN AMERICAN RAPPER BORN IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. LUCKI IS AN ARTIST WHO IS KNOWN FOR HIS **UNIQUE AND DISTINCT SOUND** – OFTEN **RAPPING IN A LAIDBACK MANNER**. ALTHOUGH HIS STYLE OF RAP IS UNUSUAL AND HAS NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE, RAPPERS SUCH AS *DC THE DON, WHIZ KHALIFA*, AND EVEN THE LIKES OF *PHARRELL WILLIAMS*, HAVE ALL OPENLY EXPRESSED THEIR LOVE FOR LUCKI.

LUCKI STARTED RAPPING IN **2012**, HIS FIRST YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL, UNDER THE ALIAS *"LUCKI ECK$"*. DURING THIS TIME, HE PRODUCED MANY SINGLES SUCH AS *"UNTOUCHABLE"* AND *"EVERYTHING OUT$IDE"*, WHICH WERE BOTH PUT ONTO THE *ELEVATOR* YOUTUBE CHANNEL, **AN EXTREMELY POPULAR CHANNEL FOR UNDERGROUND ARTISTS TO PROMOTE THEIR MUSIC**. HE WAS ABLE TO GAIN CONNECTIONS TO *BRYAN ZAWLOCKI* THROUGH HIS FRIENDS, ALLOWING HIM TO START **GAINING TRACTION** ON THIS YOUTUBE CHANNEL. THE YEAR AFTER, IN 2013, LUCKI WOULD RELEASE **HIS FIRST EVER ALBUM** – *ALTERNATIVE TRAP.*









A TOUGH JOURNEY TO FAME

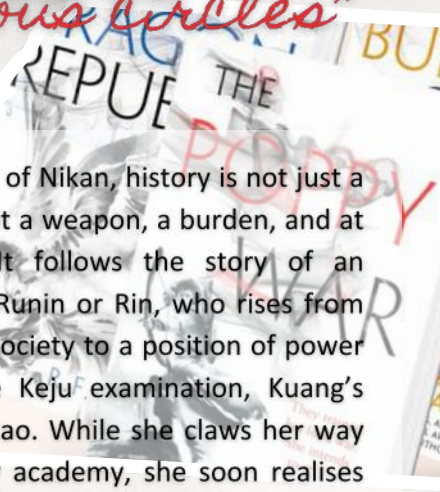
ALTERNATIVE TRAP IS OFTEN REGARDED BY MANY OF LUCKI'S FANS AS A **MASTERPIECE**, DESPITE IT ONLY BEING HIS FIRST ALBUM. HIS HIT SONGS FROM THE ALBUM INCLUDED: *"COCAINE WOMAN", "COUNT ON ME II"* AND *"ALTERNATIVE OUTRO". ALTERNATIVE OUTRO* HAS **BLOWN UP EVEN MORE SINCE RELEASE**, FINDING ITSELF ON MAINSTREAM PLATFORMS SUCH AS TIKTOK AND INSTAGRAM DUE TO NEW LUCKI FANS DISCOVERING THIS HIDDEN GEM. THOUGH AT THE TIME, **LUCKI WAS STILL RELATIVELY UNDERGROUND**. HIS STYLE BACK THEN WAS EXTREMELY DIFFERENT FROM HIS RECENT WORK, HAVING A **MUCH MORE EMOTIONAL AND RAP-LIKE VOICE BACK THEN COMPARED TO HIS LAIDBACK VOICE NOW**. AFTER THIS PROJECT, LUCKI RELEASED *BODY HIGH* IN 2014. IN AN INTERVIEW, HE STATED THAT **HE DIDN'T LIKE THE ALBUM THAT MUCH**, SAYING THAT HE RECORDED IT WHILST ON DRUGS WHICH CAN BE HEARD FROM THE LYRICS IN THE ALBUM, WHERE HE WAS OFTEN TALKING ABOUT HIS STRUGGLE WITH TRANSITIONING FROM A DRUG DEALER TO A DRUG ADDICT. IN 2015, LUCKI RELEASED *X*, THE FIRST ALBUM WHERE YOU CAN **SEE HIS VOICE STARTING TO EVOLVE,** BECOMING A LOT LIKE THE LUCKI WE ALL KNOW NOWADAYS.

HE **DEVELOPED THIS VOICE THROUGHOUT THE YEARS**, MAKING THE *FREEWAVE* TRILOGY, AND BY FAR HIS DARKEST ALBUM *WATCH MY BACK*, AN ALBUM WITH DEEP MEANINGFUL LYRICS THAT LEAVE A SENSE OF EERINESS INSIDE YOU**.** AT THIS POINT, **LUCKI HAD RISEN OUT OF THE UNDERGROUND**, GARNERING A LARGE FOLLOWING OF FANS. HE HAD RELEASED *DAYS B4 III*, AN ALBUM FANS CONSIDER HIS GREATEST WORK, WITH POPULAR HIT SONGS SUCH AS "*RANDOMLY*", "*GEEKED*", AND "*ME MYSELF & I*". THEN, **LUCKI WOULD CONTINUE TO WORK ON CREATING EVEN GREATER ALBUMS TO REACH A NEW LEVEL OF FAME.** HE CREATED AN ALBUM WITH *F1LTHY*, WHO IS KNOWN FOR EXECUTIVELY PRODUCING *WHOLE LOTTA RED*, BY *PLAYBOI CARTI*. IN 2022 LUCKI WOULD FINALLY BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE HIS DREAM OF WORKING WITH HIS FAVORITE ARTIST: *FUTURE*. AND NOW, HE'S RELEASED PROJECTS LIKE *GEMINI!*, WHICH INCLUDED ANOTHER FEATURE FROM *FUTURE*. IN 2025, LUCKI ANNOUNCED HIS NEWEST ALBUM CALLED *DRUGS R BAD*, WHICH IS SEEMINGLY SUPPOSED TO RELEASE THIS YEAR.

NOA B11

THE POPPY WAR REVIEW

"Oh, but history moved in such vicious circles"



Many say that we study the subject of history so that we don't repeat it. We study history to look back on the actions of the human race. But how true is that statement - have humans ever learned from their mistakes? From wars to genocides, it really begs the question if we are ever going to learn our lesson. How much longer can we keep telling ourselves that we study history to avoid its mistakes when the cycles of violence and suffering seem to resurface in every generation? *The Poppy War* explores this very question as it confronts readers with the uncomfortable truth: history is often ignored or twisted. It fuels new conflicts instead of preventing them. This series becomes a brutal depiction of how easy it is for humanity to fall back into violence - even when armed with knowledge of the past.

