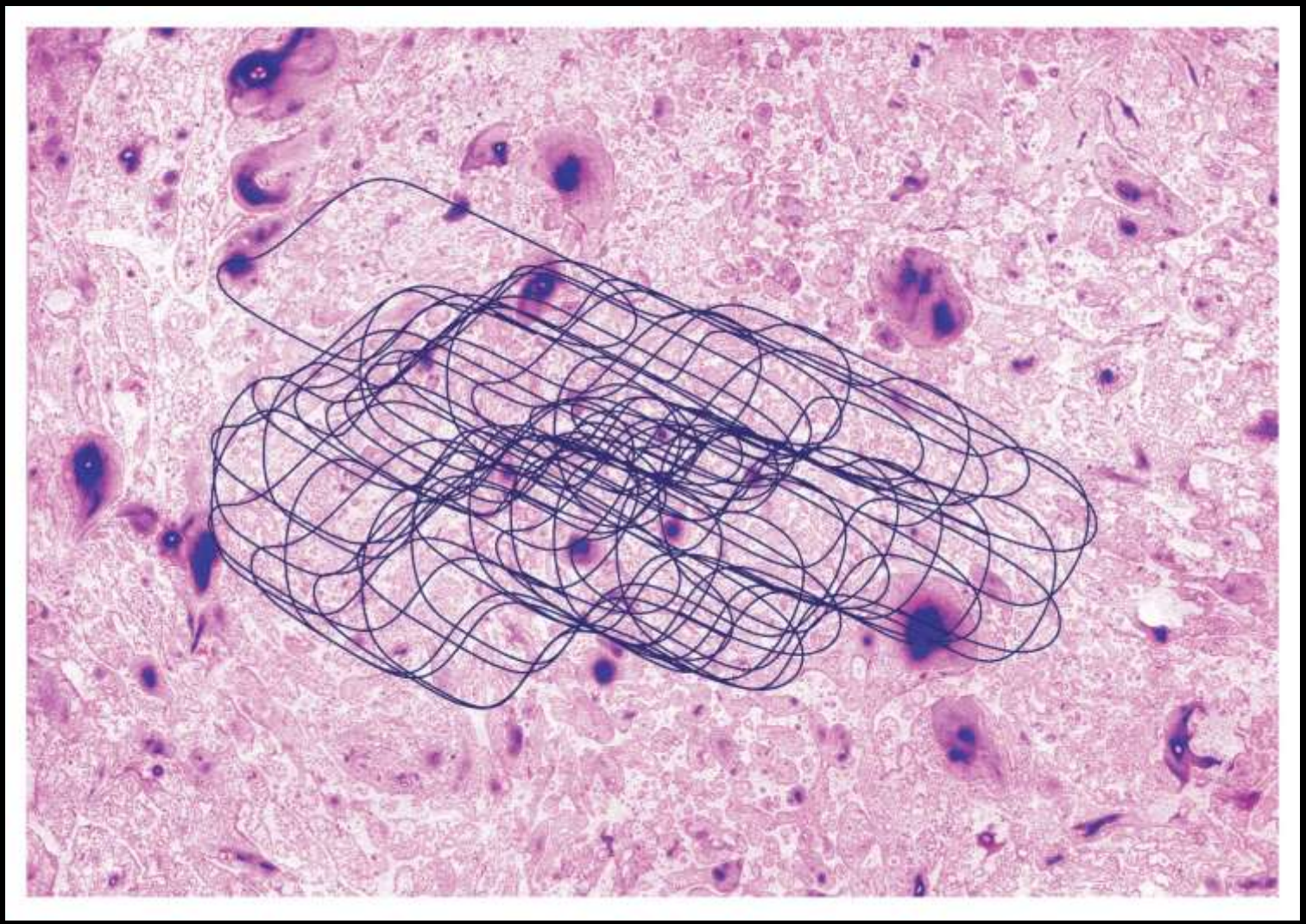
CONNECTIONS

A JOURNAL FOR LANGUAGE, MEDIA AND CULTURE



December 2021 Volume 2, Issue 1

Cover Art by Arianna Pace

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A JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, MEDIA AND CULTURE

Connections is an annual academic publication led by the graduate students from the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta. Established in 2019, this journal seeks to showcase innovative and interdisciplinary research that either challenges or reimagines normative approaches to applied linguistics, translation, comparative literature, media, and cross-cultural studies. *Connections* is committed to elevating the scholarly and creative voices of students engaged in research that crosses geographical, disciplinary, and political boundaries. Ultimately, this publication calls on authors to map the connections, wherever they may be.

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Please send all editorial correspondence to cnctjrnl@ualberta.ca
or to the following mailing address:

Connections Journal
Department of Modern Languages & Cultural Studies
University of Alberta
200 Arts Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2E6
Canada

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A Note from the Editor-in-Chief,

I am happy you found your way to the second issue of Connections: A Journal of Language, Media and Culture. From wherever in the world you are reading, I hope this issue inspires you to nourish existing connections around you and establish new ones.

The present issue is built on connections, old and new. It would not have been possible without the diligence, commitment, and enthusiasm of its section editors: Kerry Sluchinski, Sofia Monzon Rodriguez, Peter Morley, Kenzie Gordon, and Valentina Benvenuti. Thank you! The editorial team is indebted to the many graduate students and faculty in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta and beyond who dedicated their time and energy - during challenging times no less - to review submissions and ensure the quality of the journal.

Inspired by the present and ongoing pandemic, this issue centers on building bridges in times of crisis. If we have learned anything these past two years, it is how important connecting with your family and friends (and pets) is. Personally, I have also found comfort in building relationships across the academic community: at the journal, during virtual 'study/work together' sessions, at digital conferences, etc. I believe the current issue represents the importance of such relations.

The creator of Connections and former Editor-in-Chief, Megan Perram, wrote in the introduction to the previous issue: "As new academics ready to shake up the long-standing traditions of our respective disciplines, we envisioned a publication with a single objective: to challenge or reimagine normative approaches to applied linguistics, translation, comparative literature, media, and cross-cultural studies. We are committed to publishing research that showcases how our community of students are occupying creative, radical, and innovative spaces of scholarship." This goal has not changed and with this issue the editorial team has done exactly that: the present issue holds space for not only publishing in non-conventional styles but also for crossing geographical, disciplinary, political, cultural, and linguistic boundaries.

The issue has been divided into five meta-categories, the first two of which contain traditional academic articles. The first section, 'Transnational and Comparative Literatures,' includes two articles that challenge the reception of important literary works: Manuel Garzon's "The Indian, The Mestizo, and The Impostor: The Fictionality of Race in Inca Garcilaso de la Vega" studies Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's bicultural status as a literary creation, while Cristina Zimbroianu's "The Reception of Olivia Manning's The Great Fortune in Romania" examines what influences censorship might have had on the novel's reception. The second section, 'Media and Culture,' includes three contributions around the themes of illness in media and culture. Sarah Paust examines how users of the crowdfunding platform GoFundMe subscribe to "the individualizing discourse of deservingness to create reciprocal ties within biosocial communities of care", fighting for resources in a crowded virtual space and normalizing neoliberal discourses about illness. From a historical perspective that includes the study of early modern Italian material culture and art, Natalie Massong's piece offers a topical, detailed, and well contrasted exploration of the roles, restrictions, and mobility of Italian women during the 1630 plague in Bologna. Christina Han explores the adaptation of South Korea's popular samhaengsi digital acrostic poems to the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the format offered a playful form of community building as users, governments, and corporations alike used it to engage the new realities shaped by the pandemic.

Not surprisingly, the theme 'Building bridges in times of crisis' generated submissions focused on connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic including research-creations shaped by meeting and travel limitations imposed by the pandemic. These are presented in the thematic section "Connecting during COVID-19." Sheri Klassen reflects on a family's experience of disability in relation to the bubble tactique adopted by many during the pandemic; Matilda Tucker and Hannah Clarkson explore an innovative form of scholarly creation, namely a Google Doc conversation on "language, laziness, and long-distance running." Lauren McLean offers the reader a poem on the experience of working from home and reflecting on the new meaning of 'team.' The following section, "Creative Works," contains two poems and an art work: in her poem, Rahmawaty Kadir mixes Gorontalo, one of Indonesia's Indigenous languages, Indonesian, and English to reflect her experience as a multilingual speaker and to raise awareness about language endangerment; Cristian Guerra offers a self-translated romantic love poem in Spanish about a front-line nurse and her dying husband; and the graphic art piece by Arianne Pace represents the science of a virus and the art of connection and is featured on the cover of this edition of Connections. Lastly, the section "Translations" contains Houssem Ben Lazreg's translation of one of Tamim Al Bargouthi's poems and his commentary on the process of translating a Ghazal.

Together, the authors envision and create a myriad of connections. I believe that I speak on behalf of the editorial team when I say that we hope you continue to find connections with your family, friends, colleagues, and academic, religious, linguistic, and cultural communities.

Sincerely,

Malou Brouwer

Malou Brouwer, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta

IN THIS ISSUE

A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Transnational and Comparative Literature

Media and Culture

Connecting During Covid-19

Creative Works

Translations

The Indian, The Mestizo, and The Impostor: The Fictionality of Race in Inca Garcilaso de la Vega

Manuel Garzon[1]

[1] Hispanic Languages and Literatures, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, United States

E-mail: mag296@pitt.edu

Abstract

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega is perhaps one of the most racially conscious authors of early modernity. In fact, he is the first American-born author to self-identify as a direct descendant of a colonized indigenous nation. As such, Inca Garcilaso understood well the epistemic implications of his biracial and bicultural status (his *mestizo* condition). Most literary critics have analyzed the incessant reiteration of his *mestizaje* throughout his texts as a way of countering the racist colonial labels imposed on Amerindians and their descendants. However, there is a complex and somewhat contradictory usage of racial terminology throughout his works. Sometimes Garcilaso claims to be a *mestizo*, sometimes an Indian, and at times he seems to only highlight his Spanish heritage, depending on the situation. In this sense, Inca Garcilaso's depiction of his authorial persona is not a straightforward decolonial counter-discourse. Instead, I argue that the Inca Garcilaso that appears in his texts is a fictional author whose deliberately inconsistent use of the different racial labels amounts to a modern decolonial strategy: a critique that ironizes the traditional meaning of racial labels, thus destabilizing their epistemic status. In this paper, I aim to flesh out Garcilaso's complex decolonial strategy, through a literary reading of his authorial persona.

Keywords: Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Decolonial studies, Colonial studies, Indigenous studies

Introduction

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega is perhaps one of the most racially conscious authors of early modernity. In fact, he is the first American-born author and best-seller to self-identify as a direct descendant of a colonized indigenous nation. Inca Garcilaso was the son of an Inca princess (Chimpu Ocllo) and of a Spanish conquistador (Captain Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega). Throughout his books, he wastes no opportunity to mention his both biracial and bicultural condition. He always reminds his readers that he spent his childhood and adolescence in Cuzco, where he learned the Inca ways, customs, and language, and later moved to Spain, where he fought in Phillip II's army, in the Rebellion of Alpujarras, and finally established himself in the cities of Córdoba and Montilla close to his paternal family. In light of these events, it is not surprising that most of his scholarship has been rightfully concerned with the topic of his *mestizaje* and biculturalism.[1] Most of Garcilaso's critics see his *mestizaje* as a way to unravel key elements of his intellectual production. Some say that El Inca represents a merger of two different worldviews which he transforms into a new polyphonic writing style (Mazzotti 1996), while others label him as a translator of the "*incario*"[2] into the Spanish conceptual scheme (López-Baralt 2011, Pupo-Walker 1984, Zamora, 1988, Jákfalvi-Leiva 2016, Fernández 2016, Castro-Klarén 2016), thus preserving a lost Andean world within the new Spanish epistemological order (López-Baralt 2011). In short, Garcilaso has been placed at the intersection of a Venn diagram. In other words, he has been studied as a merger, translator, and mediator between two cultures.

[1] As it would become clearer in the article, Mestizaje refers to a phenomenon of cultural and ethnic miscegenation where mestizos are individuals are regarded as the product of relationships outside the European conventions: progeny out of wedlock, of Spaniards with non-Spaniards, of Christians with non-Christians.

[2] The history and socio-political structure of the Incan Empire.

Nevertheless, a curious fact about the scholarly focus on Garcilaso's *mestizaje* is how little attention has been paid to his incessant, almost obsessive, reiteration of it. His insistence on his bicultural heritage throughout the texts can, at times, be an overwhelming experience. Not only does he make explicit his dual ancestry in all his prologues, proems and dedications, but he also finds a way to invoke his Andean and/or Spanish origins as tool to authenticate his historical explanations and as an authoritative place from which he develops sardonic philosophical arguments. For instance, in *Comentarios reales de los incas* (1609), Garcilaso relies heavily on having spent his childhood with his Indigenous mother's family in Cuzco to claim the necessary authority (linguistic, cultural etc.) to correct Spanish historians about their version of Inca history, while craftily concealing his "critique" of what Spanish historians got wrong or missed under the less threatening title of "comentarios". Analogously, in *Historia general del Perú* (1616), Inca Garcilaso puts a lot of emphasis on his father's Spanish noble lineage as he addresses the intricacies of the tumultuous civil wars being waged among conquistadors in the early days of the Peruvian viceroyalty. Furthermore, the repetition of his Andean and Spanish backgrounds in several key passages of his works aims to counter various conceptual misconceptions that Europeans had of Amerindians and their descendants. In essence, unraveling the intricacies of Garcilaso's self-fashioning regarding his *mestizaje* is crucial to understanding the construction of his authorial authority which he creates by employing symbols of exotic appeal.[3]

Considering these facts, my objective here is to delve into the meaning behind the repeated mention of his bicultural status, and thus perform a new reading of the autobiographical figure of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega as a product of his own literary creation, i.e., as a meticulously crafted literary character whose identity as an authorial figure depends on the reiteration (and sometimes suppression) of certain traits and aspects of his material life. Specifically, I will analyze how Inca Garcilaso constructs a complex and paradoxical literary persona, who sometimes describes himself as an Indian, sometimes as a *mestizo*, and at times overemphasizes his Iberian heritage, depending on the context. I argue that this literary persona enables Inca Garcilaso to question and destabilize the kind of imposture that racial labels usually bear. I also argue that this literary persona provides the necessary material to produce novel forms of fiction that work as decolonial tools in the struggle of Amerindians against European coloniality. In this sense, I suggest that Inca Garcilaso pioneers a form of conceiving of the modern author as an imaginary (not to be confused with unreal) character, who, in virtue of his fictional nature, can question the politics of identity in ways never available for racialized people like him. So, guiding this paper are the following questions: What constitutes a fictional author? To what extent is the Inca Garcilaso a fictional character? How does he use the racial labels imposed on him as well as his dual cultural heritage to create a literary version of himself? What sort of mestizaje did he develop? In what sense does the fictional construction of a *mestizo* character advance a critical understanding of the term?

To answer these questions, I will divide this paper into three parts. First, I will consider the idea of a fictional author in the sixteenth-century Hispanic context, its literary function, and its political implications. Second, I will show how Inca Garcilaso uses his own life experience and biography to create a literary persona throughout his texts. Third, I will address the ways in which the literary version of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega works as a conceptual tool for a decolonial critique of: i) colonial labels imposed on Amerindians, ii) sixteenth-century symbols of authorial (literary) authority, and iii) contesting the lines separating historiographical and literary discourses.

1. The author as a fictional character

Although my reading of the historical figure of the Inca Garcilaso as a fictional author is new, the construction of fictional authors during the sixteenth century is not. In fact, the fictionalization of the authorial figure was an emergent form of literary subjectivity concomitant with the modernization of European prose. One of the first Spanish (and European) fictional authors, whose rhetoric aimed at resembling real speech, was Lázaro de Tormes, the author-protagonist of *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554). This book is an account (a letter) written in the first-person, where Lázaro (the author-protagonist) recounts his life and misfortunes. Although Lázaro's life events are all fictional, to the sixteenth-century reader, Lázaro's adventures must have seemed as real as any other event happening to the ordinary person. The occurrences told in *Lazarillo* were not the traditional literary adventures which the sixteenth-century reader was accustomed to read. They were the occurrences of the average beggar in the streets of Toledo or Seville. This semblance to reality was certainly a new thing since it did not correspond to what was usually thought to be literary narrative (fantastic tales). Here is where the novelty of modern fiction resides: ordinary events could also be fiction.

[3] As it will become clearer later, these symbols of exotic appeal refer to the subversive use of the colonizer's epistemic values. Inca Garcilaso would reappropriate the Spanish ideas about Indians in order to flip the script, thus affirming his authority on Andean culture and destabilizing the Eurocentric definition of the author.

Moreover, Lázaro's manner of speech had dropped the archaisms pertaining to chivalric romances and poetry, to unapologetically use the vernacular dialect of everyday life. This means that there was an epistemological dissonance between the language of truth and the language of fiction. *Lazarillo*'s use of the sixteenth-century Spanish vernacular marks a shift in the epistemic character of the fictional text. The language in which it is written seems to speak truths about the "real world," just as chronicles, histories, letters or memoires, describe the real world. This literary trick is one of the most salient indicators of modern fiction. For this reason, critics contend that Lazarillo is perhaps the first modern novel (Rico 14). The life of Lázaro de Tormes is but a fiction inspired by one of the most common and ordinary characters of sixteenth-century Spanish society, the *pícaro* (rogue or lowborn city boy).

The discourse of the modern novel is, in essence, an objectivist pretense. As Francisco Rico (1987) puts it, the modern novel is but a *superchería* (trickery or sham), because it pretends to present whatever it narrates as truthful and factual, while, in reality, it is but the product of the human imagination. In texts like *Lazarillo*, the fictionality of the real becomes even more apparent as the author betrays the objectivist pretense, precisely because of the first-person narrative style. Here, reality is narrated through the perspective of just one person. Such a literary discourse epitomizes the paradox of historical objectivism: even the most objective of accounts is, at the end, grounded in human subjectivity. This is how the authorial figure appears as a central pillar of the novel's imagined reality. The formulaic expression of the "I" (*yo*) operates as a rhetorical device that situates the text away from the objective measurements of a purely historiographical exercise, and closer to literary narrative. In a similar fashion, Inca Garcilaso uses the author-narrator formula to produce a comparable effect. The constant reminder and acknowledgement of his authorial presence throughout his texts gives an air of familiarity that makes the reader a participant of another story, the author's story.

Before continuing this analysis, it is important to note that I am not suggesting that Inca Garcilaso's autobiographical figure is an imaginary character (for neither is Lázaro de Tormes), nor am I suggesting that Inca Garcilaso's texts are all a form of the modern novel. The purpose of this article is to flesh out the literary construction of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega as a fictional authorial figure, i.e., as a literary subject. This means that I will focus on the ways certain features of the flesh and bone Inca Garcilaso—especially racial and cultural ones—are deliberately altered to produce a specific effect in the author's reality. Namely, the creation of an author whose authority cannot be questioned, whose personal story allows him to carve out his own special place among sixteenth-century writers, and whose literary demeanor delivers a powerful critique of sixteenth-century intellectuality. As such, the elements constituting his literary persona are not mere echoes of Garcilaso's real-life; they are instead meticulously devised strategies that operate as markers of authority as well as spaces for plot composition, where the reader finds a strong critique of Spanish coloniality. Such decolonial critique consists in the playful use of the biases and preconceptions that Spaniards had of racialized individuals in the creation of Inca Garcilaos's literary persona.[4] Such fictional authorial figure is, in essence, an irony that aims at deconstructing the labels imposed on Amerindians and their descendants.

At the moment of creating his literary persona, Inca Garcilaso knew too well that he was an exotic figure. Garcilaso's cultural hybridity clearly distinguished him from the rest of European intellectuals before him. Such cultural and ethnic peculiarity enabled his texts to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers. Not only were regular European readers captured by the exotic novelty, but also creole patricians and the Indigenous elite found in his works a message that directly spoke to them (Lamana 42; Guibovich-Pérez 132-33). Considering the appeal of a racialized individual, Inca Garcilaso emphasizes his bicultural condition at the opening of all of his works. From the first proem (in his translation of León Hebreo's *Dialoghi*, 1502), where he mentions both his double noble lineage—his father was a hidalgo and his mother an Inca princess—as well as his exotic condition, to his historiographical version of Inca history (*Comentarios reales*, 1609), where he makes several mentions of his own family and upbringing; Inca Garcilaso appears to always make the most out of his "exotic" life-story. Inca Garcilaso did not intend to leave the reception of his life story to chance. He was decisively in control of the kind of literary character he wanted to present. He was determined to be the creator and active narrator of his own story.

The first stage of this process of literary creation is, of course, drawing a distinction between the real or material Garcilaso and the literary one, as this will enable us to understand how the literary character came to be. In the

[4] I owe the clarity of these ideas to long fruitful conversations with my mentor, Gonzalo Lamana (2019). In his most recent book, *How "Indians" Think*, Lamana highlights the performativity of Indigeneity as a subversive strategy to counter claims of indigenous cognitive inferiority. Based on the notion of the trickster, Lamana signals Inca Garcilaso's sense of doubleness or ironic double vision (where Garcilaso anticipates what Spaniards think about himself and, thus, confirms their ideas only to hide his criticism in them) as the primary tool for a surreptitious decolonial critique.

following section I will show that, although Garcilaso's "real" life episodes are present throughout his texts, they are strategically arranged (and sometimes transformed) to put forth a particular narrative. In short, I will explore how Garcilaso utilizes his own personal reality to transform it into literature.

2. From Gómez Suárez de Figueroa to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega

Behind Inca Garcilaso de la Vega there is another name, his baptismal name: Gómez Suárez de Figueroa. Born to an Inca Princess and a Spanish conquistador in 1539, Gómez Suárez spent his early years in Cuzco amid waves of civil strife and political unrest. Despite these turbulent times, the young *mestizo* lived a tranquil and somewhat privileged childhood, due to his parents' high social status. His mother, Ñusta Isabela Suárez Chimpu Ocllo, was first cousin to Huáscar Inca and Atahualpa Inca, the last two Inca rulers. Through her bloodline, he was also a member of his great grandfather 's (Inca Tupac Yupanqui, the eleventh Inca ruler) *panaqa*.[5] Hence, his maternal family enjoyed a residual sphere of influence within the remaining cultural elite of the Incas. His father, captain Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega y Vargas, was the descendant of a long aristocratic line linked to the houses of Feria and Valdesvilla. These nobiliary credentials, as well as a small fortune, granted the young Gómez a better education than the rest of his Peruvian contemporaries. Gómez Suárez's early teaching was entrusted to Juan de Alcobaza, and later to Juan de Cuéllar, whose reputation and passion for pedagogy was reflected in his desire to see his pupils at the University of Salamanca, as Garcilaso would recall later in his *Comentarios* (*Comentarios*, Part I, Book II, Chapter XI).

However, his high-born ancestry was tinged by the fact that he was an illegitimate child. In the deeply Catholic Spanish society, Gómez Suárez was not entitled to the same privileges enjoyed by legitimate offspring. This condition had a profound impact on Suárez de Figueroa's life and intellectual formation. According to a number of testimonies recorded by biographers (Porras-Barrenechea 1955, Varner, 1968, Miró Quesada 1973, Durand 1988), Gómez had to face several setbacks, because of his bastardy. These incidents, which include being denied his father's inheritance, would eventually force him to come to terms with his own reality as a somewhat marginalized individual. When his father died in 1559, young Gómez Suárez was left unprotected in a rather hostile society against *mestizos*. He quickly understood that being both a bastard and a *mestizo* were not very different things. Since most *mestizos* were the product of relationships outside wedlock, the Catholic societal conventions in the Spanish Empire marginalized individuals like him. For individuals like Gómez Suárez, the law and societal conventions tended to work against their favor. Hence, both as an ethnic *mestizo* and illegitimate child (which at the end were similar things), Gómez Suárez was not entitled to inherit his father's fortune, and neither was he able to exercise public offices stipulated by the royal decrees of 1555 (Konetzke, 1946).

Soon after his father's death, Gómez Suárez traveled to Spain to finish his education, and meet his paternal side of the family. Though he was able to conclude his studies, meeting his paternal family did not prove to be a joyous occasion. According to biographers, young Gómez Suárez first arrived to his uncle's house in Córdoba, he received a rather cold welcome. It was no secret that this unenthusiastic family reception was caused by his illegitimate status and racial condition (Varner 1968). His paternal family, were part of the noble household of Vargas, which had a long-established observance of blood purity laws in the Iberian Peninsula. Such laws were primarily conceived to deter non-Christians, and by extension, non-Spaniards, from prominent positions in Spanish religious and governmental institutions. The *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* of the early fifteenth century originally targeted Jews and new converts to disqualified them for public office. Later, in 1492 the Catholic monarchs, Isabel I and Ferdinand II, issued a series of decrees that hardened the purity of blood rationale, by which both Jews and Muslims were forced to convert or be expelled from the peninsula. Even the new converts faced discrimination, as they required proof of at least four generations of Christian ancestry to aspire to a position in political or religious institutions.

This racist rationale was not new to Gómez Suárez. Although the observance of blood purity laws was perhaps stronger in Iberia, such juridical racism made its way into a series of royal decrees in the New World during the last years of Charles V reign (1549-1555). These New World decrees aimed at reducing the number of *mestizos* in political and religious institutions in the colonies. Ultimately, the world Gómez Suárez left in Spanish America was no different from the one he encountered in Spain. In the peninsula, the young *mestizo* could observe how highly intertwined Iberian and New World racial logic were and how Iberian racist foundations informed the constraints and restrictions imposed against *mestizos* back at home. Racial prejudice was then a persistent and manifest issue that

[5] A *panaqa* was an Incan filial group formed by the descendants of a monarch, only excluding the next monarch's family.

undoubtedly marked Gómez Suárez's life on both sides of the Atlantic.

Gómez Suárez's negative experiences with the Spanish *sistema de castas* (colonial racial caste system) reached a turning-point in 1562. In that year, Gómez Suárez arrived at the Royal Court in Madrid to seek recognition as his father's rightful heir. He asked for the restitution of his father's *encomienda*[6], as well as of his mother's patrimony (Varner, 1968). Both petitions were rejected. In *Historia general del Peru* (1616), Garcilaso comments on these events, arguing that they were the result of a vicious defamatory campaign against his father. Such campaign —he argued— was based on allegations concerning his father's participation in Gonzalo Pizarro's rebellion against the crown's government in Peru (1544-1548). He recounts that, after the jurors were already convinced of the proof he presented, the Court's prosecutor, Lincenciado Lope García de Castro, interrupted to dismiss his case, based on the admonishment that he should not have requested any favors from the king at all, given the fact that his father had been a traitor, a rebel in the battle of Huarina (Durand, 1976, 1988; Miró-Quesada, 1948).

Garcilaso denied such allegations, claiming that they were the product of misinformation. He argues that Spanish historians had rendered a corrupt account of his father's participation in the war, due to their lack of knowledge of the real intricacies of the battle. The truth —as told by Garcilaso in *Historia general del Perú*—was that his father simply lent his horse to a friend, who happened to be Gonzalo Pizarro himself, and who ultimately won the battle. Garcilaso thus says that even though his father used to be Pizarro's friend, he was not actively involved in the battle. At any rate, Garcilaso emphasizes it was after García de Castro's intervention, that the court dismissed his case. In light of these remarks, Garcilaso proceeds to tell the reader that he decided to rest his case, renounce any pretentions to his father's inheritance, and finally find solace in living a quiet and intellectually enlightened life:

> no me fue possible volver a la corte, sino acogerme a los rincones de la soledad y la pobreza, donde paso una vida quieta y pacífica, como hombre *desengañado* y despedido de este mundo y de sus mudanzas, sin pretender cosa de él, porque ya no hay para qué (*Historia general*, Book V, Chp. XXIII).

