

A MYTHOLOGICAL NUDIST LOST IN SWEDISH SUBURBIA

A study of the Nix's masculinity and media-loric function in the
manga series *Oblivion High*

[Received March 4th 2021; accepted April 29th 2021 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.134]

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the visual representation and function of the folkloric Scandinavian *nix* in the manga series *Oblivion High* (2012–2014) published by the manga studio Ms Mandu. The aim of the research is to investigate how a well-known folkloric image develops and to consider the *nix*'s portrayal of masculinity. The article is a critical cultural study based on feminist and queer perspectives on visual culture and folklore studies. The article concludes that the *nix* in *Oblivion High* must update his desirability through spectacular clothing and change of musical instrument to meet the contemporary Western heteronormative masculinity ideals. His weakness to the metal iron ties into the *nix*'s association to fairies and the construction of the *nix*'s underwater realm is connected to Norse mythology with the appearance of Aino from the Finish national epos *Kalevala*, Nornorna and hints of the Norse god Odin. Furthermore, the androgynous art style of *shōjo manga* (a sub-genre aimed at female teenage readers) creates a heterosexual female gaze pattern, while the imagery of a *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) connects the character Nix to the literary trope of the 'pretty boy,' leaving hegemonic masculinity unchallenged.

KEYWORDS: Keywords: nix, Norse mythology, folklore, masculinity, the female gaze

Introduction

The Scandinavian *nix* (*näcken*)¹ is a shapeshifting water spirit that originated from folktales of Germanic-speaking countries around the Baltic Sea and further out into the North Sea. The Scandinavian version comes in many local variations but distinguishes itself as a lonesome male entity linked to aquapelagic locations such as lakes, rivers and mills. In folktales and ballads, he operates as a form of gatekeeper in the gap between culture and nature, land and water, known and unknown, life and death. This position of liminality connected the *nix* to experiences such as forbidden sexuality, childbirth and disease and he

¹ There are many terms regarding the water spirit. In Swedish, he is often referred to as *strömkarlen* (the man of the stream), *älven* (the river), *vattenmannen* (the waterman) or *bäckahästen* (the river horse). There are also several national variations regarding the name such as German: *nixe*, Dutch: *nekker*, Finnish: *näkki*, Norwegian: *nøkke*, Estonian: *näkk*, Old English: *nicor*. Historian Mikael Häll uses *näcken* (the neck/nick/nix) as an umbrella term for all of them and is of the opinion that all names usually refer to the same water spirit (Häll, 2011: 594). I choose to use the term *nix*.

was expressly portrayed as a threat for women, with the habit of lying in wait and abducting them and/or their children. (Häll, 2011: 620; Stattin, 1984). Furthermore, the *nix* was also strongly associated with musicality and there are many orally preserved stories about the *nix* teaching different fiddlers how to play their instrument in exchange for an offering (Kjellander, 2008: 326). The *nix*'s folkloric abilities as shapeshifting (with the power to turn both into other humans, animals and things), virtuoso expertise at violin and harp and seducing and drowning people ties into the traditions of many water-related spirits. The mistress of the lake (in Swedish: Sjöräet or Sjöfrun), mermaids and mermen were also believed to inhabit water sources in Scandinavian folktale. Interestingly, from a gender perspective, the *nix* seem to share more similarities with the mermaids than with the mermen. Both the *nix* and the mermaids used their alluring musicality and/or appearance to attract humans, whereas mermen were often traditionally described as burly and were depicted with weapons or battle horns made of seashells rather than instruments. Mermen's attractiveness was (and still is in modern media-lore), typically based on a muscular body type in contrast to the *nix*'s appearance (Jilkén, 2018). Another component that distinguishes the *nix* from its kindred water spirits is its lack of animalistic features and he was less restrained by the domain of water due to his considerable abilities in shapeshifting.



Figure 1 – Nix (Nina von Rüdiger, 2013).