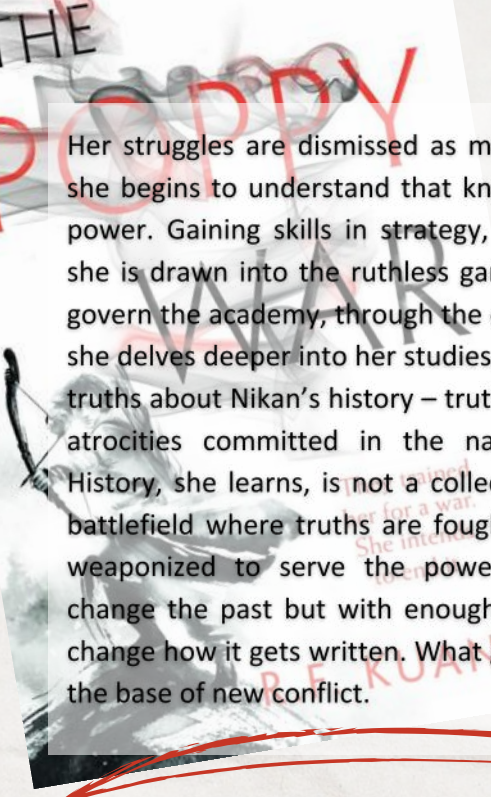
The author, R.F. Kuang, says "To be entirely frank, if you're turned off by violence, I might pick up a different book" (Goodreads). This book explores the nature of war in a way that, although historically accurate, it may be disturbing to readers. The author doesn't make any effort to bring light to the end of the tunnel for readers as the trilogy rides on the running wave of human suffering.

In R.F. Kuang's world of Nikan, history is not just a record of the past but a weapon, a burden, and at times, an excuse. It follows the story of an orphaned girl, Fang Runin or Rin, who rises from the lowest rungs of society to a position of power through passing the Keju examination, Kuang's take on China's gaokao. While she claws her way into an elite military academy, she soon realises that knowledge and ambition comes at a cost. Escaping poverty comes at a cost - but what choice does she have? Knowledge no longer seems to bring her freedom; if anything, it shackles her tighter to the past. The readers explore, what seems to be, another pawn of the board faced against the unyielding demands of survival. Peers use their historical narratives to justify their actions and prejudice, manipulating the past to suit their ambitions. For them, the past serves as a foundation upon which they build their futures. Rin, born from the dirt of the nation, had no history. None of that she knew of. Without a personal narrative to guide her, she becomes adrift. Forced to prove that she is more than just an orphan of the south.



If you are emotionally, physically or mentally upset of sexual or physical abuse, and war crimes, **do not**, read this book.





Her struggles are dismissed as mere desperation, and she begins to understand that knowledge is a form of power. Gaining skills in strategy, magic, and warfare; she is drawn into the ruthless games of ambition that govern the academy, through the drive of validation. As she delves deeper into her studies, Rin uncovers hidden truths about Nikan's history – truths that illuminate the atrocities committed in the name of the empire. History, she learns, is not a collection of events but a battlefield where truths are fought over, twisted, and weaponized to serve the powerful. You can never change the past but with enough bloodshed, you can change how it gets written. What gets written becomes the base of new conflict.

So, what does it mean to seek power in a land soaked in blood?

When war looms over, she is ultimately engulfed with impossible decisions. Time and time again, her world reminds her - and us - that history isn't an abstract concept but a constant force. It pulls us through the cycles of brutality and sacrifice as the darkest chapters of history can not be buried or sanitised. They become stitches to wounds that are reopened no matter the sewer. As the story progresses, the line between virtue and vengeance starts to blur - can vengeance be virtuous if it brings about a sense of justice for the oppressed? Or does it merely perpetuate the cycles of suffering she yearns to escape?

The obscurities to her decisions send readers into a spiral: is what she is doing actually right? We see through the character's eyes how much pain and suffering they have endured - Rin is no exception. This creates attachment. As the story progresses we start to wonder how reliable of a narrator she really is. When is too much, too much? We want to root for the main character yet, each decision seems to be a test of our loyalty. Rin's descent into moral chaos is a mirror held up to humanity's darkest impulses, challenging us to consider our limits to empathy and forgiveness.

The world of Nikan is layered with historical echoes, drawing heavily from the Second Sino-Japanese war, the atrocities of The Rape of Nanking, and the gaping cultural wounds left by colonialism and internal division. It paints a bloody canvas of how imperialism can strip a country of its identity. Kuang does not shy away from portraying the horrors of colonisation. Instead, she forces readers to confront its destructive impact and trauma it leaves behind.

Think of it like this. If your opponent wasn't human, if your opponent was a cockroach, what did it matter how many of them you killed**?** Why shouldn't you pull wings off insects for your own enjoyment**?** The bug might feel pain, but what did that matter to you**?** If you were the victim, what could you say to make your tormentor recognize you as human? Why should an oppressor care**?**

Nikan stands on the brink of collapse, trapped between two powerful forces: the Hesperians, representing a Western, technologically advanced empire, and the Federation of Mungen, a neighbouring island nation with a history of invasions. Religion plays a huge role in the Hesperian's drive for colonising Nikan and converting the citizens in order to make them more 'civilised'; something that is often overlooked when we talk about western colonisation. Furthermore, the invasive nature of the federation represents the physical, cultural, and psychological assault that often comes with colonisation. Both powers seek to exploit Nikan, as their disregard to Nikara lives reflects the dehumanising attitude of an imperial force that sees another culture as inferior and disposable.

The cultural erasure in The Poppy War is not just metaphorical, but literal. The two powers do not only seek territory; they seek to erase Nikara identity. Rin becomes torn between clinging to history and adapting to survive. The Nikara gods, once central to the nation's spiritual identity, are slipping into legend and becoming remnants of a time when Nikan could believe in its own strength. Tapping into an ancient heritage, she gains the strength to fight, but ultimately becomes a manifestation of Nikan's past, a vessel of power that is as feared as it is revered.

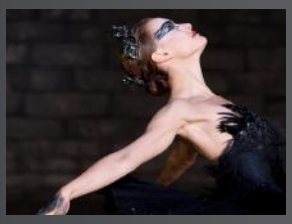


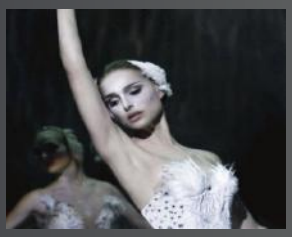
Kuang also digs deeply into the internal divisions within Nikan itself. She highlights how colonisation fractures a society through division of class as well as ethnicity and political ideology. The internalised hierarchy, a product of past invasions and foreign influence, showcases how colonisation manipulates local power structures. It plants seeds of a division that weaken the nation from within, making this nation a subject of vulnerability.

