

## Editor's Introduction

This year's issue is of particular significance for our journal's history, marking the inclusion of Religious Studies in *Past Imperfect* for the first time. In 2020, our department at the University of Alberta expanded to become the Department of History, Classics, and Religion. In 2021, it was decided to retire the Religious Studies graduate student journal *Axis Mundi* and collectively combine our publishing efforts under *Past Imperfect*. We warmly extend our welcome to all Religious Studies staff and students and encourage our readers to explore the archives of *Axis Mundi*.<sup>1</sup> The addition of Religious Studies to *Past Imperfect's* purview is an opportunity to extend the range and diversity of our collective voice and to explore the fertile possibilities of inter-disciplinary research between our subject areas. With this in mind we dedicate this year's issue to *Axis Mundi*, recognizing it as a longstanding source of innovative graduate research at the University of Alberta.

Voice is fittingly a central theme of this year's issue. However, while we excitedly look forward to the flourishing of our journal's voice, all too often humanity has faced the systematic silencing of speech or, in the most extreme instances, the attempted destruction of entire categories of voices. These oppressive efforts—by state, culture, and even the self—have, in turn, equally necessitated responses from the suppressed. This year's articles and book reviews offer a series of case studies on such strategies of censorship and resistance.

Focused upon a unique Chinese police file discovered via an online auction, Ziyu (Zoe) Guo's article examines the life experience and confessions of Gong Moumou, a female hooligan during the Maoist Cultural Revolution. Guo poignantly traces the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to reform Gong's youthful rebelliousness and define her femininity, sexuality, and individuality according to the Party's rigid ideological strictures. In Katerina Johnston's article we are likewise confronted with the silencing of female voices. Johnston illustrates the various ways in which early-modern women were excluded from practicing medicine and restricted from transmitting their knowledge through published texts. Nonetheless, female medical

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<sup>1</sup> *Axis Mundi's* archives can be accessed at <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/axismundi/index.php/axismundi/issue/archive>.

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practitioners developed a host of strategies to evade sanction. Through a close reading of early-modern medical texts, Johnston reveals how women pushed against the boundaries of permissibility to have their voices publicly heard.

To round off this year's selection of articles, Christopher Morales examines the spiritual roots of Ralph Waldo Emerson's concept of self-reliance. Morales directly challenges the traditional interpretations of Emersonian self-reliance as an expression of bootstrap American individualism. By contrast, Morales argues that Emersonian self-reliance offers a powerful critique of the latter by grounding individuality and autonomy in the spiritual unity of people as a whole. Far from being a selfish ego-driven pursuit, Emersonian self-becoming and individual expression is a means to actualize freedom by overcoming egoistic anxieties and social expectations. In this loss of the ego, authenticity can be found and playfully explored through spontaneity and open conversation with others.

Our long format- book reviews likewise explore themes of oppression and resistance through the topics of white evangelicalism in Trump's America; Transylvanian Holocaust survivors and the role of food in cultural survival and identity; and the dark environmental legacy of global European imperialism and colonialism. Collectively our issue not only thematically speaks to historical questions but to issues of great contemporary significance. Resurgent political and cultural efforts to restrict marginalized and dissenting voices, erode bodily autonomy, and promote an environment of toxic divisive conversation are all echoed in our authors' themes. How we collectively define freedom, speech, and community in the coming years is of great importance. It is our hope that the articles and book reviews presented in this issue can positively contribute to this evolving conversation.

Sean Patterson  
September 2022

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