The *nix*'s way of representing desire and sexuality is often visualised through imagery depicting him as an attractive, young, nude male. This causes gender 'trouble' as men are seldom portrayed as objects of desire in modern Western society (Mulvey, 1975). Critical masculinity theorists have proclaimed that imagery of male sexuality and nudity is not a new phenomenon, but the way desirable masculinity is portrayed varies heavily depending on cultural context (Frizzoni, 2009: 28). A common heterosexist division is to create female imagery as an object of lust whereas male objectification is avoided completely or is there to declare the rigidity of the binary gender structure (Connell, 2008: 84). This ongoing power struggle is made evident throughout debates regarding the *nix*'s appearance. Historian Lars Gahrn claims that the artist Ernst Josephson's many paintings of the *nix*, for example *Strömkarlen* (1884 - Figure 2), standardised the *nix*'s modern appearance in a classical tradition as an appealing adolescent male, nude, with flowers in his blond hair, playing the violin (Gahrn, 1999). This erotic visualisation has been criticised as the *nix* most commonly appears in folkloric settings as a well-dressed gentleman (Kjellander, 2008: 327). Moreover, Josephson's interpretation was heavily critiqued in the 1800's because of the paintings' highly sexualised nature. One art critic condemned Josephson for prostituting himself through the motif (Brummer, 1995: 33). Later, Josephson's paintings got their due recognition and his version of the *nix* might be the most well-known today. The critique of the *nix*'s sexualised imagery is often based on the *nix*'s malicious nature and his characteristics as an abductor and bringer of death. These abilities have created a more grotesque depiction of him. The Swedish Institute of Language and Folklore describes the *nix* as "sometimes nude but definitely not beautiful" (Institutet för språk och folkminnen, 2017: online – author's translation); and the illustrator Johan Egerkrans depicts the Nix in his book about Norse spirits as a Gollum-like figure; amphibious, hideous and wearing trousers with the description, "despite the common perception [the *nix*] rarely displayed himself in the nude" (Egerkrans, 2013: 54 – author's translation - see Figure 3). This shows how different influences have formed the *nix*'s appearance and function during different times. For example, Christianity demonised the *nix*, giving him similar abilities to the Devil (Häll, 2011: 600), and the Romantic art style of portraying water spirits in the nude took away the *nix*'s posh clothing (Hansson, 2019: 59). There are also regional alterations that treat the *nix*'s folkloric function differently. It is worth noting is that this article is based on Swedish sources.

The *nix* is a recurrently appearing motif in art and pop culture. Recently he appeared in his horse shape in Disney's *Frozen 2* (Peter Del Vecho, 2019). Previous research mainly focussed on the *nix*'s function in ballads and folklore during the early modern period and his depiction in artwork from 19th Century (see Brummer, 1995; Häll, 2011; Kjellander, 2008; Stattin 1984), ignored his versatile portraiture in modern media-lore. This article engages with contemporary *nix* imagery, focusing on his folkloric, gendered and sexual function in the manga series of *Oblivion High* in the early 2010s.



Figure 2 – 'Strömkarlen' (Ernst Josephson 1884)

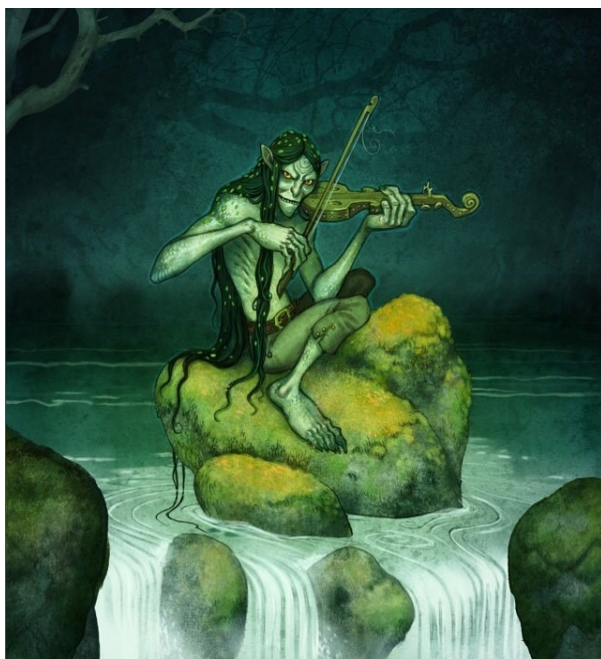


Figure 3 – 'Näcken' (Johan Egerkrans) from *Nordiska väsen* (2013).