Perhaps, then, the question isn't whether we'll break free from history's grip
but whether we even know how.

Khao Hom So11


Black
SWAN.
A movie review.





Natalie Portman stars as Nina, the lead dancer for Swan Lake. In order to achieve artistic perfection, this also means it will cost her own sanity and even turn her own role much like that of Odile, the Black Swan - just as she finds her own life beginning to parallel that of Swan Lake while not being a complete replication, beat by beat. The movie Black Swan is comparable to films that have already handled similar stories (The Red Shoes and Perfect Blue). The story follows Nina, a ballerina in a New York City ballet company whose life is completely consumed with dance. She lives with her retired ballerina mother Erica who jealously supports her daughter's ambitions. When a director decides to replace prima ballerina Beth MacInture for the production of Swan lake, Nina is his first choice. We watch as she spirals into insanity.

Dancing in a lake of black feathers, where every motion, every breath, and every feeling is a hard-fought victory. Over and over, until each movement and emotion aligns in flawless imperfect harmony, as if destined to be. This is the relentless chase for perfection, a reflection of the film embodying its own essence. Perfectionism seeps into your skin, steals your breath, and claims everything you've ever longed for. The stark duality of light and shadow wages war within the mind—a testament to how deeply unsettling movies can be.

The film belongs to Portman. The way she maps out her repressed emotions, mind into two halves creates a truly fascinating character that you can't help but both admire and fear. It's like staring into a mirror for a long time, only to realize your face begins to change and transform until you no longer recognize it as your own. The way breakdown and liberation intertwine in this film is nothing short of extraordinary.

This could be viewed as a study of madness, a deep descent into the fragmentation of the mind, one that invites lots of different interpretations. The film masterfully blurs the boundaries between itself and its story, leaving you to wonder what's real and what's not. And question what was happening? The way the narrative shatters, unfolds, and mirrors itself with a visual enigma is excruciatingly compelling to watch.

The film captivates audiences by how it weaves a schizophrenic soundscape around itself. Breathing, laughter, crying, music—these elements are always present, even when they're silent, lingering in the background like an unspoken truth. The stark black and white visuals are both disturbing and flawless, creating a sense of unease that feels like it's carved into the very fabric of the film. Aronofsky is the perfect example of how he transforms his movies into horror, making it hurt and resonate deeply. It's not just fear; it's the kind of dread that comes with a nightmare, where you feel lost in a world that doesn't make sense.

You are not the same person after watching this film. It subtly shifts your gaze, cutting into itself in such an exasperating way that it almost feels like it's tearing you apart. It makes your stomach turn. Maybe, in the end, the film lures you into its horrific story, like the demon of sleep paralysis, staring you straight in the eyes from the edge of your bed while you lie frozen, unable to move or speak. This is imperfect perfection at its finest and is a masterpiece.



NICHA SO11

METALLICA

A METAMORPHOSIS

THE BIRTH OF METALLICA

Metallica, founded by James Hetfield and Lars Ulrich, has gone through many changes since its creation in *Los Angeles* in 1981. The other founding members were bass player *Ron McGovney*, and lead guitarist *Dave Mustaine*. In 1983, the band fired Mustaine (he went on to form 'Megadeth') after clashes with Hetfield and his addictions and kicked out McGovney, replacing him with the unforgettable Cliff Burton.



(Photo on left)
From right to left:
Mustaine
Ulrich
Hetfield
McGovney



(Photo on left)
From right to left:
Hammett
Hetfield
Ulrich
Burton

(Photo on right)
From right to left:
Hammett
Ulrich
Hetfield
Newsted



THE EIGHTIES

'***Kill 'Em All***' (1983), their first album, is fast-paced and has come to be one of the most well-known gateway albums into thrash metal. If you want some gritty, swift songs, then '*Metal Militia*' or '*The Four Horsemen*' are easy to headbang to.

'***Ride The Lightning***' (1984) hints at their desire to expand their musical capabilities, with the song 'Fade To Black' being a departure from their typical hyperspeed headbangers in terms of both pacing and lyrical content. From this album, I find '*Fight Fire With Fire*' and '*Am I Evil?*' the most appealing and would vehemently recommend a listen.

The change in tone becomes more evident upon the release of '***Master Of Puppets***' (1986). It's regarded as a complex and profound masterpiece. Hetfield's vocals take on a more mature tone, differing from the vicious screeching of their first album. The drumming is fantastic, and the overall speed is simply amazing. I personally enjoy '*Battery*,' '*The Thing That Should Not Be*,' '*Welcome Home*,' and '*Leper Messiah*' the most. They show the wide variety of styles that can be achieved: from swift and furious to eerie and foreboding.

'***...And Justice For All***' was released in 1988, featuring their new bassist Jason Newsted following the death of Burton in 1986. Cliff is remembered as being an integral member of the band, and following his passing, a change occurred in the group's mentality, even if it wasn't explicitly stated. Though claimed by Hetfield to be a stylistic choice, it's evident that all bass in the songs had been obscured. Despite this, '...And Justice For All' remains seen as their most progressive album, with stunning musical combinations of aggression and melodies, telling harrowing tales of the horrors of war ('*One*'), corruption in the American justice system ('*...And Justice For All*'), and mutually assured destruction ('*Blackened*'). It is widely regarded by most Metallica fans as one of their best albums. (My favorite songs are '*Blackened*,' '*Frayed Ends of Sanity*,' and '*To Live Is to Die*.' The rigid structure of 'Sanity' and breathtaking guitar in 'To Live' are truly wonderful.)



MOVING METALLICA INTO THE NINETIES

In 1990, the band began working with producer Bob Rock as their music sound evolved between the '80s and '90s territory. Some thrash-elitist fans believe (or still believe) that the band was 'selling out', choosing to sound more grunge and alternative like other bands at the time, such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam (I disagree).



'***Metallica***' (1991), better known as '***The Black Album***', was a quarrel-filled year in the making; nevertheless, it proved to reap great rewards. In its first week on the shelves, it sold over half a million copies. '*Holier Than Thou*', '*The Unforgiven*', '*Nothing Else Matters*' and '*The Struggle Within*' are all standout songs, in my opinion. This album earned them the title 'the face of metal' and shot metal into the mainstream. The band toured and their historical performance at the 1991 festival, Monsters of Rock, accumulated a crowd of 1.6 million attendees.