The relevance of this passage resides in the transformation that takes place. In the passage, former Gómez Suárez, who is now transformed into the author Inca Garcilaso, remembers the moment when he decided to abandon the preoccupations and aspirations of his previous life to become a different man. Inca Garcilaso evokes the occasion of his literary birthing when his signature would no longer be Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, but Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca. In the text, Garcilaso uses the word "*desengañado*" as a way of highlighting this rite of passage. The famous concept of *desengaño barroco* (Baroque disillusionment or enlightenment) acquires here full significance. It marks the realization of a truth that, even though it might be difficult and inconvenient, brings about a special knowledge and awareness of one's relationship with the world. In this case, Gómez Suárez realizes that the world is but a stage, where one's performance is based on inherited prejudices and misconceptions. Moreover, he realizes that identity is something that exceeds the individual: it is conferred, imposed, and removable. Therefore, Garcilaso reads the words of Lope García de Castro, as another way in which the system has denied his legitimate identity. Back in Peru it was denied because of his bastardy, and now, in Spain, it was denied by stripping his father of any honorable identity to give. Therefore, when the impossibility of claiming his father's identity finally hit him, Garcilaso, then as Gómez Suárez, renounced any old pretension of claiming a legitimate identity through the system (i.e., through legal terms), to instead live a life of solitude and erudition as a new man.

According to critics and biographers (Miró Quesada 1973, Durand 1988), it was after the year of 1562 that the signature of Gómez Suárez disappeared to be replaced by the name of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. However, if we are to take seriously Garcilaso's testimony in the passage cited above, the name choice seems a rather odd choice. Changing his name to that of his father (i.e., Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega) seems to be a contradiction given the fact he was trying to move on from his past. i.e., move on from any legal pretensions regarding his father's patrimony. It thus is ironic that Garcilaso de la Vega is part or half of his chosen name. In this sense, the Madrid incident described above seems to be more of a poetic episode aimed to launch his literary career, rather than a reaction to the legal "*desengaño*" he experienced.

The reason to believe that this is the case is that, in reality, Gómez Suárez's petitions did not have a strong chance of succeeding at court in Madrid. Furthermore, it would be stranger to believe that he had hopes at all for his case. First, on the issue of the restitution of his mother's patrimony, she had none of her own. Anything she had, according to Varner (1968), Gómez Suárez already

[6] A grant by the crown, to a Spaniard, of a specified number of Indians for work and extraction of tribute.

possessed: i.e., a coca plantation in Havisca, which his father had conferred to him, to his cousin, and to his mother, while he was still alive. Had she had any other properties after marrying Juan del Pedroche, it was clear that Gómez Suárez could not inherit any of them. Second, he did not possess any rights over his father's *encomienda*, since the law unambiguously stated that *encomiendas* were only conferred to the legitimate offspring of an *encomendero*. From a juridical point of view, it becomes apparent that Gómez Suárez's trip to Madrid was a futile enterprise. This becomes clearer when Garcilaso took the decision to join the crown's army to combat in the Rebellion of the Alpujarras (1568-1571), as a way to make up for his father's poor reputation amongst the Spanish establishment. In light of these observations, why were the events in Madrid important at all in Garcilaso's texts?

As I have been hinting, to answer this question one should look at the Madrid affair at a symbolic level. This means separating Gómez Suárez's life from that of the new literary persona of Inca Garcilaso. For the former, one could only speculate the real importance of the issue. For the latter, the occurrences in Madrid were repackaged as a symbolic moment, a literary birth. As records show, after 1563, the Peruvian *mestizo* known as Gómez Suárez de Figueroa officially changed his name to Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. He chose to be called after his father, Captain Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega. With this name, former Gómez Suárez de Figueroa started signing all of his works, thus rebranding himself as his father's legitimate heir. Although this new persona seems to have real correspondence with the real-life *mestizo*, one should observe that, ultimately, Inca Garcilaso does not conform completely to reality. This new character is not an exact copy of Gómez Suárez's, but is rather the magnification of some of his features. These features, carefully picked and meticulously curated, are developed into strong and vibrant literary qualities, similar to those of the literary characters of Lázaro in *Lazarillo*, *Don Quixote*, or *El Buscón*. All these characters represent a new wave of literary personages that, in modern times, resonate with the growing number of non-aristocratic readers. The difference is that Garcilaso is not a *pícaro*, a member of the bourgeois, or a mad hidalgo, but a *mestizo*. This is why Garcilaso's first act is choosing a name appropriate to his mixed heritage. Hence, he chooses his father's name, Garcilaso de la Vega, with the addition of the title of Inca.

Inca Garcilaso's name choice is clearly ironic for two reasons. First, choosing his father's name seems a blatant contradiction to his previous pledge to let go of any pretentions to reclaim his father's identity and patrimony. Second, adding the title of Inca to his name could be read as both an act of defiance against the rigid aristocratic order, and as a mockery. On the one hand, "Inca" is a defiant label because it designates both an inferior race "the Indians" as well as nobility within the Inca codes. This double entendre seems to make up for Garcilaso's impossibility of aspiring to Spanish nobility by reaffirming his mother's noble background.[7] On the other hand, "Inca" is also a mockery precisely because it is a marker of difference from the Spanish pure blood ideal mentioned before. In sum, Garcilaso's act of rebranding himself as a literary character marks the beginning of a number of rhetorical games aiming at disabusing the reader of a treacherous and deceitful reality. In Garcilaso's case, the reality he chooses to play with is the New World colonial reality.

One of the key moments in Garcilaso's literary journey happens in 1590 with *La traduzión del indio de los tres diálogos de amor de León Hebreo*. This was the first published work by an indigenous *mestizo* from the Americas. In one of its prefaces, the dedication to king Phillip II, the former Gómez Suárez de Figueroa formally introduced his fictional persona, a literary character created from his very own reality. The dedication functions as an instance to counter the juridical episode in Madrid. If we recall, the affair consisted of an audience where Gómez Suárez plead to his Majesty's court for the restitutions of his father's patrimony ("*pidiendo yo mercedes a su majestad*"). The dedication is, paradoxically, a parallel deposition, as if Garcilaso were recreating the court trial in Madrid. As such, he creates a parallel: in Madrid Gómez Suárez was trying to unsuccessfully prove his lineage before the court (i.e., his worthiness as a member of Spanish society); in *La traduzión*, Garcilaso is trying to exalt the value and merit of his translation, i.e., his worthiness as an intellectual.

The irony of dedicating his first work to the king, after he swore to abandon any pretense of proving again his family lineage is not only proof of the fictional character of the author, but it is also a warning to the reader, for they will encounter several other instances where nothing seems to be as declared. In this sense, this autobiographical character reshapes many of the features of Gómez Suárez's life in order to create a solid literary persona: Inca Garcilaso, the Amerindian intellectual of aristocratic parentage. In every single one of his works, Inca Garcilaso makes sure to present himself as such. There is a constant repetition of his ethnic and ancestral background, alongside a masterful display of historical, philosophical and philological knowledge. This combination of factors inaugurates the metatextual frame that interconnects all of his works. As such, each individual text

[7] It also shows how much care Inca Garcilaso puts into choosing his name as also uses the broader more readily recognizable form (to Spanish readers) "Inca" as opposed to his mother's actual Indigenous last name.

not only bears its own particular meaning or purpose (be it literary, historical, philosophical, or philological), but also forms part of a bigger puzzle. The reader of Inca Garcilaso's opera witnesses a fictional life narrative unfolding before their eyes.

In the proems to *La traduzión* –especially in the dedication to king Philip II–, Inca Garcilaso introduces himself as a natural high-born of the city of Cuzco and former captain of His Majesty's armies in the Alpujarras. These two features of Gómez Suárez's life emblazon the ethnic and social character of Garcilaso, the author. The confluence of his aristocratic and mix-breed *mestizo* background not only speaks of his exoticism, but also of a changing world. Sixteenth-century Spain, and Europe in general, witnessed the emergence of new subjects in the political and social arena: subjects with characteristics like those of Garcilaso. More and more people of different backgrounds began to have a public presence in politics, or in the arts. In *Lazarillo*, *pícaros* roamed the streets of Seville; in *Don Quixote*, shopkeepers and students begin to have more prominence and agency. Similarly, Indians and low-born conquistadors also appear in Spain's general imaginary through chronicles and histories. Thus, not only was the arrival to America a game changer for the emerging European states—especially for Spain—but it also produced substantial changes in all fronts, including a new literary tradition that reflected the growing number of these new modern subjectivities.

With the creation of his literary persona, Inca Garcilaso intends to shed light on the tensions, problems and dilemmas of the modern subject. This Spanish modern subjectivity was diverse. It consisted of a plethora of subjects, a large number of them being products of racial and religious marginalization. For New World subjectivities in particular, social identity was a concept marked by a caste system with deep racist undertones. But unlike today's conceptions of race and racism, sixteenth-century racial thought was deeply rooted in religious orthodoxy and social pedigree conventions, rather than in phenotype. Such conventions were the product of Spain's historical struggle to consolidate a national state around Catholic orthodoxy (Padgen *Conquest*, 164).

As such, in Hispanic Iberia, non-Christian groups were constantly ostracized, and deemed inferior to Christians. Moreover, the statutes of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) which required at least two generations of Christian ancestry to be considered a "real" Christian, added another layer of difficulty to social mobility. Hence, Jews, Moors, and new converts were doomed to either migrate or live a life of social and economic stagnation. After the *Reconquista* years (722 – 1492), there was rationalized prejudice against Jews and Moors distinctively characterized by a form or religious ideology (Padgen *Conquest*, 235). From the fifteenth century onwards, the legal and cultural emphasis of *limpieza de sangre* made Spaniards particularly conscious of racial difference in terms of social behaviors and parental lineage. In consequence, customs (forms of prayer, eating habits, and even personal hygiene) and genealogical trees were highly observed as a method of classifying individuals. The social groups resulting from these racial considerations were called *castas*. In the peninsula, this term was reserved for Moors, Jews or former Jews, but later it would also encompass the different forms of miscegenation in the Americas. So, in the New World, Spanish intellectuals pursued highly intricate and complex arguments to debate the right kind of Indian inferiority, and thus support the Spanish right for conquest, all while preserving the consistency of the Catholic dogma, as well as the divine right of the monarchy to govern. The formulaic essence of these racial considerations made its way across the Atlantic, thus resulting in similar standard prescriptions and prejudices against natives, as well as against *mestizos*. It should be noted, however, that theological and philosophical disquisitions were a rich ground for nuanced debate about the nature of native peoples. These are precisely the issues that Inca Garcilaso tackles with ironic genius in the presentation of his racialized literary persona.

3. Subverting racial labels of coloniality

3.1 Inca Garcilaso, the Indian

In the New World, the Indian question was undoubtedly a hot topic. By the late sixteenth century there was already general prejudice among Spaniards about the native's cognitive inferiority[8]. Such inferiority was rooted more in the Spanish need to justify the missionary enterprise than in their already biased perception. Let's remember that Spain's main ideological concern was the defense and expansion of its self-appointed role as guardian of Christendom and its universal mission to expand the realms of Christianity (Padgen *Conquest*, 238). Thus, the consequences overseas resulted in a theoretical obsession over the issue of the evangelization of the Amerindian other. A well-written missionary agenda for Christian conversion gave purpose to the conquest and provided an infallible justification to

[8] For a detailed explanation of the different arguments about the nature of Indians, see Anthony Padgen's *Dispossessing the Barbarian: the language of Spanish Thomism and the debate about the property of rights of the American Indians* (1990); and *The Peopling of the World: ethnos, race, and empire in the early modern world* (2009).

Spanish presence in the Americas, and thus to further promote a full colonization enterprise. In this sense, the Spanish evangelizing agenda was paramount for religious and political purposes (238-39). Moreover, since legal writing defined the relationship between the Spanish state and its subjects, including *criollos* (Spaniards born in the Americas) and Indians, the theorization of a consistent and sound theory about the Indian's spiritual (cognitive) nature (inferiority) was a fundamental issue for Imperial Spain[9]. As such, conversion was, at least in paper, the fundamental objective of Spanish enterprise in the Americas.

However, as it would be expected for any political issue of such an importance, there was heated debate regarding the best method for conversion. There were in particular two forms of thinking about the Spanish religious enterprise in the Americas known as the first and second waves of evangelization. These represented two opposing ways of conceiving the conversion process, of explaining the natives' cognitive nature, and how to proceed in the ministry of the faith. In spite of the differences between the first and second waves of evangelization, there was an underlying idea: if Indians were to be guided and converted to Christianity, they had to be ignorant. Their ignorance was explained as a form of blindness to truth, both worldly and spiritual. The first wave of evangelization was associated with Bartolomé de las Casas and represented a more benign approach to this issue. For its proponents, Indians were thought of as unguided children, who, even without signs of wickedness in themselves, were still incapable of fully grasping the true meaning of God's divine plan for men. The second wave of evangelization was associated with José de Acosta and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, and often recommended the use of institutionalized violence for conversion. For its proponents, the native's mental deficiency was regarded in conjunction with devilish and wicked practices, because Indians, as ignorant peoples, were easily deceived and prone to act under the influence of dark forces. This conception thus resorted to violence to set an example and effectively extirpate wickedness from the natives' souls.

Whatever the approach, the Indian's cognitive deficiency resulted in the natives acting wrongly, deviating from the true faith, and ultimately condemning their whole progeny to hell. In essence, Indians lacked the cognitive ability to discern what was real, what was true, and what was good (Lamana, 87). Furthermore, both evangelization ideas pinpointed another crucial element of the natives' intellectual deficiency: Indians were not only ignorant of these divine truths, but were also ignorant of their own ignorance. Therefore, the impossibility of recognizing their own cognitive deficiency put the natives in desperate need for external guidance and salvation. These arguments were used as justification for the Spanish political conquest, and to a large degree defined the nature of their presence in the New World as a whole. This is why Garcilaso's decision to portray himself as an Indian and intellectual directly questioned the Spanish belief in their own epistemological superiority. The indication that an Indian could also be a writer (a job mainly reserved for Spanish aristocrats and clerics) purports to a radical dichotomy aiming at dismantling the racist assumptions of Spanish evangelizers like Sepúlveda, Acosta and Las Casas. If there is an Indian who writes, there is an Indian who knows and is therefore capable of governing himself without any external assistance. Through this literary maneuver, Inca Garcilaso contradicts the Eurocentric narrative of Indian inferiority.

What is interesting about Garcilaso's criticism is the way he delivers it. The Indian question was certainly a delicate issue. A direct rebuttal to the idea of Spanish superiority ran the risk of suppression and censorship. In consequence, Garcilaso's critique needed to be performative, rather than a direct logical exposition. This is why he continuously reminds his readership of the things that an Indian *cannot do*, all while doing what he had just claimed an Indian could not do (Lamana, 86). One of the most telling examples of this performative exercise appears at the beginning of *Comentarios* (1609) when introducing the complex topic of post-Columbian cartography (i.e., the explanation of why there is a New World, which had not been accounted for before). Garcilaso warns that he will not engage in this topic, because, as an Indian, he cannot aspire to deal with such complex matters.

> Mas porque no es aqueste mi principal intento *ni las fuerzas de un indio pueden presumir tanto*, y también porque la experiencia, después que se descubrió lo que llaman Nuevo Mundo nos ha desengañado de la mayor parte de estas dudas, pasaremos brevemente por ellas, por ir a otra parte, a cuyos términos finales temo no puedo llegar. (*Comentarios*, Book I, Chapter I).

However, a few pages later he ends up extensively talking about it anyways. He engages in a detailed explanation about the origins of the New-World and Old-World division, and even goes as far as to contradict those who believe in such a division:

[9] The Indian question was a way of describing the Spanish need for categorization of Indians as humans capable of conversion (having souls), but in need of constant guidance and mentorship due to their childlike nature, if not correction for unruled behavior. Intellectuals thus quarreled over definitions and compatibility with the scriptures.

> Se podrá afirmar que no hay más que un mundo, y aunque llamamos Mundo Viejo y Mundo Nuevo, es por haberse descubierto aquél nuevamente para nosotros, y no porque sea dos, sino uno. Y a los que todavía imaginaren que hay muchos mundos, no hay para qué responderles, sino que estén en sus heréticas imaginaciones hasta que en el infierno se desengañen dellas (*Comentarios*, Book I, Chapter I).

So, when Garcilaso uses the word *indio*, he tries to make a point regarding the Indian's cognitive abilities. Since the word *indio* functions as the generic for all New World natives and operates as a marker of distinction, in this case separating cultured Europeans from the savage ignorant, Inca Garcilaso's appropriation of the term contradicts the meaning given by Europeans, rendering it obsolete as an expression of epistemic disparagement. Such performative usage of the word was already found in the title of *La traduzión del indio de los tres Diálogos de amor*, where Garcilaso purposely uses the word *indio* after the word for translation (and a translation represents a highly difficult intellectual task, for it supposes the mastering of not only both an unknown language and the language of the reader but both their cultural repertoires), thus flagrantly defying the supposedly cognitive inferiority of Indians. Finally, the title "*la traduzión del indio*", a translation done by an Indian, produces a surprising and exotic effect on the reader, who recognizes the novelty of the work. With this, Garcilaso highlights the significance of his translation not only as an important contribution to Spanish philosophy (León Hebreo was indeed a respected philosopher), but also because of the fact that it is an Indian who translates it and, therefore engages in complex philosophical thinking, once again contradicting any notion of Amerindian cognitive inferiority.

3.2. Inca Garcilaso, the mestizo

The second label Garcilaso uses to describe himself was "*mestizo*". While the label Indian was used to refer to ignorance, and mental inability, *mestizo* did not necessarily have a specific cognitive signification. *Mestizo* was a term that, according to Margarita Zamora (2016), spoke about a generalized social attitude against miscegenation (176). Mestizo was a term whose theoretical underpinnings are found in the long-established *limpieza de sangre* conventions, whose primary objective was to keep non-Spaniards from positions of power (Nirenberg 76). In this sense, it was a social term designed for discrimination. In practice, this meant that *mestizos* were destined to hold lesser roles and opportunities than Spaniards. For Garcilaso, this meant that it was going to be more difficult to make his way into the world of letters.

The prejudices against *mestizos* resembled those already held against Jews and new converts for decades, in that they were all thought to have of impure blood. After the long Jewish and Muslim purge of the early fifteenth century in the Peninsula, positions in the sciences and letters were reserved for Spaniards and old Christians, in opposition to Jews and new converts, whom were thought of as corrupt and potentially seditious (Nirenberg 76, 83). Similarly, in the American colonies, the Spanish crown feared that *mestizos* could develop a sense of patriotism towards their native land that might lead to rebellion. *Mestizos* were considered congenitally impure and dangerous. Based on this notion, most *mestizos* were actively discriminated against, and thus were kept from holding any real power in colonial administration (Zamora 180, Levillier vol. III, 235-36). As a result, only Spaniards were admitted to important positions, including the role of official historian in any New World Viceroyalty. In Peru, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, a Spaniard and former soldier during Charles V reign, was entrusted with the writing of the history of the Incas and their downfall. No native or Inca descendant was given such a task. In light of this, Garcilaso sought to counter the negative image that Spaniards had of Amerindians and their descendants, by linking his unfavorable *mestizaje* with his more favorable and dual aristocratic background: his Inca royal ancestry from his mother's side as well as his father's Iberian pedigree. As such, the image of an aristocrat-*mestizo* aimed to challenge that of an impure, and potentially seditious image imposed on him regarding *mestizos*.

As noted before, the *mestizo*s' negative image was rooted in the fact that most of them were the product of illicit marriages. According to the sixteenth century jurist Solórzano y Pereyra (1575-1655): "porque lo más ordinario es que [los mestizos] nacen de adulterio o de otros ilícitos y punibles ayuntamientos" (Levillier vol. 1, 445). *Mestizos* were thus poorly regarded overall, precisely because of an association between the negative act of adultery and being an offspring thought to be inherently prone to vices and corruption. Years before Solórzano, Juan de Matienzo (1520-1579) had already referred to *mestizos* as restless and incorrigible delinquents. As such, these prejudices against *mestizos* prompted the idea that they posed a very real threat to the colonial order (Zamora 184). Thus, colonial jurors and administrators like Lope García de Castro, president of the Audiencia de Lima, warned against possible *mestizo* insurrection and civil unrest in a letter to the king in 1567:

> ay tantos mestizos en estos rreynos y nacen cada ora que es menester que vuestra magestad mande ymbiar cédula que ningún mestizo ni mulato pueda traer arma alguna ni traer arcabuz en su poder so pena de muerte porque esta es una gente que andando el tiempo ha de

> ser muy peligrosa y muy perniciosa en esta tierra (Levillier, vol. III, 235).

Furthermore, during the early colonial period *mestizos* lost their rights to inherit *encomiendas,* to hold positions in the Church or political administration, and to enlist in the military (Zamora 184). This latter point is of special interest to Garcilaso because, in the sixteenth century, writing was still tightly associated to military values. Poets, chroniclers, and historians often participated in European wars or New World expeditions. Their military and intellectual pursuits were driven by the fact that these were activities that conferred name and authority in the highly aristocratic society of the Spanish Empire. Let's remember that, by that time, the majority of non-religious literature was written from, for, or about aristocrats. From the famous *cantares de gesta* (where dukes, counts, and princes were depicted as military champions) to the New World chronicles (where conquistadors tried to win fame and noble credentials through their deeds), there was a strong connection between nobility, military virtues, and writing. This is why Garcilaso purposely highlights his years of military service in the Peninsula (*La traduzión*, proem), as a way of defying the military restrictions for *mestizos* in the colonies, and of negating their supposedly treacherous nature. Moreover, his military career is another way of accentuating the image of the *mestizo* aristocrat for himself. By bringing these elements together, Garcilaso destabilizes the association between the figure of the *mestizo* and the traditional figure of the author.

This association gives rise to a new understanding of the author's authority that is not grounded on traditional sixteenth-century conventions of noble lineage or blood purity. The fact that Inca Garcilaso did not have nobiliary credentials (or was denied such credentials), in addition to the fact that he was a *mestizo* and a bastard, contravenes the Castilian notion of the aristocratic author. So, when Garcilaso presents himself as character with aristocratic lineage, despite the fact that he was often denied his Spanish nobility, he is not simply trying to contradict those who rejected his plea, but rather, he is highlighting the capricious nature regarding the social assumptions through which his nobility was denied. His insistence on claiming that he is both of noble descent and a *mestizo* erodes the epistemic foundations of the traditional definition of such terms (aristocrat and *mestizo*). This literary maneuver produces a powerful twofold effect.

On the one hand, Inca Garcilaso demonstrated that a *mestizo* could certainly partake in professions traditionally reserved for Spanish aristocrats, i.e., Garcilaso puts for the case that there is no real basis to claim what Indians or *mestizos* can or cannot do. Given that he was a *mestizo,* and thus one of the least expected people to be an author, Garcilaso's construction of his literary persona becomes a performative critique of the entire Spanish class and caste system. It exposed the flimsy and volatile notions upon which racial categories were constructed. For example, faced with the image of an aristocratic *mestizo,* the reader could only be left to wonder: could a person with such noble ancestry still be a *mestizo*? How could a mestizo form part of His Majesty's army in Spain but not in the colonies? Could a mestizo be trusted to tell the truth? As a term, *mestizo* was not ontologically defined, but rather subject to social prejudices coming from the already highly racialized Iberian society. Hence, the difficulties Inca Garcilaso experienced, when he called himself a *mestizo* and not an Indian, were not only a strategy to avoid racial prejudice, but also the result of the clash between economic and political forces. Every time El Inca talks about the impossibility of legally claiming his father's name, he is indeed alluding to the efforts of the traditional ruling class of excluding new modern subjects (and subjectivities) from positions of power that the elite Spanish enjoyed. This is why Inca Garcilaso chooses to transmit feelings of pride regarding his *mestizo* status: "*Mestizo… me llamo a boca llena y me honro con él*" (*Comentarios*, Book IX, Chap. XXXII).

On the other hand, Inca Garcilaso shows that an author is the author of their own life story. In other words, that author's authority does not depend only on external factors. The author creates their own epistemic authority. With this, Inca Garcilaso inaugurates, alongside other works and authors, a new form of writing: modern fiction, where everyday reality and history are also sources of literary fiction. This is why Inca Garcilaso, the author, can be both an Indian writer and a *mestizo* aristocratic, despite traditional opinions concerning the Indian's supposed inferiority and despite the negative decision of the Madrid court regarding his plea to claim his father's name and inheritance.

Conclusions

This paper has aimed to show how Inca Garcilaso constructs a literary version of himself as a fictional author who operates as an intertextual sign, as a metatextual character, and as a decolonial symbol. By introducing self-descriptions and narrating episodes of his life throughout different instances in his books, Inca Garcilaso, the author, connects all the elements of his opera and deconstructs traditional epistemological assumptions regarding literary authority. His life story contravenes deep-rooted Spanish beliefs about Indians, *mestizos,* and their descendants as ignorant and corrupt, and therefore incapable of writing. Furthermore, by embracing the paradoxical label (paradoxical for the Spaniards) of "Indian writer", Inca Garcilaso negated the idea that Indians lacked both the skill

and the authority to write (which thus meant that Indians were in fact capable of telling the truth, and, therefore, had intellectual authority). In short, his literary persona aimed to destabilize both the racist conceptions against Amerindians as well as traditional notions about authorship. By presenting himself as a an Indian and mestizo who writes and as an author whose primary concern is *not telling the truth* but *making his audience believe that he is telling the truth*, Inca Garcilaso calls attention to the fictionality of both race and intellectual authority: i) an Indian and a mestizo can write and tell the truth, ii) and an author does not necessarily have to tell the truth. Such literary artistry, inaugurates a form of writing where the quotidian and ordinary can be forms of fiction (e.g., the modern novel, utopian texts, metahistorical critiques, fictional autobiographies) that—in a colonial context—foster decolonial interventions against racist concepts and Eurocentric notions of epistemic authority.

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The Reception of Olivia Manning's *The Great Fortune* in Romania

Cristina Zimbroianu[1]

[1] Department of English Philology, Autonomous University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain & Department of English Philology, Applied Linguistics to Science and Technology, Technical University of Madrid

E-mails: cristina.zimbroianu@uam.es & cristina.zimbroianu@upm.es

Abstract

Manning's (1908-1980) novel *The Great Fortune* (1960) is the first Second World War novel of a six-part novel series titled *Fortunes of War.* Set in Bucharest, Romania, the novel portrays the historical events of the first year of the war (1939-1940) and how these affect Romanian society and the English community. The novel was well-received in England, and in 1987 was adapted to a television serial issued by BBC. In Romania, the response of the critics after the communist regime was rather harsh, accusing Manning of misinterpreting Romanian reality. Moreover, considering that Manning portrays not only the wealth of high society but also the misery and the political conflicts of those times with the fascist Guard in the background, it could be stated that in 1960 when the novel was reviewed by the censorship board, it might not have been positively evaluated. Therefore, this article analyses the reception of *The Great Fortune* in Romania during and after the Communist regime from a historical perspective focusing on critics and censors' responses to determine whether censorship influenced the reception of the novel in Romania. To undertake this study the censorship files located at the National Archives in Bucharest, as well as articles guarded in various libraries in Romania, were consulted.

Keywords: Manning, Second World War, Romania, Bucharest, censorship, criticism, history, reception studies

Olivia Manning (1908-1980) was an English writer of World War II who shared the wartime setting with other novelists such as Phyllis Bottom (1984-1963), both of whom wrote their works in English. Manning is known for a series of six novels written after the Second World War. These were later published as two trilogies, *The Balkan Trilogy* (1981) – *The Great Fortune* (1960), *The Spoilt City* (1962) and *Friends and Heroes* (1965) - and *The Levant Trilogy* (1982) – *The Danger Tree* (1977), *The Battle Lost and Won* (1978), and *The Sum of Things* (1980), all of them based on her war adventures. *The Great Fortune* opens the first trilogy and relates the experiences of the couple Harriet and Guy Pringle who travel to Bucharest, Romania where Guy must occupy a lecturer position at the University of Bucharest. The novel follows the historical events of 1939-1940, and how these affect the Romanian society and the English community in Bucharest. Manning describes historical incidences like the assassination of the Romanian prime minister, Armand Călinescu, by the Iron Guard, the fascist movement in Romania, the fall of Poland, the invasion of Denmark and Norway by Germany, the coup that replaces Gheorghe Argeșanu who exercised as prime minister for a short period, with Constantin Argetoianu, and the entrance of Italy into the war on the side of Germany.