An ancient water spirit enters high school

Illustrator Nina von Rüdiger first got enthralled by the *nix* as a child when she encountered an empty condom package from the brand ‘Näkki’ with the mythical man playing the violin on the cover (Oxfordghosts, 2012). Many years later she teamed up with the writer Johanna Koljonen to commence the manga studio Ms Mandu. The Swedish-Finnish duo started to create their own portrayal of the water spirit in the book series *Oblivion High* with the starting point; what would happen if the alluring lake deity started high school? Aiming for a trilogy, Ms Mandu released two parts in Swedish; *Oblivion High del 1: Bortbytingen* (‘The Changeling’) (2012) and *Oblivion High del 2: Förföraren* (‘The Seducer’) (2014) with publisher Kolik förlag and with the same material but some slight differences a Finnish version in three parts *Oblivion High 1: Vaihdokas* (‘The Changeling’) (2008), *Oblivion High 2: Kade* (‘Jealousy’) (2009) and *Oblivion High 3: Laulu* (‘Melody’) (2011) with publisher Otava. The plot concerns two c13 year olds, Nin and Soon Mi, who are due to receive an exchange student from Japan at their junior high school in Upplands Väsby, a suburb of Stockholm. The *nix* (who calls himself by the name Nix) intercepts the exchange student, assumes his identity and starts living his life as a guest with Soon Mi’s family. Nix has a hard time conforming to modern ways of living and, as Nin and Soon Mi grow suspicious of his behaviour, he decides to go back to his underwater world. Going back to the lake where he came from, he realises that someone has hid his changeling (the exchange student), and therefore trapped him in the mortal realm. Furthermore, spells have been put onto him interfering with his ability to shapeshift and giving him memory loss (hence the series title). Because of this, Nix decides to reveal his identity to the teenage girls (Figure 4).

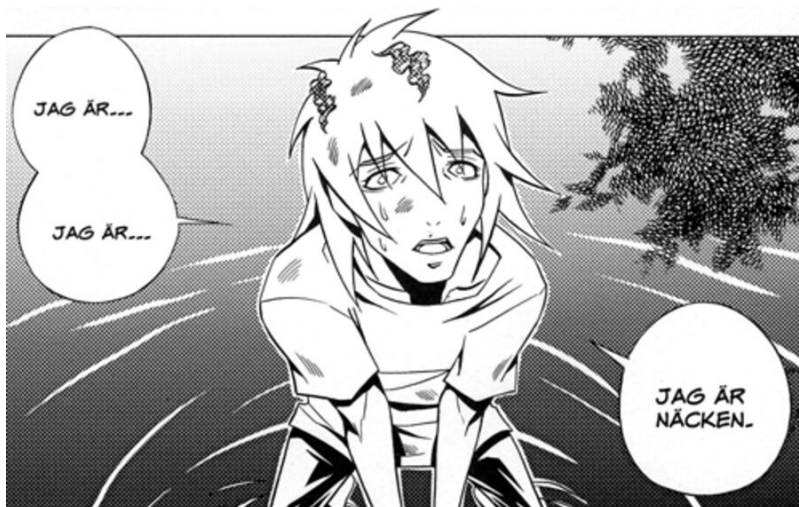


Figure 4 – Nina von Rüdiger (2013): the scene in which Nix confess his identity after realising that he is unable to return to the water realm. (He says: ‘I am... I am... I am the *nix*.’).

The culprit behind Nix’s misfortune is his ex-lover, Aino, who came to the underwater world more than a thousand years ago. Aino was transformed into a power-crazed mare when she got turned away by Nix. After all that time, she finally put her vengeance into action. Nix’s double life in the human world goes on and he joins Nin’s older brother’s J-Pop band. Playing at a festival he accidentally put the audience into a magical trance and is

unable to stop himself until Soon Mi's little brother stabs him with a knife. The incident triggers Nix's memory and he understands that Aino is responsible for his entrapment. Nix shares the information about his vengeful ex with Nin, Soon Mi and their group of friends. As the teenagers try to cope with the realisation of the existence of magical beings and underwater dimensions, Aino grooms her prisoner - the Japanese exchange student Masato - into a powerful underling surely to use as a weapon against Nix.