A NEW IMAGE

Their next album's change of style aimed to focus on groove and rhythm, sounding much less gritty and rigid than previous albums. Hetfield sought inspiration from his country roots, Ulrich recieved subtle inspiration from the Brit-pop group Oasis, and lead guitarist Hammett found his interest in jazz and blues inspiring.

'***Load***' was released in 1996, along with their revamped image. Their long, unruly hair had been shorn, and they wore thoughtful and contemplative expressions in their album booklet as well as more expensive-looking attire. The logo also changed, with shorter points on the 'M' and 'A', creating discourse within the fans, making most of the conversations on their new album about their change in appearance rather than the music itself. Nevertheless, I for one think it's a fantastic album, as it portrays their versatility and desire to experiment, with some of my favourite Metallica songs: '*The House Jack Built*' (no, not the 2018 horror film) creates a twisted atmosphere, a powerful perspective on addiction, and '*Until It Sleeps*' is pained and raw. '*Bleeding Me*' is just POWERFUL. And '*Mama Said*' is my favorite modern country song.

Released a little over a year after '***Reload***' (1997), faced similar criticisms from critics and is a more rock-based album. '*The Unforgiven II*' is an excellent second addition to The Unforgiven trilogy, '*Slither*' is fierce and blazing, and '*Low Man's Lyric*' is mournful and possibly my favourite song ever.

'***Garage Inc.***' (1998) followed posthaste: an album made entirely of covers, paying respects and homage to the bands that influenced them. '*Sabbra Cadabra*', '*Whiskey In The Jar*', and '*So What*' are my favorites.

SYMPHONY AND METALLICA

'***S&M***' (1999) was recorded live, where they collaborated with the talented Michael Kamen and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. Never before had such juxtaposing genres of music been blended together so seamlessly and with such taste. My personal preferences are '*Battery*' and '*Until It Sleeps*'. For the latter, the transcendental violin after 3.31 mins is well worth a listen.





(Photo on right) Robert Trujillo



Hetfield made the difficult decision to retreat to a rehabilitation center to regain some control over his alcohol addiction but returned to the band in November 2001 to celebrate Hammett's birthday. Shortly after, they recruited Trujillo to replace Newsted, who left before Hetfield's hiatus due to restrictions placed on him about creating solo albums or joining other bands.

'***St. Anger***'s (2003) song lyrics were written by committee, with each band member adding something to the songs. Many found this to be discordant, with combined lyrics making no sense. Many also claim that this is the band's worst album. Nevertheless, the album *Lulu* in my opinion is worse, and I will not be reviewing it in this article. I really enjoy '*St. Anger*,' '*Some Kind of Monster*,' '*Shoot Me Again*,' and '*The Unnamed Feeling*' and would highly recommend a listen.

On the album '***Death Magnetic***' *(2008)*, Hetfield seems to have found more grit and fire in his tone, far less nasally than critics claimed him to be in *Reload*. The re-introduction of Hammett's guitar solos is most certainly a plus, as well as the sometimes alien-sounding bass. The drumming is also very well thought out and really knits the instruments together. '*All Nightmare Long*' is reminiscent of their thrash beginnings, and the swiftness of the guitar is an impressive feat. '*The Unforgiven III*' is one of Metallica's more ballad-like songs.

Eight years later, '***Hardwired... To Self-Destruct***' (2016) was released, once again a callback to their days of youth, yet widely viewed as a step up from Death Magnetic. Most of the songs are heavier and faster. I really like '*Moth Into Flame*,' being one of the first Metallica songs I listened to on repeat. '*Am I Savage?*' reminds me of a twisted fairytale, but with earwormingly good riffs. '*Spit Out the Bone*' is hands down the most similar to their early days. Although, I'm sure if anyone tries to headbang through the entirety of it, they'd get an awful (no pun intended) whiplash.

'***S&M2***' (2020). Metallica revisited a classical-metal mix in 2020, with the aid of Edwin Outwater. With the inclusion of songs from their later albums, it should come as no surprise that I would recommend a listen to '*The Day That Never Comes*,' '*Moth Into Flame*,' and '*The Unforgiven III*.'





Their latest album, '***72 Seasons***,' was released in 2023, and tells a tale of the first 18 years of life, asking, "How do you evolve and grow and mature and develop your own ideas and identity of self after those first 72 seasons?" It portrays it in a slightly more hopeful tone with songs like '*Lux Æterna*,' taking the perspective that "Without darkness, there is no light." I'd also recommend '*You Must Burn!*' and '*Inamorata*.'

WIDER LISTENING (AND READING)



BLACK SABBATH:

- 'Sabbath Bloody Sabbath'
- 'N.I.B'
- 'Planet Caravan'
- 'Symptom Of The Universe'
- 'Hand of Doom'
- 'Changes'
- 'Who Are You?'
- 'War Pigs'
- 'God Is Dead?'
- 'Iron Man'
- 'Children of The Grave'



MEGADETH:

- 'A Tout Le Monde'
- 'Dread and the Fugitive Mind'
- 'Holy Wars... The Punishment Due'
- 'Killing Is My Business... And Business Is Good!'
- 'In My Darkest Hour'
- 'Good Mourning'
- 'Trust'
- 'Mechanix'
- 'Peace Sells'
- 'Wake Up Dead'
- 'Take No Prisoners'



ROB ZOMBIE



- 'Feel So Numb'
- 'Run Rabbit Run'
- 'Superbeast'
- 'American Witch'
- 'Scum Of The Earth'
- 'Meet The Creeper'
- 'House Of 1000 Corpses'
- 'Shake Your A**- Smoke Your Grass'
- 'Living Dead Girl'
- 'Dragula'
- 'Dead Girl Superstar'

SYSTEM OF A DOWN



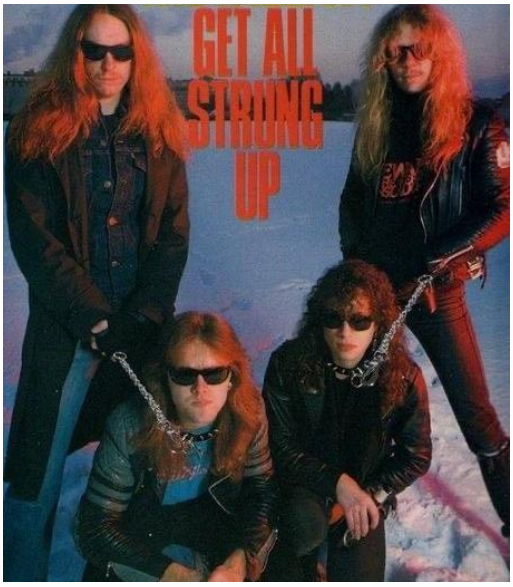
- 'Vicinity Of Obscenity'
- 'Prison Song'
- 'Spiders'
- 'Aerials'
- 'I-E-A-I-A-I-O'
- 'Lonely Day'
- 'Toxicity'
- 'Radio/Video'
- 'B.Y.O.B.'
- 'Deer Dance'
- 'Ego Brain'