It should be mentioned that *The Great Fortune* is a novel based on Manning's experiences in Romania, which was translated into Romanian seven years after the fall of the communist regime, in 1996 into *Marea Șansă* by Diana Stanciu. Manning stated that she did not have "a capacious imagination nor a feel for fantasy" and she insisted that she wrote entirely "out of experience" (Deirdre 2012, 24). *The Great Fortune* portrays some of Manning's experiences that would be controversial to Romanian readers, censors, and critics. Thus, Harriet and Guy Pringle represent Olivia Manning and her husband Reggie Smith. The newly married couple travels by train to Bucharest in 1939, where Guy is expected to teach English literature at the University of Bucharest. Guy had already spent a year there; so Romania was not unknown to him. Harriet, a young woman of twenty-four, discovers that Guy had a special relationship with one of his students, Sofia, and she must learn to cope with Sofia's presence as well as Guy's absence, as he is always absorbed in his work at the university or visiting his countless friends,

being such a sociable and extroverted character. In Bucharest, Harriet admires the architecture of the city, its parks, restaurants and foods, but she also meets the beggars, the poor peasants, and witnesses the protests of the Fascist Iron Guard, the murder of the prime minister Armand Călinescu, and the instability of Romania finally occupied by the Soviets.

English and American critics issued a series of positive reviews and monographs on Manning's war novels, such as *British Women Fiction Writers 1900-1960. Volume two* (1998) edited by Harold Bloom which encloses a series of reviews of Manning's work by writers including Anthony Burgess, Hollis Alpert, and Peter Straub. Manning's trilogies became famous in 1987 when BBC produced a television serial starring Kenneth Branagh as Guy and Emma Thompson as Harriet. In Romania, critics issued several reviews and articles, mainly after the communist regime, like "Olivia Manning și imaginea Bucureștiului" ("Olivia Manning and the Image of Bucharest") (1997) published by *Convorbiri literare* (*Literary Conversations*) or "O geloasă" ("A Jealous Woman") (1996) by Grete Tartler. Romanian critics debated the standpoint of Manning regarding Bucharest, but they did not focus on the reception of the novel during the communist dictatorship. Thus, this paper analyses the reception of *The Great Fortune* in Romania during and after the Communist regime from a context-activated perspective within the field of reception studies as presented by Janet Staiger (1992) in *Interpreting Film. Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, in order to determine whether censorship had a positive or negative effect on the reception of the novel. To undertake this study, the censorship files located at The National Archives of Romania in Bucharest and critical publications about Manning produced in Romania during and after the dictatorial regime were consulted.

According to Janet Staiger, the object of research of reception studies is the history of interactions between reader and texts (8). In *Interpreting Film. Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*, Staiger refers to "context-activated" theories that focus on contexts for reading experiences, and historical circumstances become central (35). In Romania, the political and historical events at the time when *The Great Fortune* was examined by the censorship board may have influenced the positive reception by the censors, as the evaluation of the novel was based on the framework set by the communist ideology. Without a positive response from the censors, the novel could not be translated or published. One of the classical approaches of context-activated theories is that of Hans Robert Jauss. The reception theory proposed by Jauss is a response to the Marxist and Formalist schools that deprived literature of "the dimension of its reception and influence" (Jauss 18). In both literary theories, the reader plays a limited role. As Jauss suggests, Marxist aesthetics treats the reader the same as the author, enquiring about his social position and endeavouring to recognize him in the structure of a specific society (18). On the other hand, the Formalist school presupposes that the reader has the theoretical training of a philologist who can distinguish and analyse artistic devices. None of these schools recognizes the authentic role of the reader as the genuine addressee "for whom literary work is primarily destined" (19). Considering these positions regarding the role of the reader, Jauss attempts to fill the gap of these two approaches focusing on the public as an active factor being itself an element that contributes to the creation of history (19).

Jauss's prime interest is not in the response of a single reader at a given time, but in the changing, interpretative and evaluative responses over a span of time enclosed in the concept "horizon of expectation" proposed by Jauss (25). Since later regular readers and literary critics have access to the literary text and to the published responses of former readers and scholars, then an evolving historical tradition develops critical interpretations and evaluations of a given literary work. This leads to a historical tradition of reception, which focuses on social, artistic, historical, and political factors. Thus, the historical reception of Manning's novel in Romania is given by the response of the censors, who decide whether the novel should reach or not the Romanian libraries and the response of the critics who had access to the novel. Nonetheless, to understand the responses of these readers, the historical context of Romania during the communist period should be studied, more precisely the functioning of the censorship apparatus.

After introducing the theoretical framework, this paper will proceed with the presentation of various aspects, such as the context of censorship in Romania, the reaction of censors to Manning's novel and the reaction of critics. The presentation of the context of censorship is necessary to understand the censors' evaluation of the novel, which was influenced by the laws imposed by the communist regime. From the analysis conducted, it appears that the original censorship of Manning's novel in 1960 had an impact on the reception of the work after the fall of the communist regime. Romanian critics published several reviews and articles in 1992 and 1996, several years after the communist regime, in which they seemed to focus on the same aspects as the censors, i.e., the poor peasants, the presence of beggars throughout Bucharest, the condescending view of the English on Romania and the situation of the Jews. These aspects are dealt with in the section entitled "The Critics' Reception of *The Great Fortune*". Furthermore, the section dedicated to the reception by the censors is divided into subsections in order to give a clear picture of the aspects that the censors

focused on, such as the representation of the Romanian people, the representation of the Jewish people, political references considered subversive, and the expectation of authenticity.

Since 1938, censorship in Romania was regulated by *Decret-lege privind introducerea stării de asediu* (the Decree-Law Regarding the Introduction of the Siege State). Article four of this law allowed the military authorities to "censor the press and any other printed material having the right to refrain the publishing of any newspaper or other publication, or the publishing of certain news and articles" (qtd. in Scurtu, Stănescu-Stanciu, Scurtu). Under this law, the institution that controlled censorship in 1945 was the *Cenzura Centrală Militară* (Central Military Censorship) aimed at supervising the Press Censorship Service, the Foreign Post Censorship Service and Interior Post Censorship Service. Therefore, Central Military Censorship was not a Soviet invention, as it functioned before the entrance of the Soviet troops in Romania (Corobca, *Instituţia cenzurii* 9). On January 1946, the Allied Control Commission (CAC) was created to introduce the communist regime. This institution participated in the foundation of the main soviet-communist institutions: the party, the *Securitatea* (security police), and the censorship system (Corobca, *Controlul cărţii* 12).

The CAC oversaw the book purging and the employment of "prior censorship" to control the post as well as the publishing of any material (Corobca, *Controlul cărţii* 15-17). On November 7, 1947, the CAC ceased to operate. On May 20, 1949, the Ministers Council issued Decree 214, which stipulated that the Directorate of Press and Printing of the former Minister of Arts and Information was transformed into the *Direcţia generală a presei şi a tipăriturilor* (the General Directorate of Press and Printing, GDPP), which was to function alongside the Ministers Council.[1] In 1949, Decree 218 established the basic functions of the GDPP as follows:

> General Direction of Press and Printing has the following attributions:
>
> a) Writes the Official Bulletin of the Romanian Popular Republic.
> b) Authorizes the publishing of any printed material such as newspapers, magazines, programmes, posters, etc., by taking measures regarding the accomplishment of the printing legal conditions.
> c) Authorizes the publishing of all books in the capital city and province.
> d) Authorizes the diffusion and selling of books, newspapers, and other printings, as well as the import and export of newspapers, books, and objects of art.
> e) Regulates the functioning conditions of libraries, book antiquarians, public libraries, newspapers deposit and books deposit.
> f) Writes and transmits to the press the official news of the Ministers Council and coordinate the activity of the press and ministries, departments, and public institutions. (File 6/1951)

The GDPP carried out its activities through seven departments, including the management of the press and periodical publications, and the management of book approval (Corobca, *Controlul cărţii* 89). In these departments, the *lectorii* (readers, as the censors were called) reviewed all national and international books, newspapers, and mail to prevent the intrusion of subversive material. It is not clear what exactly was considered subversive. As Corobca mentioned, censors did not have delimited criteria or principles to follow when developing their activity (*Controlul cărţii* 60). However, a report issued in January 1964 reveals that they used to disapprove aspects that went against Romanian history and people, the communist party, and the political relationships with the befriended countries (File 11/1964 4-6). They seemed to focus on issues related to the party and defended the Marxist-Leninist ideology claiming that the multiple tasks of the great responsibility they had to conduct could be accomplished only through the Marxist-Leninist learning. They also paid special attention to a profound permanent knowledge of the party's norms, its internal and external policy and the documents regarding Romania and the international working movement (File 11/1964 2).

In the late 1970s, the censorship system intended to be more tolerant. As a result, the *Comitetul pentru Presă şi Tipărituri* (Committee for Press and Printing, CPP), which had taken over the General Directorate for Press and Printing on 30 May 1975, was abolished by Decree 471 of December 24, 1977 (Deletant 145). However, this suppression was merely a strategy by the party to give the impression that it wanted to loosen its control over literature (145). Deletant explains that "in practice, publishing houses and newspapers were henceforth required to verify manuscripts and articles in-house and then forward them to readers, *lectori*, in the *Consiliul Culturii şi Educaţiei Socialiste* (Council of Culture and Socialist Education) for the official imprimatur" (145).

[1] See the fund of the Committee for Press and Printing, file number 10/1949 held at the Romanian National Archives. All translations from Romanian are my own unless otherwise stated.

Books that passed through the Censorship Department were either amended and approved or sent to the Secret and Documentary Book Collection *Fondul Special* (the Special Collection), established in 1951. The Special Collection is significant because many of the books that were destined to be burned were saved. The DGPP decided to establish a special book collection to contain the documentary and secret books that were considered dangerous. A note from the censor dated May 22, 1964 clearly states that Special Library would protect those "publications and books that are politically harmful because of their content" (File 10/1964). The access to these books was restricted. As the note mentions, "readers' access to the special collection is restrictive, being regulated by legal provisions, and the circulation of this material out of the special library is forbidden" (File 10/1964). Therefore, only some personalities of the regime had access to these works with a special permission, but they were never allowed to take the book out of the library and were allowed to consult it only briefly and always under the supervision of the librarian (Costea, Király, Radosav 262). The books of Special Collection were returned to the public in 1990, a year after the fall of the communist regime (143). Even today, one can see the letters *D* for documentary and *S* for secret on the registration cards of these books. Most of the registration cards were signed with a pencil, so these letters are barely legible, but some of the books were also marked with *D* and *S* on the first pages with a pen, so the letters are easy to identify today.

The Special Collection was included in the most important libraries of the country, such as the library of the Romanian Academy, the Central University Library of Bucharest or the university libraries of Cluj and Iaşi. These libraries could only keep one copy of each volume, the remaining copies were destroyed (Corobca, Controlul cărţii 81). The criteria by which the censors distributed the books in either the documentary or the secret collection are presented in a note from 1950-1955 on the instructions for book selection in the volume *Fond Secret. Fond "S" Special* by Costea, Király and Radosav. According to these instructions, books were divided into three libraries: forbidden, documentary, and open. Books published before 1914 were included in the open library. Books with anti-Marxist, chauvinist and anti-Semitic content were kept in the documentary library. The forbidden library guarded, among others, fascist and anti-communist books, translations of Anglo-American literature from 1920-1945 and works written by or about the royal family (Costea, Király, and Radosav 260-261).[2]

An important aspect concerning the censorship files kept in the National Archives in Bucharest and in the fund of the Committee for Press and Printing is that innumerable files were destroyed (Stănescu). Therefore, it is extremely difficult to find a single censorship report on a particular author, in this case Olivia Manning. If such a report is found, researchers can consider themselves extremely lucky. However, even if a censorship report cannot be located, the library of Romanian Academy has the registration cards of books registered during the communist period. These cards can reveal whether the books in question were introduced in Special Collection, because they are marked with the letters *D* or *S*, which means that they were forbidden to the reading public until 1990.

1. The Censors' Reception of *The Great Fortune*

1.1 Representation of the Romanian People

The novel reached the censors of the Import-Export Directorate in 1960. According to the censor, the book was an edition of 1959 published by Hope Leresche and Steele. However, this must be an error as the novel was first published in 1960, not 1959, by William Heinemann. The volume was to be delivered to the translator Alf Adania, thus the censor had to first review the book to authorize its translation by Adania (File 7/1960). The censor's report opens by mentioning that the action develops in Bucharest before the outbreak of the Second World War (File 7/1960). Guy's activity in Bucharest seems to be misinterpreted, as the censor points out that Guy is "a civil servant with dubious relationships at the British Embassy in Bucharest" (File 7/1960). This is not correct, as Guy is a university professor, but he relates more with the members of the British Council rather than with the embassy.

Regarding Harriet, the censor underlines that she critically observes everything around and reports it to the "civilised" Britain. "Civilised" is written in inverted commas, probably to emphasize the thought that Britain is more civilised and superior to Romania. Steinberg Theodore (2005) in *Twentieth-Century Epic Novels* states that the British in Manning's novel were aware of their superiority and their attitude towards the Romanians "can most nicely be described as condescending" (87). Their superiority, however, might have been influenced by the Balkan

[2]See also Zimbroianu Cristina "Evelyn Waugh's *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies* in Franco's Spain and Communist Romania". *Philologica Canariensia* 25 (2019), pp. 86-106.

stereotype transmitted mainly through European and American literature (Andrés Oliver 80). Maria Todorova (1997) in *Imagining the Balkans* explains that the Balkan stereotype stands for "filth, passivity, unreliability, misogyny, propensity for intrigue, insincerity, opportunism, laziness, superstitiousness, lethargy, sluggishness, inefficiency, incompetent, bureaucracy" (114). Most of these negative connotations are identified by Harriet in Romanian people, and the censor clearly highlights this aspect when mentioning that Harriet reports to the "civilised" Britain "on the one hand the poverty and misery, and, on the other the tasteless luxury, the typical dirt of the East and people stuffed with too much food" (File 7/1960).

The censor finds positive the fact that Manning realistically reveals the poor situation of the peasants. The peasants described are "starved, frightened figures, scrawny with pellagra, wandering about in a search for work or making a half-hearted attempt to beg"; and more descriptions of the sort can be found also on page 167 (File 7/1960). On this page, Manning refers to the shaking beggars who in the middle of the winter were half-naked: "the beggars were, as ever, half-naked, their bodies shaking fiercely in the bitter air" (Manning 167). Poor peasants and beggars have always been part of Bucharest. Peasants always suffered from poverty, and their situation worsened during the great depression when their harvest failed, and the prices of agricultural goods became unaffordable. As Roland Clark (2012) explains, "peasants with small lots found themselves in a particularly precarious situation as the value of agricultural exports plummeted and the interest rates they had to pay on bank loans soared" (227). Finding themselves in such difficulties, they decided to go to the city where their situation may somehow improve. It is surprising, however, the fact that the censor found their situation positive. A possible explanation may be given by the fact that when the peasants encountered such dramatic conditions, most of them joined the fascist movement headed by the Iron Guard (Legionaries) in hope of an improvement of their situation. Countless violent street manifestations took place in major cities where peasants and factory workers fought for their rights (Clark 227). Thus, censors might have judged positive the poverty of peasants and beggars probably because their condition did not improve despite joining the fascist Iron Guard. This means that the legionaries had not a positive effect on these people. Communists condemned the fascist legionaries because they were identified "with the capitalist class, and argued that fascist regimes took away workers' rights, using Mussolini's Labour Code of 1927 as an example" (Clark 233).

1.2 Political References Considered Subversive

Apart from the poverty of the peasants and the beggars, the censor also identifies some unsuitable political references. The censor's remarks are not entirely correct, for they mention that Harriet "addresses the actions of reactionary circles and highlights their actions that led to the alliance with fascist Germany" (File 7/1960). This statement is confusing, as Harriet has no active role in the Romanian "reactionary circles", she is just a passive observer of the events. The censor states that Harriet describes the struggles of a small group of people composed by "the members of the embassy, the political refugees, dubious journalists she met on the hallways of hotels and restaurants and some Romanian nobles", and her political ideas are anti-fascist, pro-British, pro-French displaying "a profound spirit against Russia and its politics, as revealed on pages 86, 102, 156, 219, 223, etc." (File 7/1960). The file does not include the exact lines considered subversive on the mentioned pages, but on page 86 Professor Inchcape tells a comic story about a drunk in a café who was insulting the king Carol II:

> A drunk in a café was reviling the king calling him lecher, swindler, tyrant; all the usual things, when a member of the secret police overhearing him, said: 'How dare you speak in this manner of our great and glorious Majesty, your king and mine? 'But, but' stammered the drunk, 'I was not speaking of our King. Far from it. I was speaking of another King. In fact – the king of Sweden. 'Liar', roared a policeman, everyone knows that the King of Sweden is a good man.' (Manning 1981, 85-86)

It is difficult to know why the censor considers this reference to the king to be anti-Russia, since the king is not praised, but rather criticised. Possibly, the king was seen as a symbol of a past when the communists were not leading Romania, but they still had certain power as they owned Bessarabia and Bukovina ceded to them precisely by the king Carol II (Tismăneanu 158). According to the norms issued by GDPP for the Special Collection, the works that dealt with the royal family were included in the secret and documentary libraries, so such works were forbidden. However, the main subject of Manning's novel is not the royal family, so the censor could have been more flexible on this point.

1.3 Representation of Jewish People

The censor considered that on pages 102, 156, 219 and 233, Manning expressed "a profound aggressive spirit towards Russia and its policy" (File 7/1960). However, the reader did not mention the exact lines considered "aggressive". Probably the censor referred to Romanians'

negative attitude towards the Jews. On page 102, in a conversation of Harriet with the sister of Emanuel Drucker, a rich Jew banker, the woman complains that the Jews are treated deceptively by the Romanians, and her husband, a clever lawyer who worked in Germany, is not allowed to work in Romania:

> 'In Germany my husband was a clever lawyer. He had a big office. He comes here – and he is forbidden to practise. Why? Because he is a Jew. He must work for my brother. Why do they hate us? Even the trăsură driver when angry with his horse will shout: "Go on, you Jew." Why is it? Why is it so?' (Manning 102)

Furthermore, on page 156, Manning describes the opinion of a Romanian character, Nikko, about the detention of Emanuel Drucker thrown in "a common cell with low criminals and perverts" (Manning 156). Nikko replies that:

> 'This Drucker,' he said, 'is a big crook […] Although he describes himself as pro-British, his business is with Germany – such a thing is not uncommon here – and he thinks Germany will protect him. So he refuses. He is arrested. He is jugged. Each minute a new charge is cooked for him – treason, forgery, plotting with Germany, plotting with Britain, black-market deals and so on. One would be enough. He is a Jew, so his possessions anyway are forfeit' […] Dugdale gave a high neigh of a laugh. 'Delicious!' he cried. Clarence asked: 'You are amused by a system of government that permits wrongful arrest, wrongful seizure of property and imprisonment for life on faked charges?' (Manning 1981, 156)

These quotes show that Jews were persecuted even before Stalin's Purge-Campaign, which was carried out in Romania from 1948 to1953 to eliminate all Jews who belonged to the Communist Party (Tismăneanu 67). As Clark (2012) mentions "Jews had lived in the territory of present-day Romania since at least the late Middle Ages, but modern anti-Semitism in Romania dates to the wave of Jewish immigration from Polish Galicia during the eighteenth century" (44). Jews were described in Romanian documents "as sly, deceitful, ugly, smelly, cowardly, and lazy" (Clark 44). The Jews posed a problem for Romanians because the small bourgeois class included more Jews than ethnic Romanians, meaning that Jews' economic importance was growing; this led to concerns about "who truly held the power in the country – the (Jewish) bankers or those (Romanians) who worked the land" (Clark 45). As consequence, an anti-Semitic movement emerged mainly among nationalist intellectuals who adopted "anti-Semitic stereotypes from popular culture and then re-introduced them through polemical texts" (Clark 46). The historian Carol Iancu presents the situation of Romanian Jews in the twentieth century as follows:

> Professing a systematic state anti-Semitism, liberal and conservative governments ... forbade Jews from entering the judiciary, education or the state administration. Excluding Jews from public functions and from numerous economic activities, they still required them to perform military service though they would not allow them to become officers. Their children were accepted in schools with difficulty, and then only in return for higher fees. (qtd. in Clark 53)

1.4 Expectation of Authenticity

The last pages that are considered subversive, 219 and 223, show some characteristics of the Romanians like greediness and snobbism. On the one hand, on page 219, Yakimov complains to Guy that he was forcibly evicted by his landlady because he could no longer pay the rent and owed her more unpaid rent:

> 'Difficult times,' he said. 'Your poor old Yaki's homeless. Been turned out. Thrown out, in fact. Literally thrown out by m'landlady. A terrible woman. Terrible. And she's kept all m'belongings.' 'She can't do that.' Guy was indignant, but on reflection added: 'Unless, of course, you owe her some rent.' 'Only a few lei. But that wasn't the main trouble, dear boy. It was a ham-bone I found lying about. Feeling a bit peckish, I picked it up – and she caught me with the bone in m'hand. You know what's on a ham-bone, dear boy! Scarcely a mouthful, but she went mad. Mad. She hit me, kicked me, beat me over the head, screamed like a maniac: then she opened the front door and shoved me out.' […] 'Never knew anything like it, dear boy.' (Manning 219).

It is possible that the violent attitude of the landlady was seen by the reader as censurable because it displayed a certain violence, even though this could have been the reaction of any other landlady in any other country who did not receive the rent they were owed. However, the main aspect that the censor might find problematic is probably Yakimov's hunger, which involves the fact that food was lacking. He was caught by the landlady with a "ham bone" in his hand because he had nothing to eat, and the landlady refused to share the food with him. The censor could have interpreted that the country was starving because no food was provided; such interpretations should not be made by potential readers.

On the other hand, Guy mentions on page 223, in a conversation with Harriet about the play he plans to stage

about "Troilus and Cressida", that Romanians respond only to "snob appeal" (Manning, 223). Guy's intention is to perform the play at the National Theatre, and he needs lots of actors and costumes. Harriet is afraid that he must invest a lot of money in producing it, and she tries to persuade him to give up or do a simple reading in the lecture hall. To this Guy reacts: "'Oh no. We must do the thing in style. Rumanians only respond to snob appeal.'" (223).

Guy's reference to Romanian snobbery could also be a threat to communist values. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, a snob is "one who blatantly imitates, fawningly admires, or vulgarly seeks association with those regarded as social superiors". Romanians, then, must not call for striving for social superiority, for that would mean turning to capitalism. The communist ideal was to build an equal society without social classes (Tismăneanu 13). Communism wanted to suppress private property at all costs and establish a universe of total equality (9).

The censor ends the file by stating that *The Great Fortune* cannot be translated and must be included in the Special Fund, more precisely in the Secret Library (File 7/1960). The novel was thus banned, and readers could not access it until 1990, a year after the fall of the regime, when the books of Special Collection became available. The censors' decision is not surprising, given the novel's content. Their task was to preserve and defend communist values and not to allow interpretations if the text was not clear enough. As the writer and translator Ștefan Augustin Doinaș mentions in the volume *Censorship in Romania* edited by professor Lidia Vianu, "the censor sought a language which would communicate only one thing at a time, the same thing, in fact, over and over again, and even with determination, if possible. Plurisemantic language was changed into an obvious one, which was meant to obey and serve as propaganda" (qtd. in Vianu 30).

2. The Critics' Reception of *The Great Fortune*

The negative reaction of the censors to Manning's novel in some ways anticipates the reaction of the Romanian critics who published reviews, prefaces, and articles on *The Great Fortune* after the communist period. In the biography of *Olivia Manning, a Woman at War* by Deirdre David, the historian Roy Foster mentions that Manning's war trilogies are "the best evocation of the Second World War in English" (qtd. in Deirdre 339). However, despite the critical praise of the trilogies, Foster sadly concludes that Manning's work "remains critically undervalued" (qtd. in Deirdre 400). It could be said that not only in England Manning's oeuvre is undervalued, but also in Romania. In the article entitled "Cărți despre România aparute in Occident înainte de 1989. Olivia Manning: 'The Balkan Trilogy'" ("Books about Romania published in the West before 1989. Olivia Manning: 'The Balkan Trilogy'") published in the journal *Steaua* in 1992, the writer, researcher, essayist, and editor Andronescu Șerban evaluates Manning's novel from a rather negative perspective focusing mainly on Manning's description of the poor conditions in which most Romanians lived, as well as their lack of morals and values.

From the beginning Andronescu mentions that the impression Manning has of Bucharest is detestable, which is especially evident in the third volume of the *Balkan Trilogy*, *Friends and Heroes*, where Greek society is portrayed in a positive light in contrast to Romanian society (26). Andronescu emphasises that the trilogies became bestsellers, bringing Manning a considerable income, and their task is to influence the reader's thinking. Therefore, the Romanian reader must be particularly attentive and should rather focus on the sources of the author's inspiration instead of the writer's talent (26). When Harriet Pringle /Olivia Manning travelled by train from Venice and Belgrade to Bucharest, she made a negative first impression of Romania. Arriving in Bucharest, she was annoyed by the melody of the Romanian *hora*, a traditional tune that has its own dance style and is nowadays mainly played at weddings. She was impressed by the begging, which was then - and still is today - a very well organised profession:

> These were professional beggars, blinded or maimed by beggar parents in infancy […] All the beggars set upon the Pringles together. One hid half a loaf behind his back to join in the age-old cry of: 'Mi-e foame, foame, foame.' They were hemmed in by a stench of sweat, garlic and putrid wounds. (Manning 22)

Andronescu claims that Manning is comparing the Romanians to the Nazis. It seems that the people of Bucharest did not walk properly on the sidewalks of the city and did not let anyone pass, "not even she, the Englishwoman," using this phrase to pejoratively imply that she was a superior citizen. She compares this attitude of the Romanians to that of the Nazis in Berlin, when the young student Sofia mentions that the Nazis in Berlin displayed the same behaviour. This comparison with the Nazis is perhaps not so far-fetched, because at that time the Iron Guard, the representatives of the fascist movement in Romania, had some power and they were always organising protests on the streets of Bucharest against the King, who had ordered the assassination of their leader Corneliu Codreau in November 1938 (Delatant 11).

The critic underlines that Manning emphasizes the gap between the rich and the poor. The places Harriet and Guy

visited offered good food, an example of such display is the food of the party given by the princess Teodorescu:

> Roasted turkeys with breasts ready sliced, two gammons baked with brown sugar and pineapple, crayfish, salmon coated with mayonnaise, several sorts of paté, three sorts of caviar, many aspic dishes, candied fruits, elaborate puddings, bunches of hot-house grapes, pineapples and autumn raspberries, all set on silver plates and decorated with white cattleyas. (Manning 57)

Nonetheless, the peasants coming from villages did not enjoy these pleasures. During the winter, their situation was critical, therefore they travelled to Bucharest to find help. They used to stay for hours in front of the main institutions like the palace, the law courts, or the prefectures, but they never dared to get in. Defeated by hunger and cold they would go around in groups to beg. Lacking the professionality of the beggars, they would give up easily and many of them went to Cișmigiu park to sleep under the trees. Only a few could survive the cold and the hunger:

> Few of them survived long. Each morning a cart went round to collect the bodies dug from the snow. Many of these were found in bunches, frozen inseparable, so they were thrown as they were found, together, into the communal grave. (Manning 178-180)

Andronescu goes on to describe men's lack of respect for women as portrayed by Manning. Professor Inchcape mentions that when women witness a dirty joke, they pretend not to understand it, and that young women are "the most conventional jeunes filles in the world, and the most knowing. 'Sly' Miss Austen would have called them" (Manning 36). Harriet describes a conversation between a Romanian man and his German friend about women. As they walk down the street, the Romanian tells the German about the price of every woman they meet along the way. The German asks in exasperation if there are any decent women in Romania, and the Romanian replies that there are, but they are too expensive (Andronescu 27). Harriet shows her appreciation for the women who study law in Romania, because in England, a law degree is an extraordinary undertaking. To this, Inchcape responds that "here it doesn't mean anything ... They all take law degrees. That qualifies them to become second assistant stamp-lickers in the civil service" (38). It seems that Romanians can absorb information, but they lack creativity and are incapable of putting their knowledge into practice: "all Rumanians are much of a much-ness. They can absorb facts but can't do anything with them. A lot of stuffed geese, I call them. An uncreative people" (38).

