



The 2020 University of Chicago Undergraduate Research Symposium Proceedings: Abstract

Dark Souls: Power and Control During the Apocalypse

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Mentor(s): Professor Patrick Jagoda, English Language and Literature

The past decade saw the rise of the Souls-like genre based on From Software's Dark Souls series and its multiple spin offs. Each of these games is focused on the apocalypse and provides a unique take on the zombie survival genre in both its mechanics and narrative. Considering that this series has seen its rise to mainstream popularity in a time when apocalyptic themes are an ever-present thought on people's minds, it raises several questions on how apocalyptic literature operates in various mediums. Using Dark Souls as an example, I discuss the ways in which the interactive medium of video games benefits such a vast storyline and allows new affordances that are uncommon in other apocalyptic stories. I trace the ways the narrative unfolds using methods that are common to literary analysis, in doing so I touch upon more foundational debates to game studies. While the consensus is that video games deserve their own category of study because of the unique blend of systems at work, I bring the focus back to narratives in order to illustrate the reasons why this story could only work in a game. The purpose of this work is to show the ways in which power is used to control the narrative around the apocalypse and how it is further used to halt or accelerate it. Finally, I touch upon the ways in which an apocalyptic narrative may be interpreted as a force of creation for any new power that survives the destruction and thrives in the new world that rise from the old.



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Seeing Culture in Morphology: Connoisseurship of the Nimrud Ivories

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Mentor(s): Professor Seth Estrin, Art History; Professor David Schloen, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, The Oriental Institute

The only agreed upon aspect of the collection of ancient ivories found at the archaeological site of Nimrud is that the majority of the pieces were not made at Nimrud. Since their excavation, the ivories have been attributed to multiple geographic origins – directly linking style and region = by scholars using connoisseurial methods. Divided into increasingly specific regional groups through a connoisseurial practice from Poulsen (1912), through Barnett and Winter, and most recently Herrmann (2017), the ivories are attributed to individual workshops or even specific hands. However, these groupings rest on problematic foundations as early scholarship either involves personal aesthetic preferences or is based on hypothetical conceptions of style, proceeding from the unfounded assumption that Levantine ivory production would operate similarly to western artistic workshops. Addressing these shortcomings, Marian Feldman (2014) proposes that ivory production in the first millennium BCE Levant was based on what she refers to as social interaction networks, a model which eschews the value and validity of geographic attributions and, thusly, connoisseurship. Whereas Feldman effectively rejects connoisseurship on this basis, I argue that connoisseurship of the Nimrud ivories need not be inherently linked to geographic workshops. Instead, the stylistic analysis and modes of seeing that connoisseurship entails allows one to see and analyze the visual language that Levantine communities would have access to. In this way, connoisseurship can be a tool to identify the cultural influences that impacted ivory production, a method that makes the product of Feldman's model of social interaction networks more concrete.



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Revulsionary Writers: The Aesthetics of *Dégoût* as Self-Positioning in Baudelaire and Lu Xun

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Mentor(s): Professor Haun Saussy, Comparative Literature, the Committee on Social Thought, East Asian Languages and Civilizations; Claudio Sansone, Classics and Comparative Literature

With the publication of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857, Baudelaire provoked *un nouveau frisson* (“a new thrill,” as Victor Hugo remarked) in western literature, known for its aesthetic of the Ugliness, rejection of Christian morality and the Absolute. In the early 20th century, a group of Chinese literati, notably writers involved in the New Cultural Movement with the aim of creating a modern Chinese literature by assimilating Western values, had found affinity with Baudelaire’s aesthetics of “decadence”. Among them, Lu Xun had responded directly to Baudelaire in his prose poems include in the anthology *Wild Grass* (野草) published in 1927 (Bien 2012). In this collection, he not only adopts the prose poem form, but also deals with themes of death and decay that are found in Baudelaire. However, contrary to Baudelaire, who claims art to be an autonomous realm independent of morality and politics, Lu Xun is known for his dedication of literature to the political and social goal of “curing the ills of Chinese spirit”, using the art of writing as a means for social reform rather than an end in itself. Nonetheless, as a self-professed writer of *dégoût* [“disgust”; or literally, “distaste”], Lu Xun expresses a similar anxiety with literary writing and its role in society, and *Wild Grass* marks the radical transition of his conception of the artist-writer’s role in the pragmatic world: while he once conceived the writer as a revolutionary prophet who will liberate his nation, he now cast a serious doubt on literature’s revolutionary power and instead withdrew to the personal resistance of the interior darkness and nothingness (Veg 2009). Informed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s essay, “Flaubert’s Point of View” (1988), I propose to read the anxiety in Lu Xun’s *Wild Grass* as a process of defining his own position amongst other revolutionary intellectuals, a negative process that entails rejecting the existent positions of his time. This project could in turn shed light on Baudelaire’s position in his context and open up towards the larger question of the artist’s political role in the broader discourse of their society.

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Creating Exhibit Resources on the *Nova Reperta* Prints

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Mentor(s): Dr. Lia Markey, Newberry Library; Professor Niall Atkinson, Art History

Designed in Florence and printed in Antwerp in the late 1580s, the *Nova Reperta* print series depicts a variety of novelties from Renaissance Europe. An April 2020 exhibit at the Newberry Library examines these prints through the lens of Renaissance invention. This project synthesized research from the exhibit and conducted supplementary secondary-source research on family life, technology, and global exchange in the Renaissance in order to produce a children's and family guide for the show and develop an exhibit map illustrating the global roots of the novelties depicted in the *Nova Reperta*.