The Nix's updated desirability

As established, the *nix's* nude imagery has been questioned since, in folkloric settings, he was most often described as a well-dressed gentleman wearing a red and golden garment to lure women and their children from their house (Häll, 2011: 595). *Oblivion High* treats Nix's naked figure as his preferable way of presenting himself. However, the *nix's* flamboyant dressing in the folkloric setting is reinterpreted as his tendency to dress unconventionally and sensationally. For example, he has no problem with dressing in the Japanese gender-bending Harajuku style (see Figure 5) and he gladly participates in a photoshoot with a daring clothing choice. The photoshoot gets a lot of attention in their school resulting in an 'appropriate clothing-policy' enforced by their parents. Nix's excessively stylish dressing in this photoshoot notably has a greater impact on seducing his classmates than showing himself in the nude, which most often is received with suspicion and awkward blushing. After their first encounter with Nix, where he appears in the nude, Nin calls him "a nude bather" while Soon-Mi use the codename "Naken-Janne", referring to a Swedish reality star famous for being a nudist. Arguably, it is Nix's unconventional relation to clothing that sparks a deep mistrust for him amongst those he associates with. Here, we see a first example of how *Oblivion High* plays on how Nix's old (arguably false) tactics do not work in the modern world and how he must adapt to a new set of rules to still be an alluring creature. This 'new' tactics correlates with the myth that assumes that women and children are more likely to be seduced by a man who displays wealth with fancy clothing rather than an exposed body.

A second example of the urgency for Nix to update his strategy in desirability is his musical repertoire and use of instrument. In ballads and folktales, the *nix* is associated with playing either the violin or harp. The harp comes with divine connotations and is linked to religiosity and goodness while the violin was regarded as an instrument for the common people during the era when the tales and ballads were fabricated. Since violins came to Scandinavia in the second half of the 17th Century, it is suspected that the *nix* must have had some other instrument in earlier mythology (Kjellander, 2008: 335–336). In *Oblivion High*, Nix abandons both instruments. Instead, he gets to show off his musical abilities on a guitar. Yet, this updated use of instrument is not enough as he gets dismissed as a wimp by the bullies in class for playing old-fashioned polkas. It is not until he achieves the full imagery of a rock star, playing an electric guitar at a festival with a band that plays some obscure J-Pop genre, that he achieves the same magical ability as in the folktale; the ability to completely enthrall his audience, which wouldn't stop dancing until the music stopped (ibid: 325–326). Differences between the manga and the folkloric tales are the way that Nix can be banished or weakened.



Figure 5 – Harujuku nix ((Nina von Rüdiger, 2011).

Fairy or descendant of a pagan god?

According to folktales and ballads, there were several ways of dispatching the dangerous *nix*, some more advanced than others. The most well-known was to use the *nix*'s name against him as the *nix* couldn't stand hearing it. People encountering the *nix* should proclaim who or what he was or sing a song that included his name. In one ballad, the *nix* got banished through the notes from a golden harp. This might seem peculiar, as the *nix* was deemed a musician himself and often associated with the harp, but it was a recognised medieval idea that magical beings were best repelled with their own kind of magic (Kjellander, 2008: 327, 333). In *Oblivion High*, Nix insists on everybody calling him by his name even though he has stolen the identity of the Japanese exchange student named Masato. Thus, this breaks with earlier founded myth. It can, however, be argued that Nix's

response to the revelation of his true identity, which causes him to take flight to his lake, is the true naming of him and thereby align with the folktales.