The critic continues with the problematic relations between the Jewish community and the Romanians. The Jews, represented in the novel by the Druckers, a wealthy banking family, show no fear of war, but not for stupid reasons, like the Romanians, but for well-considered reasons (Andronescu 27). Mrs Hassolel assures Harriet and Guy that the Germans will not occupy Romania because "the Rumanians are clever in their way. Last war, they gained much territory. This time they will keep a foot in each camp and come out with even more" (Manning 106). The Jews believe that "if it were not for us Romania would be on her knees", and they could buy and sell the country a dozen times (107). Although the Jews work hard, save, and bring prosperity to the country, the Druckers complain that the Jews are still persecuted by the Romanians and believe that the Romanians "are content to do nothing but eat, sleep and make love. Such is their nature. The Jews and the foreigners, they run the country" (108). In the eyes of the Jews, then, the Romanians are snobbish and suffer from a sense of inferiority to the foreigners and the Jews who run the country for them because they are too lazy to do it themselves (154). The Druckers also believe that the peasants are worth nothing, they are just hopeless "beasts" and there is nothing for them to do (110).

Andronescu concludes the article by mentioning that Paris was occupied by the enemy and Guy gave a party to celebrate the success of the play "Troilus and Cressida", which he himself had directed and performed at the university. While they were celebrating, a woman entered the room angrily and admonished them for making such a noise. They were asked what they were doing there, if they had lost the war. They replied that they might have lost a battle, but they would not lose the war. In a conversation about the situation of Romania, it became clear that the country could no longer defend its great estates, i.e. Bukovina and Bessarabia, and Harriet concluded that they had better try to preserve and defend their own lives (Manning 318).

In a review entitled "O geloasă" ("A Jealous Woman") of the translation of *The Balkan Trilogy* into *Trilogia Balcanică* (1996) by Diana Stanciu, the writer and translator Grete Tartler (1996) argues that the main theme of the first volume is Harriet's jealousy of Sofia, who used to be Guy's girlfriend in Bucharest. Tartler believes that this is the reason why Harriet finds Bucharest hostile and makes disparaging descriptions about the city and its people (19). The tone with which Tartler describes the first volume is even more negative than Andronescu's. Andronecu at least limited himself to presenting events as Manning described them, even if most of these events were not pleasant for the reader, but Tartler assumes that this volume is exclusively Manning's negative view of Romania. The reviewer notes that Manning's contact with local people is artificial, as she

only encounters gipsies, beggars, hotel staff, and the *Taraful* (a small band playing traditional Romanian music) who played in the restaurants she visited (19).

According to Tartler, Manning, without realizing it, implying that this was not her intention, also refers to positive aspects of Romania at the time, such as the tasty food, the description of the Athénée Palace restaurant, the drinks and sweets of Capșa, and the culinary parties of Princess Teodorescu. Tartler believes Manning is ignorant because she did not know who Armand Călinescu was, the prime minister assassinated by the fascists Iron Guard (19). Tartler concludes that the heroine of the book is "a snob and an uncultured woman" because she considers the architecture of the street Calea Victoriei "terrible" and the coachmen who drive their *trăsuri* (horse-drawn carriages steered by drivers in green costumes with white letter belts (Deirdre 91)) should not be introduced in the novel because they disappeared from the landscape of Bucharest several decades ago (Tartler 19). The critic concludes that Manning's ignorance can be justified by her blind jealousy (19).

In the preface to the third volume of the trilogy, *Friends and Heroes* into *Prieteni și eroi* (1996), the Romanian historian Neagu Djuvara assesses Manning's work from a point of view as caustic as Tartler's. Djuvara notes that Manning does not understand Romania, and "the description of the place and the people is dark and malevolent, in a word, a caricature" (335). The historian makes it clear that he is not a literary critic and therefore will not discuss the literary value of the work, but he does want to point out some aspects that disappointed him. First, reading the title, Djuvara believed that the trilogy would be a masterpiece like D.H. Lawrence's Alexandrian tetralogy. However, he only discovered:

> A banal string of sentimental intrigues and psychological situations presented on a hideous historical background that characterizes Olivia Manning's novel, which has nothing that could resemble Lawrence Durrell's gorgeous fresco, a masterpiece of psychological analysis and sociological understanding of the Egyptian Alexandria society between the two wars. Nothing. I would even say that as a literary genre, I would classify it at the antipode of Durrell's work (335)

The historian believes that readers were drawn to Manning's talent for describing places and characters in two or three stages, and this was probably why the BBC adapted the novel as a series.

Like Tartler, Djuvara accuses Manning of lacking culture because she never travelled to Mediterranean countries like Spain, Greece, and Italy. Had she done so, she would have known that the multitude of people she met on Calea Victoriei dressed ridiculously is not typical of Romania, as such landscapes can be seen in other countries as well (335). Djuvara believes that "Manning sprinkles mud from antipathy and contempt. In Bucharest, she sees nothing but dust, dirt, and beggars" (336). He insists that beggars are her obsession because that is all she sees when she walks down the street and she tries to describe them without racial nuance (336). Djuvara mentions that among all the people she meets in Bucharest, Manning hardly meets any decent Romanians. The only Romanians she seems to appreciate are the young Jewish Sasha, his father, an economist named Klein, and the housekeeper who takes care of Sasha (336). Aside from these characters, Manning has not met a Romanian worthy of respect, and she devotes herself to criticising Sofia, her husband's alleged ex-girlfriend, for being "stupid and whiny and wearing too much makeup" (336). Djuvara concludes that if Manning had been a gifted writer, she would have been an interesting subject for psychoanalytic analysis (336).

As can be observed, both the censors and the critics made no distinction between fiction and non-fiction. This means that they consider the book as autobiography and not as a novel, because for them Olivia Manning, the author, is the same as Harriet Pringle, the character. Therefore, Harriet's descriptions of Bucharest and its inhabitants are not interpreted as fiction, but as Manning's autobiography. Both censors and critics have focused on and criticised the same aspects, such as Manning's vision of poor peasants, beggars and Jews, the former being somehow appreciated by Manning, although they all represent otherness. The existence of beggars and poor peasants cannot be denied, but Manning's attitude towards them is somewhat condescending. This could be partly due to her lack of travel culture, as Romania was the first foreign country she visited, so she might have been impressed by its otherness, and partly due to her belief that "Britain was supreme in the world, and British the most fortunate of people (qtd. in Steinberg 88). As Andrés Oliver (2018) mentions "the British group are on a mission in Romania, so they enjoy certain privileges simply for being British, and they identify the natives as Other…They are well aware of their own otherness (most of them know very little of the language and cultures of these countries)" (109).

Olivia Manning /Harriet Pringle thus distinguishes herself from the Romanians and perceives their culture and lifestyle with a critical eye (Andrés Oliver 116). She is aware of her class and observes and describes how the different social ranks should behave. For instance, "Harriet narrates how only peasants and servants walked in the road while the new bourgeoisie walked on the pavement. However, and for

her own comfort, she decides to walk in the road too, as she is a foreigner, and she does not need to worry about these socially imposed classist rules" (Andrés Oliver 118-119). Like Mrs Drucker, Manning dehumanizes the peasants considering them less then beasts as "they had not the beauty or dignity of beasts. They treated their animals and their women with the simple brutality of savages" (Manning 133). As Andres Oliver notes, she feels hostility toward peasants, and this description reinforces the Balkanist stereotype as presented by Todorova: "they seem to be backward, primitive, lazy, misogynist, and cruel" (120).

The only Romanian character she seems to appreciate is Sasha Drucker, the Romanian Jew she and Guy protect from the Iron Guard. Even though she likes Sasha, that does not mean she feels sorry for the Druckers when they complain that they are being persecuted by Romanians. At first, she thinks the Jews are responsible for their situation and are excluding themselves from society: "'Perhaps that is the trouble,' said Harriet, 'that [Jews] live apart. Your first loyalty is to your own race. And you all grow rich. The Rumanians may feel you take from the country and give nothing back'" (Manning 108). However, when she meets Sasha, she understands that "his status as an outsider is largely thrust upon him" (Steinberg 94). Thus, she makes a clear difference between "a foreigner" and "a Jew". "A foreigner" is an alien, someone who belongs to somewhere else, while "a Jew" belongs nowhere (Steinberg 94). In the traditional view, Steinberg (95) explains, the nations that excluded the Jews blamed them for segregating themselves, and when they tried to integrate, they were blamed for that as well. Therefore, they were a constant outsider. The Pringles are foreigners who can return to Britain at any time, but the Drucker family are German Jews living in Romania because they were forced to leave Germany. So, there is nowhere for them to go and their existence in Europe is precarious (Steinberg 94).

Finally, in the preface to *Marea șansă*, the historian Dennis Deletant (1996), an expert on Romanian history, introduces Harriet and Guy Pringle and their new life in a Bucharest threatened by war. Deletant points out that Manning renders for the English reader the Bucharest of 1939-1940 through an intelligent, lively and amusing style (1). However, the historian stresses that Romanian readers would not feel the same as the English, as they might find it "biased and resentful" (1). When the series based on the novel was issued by the BBC, Horia Georgescu, a representative figure of the Romanian community in England, denounced the series as "repulsive" and claimed that the trilogy was "a transvestite of my country and its people, on which she sheds her own venom" (qtd. in Deletant 1). Georgescu believed that Manning did not understand the Romanian people and the difficult situation Romania was in at the time, and therefore her view was wrong (1). It seems that Georgescu was particularly indignant about Manning's references to the beggars she and her husband encountered throughout Bucharest. Harriet could not get used to their presence, while "Guy, during his apprentice year, had grown accustomed, if not injured to the sight of white eyeballs and running sores, to have stumps and withered arms and the breasts of nursing mothers thrust into his face" (Manning 22).

It could be mentioned that Georgescu's response to Manning's descriptions is not entirely coherent, for even today there are beggars everywhere in Bucharest, even the mutilated ones Manning describes. However, this tendency of the Romanian elite to ignore reality is nothing new, as this article proves; critics dedicated fiercely to criticising Manning precisely because she portrayed a reality that they keep ignoring, a reality, which, unfortunately, not entirely, but bits of it can be seen even nowadays. Deletant agrees that Harriet and Guy's experiences in Romania are not significantly different from those of the British in Romania in the 1930s, nor from Deletant's own experiences in the 1960s (2). The historian (2) reminds Georgescu that he has probably not visited his country since the war, so his irritations with Manning's work are perhaps not entirely justified. Georgescu also found Harriet's reaction offensive when she reached Greece "'To feel safe!' she said. 'Simply to feel safe! It's marvellous to be among people who are on your side.'" (Manning 678). Harriet's reaction is completely understandable considering she is an Englishwoman and "Britain stayed against Nazi Germany and its allies, including Romania" (Deletant 2). Olivia or Harriet explains that Romania was going through difficult times and therefore one could feel safer reaching another country:

> Before Guy could speak again, Mortimer Tufton, who had no patience with the conjectures of inexperienced youth, broke in with a history of Russian-Rumanian relations, proving that only Allied influences had prevented Russia from devouring the Balkans long ago. Rumania, he said, had been invaded by Russia on eight separate occasions and had suffered a number of 'friendly occupations', none of which had ever been forgotten or forgiven. 'The fact is,' he concluded, 'the friendship of Russia has been more disastrous to Rumania than the enmity of the rest of the world.' (Manning 329-330)

Deletant underlines that Manning's description of Bucharest as a city of money, food, and sex, might have been accentuated by her personal difficulties. Being only twenty-four years old, she and her husband fled from England and reached Bucharest in a tumult of social confrontations for which she was not prepared (2). Deletant states that there

was no wonder that she became very jealous of her husband because of his premarital relationships, which he never stopped cultivating (2). Thus, these situations might have negatively influenced the image of the places and people portrayed in the trilogy (2). Deletant states that someone who knew Olivia Manning while living in Bucharest described her as a

> Weak and pale girl, with a small, oval face, round, bright eyes and thin legs. It was not easy to be approached. She spent most of her time locked in the house, above the typewriter, while her husband, a gentle and friendly fellow, went for a beer with friends and taught an absurd form of Communism (qtd. in Deletant 2-3).

In an effort to justify the difficult situation Romania found herself in throughout Manning's novels, Deletant provides a detailed historical review from the Paris Peace Agreement in 1919 to the Ion Antonescu' alliance with the Iron Guard. Fearing occupation by the Soviets, Romania joined the Rome-Berlin Axis on July 4, 1940, and Carlos II asked Hitler to send a German military mission to Bucharest. But Hitler made his protection conditional on the settlement of major territorial disputes with Hungary and Bulgaria over Transylvania and Dobrogea (Deletant 6). So South Dobrogea was ceded to Bulgaria according to an agreement signed on August 21. Instead, Carlos II received Hitler's guarantees, but it was too late to keep his throne (6). After the appointment of Ion Antonescu as Prime Minister in September 1940, the king abdicated, placed his young son Mihai (Michael) on the throne, and fled Romania by train (6). Antonescu asked the leader of the Iron Guard, Horia Sima, to cooperate, but the lack of discipline of the legionaries, their violence and anti-Semitism led to disagreements between Antonescu and Sima (6). This situation also angered the Germans, as it put a stop to their attempts to further control the Romanian economy. In this context, the members of the British community were advised to leave Romania in October 1940, and Olivia Manning and her husband made their way to Athens (6).

In conclusion, this paper shows that at the time Olivia Manning lived in Romania, 1939-1940, the country was going through a severe political and economic crisis. On the one hand, the king Carol II was forced to negotiate with Hitler in order to obtain military support, negotiations that eventually led him to abdicate in 1940, leaving the throne to his young son Michael. Too inexperienced to rule alone, Michael needed the help of General Antonescu, who collaborated with Sima, the leader of the fascist movement. In the background, the fascists Iron Guard were still conducting their violent marches and inciting the peasants to join them. Since the peasants were so poor, they thought that the fascists would fight to improve their situation, and they travelled to Bucharest to protest and look for a possible solution. The poor became even poorer, but the upper class continued to be rich. This was the landscape Manning found when she reached Romania, and she reproduces this landscape in her novel. On the one hand she describes the poor situation of the peasants, the eternal presence of beggars, the strikes and violent actions of the fascists, the insecure life of the Jews, and on the other hand she depicts the opulent parties of the upper class, the tables overloaded with refined food and the extravagant life of some members of the royal family. These aspects were sharply criticised by the censors when they reviewed the novel in 1960, so much so that they decided not to authorize the translation of the book and introduced it in the Secret Library. The consequence of this decision was that literary critics, scholars, journalists and ordinary readers had no access to either the original or a translation during the communist period. It was not until 1996, seven years after the fall of the regime, that a translation of Diana Stanciu was published in Bucharest by the Univers publishing house.

The critics did not hesitate long to publish their reactions to the novel, which were not positive. Like the censors, the critics recognised and criticised the same aspects, going beyond the censors' reactions, for they even insulted Manning by calling her uncultured, untalented, and unworthy of "psychoanalytic analysis" because she was not a gifted writer. It seems that these critics read the censor's report on Manning and based their criticism on that report. Or it seems that their view of Romania was the same as that of the censors, since they highlighted and rejected the same aspects as the censors, with the difference that at the time they reviewed the novel there was no censorship board and they could even afford to insult the author. Only Deletant agreed that Manning's portrayal of Romania was not far from reality, as other Britons in 1930s Romania and Deletant himself in the 1960s experienced the same Romania Manning describes in her novels. Deletant explains that the Romania of 1939-1940 was the result of political decisions that led the country into a severe crisis that paved the way for World War II. The dismissive attitude of the censors and the harsh criticism of the critics after the communist period seem to have deterred the interest of other translators and publishers, because the novel was no longer translated, and it was only in 2016 that the 1996 edition was reissued under the title *Marea şansă*. Therefore, *The Great Fortune* did not have a great success in Romania, especially during the communist period and not too much after the regime, because when one describes, as Manning does, a reality that nobody wants to see, one usually evokes rejection.

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"Struggling Right Along With You": Precarity and the Power of Medical Crowdfunding Campaign Narratives

Sarah Paust[1]

[1] Department of Anthropology, University of California, Los Angeles, United States

E-mail: sarahcpaust@ucla.edu

Abstract

Medical fundraisers—which feature patients or caregivers seeking funds for medical care, procedures, or other needs—are ubiquitous on social media, and US-based GoFundMe.com is one of the most popular platforms. The rise of platforms like GoFundMe as forms of medical care and triage is notoriously intertwined with the failures of the U.S. healthcare system. Medical crowdfunding campaigns in the U.S. span diverse topics, invoke a wide range of moral discourses, and are affected deeply by race, gender, class, religion, and (dis)ability. Drawing on insights from a discourse analysis of ten "trending" campaigns hosted on GoFundMe in 2019, I argue that campaigns are participatory narratives (because organizers, beneficiaries, and donors can interact within the campaign space) that rely upon an individualizing discourse of deservingness to create reciprocal ties within biosocial communities of care. As politico-moral projects, medical crowdfunding campaigns are at once reflective of and responsive to normalized precarity. Crowdfunding narratives are spaces in which idealized neoliberal citizen-subjects are produced and valorized collaboratively through the discursive work of campaign organizers and donors, limiting (and enabling) our imaginaries of community and care.

Keywords: crowdfunding, narrative, precarity, GoFundMe

Introduction

Crowdfunding is a type of digital fundraising that seeks to harness the power of the crowd to raise individually small amounts of money from a large number of people. According to GoFundMe's website, "Crowdfunding harnesses the power of social networks and the internet to give people the means to raise funds, help others overcome hardship, and meet aspirational goals. With crowdfunding, you can help a friend or help an entire community. You can do everything from pay for your own surgery to fulfill a student's dream of attending college—and so much more." Medical fundraising has been the most popular motivation for new crowdfunding campaigns since 2014 (Renwick and Mossialos 50). These campaigns span diverse topics, including: cancer treatment, gender-affirming surgery, substance abuse rehabilitation, and assisted reproductive technology, and invoke a wide range of moral discourses. Their moral framings and the likelihood of their success are influenced by discourses surrounding race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and (dis)ability. Medical crowdfunding is also notoriously intertwined with the failures of the United States healthcare system, often portrayed in the news media as a last-ditch effort to forestall medical bankruptcy or access health care (Murdoch et al. 8). Lauren Berliner and Nora Kenworthy argue that "U.S. healthcare and social safety-net systems are strongly premised on ideas of deservingness structured by class, race, gender and immigration status; [medical crowdfunding] further legitimizes this logic" (240). Like other forms of philanthropy, crowdfunding is rooted in liberal, humanistic sentiments undergirded by assumptions about neediness, deservingness, and competition. Campaigns compete for donations in a sea of unmet need, and the campaign narrative discursively frames the emergency and the beneficiary as uniquely worthy of potential donors' attention and donations. It is these campaign narratives, these stories of tragic need and the work they do in the world, that I explore in this paper, contributing to a small but growing anthropological literature on medical crowdfunding.

This paper addresses medical crowdfunding campaigns hosted on GoFundMe.com. Founded in 2010, the website

provides the digital scaffolding needed for many kinds of crowdfunding campaigns, not just medical fundraisers. GoFundMe regards itself as an "industry leader" in crowdfunding. At the time of this writing, GoFundMe claims that its campaigns have raised over $9 billion USD, indicative of its soaring popularity. Much of the current literature on medical crowdfunding is based on research conducted on GoFundMe's former competitors, GiveForward and YouCaring, which GoFundMe has since acquired. However, GoFundMe's digital toolkit for campaign organizers and donors is distinct and this may have helped make it the premier crowdfunding platform in the US. For example, GoFundMe offers a free mobile app, beneficiary management services, and a team fundraising option, and its website is seamlessly integrated with other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, which facilitates the spread of "viral" campaigns. GoFundMe also continually updates to maintain its relevance and to take advantage of the needs of the moment by harnessing affective power in moments of national crisis; for instance, amid rising infections in 2020, a section of its website was devoted to COVID-19 related campaigns.

In this article, I argue that medical crowdfunding is a political and moral endeavor and that crowdfunding narratives are spaces in which certain kinds of neoliberal citizen-subjects are produced collaboratively through the discursive work of campaign organizers and donors. Although donations to GoFundMe are legally categorized as personal (rather than charitable) giving, campaigns often invoke an ethic of giving that resembles more "traditional" forms of philanthropy. However, whether digital or analog, the ideologies and relationships embedded within philanthropy are always political (see Gomberg; Hanson; Katz; and Liberman). The bureaucratic systems that structure the provision of healthcare in the US, such as the managed care model and the Affordable Care Act, have significantly contributed to the need for medical crowdfunding and are also deeply political (see Boehm; Dao and Mulligan; Horton et al.; Nelson; and Rylko-Bauer and Farmer). Furthermore, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, health inequities and costs have become a global topic of concern, while rising unemployment and medical shortages threaten families in the immediate and long-term. As of February 2021, 1 in 3 campaigns can be attributed to COVID-19, making GoFundMe a key indicator of economic and personal suffering (Cadogan).

Medical crowdfunding campaigns reflect the economic inequalities, or precarity, of the current moment, but they are also generative spaces in which worthy citizens are discursively co-produced. Discourse analysis and close reading of ten "trending" campaigns hosted on GoFundMe in 2019 suggests that medical crowdfunding on GoFundMe is a politico-moral project that reproduces offline inequalities but offers limited opportunities for resistance in the form of critique (as narratives underscore the unfairness of the tragedy that has befallen "deserving" beneficiaries, upstanding citizens) or, most importantly, by mobilizing and (re)forming community. As such, it is reflective of the processes of "precarization" and "hypercapitalism" (Karatzogianni and Matthews) that characterize life in the twenty-first century. I argue that campaigns are participatory narratives (because organizers, beneficiaries, and donors can interact within the campaign space) that rely upon an individualizing discourse of deservingness to create reciprocal ties within biosocial communities of care.

Methods

This project required close reading and discourse analysis of ten trending medical crowdfunding campaigns active on GoFundMe in September and October 2019. Navigating to the "medical fundraising" section of GoFundMe's website, these campaigns were at the top of the list thanks to their relative success. Although only 10% of medical crowdfunding campaigns are estimated to meet their fundraising goals (Berliner and Kenworthy 236), I chose to focus only on the ten most successful campaigns. In a context where failure is the norm yet so many still make an attempt, these few successful campaigns are inspirational for many. The narrative strategies employed by these campaigns are thus likely to be used as models by other campaign organizers; indeed, GoFundMe periodically selects successful campaigns to feature on its home page, holding them up as exemplars for others to follow. Moreover, where journalists write on the phenomenon of medical crowdfunding, they are apt to focus on these exemplary campaigns too, rendering the "viral campaign" discursively legible as a prominent figure in public consciousness and debate.

All of the campaigns I studied were based in the US. Four campaigns were related to cancer; three, deadly car crashes; two, rare genetic disorders; and one, a workplace injury that resulted in partial paralysis. Ill or injured children and their parents were the beneficiaries of three campaigns. At the time of data collection, cancer was the single most common motivation for medical crowdfunding (Snyder et al. 365). However, this may have changed since 2019 due to COVID-19 and the rapid rise in COVID-related fundraisers (Cadogan). Nine out of ten beneficiaries were white families, a disparity reflective of the racial bias embedded in medical crowdfunding success (Lukk, Schneiderhan, and Soares 410).

As I manually coded campaign narratives, I attended to any updates posted by organizers, photos or videos of the beneficiary, and the most recent comments left behind by donors (only donors are permitted to leave comments on a GoFundMe campaign web page). For my discourse analysis, I identified major themes such as need, urgency, deservingness (following Berliner and Kenworthy as well as Snyder et al.), gratitude, faithfulness/spirituality, honesty/authenticity, and reciprocity or "giving back." I also attended to the kinds of relationalities that were made explicit by organizers and donors: donors who knew the organizer or beneficiary "in real life," who referenced mutual friends, or whose stated bonds were forged solely through the space of the campaign ("I don't know you, but…"). Finally, I observed how organizers talked politics (if at all). As an analytical category, "politics" is broad and subject to personal interpretation, but I focused especially on critiques or elaborations of health insurance, health disparities, or economic inequality in the United States. My thematic interest in precarity emerged out of this attention to the political and its narrative submersion. Here, I follow Isabell Lorey's theorization of precarity as the management of insecurity and risk amidst rising economic inequality in order to sustain late industrial consumer capitalism (12). Medical crowdfunding is often portrayed as a "stop-gap" measure or last resort for patients who have fallen through the cracks of a fragmented, inadequate healthcare system. In other words, it exists in response to the precariousness of contemporary life, with the idealized successful campaign a means of assuaging precarity for its beneficiaries.

Narrativity: Crafting the Campaign Story

Due to GoFundMe's algorithms, campaign web pages are unsteadily located in time and space. When I began my research, I spent hours deciphering how the algorithms worked, why certain campaigns were boosted to the top of the page while others fell to the bottom of the digital pile. Following Nick Seaver, I treat these algorithms as culture, as fluid objects that are perpetually remade as users (myself included) engage them (4). GoFundMe's algorithms are proprietary, but I deduced several important variables. The campaigns you see on "Campaigns Near You" are determined by the IP address of whatever device you are using to access the site. When I logged in from Mount Holyoke College's campus in western Massachusetts, I was shown a sampling of local campaigns. South Hadley is a small college town, and in just a few minutes of scrolling I could see local campaigns that had not been updated in over six months. By contrast, when I logged in from my hometown in southeast Florida, I saw a different set of "local" campaigns entirely. I experimented with changing my IP address to different regions of the world, and verified that viewers logging in from North America see different campaigns featured on GoFundMe's homepage than viewers from Europe and South America. The speed with which new campaigns are uploaded also matters. Clearly, more campaigns had been posted from southeast Florida than western Massachusetts, meaning that in order for a campaign to stay relevant (i.e., near the top of the digital pile), frequent updates, shares, and donations are a must. In addition to geographic location, GoFundMe's "trending" algorithm also tracks the number of donations and shares, the recency of donations and shares, the recency of updates, funds raised, and progress towards fundraising goals. Campaigns tagged as "trending" have raised considerable funds in a short period of time, feature plenty of updates and donor comments, and have been shared externally via other social media platforms.

Campaigns do not have inherent endpoints. Although a campaign is ostensibly over when it has reached its fundraising goal, in practice this is not always the case. Throughout the course of my research, several campaigns increased their fundraising goals after meeting an initial goal. Moreover, some organizers continued to post updates and interact with donors after their final goal had been reached. GoFundMe does not take down campaign web pages; unless an organizer archives a campaign, it will remain "live" and continue to be indexed by GoFundMe's algorithms, in addition to Google Search. However, given the rapidity with which new campaigns are created, closed and forgotten campaigns can easily fall to the bottom, relegated to less importance by the algorithm.

As narratives, campaigns occupy fluid positions in time and space and represent the discursive efforts of many actors. Other scholars have observed that medical crowdfunding campaigns are most often organized not by the beneficiaries themselves, but by a third party such as a friend or family member. Following their research on medical crowdfunding in China, Kaibin Xu and Xiaoyu Wang suggest that third-party organizing helps to legitimize a beneficiary: someone else who can vouch not only for their illness but also for their status as a worthy community member who deserves assistance (1608). Third parties organized all ten of the campaigns I reviewed and I witnessed similar kinds of legitimacy work, as organizers extolled the virtues of their loved ones and emphasized the unique tragedy now facing them. Organizers sometimes relayed messages on behalf of beneficiaries, thanking donors for their monetary contributions, well-wishes, prayers, and shares, or requesting additional assistance. Donors themselves can also participate directly in campaign narratives by commenting on the campaign web page after leaving a donation; all the campaigns I studied received copious commentary, most of which was supportive and compassionate. For these reasons,

I argue that campaign narratives are polyvocal (i.e., multi-voiced) texts.

