

Literature and Aesthetics, thematic issue: Time of the Wolf

University of Sydney/University of Leiden

Deadline: Dec 15, 2025

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Literature and Aesthetics : the journal of the Sydney Society of Literature and Aesthetics (SSLA), thematic issue:

Time of the Wolf: Visual/Textual Culture of Ethical Impasse.

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The term "time of the wolf" is associated with the onset of chaos, destruction, and sociocultural debilitations; it denotes a time during which people are emotionally vulnerable, existentially precarious, and ontologically helpless. Occluding fair judgments and reasons, the "time of the wolf" heralds a postapocalyptic situation in which moral codes and values are temporarily abandoned. Rooted in the Nordic folklore and Germanic mythology, it refers to a time of great darkness and despair when humanity reverts to a primal state of 'dog-eat-dog' survival. In a more literal sense, the "time of the wolf" is at the crack of dawn, when an individual (or an entire society) faces its darkest dreams and lucid nightmares. The term is usually associated with Ingmar Bergman's film *Vargtimmen* (*Hour of the Wolf*, 1968), where a troubled artist (Max von Sydow) and his wife (Liv Ullmann) gradually slip into paranoia and delusion, thereby facing situations where distinguishing between right and wrong becomes impossible. The same title was also used in a film by the Austrian director Michael Haneke (*Le Temps du loup*, 2003), showing a family caught between a global cataclysm and inevitable violent tragedies. The time of the wolf, however, does not have to embody a societal collapse or an inescapable catastrophe; it can simply refer to a brief moment at which one selfishly chooses one's survival and vitality over others. An example of this is *Force Majeure* (2014), a film by the Swedish director Ruben Östlund, where a father thoughtlessly prioritizes his own escape over the safety of his family. In short, time of the wolf signals the moments in which social instabilities, cultural decays, and political dilemmas blind people to the humane principles of decision-making; it is a time when morality dissipates, and thus ethical impasse germinates.

While "time of the wolf" is usually associated with films, its core idea (i.e., representation of ethical impasse and moral deadlocks) has frequently been showcased across other media platforms. In relation to photography, for example, well-known and controversial examples are: the Saigon Execution photograph (1968) by Eddie Adams; the notorious photos of tortured prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison (2003); or the viral pictures of the lifeless Alan Kurdi on the beach (2015). Well-known animations such as *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) and *When the Wind Blows* (1986) also depicted the scarcity of humanity and the precarity of normalcy in times of war. Among popular

TV series, the celebrated *Black Mirror* (2011-2025) has consistently been envisaging ethical dilemmas raised by new technologies. In comics, the time of the wolf is often represented in spatial terms, as a zone beyond legal orders or social relations, a Hobbesian pseudo-state of nature, where 'man is a wolf to man' (*homo hominis lupus*). It depicts a world beyond the walls of the polis, in the wilderness, the forest, or on a deserted island where a zombie apocalypse forces people to make impossible ethical decisions (e.g., Robert Kirkman's *The Walking Dead*, 2003-2019). Next to such imagery, the idea of "time of the wolf" has also been frequently explored in literary works often set in postapocalyptic futures, for example: in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) where a father and his son traverse desolate landscapes destroyed by an unknown cataclysm; or in George R.R. Martin's series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-2011) where the phrase that 'winter is coming' announces the coming of a prolonged 'time of the wolf.' Such literary works interrogate our conception of morality and expose our perception of ethics.

By centring on the theme of "time of the wolf", this Call for Papers inquires: How do visual culture and literature reflect on moments of ethical deadlocks? In which ways can images (cinema, photography, animation, video, comics, etc.) and texts (fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, etc.) function as conduits for mitigating or exacerbating the ethics of decision-making? What types of visual narratives and textual metaphors are used to communicate the complexities of decision-making in moments of crisis? What forms of agencies and solidarities justify or nullify our moral codes and values in cataclysmic times? In short, this special issue inquires:

In which ways can visual culture and literature conduce and convey, or occlude and conceal, the ethical impasses of our time?

Amongst many possible approaches to the theme of "time of the wolf", article proposals may focus on, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Time of the Wolf
- Self-preservation in times of crisis
- Moments of ethical deadlock
- Waning of moral codes & values
- Survival instinct in cataclysmic times
- Apocalyptic conditions in everyday life
- Societal ruins & cultural decays
- Hallucinations & nightmares
- Selfishness & selflessness of moral judgments
- Existential malaise & ontological chaos
- Dehumanized ethics & debased life forms
- Moral blindness & inhuman conformism
- Temporality of morality & spatiality of ethics
- Dog-eat-dog worlds ...

This thematic issue will be published at the peer-reviewed and open-access journal of *Literature & Aesthetics* at the University of Sydney.

See: <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/LA/index>

We warmly invite scholars of visual culture & literary studies to submit a 400-word abstract and a short biography (including affiliation/latest publications) to the guest editors of the issue:

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A selected number of contributors will be invited to write an academic article of 5,000-6,000 words in 2026.

Deadlines:

Abstract submission: December 15th, 2025

Communication of acceptance: December 20th, 2025

Full-article submission: April 15th, 2026

Expected date of publication: August 2026

Should you have any questions regarding the CFP, feel free to contact the editors.

Reference:

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