The most prominent method *Oblivion High* displays in warding off Nix, and other otherworldly beings like him, is carrying around a piece of iron. It was the metal in the knife that kept Soon-Mi's little brother from losing control of himself while getting exposed to the dangerous, never-ending tunes of Nix's music. It was also the knife that broke the spell that caused Nix's memory loss. The importance of metal as a tool of protection and as effective against water spirits recollects of the British and Scottish fairies and their weakness to iron. Häll proclaims that the Nix to an extent can be considered a Nordic water-related fairy as he shares a lot of qualities with them (Häll, 2011: 591). The iron is also interesting in relation to one of the folkloric children's songs that was supposed to keep the *nix* at bay. The song went like this (in translation): "Nix, nix needle-thief, your father was a steel-thief and your mother was a mistress, traveling all the villages causing children mischief" (Stattin, 1984: 36). This song ties into a backstory in which Soon-Mi's long-lost father is revealed as always carrying a knife since he knows how iron can protect him from water spirits. One day Soon-Mi's father encountered a magpie on his way to his usual fishing spot. It is unclear how, but during this encounter the father's knife disappeared. The bird might represent the *nix*'s steel-thieving father from the children's song. A deity that is linked to birds and is said to have a connection to the *nix* is the Norse god Odin. Historian Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius argues that Odin was considered a god of water and that the *nix* should be regarded as a later version of Odin. He points to the evidence that some sacrificial sites for Odin later became places where sacrifices were made for the *nix*. Hyltén-Cavallius further connected the *nix*'s ability to shapeshift into a horse with Odin's horse Sleipner, and the way that the *nix* brought people to his beautiful underwater realm with Odin's means to bring all the fallen warriors to Valhalla (Hyltén-Cavallius, 1921: 193–194). Archeologist Torun Zachrisson agrees with this theory and points to how rites and folktales regarding the *nix* effectively treat him more as a pagan deity than a lesser spirit. Men went on pilgrimage to certain shrines by the water, which women and children were prohibited from and where they sacrificed substantial offerings such as body parts or silver to get the blessing of a deity that often presented himself in the shape of a horse. This ritual description fits the treatment of both Odin and the *nix*. Odin was regarded as the heavenly ruler and god of death and war, runes, ecstasy and poetry. Odin was also described as a womaniser with fickle personality and the ability to shapeshift (Zachrisson, 2015: 82–83).

Oblivion High doesn't treat Odin and Nix as the same character, although, as the second book ends with a mysterious sketch of a man with an eye-patch (another feature strongly connected to Odin) who resembles an older Nix, I would assume that some kinship to the Norse god might have presented itself if the series had been finished, especially considering the involvement of Norse mythology that structures the underwater realm that Nix derives from.

Nixes and Mares

The debate regarding the Nix's beautiful exterior and dark, murderous, interior did not result in an appalling or fearful appearance for Nix in *Oblivion High*. Nonetheless, it resulted in a character split. Scriptwriter Johanna Koljonen explained how:

a child murderer didn't feel like a delightful theme for a mainstream comic about love... so then we made them into different people. The Nix got to be 'the seductive sexuality' and Bäckahästen [The River Horse] the facet of the psychotic, sadistic and murderous. (GeekGirlMeetupSweden, 2014: online – author's translation).

In folklore, the Nix and Bäckahästen (called Bex in *Oblivion High*) were regarded as one and the same but in different forms. In *Oblivion High*, they are considered brothers and referred to as “the sons of the lordship”. They look very much alike, with long blond hair and a preference for being in the nude. While Nix has acquired a teenage body type to blend in, Bex has more of a mature figure (Figure 6). They both have the ability to turn into a horse and they share an interest in luring people down to their watery kingdom but with different motives: Bex to drown them and Nix to have sex with them. The underwater realm is presented as a place frozen in ancient times where farmers and maids are working hard at a farmyard owned by ‘the family’. Except for Nix and Bex, the privileged family of the underwater world consists of a little girl named Hitu, a third brother, Kārem, and an unseen father (possibly the man represented with an eye-patch). Kārem is hired by the antagonist Aino to spy on Nix. He is disguised as their class teacher and writes reports about his whereabouts. It is through these reports we learn about Aino's plan to eradicate Nix.



Figure 6 – Bex on a throne of hay proclaiming ‘please, help yourself!’ Nina von Rüdiger (2014).

Aino is an interesting character as she combines Norse mythology with folkloric tales. She is based on the young and beautiful Aino from the Finnish national epos *Kalevala*. In the myth, Aino gets betrothed against her will to the old but powerful magician Väinämöinen.