ALBUMS

- 'The Great Southern Trendkill' - (1996) Pantera
- 'Under the Sign of The Black Mark' - (1987) Bathory
- 'A Blaze In The Northern Sky' - (1992) Darkthrone
- 'Scream Bloody Gore' - (1987) Death
- 'Portals' - (2022) Kirk Hammett
- 'Bloody Kisses - (1994) Type O Negative

BOOKS

- 'A History Of Heavy Metal' - Andrew O'Neill
- 'Birth School Metallica Death: Vol 1' - Paul Brannigan & Ian Winwood
- 'Into The Black' (Vol 2) - Paul Brannigan & Ian Winwood
- 'So What! The Good, the Mad, and the Ugly' - Metallica



HIT THE LIGHTS (A FINAL WORD)

Metallica is, without a doubt, my favourite band of all time. I look forward to their next endeavors and ventures. Their music can provide such inspiration and elicit such a spectrum of emotions. At the time of writing this, Black Sabbath (the band that *started* the heavy metal movement) has announced a reunion concert in Birmingham on July 5th, 2025, their way of saying a final goodbye to their fans in the place of their humble beginnings. Metallica will also be headlining among a jaw-dropping number of other Metal Gods, certain to be one of the pinnacle events in metal history.

I hope by reading this article, I may have encouraged you to listen to them, and perhaps some other talented Metal bands.

By Niamh T (C12)

A Film Review

Perfect Blue

Perfect Blue is a serial killer film where the killer is patriarchal violence.







Many films undermine the tension between one's idealised self and the self that lives in reality to create drama and art, but few so adeptly recognise that for women, both of these sides are controlled by men.

Perfect Blue is the story of pop icon Mima who decides to move from singing to acting and take on a minor role in a disgusting procedural show about grisly murders. Yet, ‘decide’ wouldn’t be the correct verb in this instance; the film does not portray it as a decision. In fact, Mima is often shown consenting to something that eventually undermines her own sense of self or causes deep physical and emotional trauma, such that the consent never feels earned, it feels entirely manufactured. Mima consents because she doesn't know how not to. Thus, she becomes more and more sexualised, and more and more objectified, perhaps most explicitly in the photographer scene where Mima undresses. The positions that she is placed in and the expressions on her face most closely resemble that of a corpse. To sexualise her is to kill her.





The film cuts to a murder scene with a makeup mirror in the foreground. Has someone been murdered on the set? The audience realises that is not the case as a detective walks into the shot and leans over the body. A backwards dolly shot and a brief shimmer of static reveal that the audience is looking through a monitor. Mima's unease of being a refracted self is reflected to the audience as an unease with narrative and place. The film appropriately reflects our own viewing experience, leading us to feel appropriately fractured and upset as well.

This is the start to a good film but what makes Satoshi Kon's debut great in my opinion is that the idealised self that Mima invents and her fans struggle with, is also centered on men as well as what they want. Here, Mima is a virginal pop star for all eternity, stuck in a suspended adolescence in which she remains "pure”, pliable, and stereotypically attractive. Men will continue to want to be intimate with her, but they can only comfort their own fragile egos by imagining that she hasn't had sex with anyone through her presentation to the world. These two Mimas, which are both manufactured through patriarchal violence (that is physical, emotional, and psychological) pull her apart to where reality itself begins to fracture, something that Kon captures for his audience using various editing techniques to blend reality, the fiction of the show that she is on, and dreams.







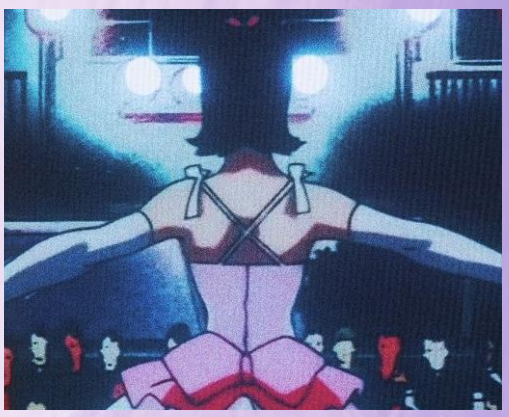




This doubling is captured even in the first few moments of the film as well. Mima is the most revered member of the pop trio CHAM! but her face looks so completely similar to her fellow singers that it's clear that the audience is expected to differentiate them through their hair styling and accessories. The men are given an individuality to their faces even as they become a sort of disgusting amorphous figure that stares longingly at the women. Women fill an expected mould for the viewing pleasure of men who manage to retain their individuality (if not their humanity).

This division is made literal in Perfect Blue.

Finally, and most importantly perhaps, a third version of Mima is introduced in the film's final moments when her manager, Rumi (an ex pop star) dons one of Mima's outfits from her CHAM! days as well as a wig and becomes the embodiment of the virginal Mima, now hell bent on killing her as she is a false Mima to be replaced by the true Mima, the pop icon. Rumi represents a third type of woman, one who does successfully exist outside the male gaze, not through her own agency but by having been discarded. Rumi's status as an ex-pop star and current manager is crucial to the film. She has been pushed so far to the edge of society that she has completely internalised the misogyny that surrounds her. It has destroyed any sense of self that once existed and has been replaced with a murderous vessel of misogynist expectations. She sees the natural course of life, ageing and gaining weight, as a personal failure and she dedicates herself to being a manager in part because she can vicariously live as a "perfect" woman forever by hiring and perfecting pop icons - then replacing them when they eventually get too old, like her. Including her character sets this film apart from the majority of Japanese animation which flattens the lives of women to three distinct periods: child, sexual object, and elder. Most Japanese animated films ignore any transition between any two stages because to show them would be to admit to a liminal stage between child and sexual object or to the fact that patriarchal society removes the possibility of sex from older women.









For a movie so accurate in its depictions of violence towards women, I find Mima's assertion, "I'm the real thing!" to be hopeful in a way - something I was genuinely not expecting at the end of this movie. To quote another famous scholar, Dr. Wade Nobles, "Power is the ability to define reality and to have other people respond to your definition as if it were their own." Mima has embraced that and resonates with an energy that she hasn't had previously. Perhaps it feels earned because she saves Rumi's life even after Rumi tries to kill her. This act of compassion breaks her out of containment in a patriarchal box.

Vicky So11

How Do You Live?