Although they are polyvocal and participatory texts, campaign narratives are shaped first and foremost by campaign organizers. It is the organizer whose discursive strategies influence a campaign's success, the organizer who sets out to tell the beneficiary's story in a manner legible to an "imagined audience" (Litt 331) of sympathetic yet discerning potential donors. Medical crowdfunding campaigns have been characterized as moral projects that seek to establish beneficiaries as worthy recipients of aid and valued community members. Trena Paulus and Katherine Roberts argue that organizers make "identity claims" about beneficiaries, drawing attention to their positive attributes (e.g., work ethic) and social standing as self-evident reasons why they deserve help now (68). They pinpoint an ethos of individualism that permeates medical crowdfunding narratives in addition to the bureaucratic logics underpinning health insurance and social safety-net politics (Paulus and Roberts 70). In one of the campaigns the organizer writes, "We believe the laborer is worthy of their wage and are not asking for anything for free. We have however exhausted every means to get this done and time is becoming critical." This appeal implies that a less hard-working family would not deserve donations as much as this one. At another point, the organizer writes, "[My wife] and I have been and continue to trust God in this matter but as the Word says *you have not because you ask not*" (emphasis mine). The onus is on the individual to do what is necessary to get what they need to survive.

In a video update, the organizer continues: "I am not a beggar, but I know I have a store in heaven. I have laid up treasure in heaven for years, as a tither, as a giver, as one who has responded to the needs of many other people in 22 years of ministry and 30 years since I have recommitted my life to the Lord I have really sold out to the things of God." He sets up a direct contrast between himself and his wife as worthy with abstracted "beggars" who would presumably be unworthy of your assistance. He emphasizes his valued position within the community as a pastor and reminds the viewer that he and his wife gave generously to others in the past. This identity claim is also an excellent example of what Elizabeth Gerber and Julie Hui have termed "social signaling factors" in crowdfunding. By giving to certain campaigns for beneficiaries who occupy certain social positions, donors can signal their affirmation and affiliation with the values the campaign endorses, performs, or represents (Gerber and Hui 24).

Campaign narratives remain individualized—an individual person in need of help or in a crisis asks for individual support—because they downplay or ignore entirely the economic inequalities that have produced the need for medical crowdfunding in the first place. Paulus and Roberts (70) report that most campaign organizers do not report (inadequate) health insurance coverage as a motivating factor, although medical crowdfunding campaigns originate disproportionately from states that elected not to adopt the Medicaid expansion (Berliner and Kenworthy 240). Moreover, Snyder et al. (366) point out that few organizers directly address the injustice of being forced to rely upon charity for healthcare in the first place. In the aforementioned campaign, the organizer explained that he and his wife did not have health insurance because they could not afford it, but he was quick to clarify that this was only a temporary state of affairs. It was merely unfortunate timing that his wife had fallen ill while he was in the process of moving his congregation to a new ministry. In the US, health insurance is often linked to employment, and "having health insurance" thus becomes a proxy for moral uprightness and a signifier of one's contributions to society.

At the same time that campaigns create the individual as moralized, liberal citizen-subject, they also create the emergency. All ten campaigns told a story that set the beneficiary's experiences in some way apart from that of "normal" life. In "Making Up People" for the *London Review of Books*, Ian Hacking writes that discourse is a way of "making up persons" (i.e., to speak of someone or something in a certain way is to *create* that kind of person or thing), and I argue that medical crowdfunding campaigns can be understood as a way of making up worthy beneficiaries beset by extraordinary tragedies. Organizers create worthy beneficiaries in two main ways: first, by emphasizing the randomness of the illness or injury, which will hopefully facilitate the audience's understanding of the victims as unlucky or tragic figures; second, by discursively positioning their illness experiences as "unthinkable" or "unimaginable," something unknowable to the outsider. In this case, the only way for outsiders to relate is through the medium of the campaign narrative and by showing support in the form of donations or shares. I have characterized campaigns as participatory narratives, and they are, but they also hold the audience at arm's length. The level of participation I observed maintained a clear distinction between the self (the donor) and the other (the tragic beneficiary). This aligns with David Perusek's autoethnography on the experience of cancer diagnoses in the United States, where he argues that the compartmentalization of cancer within our contemporary cultural imagining as something unimaginably horrifying actually isolates patients, discursively placing them beyond the reach of empathy and meaningful social support (488). In a campaign for the victims of a fatal car accident, the organizer opens with, "This morning, July 28, the unthinkable happened." Reflecting on family photos they had taken right before the accident, he writes, "Little did they

know it would be the last photos of their precious daughter and family together as they knew it." Although car accidents are all too common, the victims' experience can still be individualized and made to stand out by positioning it as something so horrible that we, the audience, cannot bear to imagine it happening to our own families.

In electing not to engage directly with the social and economic inequalities that brought medical crowdfunding into being, organizers naturalize and normalize these offline hierarchies in favor of liberal humanitarian notions of charity. According to Michael Katz, poverty has historically been treated as a personal failing in the United States (1). Certainly, there is a subtext about failure in the examples I have provided. Paul Gomberg writes, "There is a difference between the ethical obligations imposed on us when we are confronted with an individual in need of emergency rescue and the social problems that arise from pervasive poverty" (40). He adds, "There will always be a residue of exceptional unfortunate events that our foresight has failed to prevent, and the exceptionality of emergencies makes it relatively painless to respond to them with a norm of rescue" (Gomberg 49). By making up emergencies as they make up people, campaign narratives reimagine the mundane suffering caused by the health care system, rewriting them within personal narratives of hardship and individualized catastrophe.

Medical crowdfunding campaigns are rich, multilayered narratives. They invite participation from a theoretically unlimited number of actors, and they move through time and space in ways that elide easy classification. Another campaign from my sample has posted over 300 updates since July 2019. The organizer is the wife of a man who suffered a severe spinal injury at work, and her campaign web page details his medical journey, from the moments immediately after the accident to the family's cross-country move in search of improved therapeutic resources later in his recovery. As they are shared via Facebook and Twitter and converted into hyperlinks, campaigns become cross-platform narratives, (re)interpreted with each share and comment. As moral and discursive endeavors, medical crowdfunding campaigns make identity claims and invite potential donors to come to know beneficiaries as singularly worthy and deserving individuals. They make up the person and the emergency, inviting the formation of certain kinds of relationships while foreclosing others.

Relationality: Giving to Donors and "Giving Back"

Participation in medical crowdfunding campaigns has the potential to create new relationships as well as to strengthen or damage pre-existing ones. My research suggests that the relationship between beneficiaries, organizers, and donors is not merely an economic one but also includes social and emotional dimensions. This validates findings by other scholars. For instance, Gerber and Hui suggest that participating in medical crowdfunding expands donors' social networks and allows them to envision themselves as part of an emerging community (23). Irma Borst, Christine Moser, and Julie Ferguson suggest that a campaign's success is largely determined by its ability (or inability) to reach strangers, those supporters with weak or no pre-existing social ties to beneficiaries (1407). As participatory narratives, medical crowdfunding campaigns invite interaction that goes deeper than a one-time financial gift. The ten successful campaigns I studied can also be understood as nascent digital communities that facilitated aspirational reciprocal bonds between beneficiaries, organizers, and donors. I term this reciprocity "aspirational" because the economic exchange is lopsided and replicates the hierarchical power structures inherent in charity, and because the medium of GoFundMe places significant limits on the kinds of digital communication and interaction that can or should take place. Nevertheless, my research indicates that beneficiaries and campaign organizers do give something back to donors, something donors to these successful campaigns must find valuable given that only 10% of medical crowdfunding campaigns reach their fundraising goals (Berliner and Kenworthy 236).

By repackaging and disseminating technical biomedical knowledge via the campaign narrative, medical crowdfunding creates a biosocial community, and the web page becomes an educational site. In Paul Rabinow's concept of biosociality, new identities are made through both private and collaborative production and regulation, resulting in the creation of biosocial communities, where "individuals sharing certain traits or sets of traits can be grouped together in a way that not only decontextualizes them from their social environment but also is nonsubjective" (100). In the space of the campaign, a shared experience with a terrible disease constitutes one important identity, and this biosocial relationality justifies support. This is most obvious when the beneficiary has a rare genetic disorder or a condition like cancer, but I observed subtler forms of biosociality in every campaign studied, as commenters drew out the parallels between beneficiaries' experiences and their own.

The creation of these biosocial ties hinged in part on the transmission of complex biomedical knowledge between organizers and potential donors. According to Katie Tanaka and Amy Voida, one of the ways that organizers establish their legitimacy is by providing potential donors with high-quality information (4556). In all the campaigns I studied, organizers offered detailed information regarding beneficiaries' diagnoses, treatment regimens, and prognoses.

They made strategic use of medical jargon to inform readers on rare genetic disorders, experimental therapies, and complex surgical procedures. For instance, one organizer provided the following explanation of a beneficiary's upcoming treatment, which would hopefully be financed with campaign donations:

> [My son] goes to the hospital on October 11 (Day -8) to begin his pre-transplant conditioning that will destroy his bone marrow with high-dose chemo and radiation. On October 14, [his brother] will take a pause in his college life to begin daily, outpatient treatments that will boost his stem cell growth. The donation procedure is a long, but non-surgical, blood draw into a machine that separates and collects stem cells before returning the reconstituted blood back into [his] body. On October 18 (Day 0), [my son] will receive [his brother's] freshly collected stem cells by an infusion that typically lasts no more than an hour. This begins a critical time, waiting and watching for [his] transplanted stem cells to make a happy home in [my son's] depleted bone marrow, producing a new and cancer-free immune system.

This example highlights a tension facing organizers: how much detail to provide. Here, the organizer introduces potential donors to complex concepts such as stem cells, but these are also black-boxed as "making a happy home." Despite the black-boxing, the "educated lay person" browsing GoFundMe can potentially come away with a fairly sophisticated grasp of current biomedical approaches to a dizzying array of medical conditions. Harkening back to Paulus and Roberts' concept of crowdfunding as a social signaling factor, this can be framed as establishing organizers as trustworthy, well-educated members of the public who are now doing their part to educate others.

There is evidence to suggest that these kinds of biosocial tactics resonate with donors. In another campaign, parents organized a fundraiser for their newborn twins, who both suffer from Canavan disease, an extremely rare genetic disorder. Despite the rarity of the disease, commenters imagined connections with this family in other biosocial terms: shared identities as mothers, shared baby names, and the uncommon experience of raising twins. After donating to the campaign, one commenter wrote, "In honor of our own daughter Yael, and our daughter Orli who is achieving the same milestones your beautiful children are." Another writes, "I am a mom of twins myself, and my heart goes out to you and your beautiful babies." In a different campaign for a man who eventually died of cancer, one commenter writes, "A very brave man who I understood battled so hard to beat AML… We too celebrate everyday our loving Father & Husband… who fought the AML battle to the very end - [he] made us all that much better."

Not all of the relationships facilitated through crowdfunding are positive. Following interviews with donors, Jennifer Kim et al. argue that family and friends may feel social pressure to donate to campaigns even if they have already provided other, non-monetary forms of support (2005). Similarly, Wesley Durand et al. report that some donors felt obligated to give despite dealing with their own economic hardship (7). I will not dwell on this because my own research did not provide evidence one way or another on the offline interpersonal pressures associated with crowdfunding, but I do want to introduce this tension, as it relates to the idea of precarity that I will discuss in the following section.

In addition to specialized biomedical knowledge, campaign organizers and beneficiaries offer donors profuse displays of gratitude and humility. As donors provide care for beneficiaries in the form of cash and written well-wishes or blessings, so too do organizers display emotional and spiritual care for donors. In an update, one campaign organizer writes, "May each of you experience His love and peace, may you know what is the hope of His call and the riches of His inheritance available to us in Jesus! We love and appreciate you, again, Thank you! We call you loved and blessed!" Publicly expressing gratitude is a form of identity work, assuring donors that they gave to a deserving person. As Katz reminds us, the "undeserving poor" is one who does not receive assistance in their time of need (2). The need to discursively perform deservingness does not end with the campaign solicitation but remains relevant through continued interactions with donors in the form of campaign updates, as organizers address donors specifically. In another campaign, the organizer assures readers that "Gratitude is a core value for this family. With every curve ball, medical twist, and crazy bad piece of luck, this family focuses on the generosity and beauty of their community. They know that it is this tremendous outpouring of love and support that will once again see them through." Community is both online and offline.

Another way that organizers display gratitude is by promising to "share the wealth" if excess funds are raised, or to "pay it forward" at some unspecified future date. One organizer writes that unused donations, "will make a difference in some lives… We know we're not the only ones, but we would like to take pressure off as many as we can as we get to the other side of this." Another organizer pleads, "if any family is deserving and will pay it forward when they are able, it is [this one]." By pledging to act generously in the future—to create future community and reciprocal bonds—beneficiaries reassert their worthiness; they deserve your

assistance because they themselves have given and will continue to give to others. By donating to their campaign, you invest not only in the beneficiary but also in their community, which is expected to benefit from their survival and the value they bring through their positive attributes. This is an ongoing relationship that, like the campaign narrative itself, stretches indefinitely into the future.

Public displays of gratitude and humility are coupled with a "peek behind the curtain" into beneficiaries' daily lives. In my case studies, I observed that updates tended to offer much more personal information than the primary campaign solicitation. The most extreme example was a campaign with over 300 updates. Organized by a wife on behalf of her husband, who was partially paralyzed by a spinal injury, these updates chronicle the family's daily hardships and triumphs. She provides detailed biomedical updates and explanations in addition to information on his psychological state, photos and videos taken during physical therapy, and her own reflections. For instance, as she weighs the benefits and challenges of a cross-country move, she admits that "the thought of not moving and that being the wrong decision for [my husband] long term is terrifying. The thought of uprooting my children from their support system is sickening especially my [daughter]. I don't want to do it. I don't want to adult anymore but there is no pause button now. It is forward fast." Given that many people enjoy reading about others' lives for the sake of it, such reflective anecdotes (see Page) should not be discounted as a reciprocal offering in themselves. They also help verify the organizer's trustworthiness and provide additional venues for the kinds of identity claims essential to fundraising success.

I have spent most of this section elucidating what beneficiaries and campaign organizers offer donors in exchange for their donations. However, I also want to draw attention to the emotional and spiritual care that donors can provide in the comments section, as this underscores the participatory nature of the campaign narrative and deepens the relationships and communities formed through medical crowdfunding. Sometimes donors explicitly asked for additional updates, photos, or videos, emphasizing the organizer's perceived responsibilities to their donors and revealing the continuity of the crowdfunding relationship beyond the moment in which a donation is processed. What I observed most often, however, were outpourings of support, compassion, and blessings. Commenters encouraged beneficiaries to "stay strong," "keep fighting," and "not lose hope." Another writes that they are "struggling right along with you," revealing that the participatory nature of the campaign narrative can have deep meaning for donors as well as beneficiaries. One commenter went even further, offering a beneficiary a job: "finally found a bigger building to support the co growth.. move probably after first of new year.. an office will be waiting for you to fill it!! God Bless you and your family." This validates Kim et al.'s findings that medical crowdfunding campaigns can simultaneously help beneficiaries to leverage offline, non-monetary forms of support (2002).

As participatory ventures, medical crowdfunding campaign narratives forge reciprocal relationships between beneficiaries and donors, mediated by organizers' discursive work. These relationships are embedded within digital communities of care (monetary, emotional, and spiritual) with biosocial characteristics, and they collectively reimagine the campaign as a point of intervention into the lives of tragic and deserving individuals. Campaign narratives, however, draw careful distinctions between identity claims on beneficiaries and broader political claims, despite the fact that these narratives also represent a way of writing and resisting precarity amidst late industrial capitalism and the neoliberal structuring of social services.

Precarity: Politics, Insurance, and Market-Based Medicine

As I have mentioned in the preceding sections, campaign organizers rarely criticize the neoliberalization and marketization of health care in the US context, despite these being prime reasons for many of their predicaments. Campaign narratives reflect precarity in multiple ways: what is said, what is left unsaid, whose voices are present, and whose are excluded. Lukk, Schneiderhan, and Soares have found that "visible minorities" (i.e., people of color) are less likely than white individuals to start campaigns; and, when they do, they tend to raise less money (421). All but one of the successful campaigns I analyzed were for white beneficiaries, underscoring the reality that success in medical crowdfunding is racialized. Moreover, this precarity becomes mundane on GoFundMe. Although campaign narratives tended to frame events as sudden, catastrophic crises, the moralization of these discursive performances obscures how everyday life is lived as crisis.

Following Anna Tsing's suggestion that "precarity is the condition of our time" (20), I argue that precarity is the condition and justification of GoFundMe. According to Lorey, precarity is the neoliberal social order that manages insecurity and risk to sustain consumer capitalist market ideologies (12). In the US, the phenomenon of medical crowdfunding emerged in the wake of a devastating economic recession (Paulus and Roberts 65) and is both a social and an economic enterprise. The insecurities and anxieties that drive it are expressions of precarity, with both social and economic consequences. Certainly, the

beneficiaries of medical crowdfunding campaigns occupy insecure economic positionings. Campaign narratives are simultaneously individualized and embedded in networks of on- and offline relations. However, these public displays of unmet need have not changed the realities of accessing health care and health insurance in the US. Despite the substantial labor invested in their campaigns, organizers typically did not write about politics. One way of interpreting this is by attending to the ways in which precarization, as a social process and political project, has naturalized and normalized these forms of profound financial and medical instability.

Individuals organize medical crowdfunding campaigns in response to precarity. Although it is statistically unlikely that they will succeed, the choice to invest time, energy, and emotional labor into a campaign is perfectly rational given that access to health care is already a fragmented, uncertain process for many Americans, who have no choice but to move between multiple institutions, services, and providers. While only 10% of medical crowdfunding campaigns reach their goals, as many as 30% do not receive a single donation (Durand et al. 3). When faced with the specter of medical debt or another financial barrier to accessing health care, however, organizers and beneficiaries remark that GoFundMe is often a last resort. In the US, medical debt is the leading cause of personal bankruptcy (Burtch and Chan 1). One organizer explains, "We have however exhausted every means to get this done and time is becoming critical." Where healthcare is only available on a "pay to play" basis and even relatively affluent households file for bankruptcy due to medical debt, turning to GoFundMe can be understood as a natural extension of privatization and marketization within medicine. Normalized precarity is further amplified for low-income households and those who live with, or care for, someone with a chronic illness.

In the context of clinical encounters, Cheryl Mattingly has described hope as a narrative process: "I will consider dreaming that comes when you might least expect it, the terrifying nightmares that serious illness or tragedy can precipitate. Even more, I will consider what may be done with such nightmares, the work to make them habitable" (4). I argue that campaign narratives are a way of dreaming against precarity, both medical and economic. Organizing or donating to a medical crowdfunding campaign can be a way of showing care amidst, and confronting, precarity: "We are praying for their speedy recovery and they are in dire need of financial support… They strongly need our prayers and financial support to get back to normalcy." Medical crowdfunding not only reflects precarity: the construction of campaign narratives may represent one avenue through which organizers and beneficiaries rewrite their life stories and reestablish a sense of control. Arthur Frank writes, "The illness narrative presents who the ill person has become and stakes a public claim on this new identity" (42). Can medical crowdfunding campaigns, then, also be understood as narrative projects of becoming among community, however precarious? Arguing that medical narratives constitute a genre unto themselves, Frank suggests that medical narratives reveal and "make real" an ontological shift from "who I was before" to "who I am now" and "who I might become" (46). Where tragedy is portrayed as random and unpredictable, campaign success could be presented to potential donors as a means of restoring a degree of order in beneficiaries' lives. One organizer writes, "Believe it or not, even during these cancer-filled days, life is good. There is an inexplicable joy that comes with being present during the big and small moments of everyday life and paying attention to the beauty and love that cancer cannot defeat. This joy is possible thanks to you all—to the help provided by the GoFundMe community."

This narrative process of reordering and remaking a life typically took the shape of the reflective anecdote, as described by Page (234). In order to elicit affective responses from potential donors, campaign narratives tended to emphasize emotional disclosures or personal reflections rather than linear accounts. The public work of writing a reflective anecdote may also be a way for the writer to internally make meaning out of their experiences. In other words, campaign organizers narratively *resist* precarity, insisting on meaning even as they organize in response to the precariousness of contemporary existence. A successful campaign that allows the beneficiary to access care or pay off their medical bills is one concrete way of restoring order to life. Again, because they are individualized, such narratives also foreclose the possibility of collective action, organizing, or activism around issues such as health care access. Frank writes that medical narratives, because of their individualized nature, function as open-ended invitations to "see what happened to me," rather than warnings that "this will happen to you" (49). "Illness narratives are not illnesses, but they are a significant means for studying the social construction of illness as a rhetorically bounded, discursively formulated phenomenon" (Frank 41).

Perhaps what is most tragic about medical crowdfunding is its scale. In an editorial early this year, GoFundMe CEO Tim Cadogan called on lawmakers to pass more COVID-19 relief, writing that the platform is "a leading indicator of the biggest pandemic-related hardships. Even before the weekly jobless claims, the monthly unemployment numbers and the quarterly gross domestic product reports tell us the state of the economy, we at GoFundMe learn firsthand about the real struggles Americans face" (Cadogan). As the number of COVID-related fundraisers grows, he states, "We are proud of the role that GoFundMe plays in connecting those in need with

those who are ready to help. But our platform was never meant to be a source of support for basic needs" (Cadogan). In reality, platforms like GoFundMe had become a last line of support for countless families' basic needs long before the emergence of COVID-19; my data collection on GoFundMe's website wrapped up just months before the pandemic hit North America. It is the normalized, engineered financial structure of the health care system, rather than a sudden event like a pandemic, that gives medical crowdfunding a foothold in a broader ecosystem of care and harm.

The anthropology of risk and insurance has demonstrated the uneven impacts of managed care and market-based medicine on marginalized communities and families in the US. In her critique of Medicaid managed care in New Mexico, Nancy Nelson argues that the decentralization and privatization of health care has obscured the neoliberal power relations that govern access to care in contemporary life (105). She compares Medicaid managed care to foreign aid, arguing that both reaffirm the hierarchical imbalance between a generous benefactor and an impoverished recipient (104). She also points out that insurance can be depoliticized when its bureaucratic problems are met with short-term technological fixes rather than fixed at the source (113). My research suggests that medical crowdfunding is similarly depoliticized when organizers and donors portray it as an inevitability of contemporary life. Furthermore, the practice of medical crowdfunding redistributes cost and risk in a manner not too distant from that of health insurance companies. Rather than challenge these structures, however, crowdfunding narratives tend to reiterate them as simple facts of life.

The following indictment of managed care comes from an update to one campaign. It is the most explicit criticism of the health insurance system that I observed:

> [My husband's] doctor here said that 5-10 years ago patients with [my husband's] other injuries (shoulder and rib fractures) used to come to a rehab facility for a short time, learn how to survive at home, be sent home for a month to a month in a half, and then come back to rehab. Asshole insurance companies started denying people from coming back so they stopped doing that and people like [my husband] have to just power through.

Although the organizer clearly points to the fact that things used to be different and blames insurance companies for changing matters for the worse, there is an element of nihilism in her writing. Nothing can be done save raising the money and carrying on.

"No one ever sorts him or herself out on terms entirely of one's own, but the point of the experiential narrative is to see how far it is possible to make conventional rhetoric 'one's own'" (Frank 48). Precarity has been the thread running through this paper, and precarity is the thread running through medical crowdfunding campaigns on GoFundMe. The explosive popularity of GoFundMe as a venue for medical crowdfunding reflects the precarity of the current moment, but medical crowdfunding does not fundamentally destabilize or level a critique against the forces of neoliberalism that have made it so popular and necessary for accessing health care. None of the crowdfunding campaigns I analyzed mentioned the racial inequalities evidenced through medical crowdfunding. Nevertheless, medical crowdfunding campaign narratives open a limited but meaningful space for imagining alternatives to our precarious neoliberal order. Promises to "pay it forward" or "give back" in the future reiterate the importance of communities of care in the absence of robust social safety nets and offer an implicit critique of the isolating, individualizing effects of market-based medicine. Campaign narratives discursively resist the destructive, isolating impacts of precarity on individual families' lives by reworking their stories into sites of participation and intervention.

Conclusion

The reflective nature of these ten campaign narratives, especially the campaign updates, is shot through with individualizing identity claims, encouraging an interpretation of medical crowdfunding campaigns as political and moral projects. This discursive work is essential for the strategic construction of a beneficiary that stands out from the crowd, worthy of your donations. What makes a certain beneficiary "worthy" is also classed, racialized, and gendered, and reliant on the capitalist pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstrap narratives that predominate US poverty and social safety-net discourse. This comes into sharp relief given other findings on the unequal nature of "success" within crowdfunding (see Berliner and Kenworthy; Lukk, Schneiderhan, and Soares; Paulus and Roberts; and Snyder et al.).

At the same time, these individualizing narratives are also deeply embedded in social networks that link and co-create digital and offline communities. The narrative facilitates an aspirational reciprocal relationship between donors and beneficiaries in which donors give a financial gift (perhaps accompanied by emotional support in the comments section) and beneficiaries offer biomedical knowledge, gratitude, religious or secular well-wishes, and promises to "pay it forward" or invest in their communities again once

they are able. These relationships are circumscribed by the technological limitations of the platform but still allow participants to collectively reimagine what it means to care for another amidst growing economic inequality, medical uncertainty, or personal tragedy. I argue that these participatory narratives and the collective reimaginings they represent are at once reflective of our precarious, late capitalist times and an active, if limited, form of resistance. Dreaming against precarity in community is still political even if organizers typically refrain from explicit critiques of capitalism, neoliberalism, or marketized health systems. However, the forms of dreaming and writing against precarity evidenced in these ten campaigns reinforce other kinds of hierarchies and inequalities; by staking a claim on beneficiaries as worthy, they implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) make claims on unnamed unworthy others. They offer implicit critiques of the political-economic status quo but stop short of calling for active resistance to the systems that create health inequities; instead, a more passive form of resistance unfolds as donors give to individual families in need, caring for some in a way that fails to care for countless others.

Like all research endeavors, this one has its limitations. In particular, the small number of case studies means that generalization is impossible. Focusing on just ten campaigns allowed me to dig deeply into each update, comment, and photo posted to a campaign, making a true "close reading" possible and allowing me to give each narrative space to breathe. In light of the important survey work that has already been done by scholars of medical crowdfunding that addressed campaign narratives in the aggregate, this methodological choice offers a complementary, qualitative perspective. The results presented here are provocations for further research and exploratory suggestions. The whiteness of my case studies reflects the whiteness of GoFundMe's trending campaigns at the time I collected my data. However, the unequal impacts of medical racism on Black and Brown communities in the US means that future research on medical crowdfunding must address the ways that nonwhite organizers and beneficiaries are discursively and algorithmically marginalized on GoFundMe and other platforms.

My decision to analyze the narratives of only the most successful campaigns means that the narratives of the vast majority of campaigns, the unsuccessful or failed campaigns, are outside the bounds of my analysis. Durand et al.'s analysis suggests that there are significant narrative differences between successful and unsuccessful campaigns, such as the use of negative versus optimistic terms (7). Without also attending to unsuccessful campaign narratives, I cannot know if the discursive and relational trends I observed in these highly successful campaigns hold true under other circumstances. I also cannot say if themes of worthiness and precarity take the same shape in non-US contexts, especially given the uniquely precarious health financing situation in the US. Finally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has already greatly impacted GoFundMe and the nature of medical crowdfunding, whose popularity has only continued to grow in the wake of increased precarity, limited governmental assistance, and feared future austerity measures (see Robinson and Wardell for an analysis of COVID-related medical crowdfunding in New Zealand).

Future research could take up the lens of precarity to investigate the preponderance of medical and other forms of crowdfunding within left-aligned political communities, which promote mutual aid and often make use of digital social networks (Kouri-Towe 192). It is also worth asking if Tim Cadogan's entrance into political discourse, coupled with the surging use of GoFundMe in response to the ongoing pandemic, is making medical crowdfunding a more explicitly political undertaking, or if GoFundMe, as a corporate entity, is merely capitalizing on inequality. Longitudinal analyses of the kinds of identity claims being made and remade through campaign narratives could be particularly insightful in this regard. The racialized and classed subtext of "unworthiness" and individualism is perhaps the most important and urgent venue for future study because this is where the possibilities opened within crowdfunding for solidarity in resistance to capitalism and neoliberalism remain bound by the hierarchical, discriminatory social processes that have led to its very existence.