In despair, she flees, and the story tragically ends with her drowning herself and/or she is turned into a fish. Koljonen and von Rüdiger wanted to give Aino a second chance as their supervillain (Johanna, 2014). What if Aino did not drown but instead was transported to another world where the patriarchal hierarchy once again exploited her? How far would her wrath take her? When Nix dumps her, as he is unable to stay faithful to her, she turns to Nornorna (the goddesses of fate in Norse mythology), for retribution. They promise her revenge in exchange for her ability to have children and with their power she becomes a *mare* with great magical ability. In Germanic and Slavic folklore, a *mare* was a vengeful female spirit that caused nightmares. The *nix* and the *mare* weren't paired in the folktales but in contemporary media-lore they do appear as a conflicted duo not only in *Oblivion High* but also in the erotic sex novel *Maran* (2011) by Lina Neidestam.

Masculinity within an androgynous art style

Scholars from different cultural fields have proclaimed that Japanese *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animated television and film series) tend to involve more norm breaking depiction of gender and sexuality than Western comics or cartoons. An example of this is the subgenre of *shōjo manga* (girl's comics) called *shōnen ai* often referred to as BL (boys' love). BL is marked by its focus on romantic relationships between boys and the androgynous portrayal of *bishōnen* ('beautiful boys') (Ting, 2019). Feminist scholar Kathryn Hemmann claims that the consumption of BL by female fans, especially *dōjinshi* (fan-made publications) is a way to subvert the phallocentrism in mainstream narratives by creating a female gaze that operates outside of the realm of the male gaze that otherwise dominates media (Hemmann, 2015). *Oblivion High* is not a BL manga but it is noticeable that illustrator Nina von Rüdiger, as she puts it herself, is "a sucker for *bishōnen*" (Oxfordghosts, 2012: online).

Uli Meyer points to the different erotic gazes used in manga and how they demonstrate which target group the manga is supposed to attract. In Western comic tradition, there seem to be less of an objectifying female gaze. One explanation is that there is less stigma to men looking feminine in Japan (Meyer, 2013 :80). Using a manga-inspired style, Ms Mandu clearly indulges in the female gazing and is not afraid to objectify or feminise the male characters. This is demonstrated in the first panel where Nix is introduced (see Figure 1). In the scene, Soon-Mi and Nin happen to walk in on Nix as he is sunbathing in the nude. As reader, we are put into Soon-Mi's and Nin's perspective, viewing Nix's exposed body through a female gaze. The female gaze is continuously manifest in the series throughout the countless panels of shirtless male characters and the many viewpoints from Soon-Mi's and Nin's perspective. Still, the female characters are not entirely spared of an objectified gaze. Short dresses and breasts emerge, although not to the same extent as Nix's perky bum, but they are there. At one point, there is a scene represented from Soon-Mi's and Nin's classmate Max's perspective, who walks in on Nin and Nix fighting, mistaking their physical ways for necking. Watching his love-interest, Nin, with a tight grip of Nix's shirt exposing his midriff while both panting causes an infamous 'nosebleed shot' of Max. The 'nosebleed shot' is a commonly style used in manga "in which male sexual desire is symbolised by a fountain of blood gushing from the nose" (Meyer, 2013: 72). This could complicate the female gaze earlier established but rather it shows how gaze patterns are less rigid than commonly understood. The theory of the male/female gaze is based on a heterosexual assumption which assumes that men are only interested in watching women and vice versa. *Oblivion High* is undoubtedly constructed through heteronormativity, as all visible romantic relationships and sensibilities revolves around heterosexual pairings,

filtered through an implicit heterosexual female gaze. Nevertheless, this does not fully eradicate objectification of female characters.