(With grief)

The Boy and The Heron or its Japanese title *'How Do You Live?'* is Hayao Miyazaki's second Oscar-winning animated feature film after *Princess Mononoke*. It is arguably Miyazaki's most personal film as he admits to drawing inspiration from his childhood and integrating it into the protagonist, Mahito's life.

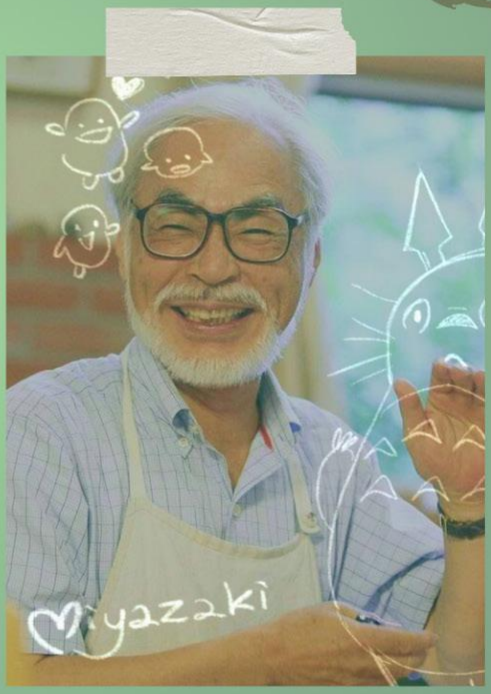
The 2023 film is unlike any other Studio Ghibli film. It isn't another romantic adaptation of a novel like *Howl's Moving Castle;* Or a bridge between two worlds like *Spirited Away* - It's an answer to the question-

How do you live?

The initial title 'How Do You Live?', as mentioned by Miyazaki was derived from a novel by Yoshino Genzaburo called 'How Will You Live?', a best-seller in Japan and Miyazaki's favorite childhood book.

But, what is even is Yoshino's answer to that question? He means we should go on living despite all of problems and just feel because everything is impermanent. Miyazaki, having adopted that philosophy dedicated his life into making films that "tells children, it is GOOD TO BE ALIVE".

According to Miyazaki, it is his last film before retirement. But you can never know with the 84 year old animator and co-founder of Studio Ghibli. The English language cast consists of A-listers, specifically celebrities who are fans of Miyazaki's previous films. Including Robert Pattinson as the heron, Christian Bale as the boy's father, and Gemma Chan as the boy's stepmother. Bale had also voiced Howl in *Howl's Moving Castle* after expressing his love for Miyazaki's films.



A question that is often raised by film goers is "Why did this film win the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film over *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse?*"

Put simply, *The Boy and The Heron*'s victory polarized the court of public opinion. Some people were ecstatic for the win, some expressed disappointment. I personally celebrated the win, taking into account the fact that it is his last film before retirement (Allegedly)…but also because it celebrates the niche becoming mainstream and acts to remind us that creativity and joy can be found in the unique and the unusual.

In comparison to *Spider-Man*, an American blockbuster sheparded by widely known directors, The Boy and the Heron is a much smaller international film. So, naturally I was happy for its win since its not often these international, niche films would win.

Hayao Miyazaki

Studio Ghibli's co-founder & animator

Other films by him:

- **Spirited away**
- **Howl's Moving Castle**
- **Princes Mononoke**

THE BOY & THE HERON

The film begins with a snapshot of Japan during the Second World War, highlighting the tragedies that occurred. The protagonist, Mahito being unable to save his mother despite desperately venturing through the distressed crowd. Already, he's condemned to a life tethered by grief and loss at the ripe age of 15. How can this woman that his father married compensate for the loss of his mother? Could she ever be his surrogate 'mother'?

They move to the countryside to avoid the attacks in Tokyo, and Mahito has a hard time adjusting. He can't accept Natsuko as his mother's replacement despite her efforts to build rapport. Nor can he go to school without being relentlessly bullied. Mahito is practically crowned as 'the other'; completely foreign to a place that is supposed to be his new home.

So here comes the heron, voiced by Robert Pattinson. It taunts him, telling him he knows where his mother is-that she is alive: "Your mother, she's awaiting your rescue.." The audience are aware that this is not true, we saw her die. Grief is foreign to the boy, and without any support, he drowns in it. Because reality has failed him. So, he plunges into the unknown.

He falls into *Inferno.* He falls into the *Alice's Wonderland* except this fantastical world presents characters from his real life and its own.

Just like Dante's Inferno, Mahito is guided down into the rabbit hole by a guide:the heron. He's presented with an image of his mother sleeping, only for her to melt away onto the floor. A cruel illusion crafted by the heron, and a sign that they have arrived in another world where rationality departs.







Mahito is a 15-year old who loses his mother in a hospital fire, and immediately, his father marries his mother's sister and even worse, she's pregnant.





The Boy and The Heron(2023)









My friends at first glance said that the heron was UGLY, downright hideous. I've had to explain time and time again, that it was a stylistic choice. If the heron represents grief, then it makes sense to see its ugliness as well its beauty simply because grief isn't an easy process. Miyazaki's decision to not romanticize sadness subverts the typical glorification of it in modern films. Put simply, the heron is supposed to appear beautiful and ugly as both coexist in within the process of mourning. And, in Japanese folklore sees the heron as divine, able to traverse across realms. And in ancient Rome, it's cry was viewed as a harbinger of change. In this film, the creature delivers the call to action, mirrors the folklore associated with it.

Just like *Dante's Inferno*, the heron gradually becomes reliable and even considered a 'friend' to Mahito just like Virgil to Dante. The heron helps him escape from foes, and eventually guides him to the reality world. The film makes a lot of references to Dante's inferno; from its narrative to the inscription found on a wall. '*Fecemi la divina potestate*' which translates to "I was made by divine power" was the inscription found on the Gate of Hell in Dante Alighieri's The Divine Comedy. This doesn't necessarily mean Mahito is entering a Hell-like realm, but perhaps hints to the obstacles he to face in order to come into terms with reality and its burdens. I think its also one of the many literary references within the story like how Miyazaki borrows Alice in Wonderland's rabbit hole.

Ranking: ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
Genre: drama, fantasy, coming of age
Directed by: Hayao Miyazaki

In the 'wonderland', he finds himself confronted by characters that are reminiscent of people from the real world. The characters appear to exist beyond linear time, and his mother is no exception. She's a supporting character in the realm and guides him to freedom along with the heron. He even meets his mother, only that she is a fire spirit and she's his age. She's a younger version of herself.