Ultimately, medical crowdfunding is marked by complexity and ambivalence. Its very existence is an indictment of the US healthcare system and a window into immense personal and collective suffering. At the same time, the discourse of the most successful campaigns contributes to the normalization and moralization of certain kinds of liberal subjectivities and sensibilities that place the burden for change on the backs of individuals, rather than communities or governments. Families facing medical bankruptcy are urged to create a campaign of their own, not to march in the streets demanding universal healthcare. This research has validated findings by other scholars about the inequalities perpetuated by medical crowdfunding. However, the potential for the campaign space to become a space of digital community also gestures toward a political horizon. Meaningful relationships are created within the campaign space, if only just for a moment, as organizers and donors collectively imagine a different, better future for beneficiaries. Donors claim connections with beneficiaries through shared experiences of illness or injury and donate in honor of these biosocial relationalities, publicly named and

even celebrated. For whatever value dreams may have, they dream together through the campaign narrative.

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The Mobile Woman: Getting Around during the 1630 Plague in Bologna

Natalie Massong[1]

[1] Analysis and Management of Cultural Heritage, IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca, Italy

E-mail: natalie.massong@imtlucca.it

Abstract*

Legal proclamations show that during the 1630 plague outbreak in Bologna, Italy, women were required to remain quarantined in their homes for the duration of the epidemic while men remained mobile. However, primary texts and visual sources demonstrate that despite these legal restrictions, women remained active players in the fight against the plague by circumventing regulations. Significantly, women played a key role in sustaining the Bolognese economy, in particular by travelling to work in the silk industry. Moreover, while male doctors enjoyed special dispensations to avoid visiting the sick directly, female nurses left their homes to care for the daily needs of patients in the *lazzaretto*, the plague hospital.

Artworks and primary texts depict a mobile woman. They show women from the poorest of backgrounds who were compelled to move through the city's public spaces, remaining active in the street life of the plagued city. For instance, along with unlicensed women healers and nuns, prostitutes commonly volunteered for service in the plague hospitals. This required a brief shift in the social status of these women as they moved from their brothels to the pestilent walls of the *lazzaretto*. This paper will address the contribution that these resilient women made to maintaining the family economy and the significant positions women held in administering care, which have been overlooked in the scholarship. It will argue that by performing these essential activities, Bolognese women enjoyed an increase in physical but also social mobility, albeit short-lived.

Keywords: Mobility, confinement, female work, plague hospitals

The anonymous and unrefined image of *Via San Mamolo con scena di peste del 1630*, a horrifying scene of a plague-ridden street in Bologna, joins a rare genre of images that offer visual clues of the lived experience of Italian early modern epidemics (Fig. 1).[1] It is one of only two early modern representation of a Bolognese streetscape during a pandemic which shows mobile women.[2] To the right of the allegory of Death, a woman walks with her staff towards the middle of the street, seemingly disengaged from the surrounding chaos. Beyond her, at the gallows near the center of the image, two women form an audience for a hanging. In contrast to the street goers, the other women in the image are depicted as would be expected, from their windows, watching the activities of men unfold from above.

* I would like to extend my gratitude to the librarians at the Biblioteca comunale dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, and to Prof. Riccardo Olivito, Terry Rodgers, Estelle Kurier, Jesai Chantler and Brenda Mayhew for their guidance and support. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

[1] This painting is one of only two existing street scenes depicting the 1630-1 plague in Bologna, both similarly composed by anonymous painter(s) shortly after the events. This first image is Anonymous, Via S. Mamolo con scena di peste del 1630. Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna, c.1631, oil on canvas, (m. 0.705 x 0.87m) and is on permanent display in Palazzo Pepoli, Museo della Storia di Bologna. The second and larger oil on canvas (1.30 x 0.95 m), c. 1631 resides in the Archivio di Stato di Bologna.

[2] This image joins an extremely small collection of Italian street scenes and an even smaller group of works that depict mobile women during early modern plague. The painting attributed to Luigi Baccio del Bianco, *La peste a Firenze nel 1630*, Museo della Misericordia in Florence, is the only existing depiction of the 1630-1 plague in Florence, as noted by Henderson (plate 3). There are at least three women in this image; Melchiorre Gherardini's etching of Milan during the epidemic, *Piazza di S. Babila durante la peste del 1630*, c. 1630, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo di Brescia, shows at least one woman in the street chaos. It is not until the plague of 1657 in Rome that Louis Rouhier illustrates an abundance of activities performed by women in the streets in his collection of prints.

Images that illustrate the mobility of women in the time of plagues in Italy are few, perhaps because most often women were subjected to greater restrictions to their movements than men. Restrictions on the movement of noble women and confinement to the domestic space was commonplace in early modern Italy, while working class women were regularly found in the public spaces of their cities. However, during the plague of 1630, all Bolognese women were legally obligated to remain inside their homes for months, with constraints aimed specifically at women lasting for the duration of the epidemic from July 1630 until June 1631. These regulations have framed the dominant historical narrative in such a way as to ignore the mobility of women (Brighetti, Guerrini, Malpezzi et al.). Yet this image and textual sources demonstrates that despite the initial laws that confined them to their homes, women remained actively involved within their communities. Specifically, women of lower classes played key roles in sustaining the local economy and in supporting the well-being of the city as primary caregivers;[3] however, the majority of scholarship has placed women in a peripheral position, devaluing the significant contributions made by women during the epidemic (Brighetti, Guerrini, Malpezzi et al.). Moreover, the ways in which movement in the city was facilitated by the roles adopted by some women while other women were expected to be immobile has yet to be investigated.

The forced quarantining of healthy women within their domestic environments was commonly enacted as a precautionary measure during periods of early modern plague (Cohn 248, 281). As mentioned by Samuel Cohn, plague treatises from the late 16th century reflected the perception that women were the "most susceptible and the plague's principal carriers" (246). Indeed, earlier epidemics in Italy had shown this to be true, as some cities recorded more deaths of women than men.[4] Cohn has pointed out that the increased vulnerability in women may have been linked to higher instances of poverty (187). The 1630-1 plague in Bologna had an estimated total loss of 24% of the population with similar losses across both genders (Bellettini 41). Regardless, the female body, which was itself treated as a site of contagion, became a primary target of public policy.

As noted by historian Leigh Ann Whaley, early modern medicine was grounded in classical philosophical treatises that formed a framework for Renaissance understanding of the female body (48). These pervasive theories largely came from Galen, Aristotle and the Hippocratic Corpus, a group of medical treatises by multiple authors, which characterized women as "abnormal in comparison to the normal male,"

Figure 1 Anonymous, *Via S. Mamolo con scena di peste del 1630*, c.1630, oil on canvas, (0.705 x 0.87m), Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna, Palazzo Pepoli, Museo della Storia di Bologna. (Photographed by author.)

Details of Fig. 1

[3] On the economic impact of plague, see Giusberti and Roversi Monaco.

[4] Cohn has demonstrated that during plague outbreaks in Milan from the 15th to 16th centuries, more women than men died (222).

necessitating "special treatment" for their inferior bodies, notions that remained ubiquitous in the Renaissance (49).

Health policy created during the 1630-1 plague echoed these attitudes with regulations disproportionately directed at women.[5] Confinement into the domestic space was a part of a process in which women were identified, classified, divided and imprisoned by the health authorities because of their classification as "abnormal." However, the division of all women into one category did not represent the real need of the healthcare system or the local economy. Exceptions to the overarching rule were quickly created which necessitated new ways of partitioning women set within a hierarchy, creating divisions based on class and occupation, each with varying access to mobility.

Geographer Doreen Massey, whose work has significantly contributed to the field of feminist geography and to our understanding of gendered space, argued in *Space, Place, and Gender* that "degrees of mobility" are gendered, in which women and men access, move through, and respond to spaces differently depending on their gendered experience (186).[6] Moreover, Massey contends that distinct sections of society experience "differentiated mobility" according to their access to mobility, influenced by social status and wealth (149). While early modern women experienced varying levels of mobility under normal circumstances, during periods of epidemics, female mobility became contingent on being placed outside the category of "woman" into new classifications based on occupation and social status. "Woman" was substituted for new divisions such as, *caldirane*, *infermiera*, *barbiera*, *gentildonna*,[7] and *ex prostitute*, each with differing access to mobility. This article aims to demonstrate how entering these new categories afforded women the agency to maintain their household economy and temporarily overcome social and physical barriers, demonstrating great resilience in moments of crisis.

This article seeks to examine how social status and work activities facilitated female mobility through a collection of contemporary textual sources. In particular, *Libro di dare, et avere*, a seventeenth-century assemblage of original letters and accounts produced by the director of the *lazzaretti*, Padre Orimbelli, offers unique insight into the variety of roles adopted by women during the plague months. Letters documenting the activities of officials from the 1630-1 epidemic in Bologna, normally residing in the Vatican Apostolic Archive, but transcribed by Antonio Brighetti, provide contemporary knowledge on the experience of women. Finally, Pietro Moratti's 1631 chronical, and Girolamo Donini's 1631 compilation of the legal notifications printed during the plague years, a work that has recently been translated into modern Italian,[8] present the social complexities of female work. In the absence of visual records, these textual sources provide the foundations in which to examine how women experienced degrees of mobility during the epidemic.

The impact of plague on women has more broadly been addressed in scholarship encompassing history of healthcare. The critical contributions made by women to early modern healthcare in Northern Italy has been widely acknowledged.[9] The significant body of work by John Henderson has extensively documented the impact of plague in 1630-1 Florence, including the changing status of marginalised groups, such as prostitutes, along with the role that women took in caring for the sick in the *lazzaretti*, plague hospitals.[10] Scholarship on women within the context of plague hospitals has been considered by Jane Stevens Crawshaw in her important work on Venetian *lazzaretti* (plague hospitals). Additionally, Nicholas Terpstra has analysed the impact of plague and famine on women and the poor in Florence in *Cultures of Charity*. The roles that women acquired within plague hospitals and convalescent homes in Bologna have only briefly been recorded (Brighetti, Malpezzi et al.). Beyond healthcare, the activities of women during epidemics have received little attention in the scholarship. The general involvement of women in the silk industry of Bologna has been considered,[11] although a deeper analysis of this female work during epidemics merits further examination. These

[5] *Bando di divieto alle donne e ai bambini di uscire di casa per quindici giorni, pubblicato a Bologna il 25 luglio 1630* (Malpezzi et al. 96). The impact of the plague on children, for which there is limited documentation, has yet to be addressed.

[6] The use of gender here is understood as the biological differences between men and women that influence power relations, a definition that is most closely aligned with 17th perceptions of gender. I acknowledge that gender is not binary, that these differences are perceived, and are socially and culturally driven.

[7] *Caldirane* were employees of the silk industry who worked with *caldiere*, cauldrons, used in the reeling process (Poni, "Misura contro misura" 385, note 3). Infermiera (nurse), barbiera (female barber surgeon), gentildonna (noblewoman). As a general source of 16th century occupations see, Garzoni.

[8] For the purpose of clarity, I have used the modern Italian translation by Malpezzi et al. (2008).

[9] Pomata 119-43; Pomata and Foy; Stevens Crawshaw, "Families, Medical Secrets and Public Health in Early Modern Venice;" Strocchia; and Whaley.

[10] See Henderson Chapter 7 for women who worked in the *lazzaretti* and Chapter 8 for a discussion on prostitutes. I have chosen to use the modern Italian spelling of *lazzaretto* (singular) & *lazzaretti* (plural) that is most commonly found in Italian scholarship.

[11] Terpstra; Poni, "All'origine del sistema di fabbrica;" Franceschi Righi; Arbizzani; and Tosi Brandi.

studies offer a useful starting point in which to analyse how many women had agency that permitted physical movement and social mobility, despite most women experiencing lengthy enclosures.

The following section of this article exposes the immense measures taken by the Bolognese government to restrict the mobility of healthy women as demonstrated through the legal decrees, known as *bandi*, which would have been posted in public places in the territory. The second part will address how the movement of women was differentiated according to social standing. The last sections will use valuable primary resources in consideration of the fundamental work of women in the silk industry and in the *lazzaretti*, occupational roles that awarded various degrees of mobility that otherwise would not have been possible.

The Great Enclosure

As cases of plague increased across Bologna in the summer of 1630, new restrictions announced throughout the end of July were executed by the Bolognese Senate and the Papal Legate of Bologna, Cardinal Spada, to counter the growing wake of the epidemic. The government sought to block trade with other cities and limit the amount of people interacting in the streets in order to reduce the spread, soon directing their attention towards women and children. Bolognese law mandated that all those who were sick or suspected of illness were to be locked inside their homes, regardless of sex or social status, thus reducing the spread of the contagion. But public policy went further to specifically target healthy women, excluding them from public space, using disciplinary measures to control their mobility even in the absence of illness, as demonstrated by numerous edicts published in 1630-1 that will be examined in this section.[12]

Published on the 25th of July 1630 the edict, *Bando di divieto alle donne e ai bambini di uscire di casa per quindici giorni, pubblicato a Bologna il 25 luglio 1630* prohibited women and children under thirteen from leaving the house for fifteen days from the 27th of July following government guidelines (Malpezzi, et al. 94). This multi-page notification was the first *bando* (edict) which outlined the extensive restrictions that would limit the movement of women until the 14th of June 1631. It is the most important edict as it was republished consecutively from July 1630 until January 1631,[13] and legally obliged women and children to domestic confinement for the duration of the pandemic, with few exemptions made for the holidays around Christmas.[14]

This first *bando*, repeated until January, highlights how the law disproportionately impacted women, containing them in their homes for the entirety of the epidemic, prohibiting women from travelling to work or engaging in business. The *bando* describes that "especially those who by age or nature can more easily run into the danger of contagion, that is children and women, who are sick in much greater numbers than men" (Malpezzi et al 94).[15] The justification of locking up women in their homes was that women, along with children, were more prone than men to contracting the plague, by reason of their age and by their natural disposition. Women and children were perceived as necessitating guardianship as the *bando* author writes, "the presence of women and children on the streets is little necessary and very dangerous for families, has decided to suspend for a few days the trade and the exiting of both" (94, my translation).[16] Even though many women engaged in business activities and worked for the major industries of Bologna, their presence in public spaces was now considered inessential and dangerous for the family. Moreover, the *bando* reads that since their presence was not necessary, then their ability to conduct their trades outside the home should be stopped along with their right to leave their homes. This shows that female trade was specifically targeted while men could continue to operate their business from outside the home.

Exemptions to these laws applied to lower class women from the countryside who sold food or herbs, provided that their home had been without illness for one month, and that they were in possession of a *fede di sanità*, or simply *fede*, a

[12] For instance, *Bando di divieto alle donne e ai bambini di uscire di casa per quindici giorni, pubblicato a Bologna il 25 luglio 1630* (Malpezzi, et al. 94).

[13] The following *bandi* outlining the quarantine for women and children were renewed consecutively every ten to fifteen days after the original publication: *Proroga della clausura alle donne a ai bambini*, 10th of August, 1630; *Seconda proroga della clausura delle donne e dei bambini. Dichiarazione per chi si muove in carrozza*, 20th of August 1630; *Terza proroga della clausura delle donne e dei bambini e dichiarazione per chi si muove in carrozza*, 2nd of September, 1630; *Proroga della clausura delle donne e dei bambini*, 15 September, 1630, outlined that the quarantine was deemed effective until further notice (Malpezzi et al. 109, 112, 123, 127).

[14] *Notifica per le donne e i bambini*, 23rd of December 1630 (Malpezzi et al. 138).

[15] "Specialmente di quelle che per età o per natura possono più facilmente incorrere nel pericolo di contagio, cioè i bambini e le donne, i quali sono ammalati in numero assai maggiore rispetto agli uomini" (Malpezzi et al. 94).

[16] "La presenze delle donne e dei bambini per le strade è poco necessaria e molto pericolosa per le famiglie, ha deciso di sospendere per qualche giorno il commercio e l'uscita degli uni e delle atre" (Malpezzi et al. 94).

certificate of health testifying to their good health.[17] While they could enter the city, these women were prohibited to enter any home or tavern and were not allowed to remain overnight. A penalty of two-month prison sentence or being sent to work in the *lazzaretto* was threatened. Furthermore, these peasant women were not permitted to speak with their *padrona*, instead their mistress could send a man to negotiate with the peasant woman on her behalf (96). These laws put constraints on women who conducted business, as the manageress was prohibited from meeting her employees and vice versa.

In comparison, men could continue to operate their businesses unless they were found to be within a household suspected of plague (Malpezzi et al. 89). All peasants and farmers from the countryside, regardless of sex, who needed to enter the city to trade were required to obtain a *fede* in order to enter Bologna,[18] as they were considered more likely to spread the plague because they were less "*prudenti*" (prudent) than city dwellers (113). The transferring of goods from outside the city without a licence was prohibited, although movement within the city was allowed for men (82). In contrast, all women and children required a licence in order to travel, which could be gained only if their home had been clear of contagion for forty days. Midwives could visit their patients with a special licence to travel (97).

The cost of not abiding by these laws was great, as women, children, and the men who were responsible for them under the law, were subject to penalties ranging from fines and corporeal punishment to forced labour in the *lazzaretti*. The July 1630 *bando* also indicated that penalties were assigned within a hierarchy, according to sex but also social position. The government had specific penalties according to the "*qualità delle persone*" (quality of the people), so that people of higher social standing received reduced sentences (95).

The sovereignty over women's bodies occurred within a hierarchy of control starting with the health authorities at the government level. At the parish level, a new position was established for men who would be responsible for the "control of enclosure for women and children" in their area (Ibid). Within the family itself, men were responsible for the behaviour of the women under their care and were charged with reporting infractions up the chain of command. Women without men to care for them were required to remain in the house but would be monitored and receive assistance from the health officials of their parish (Ibid).

Limitations to female mobility were continually enforced from January until June 1631, although access to most of the city was permitted in stages. At the beginning of January, women and children were allowed to leave the house on Sundays and on religious holidays to attend mass while remaining within their parish (145). While women were permitted more freedom, the administrative boundaries of the parish served as barriers for containment within the community. Edicts released by the end of January, and republished consecutively until June 1631, allowed women and children to travel around the city (148, 149, 154, 157, 159, 161-63). This was assuming they and their household had been clear of illness for forty days, and that they remained outside the areas defined as contagious.

There is some disagreement if men experienced a period of enclosure, as well. According to historians Carlo Cipolla, as well as Malpezzi et al., a general quarantine was called for the beginning of September 1630, which would have also confined men to their homes (Cipolla 99, note 3; Malpezzi et al. 233), although none of these authors provide textual evidence for their claim. While textual sources show that a general quarantine was considered and promoted by health officials;[19] primary sources do not confirm whether healthy men were in fact quarantined as was the case for women. The edicts, published in August and September, never set out guidelines for restrictions on male movement, except for travel outside the city walls, rather they set out measures for "anticipation of general quarantine" (Malpezzi et al. 126). These edicts reflect the attempts of the government to finance the plague efforts, urging that since it is "approaching the time" of general quarantine, that citizens give alms (107). Another *bando* similarly implores its readers to collect provisions noting that the "general quarantine is forseen, making it necessary to accumulate money and supplies" (109). It is more likely that a general quarantine was planned but never enacted due to a positive turn in the epidemic from October (Bellettini 41). Men and women experienced a very different plague simply because of their diverse access to mobility.

The experience of women in domestic confinement was challenging, especially for those in impoverished conditions. Upon entering quarantine, women were confronted with severe pressure to provide for the basic needs of their households. The troubling reality of confinement was expressed in a report of concerns by neighbourhood representatives from the quarter of San Pietro Maggiore. They argued to end the quarantine noting that the prolonged

[17] The *fede di sanità* had to be signed by three health officials (Malpezzi et al. 96).

[18] An example of these certificates has been reproduced from Donini in Malpezzi et al. (119).

[19] Anonymous, Archivio Segreto Vaticano (A.S.V.), Bologna, 282, ff. 108-09, cited in Brighetti 238-41; Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, ff. 110-11, cited in Brighetti 241-44.

enclosure of women and children and a lack of proper resources for subsistence was causing exhaustion and resulting in "*molte infermità*" (many illnesses).[20] Another report expresses the difficulty in providing food to women and children because the lengthy period of enclosure had exhausted the alms already given by citizens.[21] The *bando*, *Polizza per distribuire il pane alle parrocchie per sovvenire alle necessità dei poveri in particolare delle povere donne rinchiuse Luglio 1630* addressed the need of getting basic resources to the poor, and specifically poor women who were in their first month of mandatory confinement (Malpezzi et al. 97). Despite plague specific taxation,[22] there were legitimate fears that the economic constraints put on those in quarantine would have an impact on the long-term health of the individuals, in particular the poor, without means to survive.[23]

When possible, women supported their household economies by transferring work normally conducted in public spaces to the home. The government made provisions for women to engage in the commercial activities of the silk and wool industries, the most important in the city, by assigning responsibility to parish health officials to bring work to the women confined in their homes (Malpezzi et al. 95-96). These poorer women were the very few who continued to bring in income. The inequalities of mobility experienced by women was layered, dependent not only on their gender but on their wealth and social status, as is evident with differing access to carriages.

Social Inequities to Mobility: Women who Travel by Carriage

The disparities in access to mobility is most clear when addressing the ways that a woman was able to travel by avoiding the streets prohibited to her during the plague. The carriage, an enclosed space that provided barriers from the putrid airs of the disease, was conceptualized as a safe space from which one could not catch the contagion. Its elevation from the street and the ability to move through the city at a rapid pace, provided a justification for the continued use of carriage.

The previously mentioned edict which addressed the quarantine measures in place from the 27th of July 1630, *Bando di divieto alle donne e ai bambini di uscire di casa per quindici giorni, pubblicato a Bologna il 25 luglio 1630* (Malpezzi et al. 94-97) prohibited women and children travelling away from the home but did not extend to those who travelled by carriage, provided they resided in a home that had been free of plague for one month (96). Following this *bando*, the edict *Seconda proroga della clausura delle donne e dei bambini. Dichiarazione per chi si muove in carrozza*, published on 20th of August 1630 and enforced until December, states that women and children could go around the city by carriage and women could be accompanied by a lady's maid, as long as they do not stop or go to church or meet with others.[24]

All women, including gentlewomen, were still expected to abide by the quarantine rules; however, women experienced differentiated mobility with major disparities in access to mobility (Massey 149). The financial capacity to own a carriage would have been reserved for wealthier citizens. Hiring a carriage was more feasible although out of reach for a large portion of the populace, who could only afford to travel by foot. Further to this, prostitutes were prohibited to travel by carriage (Malpezzi et al. 96), demonstrating how the laws specifically targeted marginalised groups of women.

The restrictions on women and children travelling by carriage were maintained into the autumn despite a drop in plague cases. Surprisingly, the rules tightened around the mobility of women in December, even though numbers had decreased. *Bando sull'andare in carrozza delle donne e dei bambini, durante il periodo del contagio*, describing the restriction on carriage travel for women and children during the period of contagion, released on the 8th of December 1630, reiterates the danger of women travelling to public spaces in the city, and revokes any licences that previously permitted women to travel by carriage, with the exception of food retailers and midwives. The law specifically targeted women of middle and working class, those who could afford travel by carriage but did not fall into the category of noblewomen. In fact, the new rules included further omissions for *gentildonne*. Under the new law, gentlewomen maintained their privilege to travel in carriages, along with their daughters, but now they were permitted to ride with a companion from another household. Moreover, these noble women were allowed to travel with several other aristocratic

[20] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, ff. 109, cited in Brighetti 240.
[21] Ibid., 239.
[22] Pietro Iachomo, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 121 r., cited in Brighetti 294.
[23] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, ff. 109, cited in Brighetti 239; Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, ff. 110, cited in Brighetti 242.
[24] "Second extension of the cloister of women and children. Declaration for those who travel by carriage" (Malpezzi, et al. 112). These stipulatations are repeated in *Terza proroga della clausura delle donne e dei bambini e dichiarazione per chi si muove in carrozza -2 settembre 1630* (Malpezzi et al. 123).

women, from different dwellings, in the same carriage along with companions and servants, thus experiencing an increase in mobility (Malpezzi et al. 136).

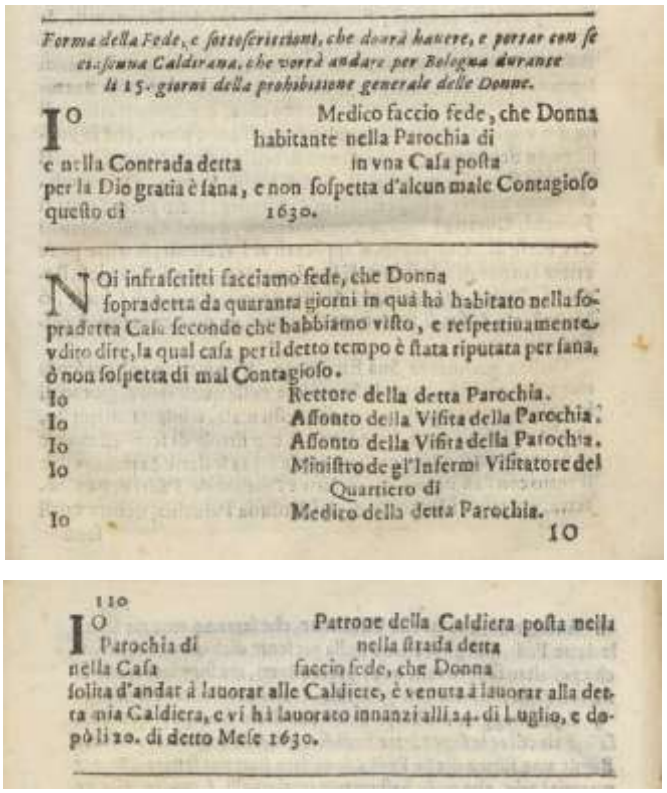
Women formally permitted to travel by carriage were positioned into a new category for exclusion with new disciplinary measures. Carriage drivers could lose their carriage and horses if they disobeyed the law, while the female traveler would endure corporal punishment (Ibid). The connotation of these laws is clear, women of different social standing had varying legal rights to mobility and, as a consequence, the threat of disciplinary action impacted women according to their social position. The edict is exemplary of the attitudes towards those outside the upper classes, as the body of the noble woman is understood to be less likely to transmit disease, while all women outside essential services are further controlled. The noble body is offered more legal rights to move through the city during a pandemic, while all other women in fact lose the last means of efficient mobility provided by the carriage. The *bando* also demonstrates that the perceived cleanliness of the noble female body extended to her chosen female companions, even those who lived outside her household. The aristocratic body carried an elite social and legal status, but also a physical superiority that could be transferred to others. While these specific exclusions to confinement only benefited elite women, alternative types of mobility were experienced exclusively by women who worked in the Silk Arts.

Women and Work: The Silk Arts and its *caldirane*

The silk industry went further than keeping women working within the domestic space; they managed to lobby for female workers to continue to work outside of the home. Bologna was a prominent actor in the silk industry of Europe during the early modern period in part due to its hydraulic powered *torcitoio circolare*, a silk throwing machine exclusive to Bologna from the fourteenth- until the sixteenth-century (Giusberti and Monaco 167). Its famous hydraulic mills and unique methods of production placed the city in a dominant position in the European silk market (Terpstra 172). The nature of the hydraulic powered machines reduced hard labour, providing more employment for women (Poni, "All'origine del sistema" 475).

The production of silk was concentrated in the spring and summer months, according to the lifecycle of the silk worm (Terpstra 172). The level of production during those months necessitated seasonal labour, and according to 1587 estimates, the silk industry employed one third of the city's population during that period (Ibid).[25] Out of approximately 25,000 workers, 84% were women (Poni, "Tecnologie"; Terpstra 323, cited in Giusberti and Monaco 173). A higher number of women than men were involved in the initial phases of production, from silk cocoons to the production of thread in preparation for weaving, while men were employed as the higher salaried expert weavers (Giusberti and Monaco 172). Women employed as *caldirane* worked with the *caldiere*, or cauldrons, large pots or vessels made of lead used in the reeling process (Tosi Brandi 305).

Reeling consisted of soaking the cocoon in a hot bath, loosening the fibres allowing for the delicate unravelling of the singular filament into skeins of thread (Giusberti and Monaco 167). The skeins went through a process called throwing, which involved the twisting of the skeins using the hydraulic powered *torcitoio circolare* machines (Franceschi 106). This aspect of the production could not be conducted at home and necessitated women to travel to the silk mills.



Forma della Fede, e sottoscrittioni, che dovrà havere, e portar con se ciascuna Caldirana, che vorrà andare per Bologna durante li 15. giorni della prohibitione generale delle Donne.