Male objectification is not the only way *Oblivion High* stands out from mainstream Western comics. As mentioned before, Nina von Rüdiger was inspired by manga *bishōnen* while composing the characters. The *bishōnen* are premised on a different way of portraying masculinity than the macho characters that are commonly seen in Western comics, since they are defined by androgynous and often feminine traits. According to queer theorist Judith Butler, there are endless of ways to ‘do’ gender but only a few are validated by society. These endorsed gender categories differ and change from time and place (Butler, 2007: 9). Masculinity theorist Raewyn Connell agrees and describes masculinity as fragmented and hierarchically arranged with hegemonic masculinity seen as the ideal. Different types of masculinity therefore exist in parallel that are competing for the hegemonic spot (Connell, 2008: 115, 119). If so, does the *bishōnen*-inspired imagery of Nix in *Oblivion High* challenge the hegemonic way of portraying masculinity? Western culture is not foreign to representations of young, androgynous, innocent boys with erotic capital. For example, Brigitte Frizzoni detects this in the genre of women’s crime novels and identifies it as ‘the pretty boy’ trope. The pretty boy idealises a youthful physique built on skinniness, non-existing body hair and a pretty, feminine face. Even though the pretty boy is an attractive character type, he seldom achieves a successful relationship as he is marked as immature and therefore not masculine enough (Frizzoni, 2009:32). This can be applied to Nix in *Oblivion High*. Even though he is an ancient water spirit he presents himself in the form of a young teenager and, in addition, acts like one. He is vain, attention-seeking, longing for admiration and when the antagonist Aino asks him for monogamy he refuses, identifying that he just wants to ‘play’. Neither Nix nor any other of the *bishōnen* boys of *Oblivion High* present a fetching type of conventional masculinity or show any signs of authority. And, as they are all children, they are inferior to the adults that make up the rules.

Another way the androgynous masculinity is undermined in *Oblivion High* is how Nix is received when he dresses in Harajuku-style (Figure 6). Some fan girls in Nix’s class cries “So trendy!!!” but Soon-Mi adds “...if you are a tranny” and Nin states “you will get beaten if you go out like that” (Koljonen & von Rüdiger, 2012: 76 – author’s translation). This shows how strictly the gendered performance is monitored and that Nix is not the obvious example of a non-binary character that one critic identified (Höglund, 2012) but, rather, is distinctly categorised as male who are expected to dress and perform according to masculine ideals. While this realisation removes some of *Oblivion High*’s subversive potential, it nevertheless gives a more believable impression of how the atmosphere at a high school in a Swedish suburb early 2010 was like.

Conclusion

By unpacking the character Nix’s gendered and folkloric function in *Oblivion High*, this article illustrates how this contemporary portrayal of the Nix both complies with and challenge earlier established notions of the mythical water spirit. Constructing the *nix* as a mischievous teenage boy and separating him from his dark murderous side through a character split, Nix in *Oblivion High* possesses many of the folkloric abilities introduced in the folktales, such as being seductive through extraordinary clothing and charisma, enchanting an audience with his musicality, luring people down to his watery domain and shapeshifting into a horse. His seducing abilities are enhanced when he updates his

desirability traits, such as choice of instrument, type of music genre and use of spectacular clothing. He departs from the established way to banish him, by calling him by his name, as he prefers the name Nix in the series even though he has stolen someone else's identity. Instead, the use of iron is proven effective both as a protective charm against all the different *nixs'* magic and as a weapon to break their spells. There are hints that the Norse god Odin exists in the world of *Oblivion High*, manifesting the entanglement of Norse mythology incorporated in the underwater realm that Nix and his family derives from. There is also the appearance of Nornorna, the goddesses of fate, and the character Aino from the Finish national epos *Kalevala*. The *nix* is paired with the female spirit, the *mare*, which is not a conventional pairing in folk tale but which seems to occur in contemporary media-lore. The use of an androgynous manga style, targeting girls as its audience, filters *Oblivion high* through an implicit heterosexual female gaze that has no problem objectifying its male characters. Representing Nix in *bishōnen* style renders him within the trope of 'the pretty boy' that aligns with his young and powerless state in the grown-up world. Although Nix in *Oblivion High* may seem to break gender norms by his androgynous imagery and a preference to expose himself as a desirable object, it is proven that he constantly gets categorised as male and that he is more successful in achieving desirability when conforming to prevailing masculine gender norms.

Thanks to my academic companion Lina MJ Johansson for smart input and support and to Philip Hayward for encouragement and patience.

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