The parallel between Mahito's mother in both realms is gut wrenching once the audience is aware of the depth of its symbolism. His mother died in a fire, and she is portrayed as a fire spirit in the other realm. Possibly, it can be interpreted as cruel, but looking deeper into it, I think it's Miyazaki's way of painting Mahito's grief. His way of coping is to formulate an idealized image of his mother at his age, so at least he would have a friend.

His journey is bombarded with disastrous obstacles, but perhaps they reflect the rockiness of the process of mourning. Mahito has no emotional support, so he seeks it in the least likely of places. Could it be that the realm he was guided into was simply his own delusion that was crafted to protect himself from the pains of confronting reality?



Near the end, his mother said she had to go back to her world(the past), and Mahito frantically refuses. He says "no, don't because then you'll die". If she returns to reality, she'll be parted from him again.



"Fire doesn't scare me, I'll be so lucky to have you."

She replies saying that she isn't scared of fire nor death, because at least she'll get to be a proud mother. This to me, is the catharsis within the film, what it all means.

Mahito clearly wants to protect his mother, save her from her imminent fate because that would save him from the pain of loss and from facing his grief. He was given a chance to deter her from meeting that fate, but she rejects his intervention entirely. She wants to live, even if it means she has to suffer, because she "will be so lucky to have [Mahito]" in the future. She wants to become a mother. Miyazaki's decision to deny him that perhaps reflects his message: to just live.

Mahito cannot save his mother from her fate because it is bound to happen, but he can learn to live with it. He can't have the security of having his mother back, but he can live with the knowledge that she was happy when she was alive.

Letter from the Editor

Having watched plenty of Studio Ghibli's films, I can attest that they are ones that are the kind audiences of all ages can return to as they provide comfort like no other. Some like *Spirited Away* and *Howl's Moving Castle* might make your heart flutter with joy and appreciation for their artistry. But, nothing beats the deep sense of melancholy *The Boy and The Heron* brings. It is Miyazaki's own gift to his crew, a last present.

Something that inspired me to write this film review was a video essay a counselor made on Youtube titled '*Why Studio Ghibli Films Hurt So Much*'. It analyses how the film explores the coexistence of beauty and ugliness in life and how to live in a world like that. And partially also because after watching it for the first time, I was left so confused. I couldn't understand the parallel nor the plot twist, or what this and that represents. I just knew that it stuck with me.

Studio Ghibli fans all know that the father of Miyazaki has flirted with retirement for decades now, but keeps on releasing new masterpieces out of sheer will. But each time, his films become more intimate, more reflective, and more like his memoirs. Each film he releases are part of a compositions of a 'goodbye' from Miyazaki. The Boy and The Heron could well be his last, or perhaps not.

Even if it is his last film, I'm sure it will remain in the hearts of many because it asks the question that people will forever be struggling with: How do you live?

Thank you for taking your time to read,

Nikki C.12



Yojimbo & Sanjuro : The Ronin of a Thousand Tales



A ronin wandered through the desolate countryside of Japan in the twilight of the Edo period; no clear signs of his intentions. He stops before a crossroad, seemingly thinking which path he will take next. With no care nor urgency, he picks up a branch from the side of the road and lazily tosses up in the air where twirled for but a second before landing like a wayward compass, pointing to one of the two paths. This proved enough direction for the ronin, going down the path which the branch had fatefully chosen, unknowing of what was to come. Had the branch been aware of the way it was about to change film history for forever, it would have perhaps twirled in the air a little longer. Had the ronin been aware that he was about to create one of the most iconic archetypes in film history - that his adventures would be some of the most direct & indirectly referenced media texts ever - maybe he would have strode with a little more nerve. Still, fate had been decided, the path was set, and the ronin of Akira Kurosawa's double feature "Yojimbo" and "Sanjuro" would go on to inspire a thousand tales all over the world, most of all in Hollywood and Japanese media.

The impact that these two tales - tangentially related and centered around the same character - would have on film and media cannot be overstated: Yojimbo was released in 1961 as a Japanese period film about a ronin, a wandering samurai with no employment or master. The ronin is left without a purpose because - as the opening text tells us - this film was set in 1860: a brief twilight between the end of the Edo period, the decline of the Tokugawa Dynasty, and the Boshin War of 1868, which would give rise to the Meiji Era and Imperial Japan. In other words, this was a time where samurais were rapidly becoming extinct; where mastery of the blade was being rapidly traded for the might of firearms and a series of modernising reforms which would eventually eliminate the samurai class altogether. Our protagonist, played by the renowned actor Toshiro Mifune, is one victim of such tumultuous change within Japanese society. Thus, he now looks for work as a "Yojimbo" or a bodyguard in any town or city he wanders into.

This, then, in its truest essence is the classic premise of "a stranger comes to town" done to its perfection. Many things about Yojimbo, when viewed today, may not seem so extraordinary, but this is only because we've seen it replicated countless times before: A morally grey protagonist who kill for hire and fight on his own terms, not tied to any ideas but a self-serving sense of individualism, has become one of the most popular tropes in today's media. Like mentioned above, perhaps the current generation would be most familiar with this through media texts like the Mandalorian, John Wick, Deadpool, or even the general familiarity of Clint Eastwood's filmography whose intricate links with this film will be later elaborated on. One also could not review the film without substantial analysis of the characterisation of the ronin, which the brief summary above does not suffice, and so this will also be inspected closely. But first, let us look at how Kurosawa shaped the opening of one of the most iconic texts in media history, and also the way in which the structure of the film cements its place in the hall of fame.

The opening is a masterclass in telling the audience all the essential things they must know about the film, with the beauty of it lying within the way it lets audiences come to their own understanding of the intended meaning. The sequence mentioned in the introduction is quiet and long, slowly and deliberately letting the audience grasp the individualistic freedom that the main character possesses - one does not have to be familiar with the archetype of the ronin to infer that he has no master and is bound only by his free will. He seems to not be bothered by the lack of direction in his life either, bringing to mind the quote often associated with the archetype "One who wanders isn't always lost". Once the ronin arrives at the end of his path, being a town, we also get an immediate sense of foreboding that would imply the scum and villainy that plagues the locals.

A stray dog runs by with a severed hand in its mouth. The whole town, as we see, is completely barren and desolate, until a gang of thugs runs out to meet the protagonist. Even on the opposite side: the local governor and his troops who we expect to be the order keepers - we also find that they are corrupt and cowardly. This is all supplemented by the movie's excellent visual communication wherein there is nothing subtle about the villains which our hero is up against; they look as wicked as they are. To this extent, Kurosawa offers a social critique that is not shy in its message, presenting a morally corrupt world where malignity is absolute. This would certainly be bleak had our protagonist not been an all powerful character that, despite his moral ambiguity, serves as an unyielding force of good in contrast to all the villainy; an impossible superhuman which seems to represent Kurosawa's own imagining of a world where good triumphs over insurmountable corruption. These qualities are all supplemented by Toshiro Mifune's iconic embodiment of the role, bringing a hypermasculine yet eccentric quality to the role that challenges the traditional role of a protagonist, what would have been the 'ideal samurai' in another world, and gave birth to the modern conception of the ambiguous protagonist, a ronin who fights on his own term.