IO Medico faccio fede, che Donna habitante nella Parochia di e nella Contrada detta in vna Casa posta per la Dio gratia è sana, e non sospetta d'alcun male Contagioso questo dì 1630.

NOi infrascritti facciamo fede, che Donna sopradetta da quaranta giorni in quà hà habitato nella sopradetta Casa secondo che habbiamo visto, e respettivamente vdito dire, la qual casa per il detto tempo è stata riputata per sana, ò non sospetta di mal Contagioso.

Io Rettore della detta Parochia.
Io Assonto della Visita della Parochia.
Io Assonto della Visita della Parochia.
Io Ministro de gl'Infermi Visitatore del Quartiero di
Io Medico della detta Parochia.

IO

IO Patrone della Caldiera posta nella Parochia di nella strada detta nella Casa faccio fede, che Donna solita d'andar à lauorar alle Caldiere, è venuta à lauorar alla detta mia Caldiera, e vi hà lauorato innanzi alli 24. di Luglio, e dopò li 20. di detto Mese 1630.

Figure 2 Fede di sanità (Donini 109-10).

Within a few days of the initial 25th of July decree requiring women and children to remain at home, a new *bando* was released which expressed how the previous laws had been prejudicial against the Silk Arts in the city (Malpezzi et al. 99). The *Bando e dichiarazione sul lavoro*

[25] The total population estimate of Bologna in 1587 was 72,000 (Bellettini 48).

delle caldirane, ovvero le donne che vanno a lavorare alle caldiere, an edict addressed to the female silk workers who worked with the cauldrons, published 27th of July 1630, made clear the need to support the silk industry, allowing women to travel to work in the silk mills. The new *bando* permitted women who worked as *caldirane* to obtain a *fede* (certificate of health) to continue to work as long as they had completed a period of quarantine or were not suspected of plague (Fig. 2). Women found without their *fede* would be subjected to penalties. Furthermore, women were commanded to take the shortest route when travelling to and from work and were informed not to make any stops or visit any house (100).

The *bando* and *fede* demonstrate the type of identification and classification of women into a set category, those who worked as a *caldirana*, with new rules and limitations to mobility. They highlight the importance of the silk industry in Bologna and the influence that profits and large industry had within governmental decision making. In this instance, the central authority determined the restrictions of mobility based on the city's economic needs. The parish authorities acted on these rules and determined which women fit within the classification of *caldirane*, determining her health based on instances of plague within her household. No less than five health officials of their parish had to sign the *fede* along with her employer.

Given the seasonal nature of the silk industry, it was essential over the summer months at the peak of the epidemic, that production continued. In particular, the women who made up the largest portion of the employees of the silk production were paramount in the continuation of the industry but also in the maintenance of their household economy which relied on this seasonal work. Entering a new classification, *caldirane* were permitted to leave their home to work but were prohibited to freely move throughout the city. No one classification authorized complete unimpeded access to the streets; yet, along with the *caldirane*, other occupational classifications offered women more maneuverability.

Women and Work: *Lazzaretti*

The largest impact made by women in the aid of the plague effort were from those who worked in the plague hospitals and convalescent homes. The *lazzaretti* in Bologna were religious houses converted into temporary hospitals and convalescence spaces. These structures all resided outside the walls of the ancient city in close proximity to each other, fortified with large iron gates and guarded around the clock (Moratti 12). The two main hospitals were the Convento di Santa Maria degli Angeli, known as "Angeli," dedicated to sick men, and the Convento della Santissima Annunziata, or simply "Annunziata," which housed sick women. These hospitals were under the authority of the director of the *lazzaretti*, Padre Orimbelli, whose offices resided in a monastery complex across the street from Annunziata. Women joined the large network of people who supplied the *lazzaretti* with food and wine (Orimbelli 135v),[26] and were paid employees, assuming such duties as nurses, cleaners, and even a surgeon (Moratti 13). Textual sources reveal that at the peak of the epidemic women made up approximately 30-40% of the workforce in the two main plague hospitals. The largest portion of female employees were nurses, understandable given the strong legacy of female practitioners in Italy.

The medical system in Italy had long since acknowledged women's role in healthcare, although female healers were more recognized in the medieval period. Gianna Pomata and Rosemarie Foy have noted that the title "*medicus*" applied to "surgeons, barbers, and even women" in medieval Italy (Pomata and Foy 61-62). In Bologna, medieval records show that women were given the designation "*medica*" when they practiced healing arts (Pomata 121). Nonetheless, as the influence of elite physicians represented by Bologna's College of Medicine grew in the sixteenth-century, there was an increased partitioning of health practitioners within a hierarchical system which placed doctors at that top, and apothecaries and surgeons nearer the bottom, excluding women altogether (Pomata and Foy 62). Clear delineations between roles and responsibilities were enforced and licensing of all three positions came to fall under the purview of the college (63). Pomata notes that from late 1500s until the latter part of the eighteenth-century, no women were listed as either doctors, apothecaries or surgeons licenced by the college (Pomata 121). The only roles that women undertook in an official capacity were as midwives and occasionally as suppliers of remedies for the treatment of female ailments when supervised by men (130). However, epidemics and war offered opportunities for unlicensed women to practice as healthcare workers, providing chances to break physical and social boundaries.

The importance of unlicensed practitioners during moments of crisis should not be underestimated. Roy Porter contends that while early modern doctors often resorted to

[26] Payments made to female vendors include: Signora Matriglia (Orimbelli 148r), Madonna Laura Cavazzoni, (156r-v, 159r-v), Madonna Ludovica (184).

bloodletting and remedies with dangerous effects, women were the most significant of healers as they addressed their patients within the "'context of individual life experiences'" and with a focus on healthcare as a cooperative process between the sick and the healer (Porter 14-15, cited in Whaley 132). Furthermore, women, in particular nuns, were responsible for recipes and the pharmaceutical production of anti-plague remedies in early modern Italy (Strocchia 73). Due to the cost of many of the ingredients found in plague remedies, a do-it-yourself approach was adopted. As Sharon Strocchia has demonstrated, the popularity of homegrown treatments highlights how early modern Italians from all social backgrounds "proactively supplemented public health measures to increase their chances of survival" (79).

The regulations for confinement would have restricted unlicensed female healers from leaving their homes, even to visit people within their communities, but the *lazzaretti* offered a space in which to practice freely. Female practitioners, unlike doctors, were not mandated to serve and thus their motivations for employment were likely out of charity or desperation. Doctors were conscripted into service, but health officials had made concessions for doctors so that they could transfer their service altogether to someone else, such as a surgeon, by paying a fine of 50 *scudi*, the Papal currency of Bologna. Otherwise, they could perform their service without ever stepping inside the *lazzaretti*. Instead, the barber surgeons could collect information on each patient and report to the doctor, who would then prescribe treatment (Orimbelli 131v-132r). Therefore, the direct care of the sick fell to the barber surgeons and nurses.

The management of staff within the hospitals was hierarchical, with Orimbelli in command. Women traditionally held leaderships roles in the management of plague hospitals, as Stevens Crawshaw has shown in Venice, but these positions largely disappeared by the fifteenth-century (Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals* 125-26). In Bologna, no women are recorded to have worked in the offices of the hospital management. The only management position given to women were leadership roles within the Annunziata *lazzaretto* for women; two female head nurses took the responsibility to monitor 10 or 12 nurses under each.[27] The hospitals necessitated a consistent influx of health practitioners in part due to the high mortality rate of staff (Moratti 30).

At the opening of the *lazzaretti* in June 1630, Orimbelli's letters reveal a great need for nursing staff,[28] and nurses were moved between the institutions according to need.[29] Regardless of necessity, nurses were poorly viewed in the official narrative of the plague events. In Moratti's chronical of 1631, he accuses female nurses of having carnal relations with *lazzaretti* officials (30). The stereotype of the immoral female nurse was very present in this seventeenth-century epidemic context. This bias could in part be based on the reliance on marginalised people to work in the hospital.

In times of crisis, necessity permitted convicts and prostitutes momentary escape from social barriers that normally kept them outside of regular society. It was a common practice for early modern cities managing plagues to offer reduced sentences or commuted sentences for prisoners in exchange for their service in the *lazzaretti*. Stevens Crawshaw has shown that entire prison sentences could be exchanged to serve as "*pizzigamorti*", those in charge of body removal in Venice (Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals* 113). A record of employees in Bolognese *lazzaretti* from the 30th of December 1630 reveal that Casa della Mela had two male prisoners and a woman listed as "*Domenica da Modona meretrice prigione*", an imprisoned prostitute.[30]

The plague presented down and out women, such as prostitutes, with extreme challenges. As Henderson has argued, during the plague of 1630-1 in Florence, the government took measures against prostitutes because they were perceived as "contributing to the sin for which God was punishing the city" (Henderson 240). Likewise, in Bologna prostitutes and homeless women were some of the first to be targeted by public policy. On the 1st of July 1630, the *Bando di divieto alle meretrici affinché non escono fuori dalle porte della città* banned the activities of prostitutes and female beggars from exiting the city or from being found with a man (Malpezzi et al. 87). The closure of brothels brought unemployment for these women. Some women disregarded the regulations out of necessity, taking the risk of contracting the contagion with the potential punishment of prison time. The prejudice against prostitutes and homeless women was evident in these policies that categorized all women of the lowest social order as causes of contagion. The movement of these women was considered a threat to public health and breaking these laws resulted in a three-month prison sentence.

[27] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 234 ss., cited in Brighetti 268-70.

[28] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 290 r.v., cited in Brighetti 282. Letter dated 21st of June, 1630 and written from Orimbelli's office in the Monastero de' Padri Gesuati, known today as the Ex-Convento delle Acque outside Porta San Mamolo.

[29] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 269 r., cited in Brighetti 275.

[30] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 215, cited in Brighetti, 280.

Moratti's contemporary account of events indicates that prostitutes came to serve at Bologna's hospitals, although he writes that prostitutes were "persuaded to this service not from charity, but from greediness for profit, and to live better than in their homes" (30). His contemporary gaze on these women calls attention to the prejudice faced by prostitutes, who were regarded as corrupt and immoral people. He does not include similar judgments on the men who worked in the *lazzaretti*, despite a number of male ex-convicts who traded in prison sentences for hospital work.[31] Instead, Moratti targets women who put their own lives at risk to serve their communities, women who likely had no other chances to find employment. More favourable contemporary accounts of prostitutes working in *lazzaretti* during early modern epidemics form part of conversion stories of those who permanently entered convent life (Henderson 206).

The personal stories of prostitutes that came to work in the *lazzaretti* in Bologna have all been lost save for one. A case of misconduct that was brought against a priest working in a plague hospital to the Bolognese courts records ex-prostitute, Susanna Ricci. Notary records show that Ricci worked in the San Giuseppe convalescent home for women, alongside the priest Bartolomeo Lena, who extorted Ricci along with others, forcing them to steal belongings from the sick. Of note, Ricci was named as a former prostitute who came to work in the *lazzaretto* as a *barbiera* (female barber surgeon) exclusively treating women. She dressed as a nun and pledged that, if she survived the plague, she would enter a religious order.[32] The court case also revealed that Ricci was both courted and harassed by a number of men, from noble, merchant and religious backgrounds, during her time at the *lazzaretto*, but she never left.[33] The plague year allowed her to gain temporary status under the category of *barbiera*, when otherwise she was banned from practicing her skills. Likewise, the epidemic provided previously excluded women a range of work opportunities. The complex story of female work in the hospitals is evident in primary sources that exist for three main snapshots of the plague: at the peak in July, in November as the situation began to improve, and in December when the majority of patients had exited.

Documents compiled on behalf of the Orimbelli's office on the 8th of July 1630 record the names of all employees, along with their title at each of the hospitals at the height of the epidemic.[34] In the house of the officials twenty-four men, and no women were working. In the Angeli *lazzaretto*, out of twenty-eight employees, eight were women, making up 29% of the employees. The Angeli records reveal that four women were called "*infermiera*" (nurse) and one had the role of "*sotto infermiera*" (under-nurse). Additionally, two women were listed as "*bugadara*" the title given to a laundress. One man is listed as a guard, and then nine additional male nurses are named, along with male apothecary, barber surgeons, and body carriers.[35] Angeli had more male nurses than female but, contrary to Moratti's account which claimed that each gender was cared for by someone from their own sex, female nurses also treated male patients (Moratti 13).

Compared to the twenty-eight employees at Angeli, Annunziata, the largest hospital and dedicated to the care of women, boasted fifty-four. Of those, twenty-one were women, approximately 39% of the employees. The names and titles are listed in the textual source, recalling the roles adopted by women which consisted of eleven nurses, six titled "*cuciniera*" (female cook), three titled "*dispensiera*" who distributed remedies to the sick, and one wife of the watchman.[36] In contrast, the male employees were two doctors, four barber surgeons, a watchman and his assistant, a dispenser and his assistant, house master, a "*canevaro*" custodian of the cellar, as well as three cooks, three scullery servants, a kitchen assistant, and apothecary, a doctors' servant, a keeper of the servants, seven "*beccamorto*" (gravediggers), a hole digger, and three "*portatore da cocchietti*", those who transported the sick from the city (277-28). Unlike the Angeli, no male nurses are listed, demonstrating that women were responsible for the direct care of other women in the women's *lazzaretto*. The doctors and barber surgeons were in smaller numbers than nurses, which could indicate that nurses took on more primary care.

Casa della Mela convalescent home had significantly less workers consisting of guards, a cook, a few assistants and one barber surgeon. Out of eleven employees, four were women including three kitchen assistants and the wife of the watchman (278). These initial records reveal how the strict divisions of labour was gendered with some crossover. The role of a laundress was solely for women. While doctors, surgeons, and body carriers were exclusively male. However, both men and women are listed as nurses, dispensers of medicine, and as cooks.

[31] Employee records for Casa della Mela from the 30th of December 1630 notes four male prisoners working in the convalescent home (Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 215, cited in Brighetti 279-80)

[32] Anonymous, Archivio di Stato di Bologna, *Torrone*, 5783, c. 552r, cited in Pastore 123.

[33] Ibid., cited in Pastore 125-27.

[34] Giovanni Salano and D. Hylario. *Note de' ministri et Offitiali fuori fi S. Mamolo fatto il giorno 8 di luglio dal Padre D. Hylario Instante Giovanni Salano*. A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 249 r. - 250r., and f. 414 r.- 416 r., cited in Brighetti 276-8.

[35] Ibid., cited in Brighetti 276-77.

[36] Salano and Hylario. A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 414 r.- 416 r., cited in Brighetti, 277-78.

The subsequent bookkeeping records from *Libro di dare, et avere* provide a snapshot four months later on the 10th of November 1630, with similar trends in employee data, although with a slight decrease in workers. A total of forty-six employees are registered in Annunziata. No doctors are recorded, only two apothecaries, along with two cooks and thirteen servants. Out of all employees, eight were women including one female cook, two laundresses, and five nurses. Four male nurses are noted along with the body carriers and a dispenser of medicine (Orimbelli 164v). The presence of male nurses in an exclusively female hospital illustrates that at a later stage of the epidemic, men also took direct care of women.

This record also exhibits the meaningful relationships formed between employees. At the bottom of the document, a note reads: "This is the entire family found presently in the Santissima Annunziata *lazzaretto*" (Orimbelli 164v, my translation).[37] The reference to these people belonging to part of a family demonstrates the strong bonds between those who came to serve in the *lazzaretto* in a period of crisis. The family bonds are also evident when looking at the other types of relationships between employees. For instance, a watchman along with his wife, titled "*guardiana*" (watchwoman), would commonly act as gatekeepers together, [38] with the expectation that the family unit could remain intact. Employee records from Annunziata, Angeli, and Casa della Mela, confirm that women titled *guardiana* were present along with their watchmen husbands in all locations. Furthermore, in Casa della Mela, a cook and a "little girl her daughter" are listed, demonstrating how a mother could remain with her child and work in the hospital.[39] These relationships show how the nuclear family was maintained even in one of the most dangerous places of the city.

The final snapshot of textual sources at the period of decline of the epidemic on the 30th of December 1630 shows less employees, although these are still confined to gender specific roles. The only women recorded in the Annunziata *lazzaretto* are the wife of the watchman, four washers along with two on retainer, and a "*cuciniera*". In the Angeli *lazzaretto*, only four female washers are listed.[40] Documents show further diminished occupancy in the main hospitals, Annunziata, Angeli, and Casa della Mela, as well as in the administrative offices. Annunziata had only nine reported employees compared to fifty-four recorded in July and the forty-six recorded in November. Of those only one woman, "*una cuciniera vechia*" (an old female cook) was reported. Once again, no women are recorded to have worked in the offices of the hospital director. Casa della Mela records the wife of the watchman, alongside "*Isabetta cuciniera*", two laundresses, and one imprisoned prostitute, likely carrying out her sentence in the *lazzaretto*. [41]

These textual sources reveal that women undertook duties as dispensers of medicines, as primary caregivers, and as leaders of other staff. These occupational categories excluded women from the quarantine restrictions and permitted them brief shifts in physical and social mobility. The convalescent homes and *lazzaretti* were places in which unlicensed female practitioners could be recognized and paid for their services in an era that otherwise ostracised women. In some cases, the female body that was previously marked for exclusion acquired new levels of freedom when women's social category temporarily changed meaning, such was the case when ex-prostitutes became *infermiera* or *barbiera*. The plague hospital offered marginalised women in particular clear avenues for temporary improvement to their social standing, but with great personal risk. Brothels were closed yet hospitals provided places to sleep, eat and earn. But mobility here was also limited. Although no longer confined to the home, women who worked in the *lazzaretti* were confined in new ways by the gated and guarded hospital structure.

Conclusion

The 1630-1 outbreak in Bologna is exemplary of the ways in which the female body was segmented and controlled under Italian early modern health policies in times of plague. The categorization of the female body as "abnormal" created an environment in which women were primary targets for health policies during epidemics, which separated healthy women from the public spaces of the city, confining them to their homes. Exceptions to these policies opened the door for women to enter new classifications with increased maneuverability. The example of Bologna has shown that access to mobility in periods of plague was contingent on exiting the category of "woman," as defined by the 25th of July *bando* confining all women to their homes,

[37] "Questa è tutta la Famiglia si ritrova presentemente al lazaretto della SSma Annunziata" (Orimbelli 164v).
[38] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 265 r.v., cited in Brighetti 273.
[39] Orimbelli, 165r; Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 215, cited in Brighetti 279-80; Salano and Hylario. A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 249 r., cited in Brighetti 277-78.
[40] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 269 r., cited in Brighetti 274.
[41] Anonymous, A.S.V., Bologna, 282, f. 215, cited in Brighetti 279-80.

and entering fresh categories under law formed from social or economic class and occupation. Classifications based on employment status and societal background, such as *caldirane*, *infermiera*, *gentildonna*, permitted more freedom, simultaneously introducing women to new categories of exclusion with varying degrees of mobility. Prostitutes and peasants, nurses and noble women, could each cross the boundaries of domestic confinement, but only to be confronted with new forms of containment.

These classifications permitted women maneuverability in the greatest disaster to hit Bologna in the seventeenth century. The dominant historical narrative on this event in Bologna has focused solely on the contribution of doctors and learned men while devaluing the variety of roles held by women. Those who volunteered for service in the plague hospitals were celebrated as part of a family of employees but have otherwise been negatively remembered in the contemporary narrative. The scarcity of visual sources has opened up fresh opportunities to journey through the rich textual material of the hospital and legal records, revealing the vital contributions made by women, especially women of lower classes, through work in local industry and in the *lazzaretti*. These documents have shone light on the agency and resilience of individual women in moments of crisis and have demonstrated that the ability to move, to travel, and to navigate the horrors of this event was deeply discriminative. Mobility was gendered, classist and conditional, issues that continue to be relevant in the twenty-first-century global pandemic in which we find ourselves today.

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Overcoming the Pandemic through Viral Poetry Games: The Phenomenon of Coronavirus-Inspired Digital Acrostic Poetry in South Korea

Christina Han[1]

[1] History, Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford, Ontario, Canada

E-mail: chan@wlu.ca

Abstract

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in South Korea in winter 2019, acrostic poems on the three-syllable word "Corona" became viral on major search engines and social media platforms across the country. The composition of acrostic poems, particularly in three lines, has been a popular cultural phenomenon in Korea since the 1980s when it became a participatory literary exercise and game featured on television entertainment shows. The digital revolution in the 2000s allowed the writing and sharing of these short and whimsical poems to expand into various digital platforms. Since 2010, PC and mobile games have been developed to further enhance the ludic approach to acrostic poetry composition and contests. While facilitating individual creativity, and as an interactive and ludic way of community building and branding, acrostic poetry contests have also been used to promote social and political campaigns and consumer products.

This paper will investigate poetry games and contests of acrostic poems on the Coronavirus featured on South Korean digital platforms. It will analyze the various games and contests organized by schools, communities, consumer product brands, and social media circles. The poems, composed by children and adults, display a wide range of messages involving self-reflection, social campaign, political criticism, and subversive wordplay. Together, these viral poems and contests promoted values of collaboration, competition, and social exchange during the pandemic. All in all, the paper explores the viral powers of language and language art in the digital world, as well as digital poetry's connections to networked self, social mobilization, and online activism.

Keywords: COVID-19, pandemic, digital poetry, acrostics, poetry games, social media, wordplay, viral language, networked self, social activism, entertainment, advertising

Language is a virus. – William S. Burroughs

Introduction

In the wake of the Coronavirus outbreak in South Korea in winter 2019, acrostic poems on the three-syllable word "Corona" became viral on the country's search engines and social media platforms. Often witty and humorous, these brief poems were composed and shared in large numbers via online poetry games and contests as well as on personal blogs and social media pages. The composition of acrostic poems, especially in three lines, has been a popular cultural phenomenon in Korea since the 1980s when it became a participatory literary exercise and game featured on television entertainment shows. In the 2000s, these short and whimsical poems expanded into various digital platforms, and throughout the 2010s, PC and mobile games that further enhanced the ludic approach to acrostic poetry composition and contests emerged. While facilitating individual creativity, and as an interactive and ludic means of community building and branding, acrostic poetry contests have also been used to promote social and political campaigns and consumer products. Despite their ubiquity, digital acrostic poetry in South Korea has not received scholarly attention, perhaps because of the compositions' relatively low literary merit in the traditional sense, much like Instagram poetry in the English-language social media (Pâquet 296).

This paper will investigate poetry games and contests of acrostic poems on Coronavirus related themes featured on South Korean digital platforms. It will analyze various games and contests organized by schools, communities, consumer product brands, and social media circles. The poems, composed by children and adults, display a wide range of messages involving self-reflection, social campaigns, political criticism, and subversive wordplay. Together, these viral poems and contests promoted values of collaboration, competition, and meaningful social exchange during the pandemic crisis.

Brief History of Acrostic Poems around the World

Acrostics, poetic compositions in which the initial or final letters of the lines follow the sequence of letters of an alphabet or a word, have a long history in world literature (Baldick 2). In the Western literary tradition, acrostic poems are found in the classical verses of Greek and Roman periods (Marcus 110; Robinson 290; Adkin 1029). Throughout the Middle Ages, acrostic poems and prayers were written as a creative way of scaffolding Christian messages that enhanced the sacredness of the letter (Tilliette). The courtly poetry of the Frankish Carolingian period and the Latin acrostic poems of Anglo-Saxon England also helped popularize the genre in the secular literary scene of the Middle Ages (Gallagher 250; Tilliette). Acrostics were also regularly used in hymns as well as in the secular prose and love songs of the Byzantine Empire (Jeffreys). Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, alphabetic songs for children emerged as an integral part of mnemonic curriculum in both religious and secular education (Jordan 10; Douglass). Acrostics were also employed widely in non-European literature. Within Hebrew literature, acrostics were commonly used in liturgical psalms to create lineated prayers (Holbrook) and to spell out the name of the author (Ofer 231). In the same vein, acrostic poems made frequent appearances in Arabic, Turkish, Swahili, and Somali poetry with both religious and secular content (Werner 561; Harries 146; Orwin 70; Aydin 249).

In contrast to the longstanding tradition of acrostics in European, Middle Eastern, and African literature, there are limited examples of acrostic works in premodern East Asian literature. Perhaps the most important reason for this can be found in the fact that literary Sinitic, the dominant script of the region, was an ideographic system comprised of over 50,000 syllabic characters. While Sinitic poetry made use of rhymes and wordplay, acrostics never became a key feature in poetry due to practical reasons. Throughout the premodern era, literary Sinitic was used as the common script for communication in the countries neighbouring China, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. In the fifth century, the 46-letter alphabet *kana* was introduced in Japan which facilitated the creation of vernacular poetry and prose. Acrostic poems based on *kana* were composed during the Heian period (794–1185 CE) but did not develop into a major genre like in other parts of the world (LaMarre; Yamanaka). The invention of the Korean alphabet *hangul* in the fifteenth century allowed for the recording of vernacular song-poems that became popularized from the sixteenth century on (McCann 362). Yet despite the pervasiveness of wordplay in vernacular Korean poetry, acrostics were rare.

In the past two decades, however, there has been a notable development in acrostic poetry across East Asia. In Japan, acrostic poetry has been explored as a means of promoting media literacy and building digital storytelling networks (Jung, Toriumi and Mizukoshi; Mizukoshi). In China, much of the effort has focused on creating computer-generated acrostic poems based on classical poetic works (Fan, et al.; Guo, et al.; Liu, et al.) and on exploring the possibilities of using acrostics in Chinese language instruction for foreigners (He; Anggreani and Agustian). These developments in China align with recent trends in English language scholarship that probe educational benefits of acrostics for both native and foreign learners of the language (Hopkins; Frye, Trathen and Schlagal; Garba) and experimentations with digitally generated acrostic poems (Agarwal and Kann). More importantly for this paper, in South Korea since the late 1980s acrostic poetry composition developed into a major mass participatory literary phenomenon, intersecting various sectors such as entertainment, politics, education, advertising, and consumer culture.

History of the Acrostic Poetry Phenomenon in South Korea

Poetry composition, exchange, games, and contests were vital components of social, cultural, and political life throughout Korea's premodern and modern history (Lee). Beginning in the late 1980s, syllabic acrostic poems began to be popularized in South Korea when three-line acrostic poetry (*samhaengsi*) competitions became regular features on TV entertainment shows. For example, a popular Sunday morning game and arts TV show for children aired on MBC, the country's leading private broadcasting company, included *samhaengsi* contest for school-age children (*Donga ilbo*, Feb. 27, 1988, 8). Throughout the 1990s, *samhaengsi* contests appeared on more TV and radio shows, often starring celebrities and other public figures as contestants. Their poems, composed on the spot to the three-syllable words provided by the hosts, were judged (often by the audience) based on swiftness, ingenuity, and wittiness (*Gyeonghyang sinmun*, Oct. 11, 1991, 16; Dec. 20, 1991, 22; Mar. 27, 1992, 24). The popularity of acrostic poetry contests on TV entertainment shows, such as Infinite Challenge (*Muhan dojeon*) featuring comedian Park Myungsoo and others, reached its peak in the early 2000s, and videos of poetry matches between prominent comedians circulated widely via YouTube and various social media platforms (*Segye ilbo*, Dec. 1, 2008).

Three-line acrostic poetry also gained popularity through its connection to the pro-democracy movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Witty and demeaning wordplay on the

names of presidents Chun Doo-hwan (in office 1980–1988) and Roh Tae-woo (in office 1988–1993) was captured in short *samhaengsi* that spread widely among people (Yi S). These poems challenged the oppressive images of political leaders and became a creative outlet for public frustration and anger over the military government and violation of civil rights. More importantly, they demonstrated the usefulness of acrostic poetry in reinterpreting and subverting established meanings and powers through participatory mass literary exercises that fostered social and political activism. Since then, the use of acrostic poetry has become a common practice in South Korean politics. Succinct, humorous, and biting acrostic poems on the names of politicians have been composed and distributed during election times and public protests, a trend that has exploded exponentially in recent years thanks to online platforms (*Hangyeore*, Oct. 8, 1997, 11; *Gyeonghyang sinmun*, Dec. 14, 2016). Such uses of acrostic poetry exemplify political activism that employs humor as a form of "creative nonviolent resistance" (Sørensen 2) and attests to the nature and importance of political engagement in South Korea mediated by social media (Kim SB).