The ronin finds the town trapped in a power struggle between what are effectively two warbands - one composed of thugs and bandits and the other being the governor and his men. They turn out to differ very little in morals and qualities, and the ronin seems unimpressed with both of them. His strategy is to create great interest about himself while keeping his motives obscure. He needs money and so presumably must hire himself out as a bodyguard to one of the two warring factions. To this end, Kurosawa does something extraordinarily interesting and altogether not-recommended for other filmmakers, which is to make the protagonist literally passive for the first half of the film. The ronin demonstrates his martial prowess but takes little initiative in influencing the situation before him, which typically makes for a boring and bad protagonist. Yet, there is something magnetic in the raw independence that the ronin exudes in choosing to not act despite being altogether very capable of totally turning the tides in the favor of one side or the other.

What is more interesting, however, is when he chooses to act, he is thoroughly punished for it. Throughout the film, we may see the ronin's inaction despite apparent villainy as a complicit act of enabling evil. The audience may then find themselves sharing the same perspective as the barkeeper who the ronin stays with: initially we may be drawn in by the ronin's independence and prowess, then become increasingly disillusioned with him once we realise he's sitting by while evil is happening. When he does act, however, it was to protect a family who has been caught in the conflict and wishes to flee the town. The ronin acted very swiftly, using great wit and roguish tricks - which altogether is even more impressive than his impossible swordsmanship - to free the captured wife and reunited her with the husband and child. The ronin, who supposedly fought for money, gave away all the spoils he was paid for the family to be able to get away and start anew.



The topic of money is another interesting issue, has although the ronin continuously bargains for a higher pay from those wishing to pay him, he dismisses these payments with great abandon, seemingly not greedy at all as if only trying to deprive these people out of their wealth instead of genuinely wishing wealth for himself.

The family is able to get away, but the ronin ends up being captured and brutally tortured. The superhuman force is brought low and beaten to an inch of his death, ultimately being able to get away with the help of the barkeeper and his friend, finding revenge in the ultimate showdown at the end of the film where he disposes the bandit leaders in an awesome show of martial prowess that we have been anticipating for the whole film.

He came to town with nothing, seemingly seeking work. He would leave the town with nothing, also, putting in no effort to actually 'make profit' from his sojourn within the town. Besides his katana and his kimono, he has no other possessions. It seems as though he is able to exist purely from being able to exert himself onto the world around him with incredible independence, being unaffected by the corruption and decay of the world around him. He left as abruptly as he came "see you around".

Although he left with nothing in the end, his legacy is anything but: the influence of "yojimbo" then supplemented by the companion piece sequel "Sanjuro" is immeasurable. This is perhaps most notable in Sergio Leone's filmography of "spaghetti westerns" that embraces this plot structure with open saddles. Clint Eastwood's performance as The Man with No Name in "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" does as much to shape the modern conception of a cowboy as Mifune did in "Yojimbo". There is very little difference between a ronin and a cowboy, and it is the combination of this untethered independence along with extraordinary ability to exert their own will onto the world around them that we would idolise this archetype so much. A child on a playground anywhere around the world could effortlessly "Play cowboys" and imitate this archetype without having seen any of these films, finding themselves lost in the fantasy of a wandering warrior as testament to how deeply rooted Kurosawa's filmography has become in our cultural zeitgeist.

As for Sanjuro, the sequel that is narratively detached from the first movie, it also further elaborates on the status of the protagonist as an amoral protagonist by allying him to a group of young, aspiring, idealistic samurais in face of an insurmountable force of evil. The idea of honor is questioned and challenged, and the character of the ronin is explored further in a similar mix of strength, eccentricity, and vulnerability similar to the first film. Its cultural significance, however, arguably rests in one single scene; being one of the most culturally significant endings in Japanese media history.

The villain asks the ronin for a final duel. The band of young samurai surrounds them and watches on in terribly tense silence. They both started each other down, not moving a muscle, seemingly waiting to see who would make the move first. Suddenly, the villain unsheathes his katana, going to strike, but even before his blow came down on the ronin, the ronin's katana had already found its mark - slashing the villain's chest open and ending the duel before it had even begun. Both participants freeze in their poses for a dramatic moment before blood comes splattering out of the villain's chest. The ronin remains in his striking post and the villain falls to his death.

If you have ever seen a cowboy duel at high noon, and you wonder why they dramatically stand still for a while before shooting, it has always been a conception of western films to emulate this moment. More important, however, is the delay of the blood splatter after the strike. In truth, this was a malfunction of the blood squib that was supposed to go off the moment the ronin strikes, but the delay had another effect of making the strike seem so impossibly fast that the reality seems to stagger behind the cut. This single mistake would give birth to one of the biggest conventions within shonen anime, wherein the effect of a strike is delayed for dramatic effect. Often we see characters cut at their enemies at incredible speed, before sheathing their blade. Only when the blade is sheathed do we see these enemies be torn to shreds as if the cut happened impossibly fast.





Thus, the ronin who has nothing left behind a legacy that is everything to the stories we tell today. Had he been real, he definitely would not have been aware of the impact he has had either. It is through these key cultural touchstones that he is remembered by but perhaps more poignantly for our times, we ought to think like Kurosawa himself and imagine that there are wandering warriors out there, untethered by present bindings and untouched by the corruption of social degradation, going town to town as an unstoppable force of righteousness against a world of insurmountable evil.

By Pom S013

Letting Go



The art of letting go. Now.
Letting
Go.

I never knew that letting a butterfly fly
Was so excruciatingly gorgeous.

Gorgeous extrication.

It locks its spindly legs,
Braces,
And

Goes.

Just like that— and
I know I will never get to hold it again.

Or appreciate its patterns that
burn foliage, lackluster brown, dirt scarlet beaus

Again.

But I let it fly,

And go.

For it was meant to fly

Fly away

Long ago.

Baikaew, So12.

Folklore

No one pulls a dead man out of the ocean
because the mystery of him is still there—

His blood cannot bleed in the water
because there is a fine line between loss and leakage

And those eyes lose the sheen of a life lived
because a puddle cannot be cupped in a hand

Then the proceeding war rises without the warrior
because there are people
who create folklore out of what could have been.

— anon.



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