Starting in the late 1990s, acrostic poems and poetry contests began to be utilized by both government and organizations to promote various social and environmental issues. For example, *samhaengsi* contests with prizes were created for an environmental protection campaign (1996), a cycling promotion campaign (1998), and an anti-bullying campaign (1999) to raise public awareness and increase engagement (*Donga ilbo*, Apr. 16, 1996, 45; *Hangyeore*, Apr. 16, 1998, 9; *Donga ilbo*, Aug. 31, 1999, 8). In 2000, a *samhaengsi* contest based on the Blue House (South Korean president's residence) was held for elementary school students, and twenty winners were invited to meet the president on Children's Day at the presidential house (Presidential Archives of Korea, 2000).

Around the same time, businesses of various types and sizes also began to use acrostic poems as advertising and marketing tools. They organized contests asking the public to compose acrostic poems on their new products or programs and awarded the winners with prizes (*Donga ilbo*, Jun. 11, 1996, 9; *Maeil gyeongje*, Sept. 10, 1997, 31). Some of these marketing campaigns combined acrostic poetry contests with social causes and nationalistic messages. For instance, a popular South Korean fast-food chain Lotteria's 1998 marketing campaign, titled "Love the Nation," included a *samhaengsi* contest based on Taegeukgi, the South Korean national flag. The company donated a portion of its proceeds from the campaign to support a school lunch program for underprivileged children in South and North Korea (*Maeil gyeongje*, Jul. 28, 1998, 16). While most research on the relationship between wordplay and advertising has focused on puns, the use of acrostic poetry in South Korean advertising presents another creative use of wordplay worthy of further attention (Djafarova 267; Wischmeyer 212).

It is important to note, however, that these political and mercantile uses of acrostic poetry contests often encountered public backlash. Especially in the recent decade, a number of online acrostic poetry contests turned into platforms for open and harsh public criticism (Kim S). For example, in November 2017, the Ministry of Defense organized a four-line acrostic poetry contest on the four-syllable words "patriotic martyrs" and "patriots." The submitted poems on the ministry's website ended up containing disparaging messages about the ministry's actions and about blind patriotism, which led to the ministry abruptly ending the contest (Yang; Yi Y). In June of the same year, during the election season, the Liberty Korean Party initiated a five-line acrostic poetry contest based on their party's name in the hope of gaining public support in the upcoming election. The event once again backfired when poems with critical messages and even slanderous attacks on candidates were composed, shared, and liked by netizens (Chae; Kim T). On the marketing front, in 2013, Hyundai automobile's marketing team created a promotional acrostic poetry contest based on "Genesis," their luxury line vehicle. Many submissions, however, were disapproving in nature, and when the winning poems chosen by Hyundai were announced, they drew much public scorn (Bak Y; Song).

This wide range of applications demonstrates the creative flexibility and effectiveness of acrostic poetry as a literary genre and phenomenon that has become a popular way of articulating and sharing ideas and feelings in contemporary South Korean society. For many South Koreans, acrostic poems have become a ubiquitous everyday sight and experience, traversing entertainment, politics, and consumer culture. Acrostic poetry composition and exchange have also become important means of individual and communal identity building. Acrostic name poems, for example, have been used broadly as a way of creating positive self-image. Writing a name poem that adds new layers of meanings reflective of personal character and aspirations has been regarded as an empowering and therapeutic literary exercise. A study by Jeong (2010) highlights the educational benefits of such exercise for students, combining creative writing, self-reflection, and self-expression. The exchange of name poems also serves a social function and has become particularly important in South Korean youth culture. Name poems of friends and classmates are widely shared on school and classroom blogs and various social media platforms from elementary to post-secondary, indicating the significant role these poems play in creating and bolstering a sense of community (Choe).

The passion for acrostic poetry led to the development of online communities dedicated to showcasing their members' literary creations. Online *samhaengsi* clubs began to proliferate starting in 2000 where members shared their poems and commented on works by other members (Seon). Articles and blog posts offering helpful writing tips also appeared. In general, they emphasize that in order to compose an effective acrostic poem, a writer would need to study the topic, combine it with trendy subject matters, employ uncommon words, and make use of wit and humour. The articles also provide guidance on using online searching functions to find words that start with the same syllable (Gang). Soon self-described acrostic poets began to emerge

and became active on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Those specializing in name poems gained following by offering personalized name poems to visitors free of charge (Yi J). Eventually, responding to the popularity of acrostic poetry, a number of online and mobile apps and games were developed that aimed to provide a more gamified experience of composing and sharing the poems (Giver Corp.; Minestrone).

It appears that the proliferation of acrostic poems in the digital environment, particularly on social media platforms, owes much to the form and nature of the literary genre itself. Succinct and quick-witted acrostic poems are attention-grabbing, memorable, and easily sharable—ideal content for social media feeds. *Samhaengsi* has intersected entertainment, social and political activism, marketing and advertising, individual and communal identity building. It has also facilitated ludic public participation mediated through digital platforms and mobile space via smartphones (Jin). Indeed, acrostic poetry has become a vital channel through which networked sociality and creativity is constructed in South Korea (van Dijck 3).

COVID-19 and Acrostic Poetry in South Korea

When COVID-19 struck South Korea in winter 2019, the country responded quickly and effectively in controlling the viral outbreak. South Korea was commended by international medical communities as one of the few success stories in the first global wave of the pandemic (Zastrow). Many factors have been identified as contributing to the successful response, including the country's excellent health-care system, the public's eager participation in a large-scale medical intervention, an outstanding digital infrastructure, a culture of mask-wearing, and the collaboration between the state and the private sector (Brazinsky). Experts have also stated that the valuable lessons learned from the fight against the 2015 Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) outbreak have enabled the South Korean government and health care system to introduce effective measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus (EGH). During the MERS outbreak in South Korea, social media played an important role in educating and communicating preventive behaviours (Oh et al.). Although the country had the highest number of MERS confirmed cases outside of the Middle East, the scale of the outbreak was mostly limited (185 confirmed cases and 37 deaths) compared to the 2019 coronavirus pandemic (WHO). Moreover, while three-line acrostic poems based on MERS were composed and circulated online, they did not turn into a nationwide cultural phenomenon.

In contrast, the COVID-19 outbreak has had a much greater impact on the everyday life of people in South Korea (as it has had in many other countries in the world). The pandemic led to a viral eruption of acrostic poems based on the three-syllable word "Corona," which were posted and shared online profusely (and their numbers continue to grow even as this paper is being written). To understand this phenomenon, I have examined the poems available on major search engines, namely, Naver and Daum. More specifically, I focused on works circulated on Q&A forums and Café sites where public and community events and exchanges of Corona *samhaengsi* took place. The discussion that follows will explore the key types and themes of Corona *samhaengsi*. As it will be shown, the types and themes vary just as the genre of acrostic poetry in South Korea has developed in multiple ways over the years. Digital acrostic poetry became a channel for people, especially during enforced social isolation, to express their sentiments and voice their opinions about the pandemic. More importantly, the poetry exchange took on the form of a mass literary game designed to help alleviate stress and anxiety as well as build and bolster a sense of community.

Poems Promoting Safety Measures

Numerous Corona *samhaengsi* promote preventive behavioral guidelines such as social distancing and mask wearing.

> Co: Don't touch your nose!! It's dangerous.
> Ro: When passing people on the street,
> Na: Please be careful, for you and me!! (Yongmaru, Apr. 18, 2020)

> 코: 코를 손으로 만지지 마세요!! 위험해요
> 로: 로드에서 지나가는 사람들 만날때요
> 나: 나를 위해, 너를 위해 "조심"!!

> Co: Do you have a runny nose? Sore throat? Fever?? That's not good …
> Ro: People in the lobby are also coughing … a fearful scene.
> Na: Are you the only one that matters? Others matter, too. Please wear your masks and follow the health guidelines! (Damanegi, Mar. 9, 2020)

> 코: 코 나오나요? 목아픈가요? 열도 있나요?? 그람 안되요…
> 로: 로비에 사람들도 기침 콜록 콜록~ 공포 분위기…
> 나: 나만 소중한가요 다른이도 소중 합니다 마스크 꼭 쓰시고 생활수칙 지키세요 제발!!

As the above examples show, the poems are light-hearted and witty wordplays of varying lengths that invite people to be vigilant by practicing social distancing and mask wearing. Poems like these are found on the public Q&A forums on South Korea's major internet search engines. Usually, someone would initiate a thread by posting a request for Corona *samhaengsi*. Netizens then add their poems to the thread, which are liked, shared, and commented on, much like the functions on Facebook and Instagram. In a concise

manner, the poems effectively communicate the message of public health safety. The second poem in particular shows how signs of common symptoms of cold or flu can incite fear in people's minds during the pandemic. The writer also rebukes those who do not follow the health guidelines issued by the government.

These and other examples of Corona *samhaengsi* can be considered as cases of social media poetry and chat poems. The internet gave rise to a proliferation of short literary forms, including poetry. Social media poems, such as Instagram poems, exemplify what Meiri describes as "nano-poetics," characterized by miniaturization and duplication (Meiri). Another distinguishing trait of social media poetry is found in its canonizing process, in which "each work is graded openly by Likes and Shares" (Shakargy 330). In a similar manner, the examples of Corona *samhaengsi* cited throughout this paper were judged by web-users, who based their evaluation on the poems' affective and humorous qualities, rather than on established literary standards (Hockx 114).

Other poems highlight the importance of forging solidarity in the shared struggle to curve the spread of the virus.

Co: Look at the person blowing the nose and coughing
Ro: at the roundabout, for all to see, not even wearing a mask!
Na: A country is not a separate entity. It is made up of every individual. And my own carelessness can bring harm to it. (Duryonggeosa, May 23, 2020)

코: 코를 팽 하고 풀면서 기침까지 하는 저 사람.
로: 로터리에서, 아주 보란 듯이, 게다가 마스크도 안 썼구나.
나: 나라가 따로 있는 것이 아니다. 개인 한 사람, 한 사람이 바로 나라다. 나 하나의 부주의가 나라를 망친다.

Co: Corona …
Ro: Logging in and discovering there is "0" confirmed case.
Na: Ah, when will that day come? Hastening that day all depends on our attitude. (Duryonggeosa, Aug. 22, 2020)

코: 코로나
로: 로그인해서 검색했을 때 확진자 "0"이라는 숫자가
나: 나오는 날은 과연 언제일까? 그날이 하루라고 빨리 오게 하는 것은 오직 우리들의 정신 자세에 달려 있다.

Co: Those of you who dismiss Corona and wander around:
Ro: consider "The Thinker" by Rodin.
Na: Though you want to go out and play, if you abstain again and again, we will have Corona-free Korea. (Duryonggeosa, May 14, 2020)

코: 코로나를 우습게 여기고 마구 쏘다니는 자들이여,
로: 로댕의 '생각하는 사람'을 한번 떠올려 보라.
나: 나가서 놀고 싶어도 참고 또 참으면 코로나 없는 코리아 된다.

The first poem underscores the social responsibility of citizens during the pandemic and the impact of individual negligence on the society at large. The second poem expresses the heartfelt wish for the end of the pandemic and the need for consolidated efforts. In the third poem, the author alludes to the iconic bronze sculpture "The Thinker" by the celebrated French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and invites the public to regulate their actions to bring an end to the pandemic.

The global impact of the pandemic is another key theme found in Corona *samhaengsi*.

Co: Corona has turned
Ro: Rome, Washington, Paris, and Seoul, and many cities
Na: and countries in the world 180 degrees. (IDAHK, Aug. 22, 2020)

코: 코로나가
로: 로마, 워싱턴, 파리, 서울 등 전세계의 많은 도시들이나
나: 나라들을 180도 바꿔놓았다.

Co: Because of ineffective handling of Corona,
Ro: they say Rome is now in big trouble.
Na: Different strategies have led to huge discrepancies in confirmed cases and deaths country to country (Moonsorrow, Apr. 18, 2020).

코: 코로나 대처를 제대로 못해
로: 로마는 지금 난리라고 하던데
나: 나라별 대처방식이 달라 확진자나 사망자수가 차이가 많이 나는 것 같네..

The first example comments on the disruption caused by the pandemic on urban life throughout the world. The second alludes to the devastating first wave in Italy and points out how the different strategies adopted by various countries in the initial phase of the pandemic led to disparate outcomes.

While recognizing the global scale of the pandemic, nationalistic sentiments also feature heavily in many examples of Corona *samhaengsi*.

Co: Korea should
Ro: make a robot
Na: and destroy Corona that's devastating the country and humanity. (Hiro, Sept. 19, 2020)

코: 코리아에서
로: 로봇을 만들어서
나: 나라와 인류를 멸망시키는 코로나를 확실하게 박살 내자.

Co: Korea has defeated! Corona!
Ro: Russia and all other countries throughout the world
Na: are focusing on eradicating the virus!
(Duryonggeosa, Sept. 19, 2020)

코: 코리아는 물리쳤다~! 코로나19를!
로: 로서아를 비롯해 세계 각국들
나: 나라마다, 박멸에 전력을 쏟고 있다.

Co: Be careful when you touch your nose.
Ro: Romance is good but be careful when you kiss.
Na: You and me, all of us, let's beat Corona.
Go, go! Citizens of South Korea! (Hyeonhyeon, Jun. 8, 2020)

코: 코 만지는것 조심하세여.
로: 로맨스도 좋치만 뽀뽀도 조심하세여
나: 나,너 우리 모두 코로나19, 이겨냅시다,
대한민국 국민 화이팅!

The first poem expresses hope that Korea should take leadership in the global fight against the virus, while the second proclaims Korea's victory over it. The third example makes a patriotic appeal to the public to come together in solidarity to defeat the pandemic. A strong sense of national pride is conveyed in all three poems.

All these examples of Corona *samhaengsi* embody wordplay in various forms with a wide range of social messages. As Winter-Foemel points out, through conscious manipulation of language and literary forms, wordplay generates a humorous effect and amusement for the listener, while at the same time fulfilling "a broad range of social functions" (13-14). Using the simple form of three-line acrostic poetry, writers of Corona *samhaengsi* playfully interpreted the realities and experiences of the pandemic. As all forms of wordplay are historically and culturally bounded (34), the works of Corona *samhaengsi* also reflect the particular historical and cultural realities of South Korea, including its unique manifestations of nationalism.

The weight of wordplay in poetry increased drastically when the production and distribution of poetry transferred to the digital platform. Playfulness has been identified as one of most salient features of the electronic text (Bolter 165). The internet as a big, open, collaborative playground has allowed its users to become storytellers through the text and images they share. Playfulness is particularly prevalent on social media platforms where "spontaneous expressions of play," in the form of jokes and banter, often evolve into "deeper social processes" (Ketchum 55).

The surge of Corona *samhaengsi* in South Korea was primarily a digital phenomenon. The poems shared on a variety of online platforms were mostly digital texts but also photographs of children's handwritten and illustrated poems. And as a massive online poetry exercise, it clearly demonstrates playfulness characteristic of internet poetry, "combining serious and original content, such as news, with creative and playful variations, such as mash-ups and jokes" (Shakargy 333). At the same time, digital Corona *samhaengsi* embody the key traits of *samhaengsi* as a literary genre characterized by speed and humour, with some of the more successful works turning into memes.

Everyday Life During the Pandemic

Humans have been documenting everyday experiences in diaries and poems through the ages, and especially so during momentous historical events. It is through these written works that we come to a deeper understanding of the impact of epidemics, wars, and revolutions on individuals from diverse backgrounds (Humphreys 48). In a similar manner, the works of Corona *samhaengsi* document a wide range of quotidian experiences of South Koreans during the pandemic and their personal reflections on those experiences. The impact of social isolation is one of the recurring themes.

Co: I laughed at it first. "It will be like MERS."
Ro: Gone are the romantic outings to see spring flowers after a war to find masks.
Na: Unable to go out and unable to work, in vain flowers fall and time goes by. (Onyeongeo, Apr. 1, 2020)

코: 코웃음쳤다 메르스정도겠지... 하
로: 로맨틱한 봄꽃나들이는 커녕 마스크 전쟁을 치르며
나: 나가지도 못하고 일도 못하고 속절없이 꽃이지고 세월은 간다

Co: Even when comedy movies are released,
Ro: Even when romantic cherry blossoms bloom,
Na: I just stay at home because of Corona.
(Dongsupmaenia, Apr. 3, 2020)

코: 코미디 영화가 개봉을 하고
로: 로맨틱하게 벚꽃이 피어도
나: 나는 계속 집에 있지 코로나 때문에

Co: Because of Corona,
Ro: staying at home again today:

Na: I am a confirmed case. (Anonymous, Sept. 12, 2020)

코: 코로나 때문에
로: 오늘도 집에 있는
나: 나는 확찐자

The above poems describe the disappointments caused by being confined to home without normal day-to-day social activities. The repeated reference to romance in the second line is due to rhyming requirement. The initial disbelief and the difficulty of purchasing masks in the early months as well as the experience of quarantine are all captured in these examples.

Some poems discuss the frustrations over cancelled international travels.

Co: Corona has to end quickly
Ro: so I can go to Rome.
Na: No matter what, I will leave in June. (Mabujang, Feb. 21, 2020)

코: 코로나 빨리 끝나야
로: 로마를 갈 수 있습니다
나: 나는 이래나 저래나 6월엔 떠날겁니다

Co: Just before my
Ro: trip to Rome, Corona war breaks out..
Na: My goodness … How much is cancellation fee? (Coffee Giftset, Mar. 2, 2020)

코: 코앞으로 다가온
로: 로마 여행을 앞두고 터진 코로나 대란이라니..
나: 나 이거 참.. 취소수수료 얼마에요?ㅠㅠ

Rome, the city that rhymes with "ro," is mentioned in both poems, which humorously capture people's reactions to disrupted travel plans. The interruption in global travels and ensuing cancellation frenzies were experiences shared by many people throughout the world in the spring of 2020.

Reliance on online shopping is another recurring theme in the Corona *samhaengsi*. The pandemic led to an explosive upsurge in online shopping throughout the world. Coupang, South Korea's largest e-commerce company that offers same-day or next-day delivery (a.k.a., Rocket Delivery) on all goods, including groceries, experienced a significant increase in sales since the beginning of the outbreak in 2019.

Co: Shopping online because of Corona,
Ro: I have become addicted to Coupang's Rocket Delivery…
Na: I am waiting again today for Coupang Man. (DJ Cool Guy, Sept. 2, 2020)

코: 코로나로 집에서 택배만 시키다보니 쿠팡
로: 로켓배송에 중독됐다..
나: 나는 오늘도 기다린다... 쿠팡맨을..

Co: Because of Corona, I am just staying at home. In times like this,
Ro: Rocket Delivery is best. Don't you agree, everyone?
Na: Am I the only one using Rocket Delivery? (Saechimbuggeu, May 13, 2020)

코: 코로나 때문에 집에만 있네 이럴때는
로: 로켓배송이 최고지 안그래? 모두?
나: 나만 로켓배송 쓰나.

These two poems capture the pandemic's impact on e-commerce and everyday consumer behavior as in-person purchasing became severely restricted due to fear and regulations.

The coronavirus pandemic also disrupted regular school life and caused schools in Korea (like all around the world) to quickly transition to online learning. Many works of Corona *samhaengsi* circulated online are by school-age children who composed the poems as their writing assignments. Their poems offer a window into young students' experiences of and views on the pandemic. The negative impact of social isolation features heavily in their works.

Co: You, Coronavirus!
Ro: Because of you I miss school.
Na: I want to go to school now! Go away quickly! (Kang Ji-u, Mar. 14, 2020)

코: 코로나19 바이러스 너
로: 로인해 학교가 그립게 해준 너
나: 나 이제 학교 가고 싶다고! 빨리 물러가라!

Co: Unable to go out because of Corona, I feel very depressed.
Ro: I miss the days when I went back and forth from home to after-school-academy like a robot.
Na: When will I be able to return to normal daily life … (Anonymous, May 21, 2020)

코: 코로나 때문에 밖에 나가지 못하니 너무 우울합니다.
로: 로봇같이 집 학원 집 학원 다니던 때가 그립습니다.
나: 나는 언제쯤 일상으로 돌아갈 수 있을까요…

Co: Because of COVID-19 social distancing,
Ro: I am becoming an outcast.
Na: Please help me! (Dajanyeomam3, May 13, 2020)

코: 코로나19로 사회적거리두기
로: 로 왕따가 되어갑니다.
나: 나 좀 살려주세요.

Co: Because of Corona
Ro: living like a robot doing the same routine
Na: makes me sick and tired. (Serassaem, Mar. 12, 2020)

코: 코로나 때문에
로: 로봇같이 똑같은 일상이
나: 나는 지겹다

The poems express students' deep yearning for normal school life and the impact of the pandemic on their social life and emotional and mental health. Even the monotonous and wearying routines of students in South Korea, whose lives revolve around school and after-school academy, have become fond memories in the post-Covid world.

Many poems also communicate frustrations over online learning.

Co: Because of Corona,
Ro: I log in and do schoolwork online.
Na: Unable to even go out, I feel very frustrated. (Yer, Jul. 1, 2020)

코: 코로나 때문에,
로: 로그인을 하며 학교수업을 한다.
나: 나가지고 못하니까 정말 답답하다.

Co: Doing online school because of Corona!
Ro: Loading… Loading …
Na: When do I get to go to school? (Dajanyeomam3, May 13, 2020)

코: 코로나19로 온라인학습!
로: 로딩중 … 로딩중 …
나: 나 언제 학교 가요?

In other works, children describe their coping methods while being confined to their homes.

Co: As for comic book, *Dog Man* is fun.
Ro: *Romeo and Juliet* is a famous novel.
Na: When I am home alone, reading is the best. (Seong Songhyeon, Mar. 14, 2020)

코: 코믹북은 Dog Man이 재미있고요
로: 로미오와 줄리엣는 유명한 소설이랍니다
나: 나 혼자 집에 있을땐 역시 책읽기가 짱이죠

Co: Don't just sleep all day
Ro: and eat and lie around like a robot.
Na: Don't go out. Exercise indoors! (Serassaem, Mar. 12, 2020)

코: 코~ 자기만 하지말고
로: 로봇같이 밥먹고 눕지만 말고
나: 나가지 말고 실내에서 할수 있는 운동을 합시다!

The poems suggest activities, such as reading and indoor exercise, as ways to stay active and engaged. On the whole, school assignments and public acrostic poetry contests offered a way for these young students to express their views and emotions about the pandemic and its impact on their daily lives (Anon. Jul. 8, 2020; Annyeong).

These various examples of Corona *samhaengsi* highlight the ordinary in these extraordinary times. They also demonstrate how "chronicling and sharing of the everyday … blurs self and other" (Humphreys 48). As Humphreys notes, the ordinary is "connective and contextual" and reveals the "togetherness" of everyday culture (6). As such, even as highly personal accounts of the pandemic, the examples of Corona *samhaengsi* listed above embody the collective and contextual experiences of many South Koreans. Indeed, Corona *samhaengsi* can be understood as a case of what Humphreys describes as "media accounting," "the media practices that allow us to document our lives and the world around us, which can then be presented back to ourselves and others, … involving the "creation, circulation, and consumption of media traces" (9). Individual poems function as "media traces," which are created, circulated, and consumed on the internet, especially on social media, to build and maintain connections. The quotidian—one of the defining characteristics of social media poetry (McCabe and Atkinson)—becomes the focus of Corona *samhaengsi* in the context of the pandemic.

The poems more than just describe everyday circumstances. The writing, sharing, and reading of the poems involve a "reflexive process" that not only "reveals aspects or characteristics of lived events" but also facilitates a better understanding of "ourselves and the world around us" (Humphreys 91). The examples presented below present more thoughtful reflections inspired by the pandemic.

Co: Masked nose feels smothered.
Ro: Unable to sing, my mouth is shut,
Na: and my face confined by the invisible virus. (Sanmorongi, Feb. 7, 2020)

코: 코 막은 마스크 답답해
로: 노래도 못 불러 닫힌 입
나: 나의 얼굴은 보이지 않는 세균에 감금 당했다

Co: Though hard to breathe freely with my nose,
Ro: I will not hide my yearnings behind the mask,
Na: for my hope is still alive. (Poet Nam Jeongrim, Sept. 10, 2020)

코: 코로 마음껏 숨쉬기는 어려워도
로: 로망까지 마스크 속에 숨기지는 않겠어요.
나: 나의 희망은 아직 살아 있으니까요.

Co: Corona, thanks to you,
Ro: I came to realize
Na: happiness is being able to breathe freely every day. (Poet Nam Jeongrim, Sept. 10, 2020)

코: 코로나 너
로: 로 인해 알게 되었어
나: 나날이 자유롭게 숨 쉴 수 있는 것이 행복임을

The psychological and emotional toll of everyday mask wearing, as well as the feelings of appreciation for simple joys of quotidian life are expressed in the poems.

Humour

The prevalence of humour in internet culture has been noted (Shifman 23), and in internet poetry, humour has often been expressed in the form of parody, satire, and pastiche (Shakargy 338). Humour appears as one of the overarching themes in many examples of Corona *samhaengsi*. A number of studies have been published on the role of humour in social interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Amici; Bischetti et al.). These studies have shown that humour was used in diverse communities throughout the world as an outlet for anxieties and distress (Lemish and Elias), a means of softening grief and lightening mood (Torres et al.), and a "form of resistance to injustices and inequalities" and "coping strategies to reclaim power and control" (Outley et al. 1). Examples of humour found in Corona *samhaengsi* also fulfill similar functions. Numerous requests for comical Corona *samhaengsi* found on social media platforms and the high level of engagement these poems create reveal the great demand for and popularity of *samhaengsi*. These poems are entertaining and frivolous in nature and encapsulate the pandemic experience in light and playful ways.

Co: Corona
Ro: is like my big brother.
Na: I hate my big brother. (Mongddangssaem, Oct. 8, 2020)

코: 코로나는
로: 오빠 같다.
나: 나는 오빠를 싫어하니까

Co: Because of Corona, I cannot travel. I don't know how to spend money
Ro: so I bought a lottery ticket. Ah! I won first place!
Na: Nah… It was last week's number. (Moji, Feb. 15, 2020)

코: 코로나 때문에 여행도 못가구 어디 다니기도 부담스러워 돈 쓸데도 없어서
로: 로또 복권을 샀아요. 1등 당첨입니다. 아~~~
나: 나가립니다. 지나주 번호였네요. ㅜㅜ

Let's defeat Corona with *samhaengsi*!
Co: For Corona
Ro: Lohas Coffee
Na: is best! (Masojang, Feb. 21, 2020)

삼행시로 이놈 잡자!
코: 코로나엔
로: 로하수 커피가
나: 나이스 입니다.

The first poem, composed by a child, expresses her detestation for the virus in a humorous way by comparing it to her pestering older brother. The second poem paints a comical picture of a hope and eventual disappointment over a lottery ticket that was purchased to help the author cope with the pandemic. The introduction to the third poem, "Let's defeat Corona with *samhaengsi*!," clearly encapsulates the belief in the role of humorous acrostic poems in the shared struggle against the pandemic. The message conveyed in the poem is unmistakably frivolous in nature, suggesting a coffee from a popular coffee shop franchise as a remedy to the virus. However, the author effectively communicates their desire to overcome the public health crisis through light-hearted wordplay.

Other examples of humorous poems intentionally avoid making any reference to the pandemic.

Co: Wearing a coat.
Ro: A romantic guy.
Na: Me? (Yonghi, Sept. 8, 2020)

코: 코트를 입은
로: 로멘틱가이
나: 나??

Co: I want to buy a Coach wallet.
Ro: I want to buy a Rolex watch.
Na: But I have no money. (Rabbit, Sept. 2, 2020)

코: 코치 지갑 사고싶다
로: 로렉스 시계 사고싶다
나: 나는 근데 돈이 옴서

Co: Korea!
Ro: Rome!
Na: Nigeria! (Jjuno, Aug. 27, 2020)

코: 코리아!
로: 로마!
나: 나이제리아!

Following the three syllables of the word "Corona," the writers have constructed new stories unrelated to the pandemic. By treating the poems as pure wordplay disconnected from meaning, they negate and reinterpret the word and the crisis associated with it. Poems of this kind make use of subversive humour to make light of the disaster and, in so doing, allow people to exert control over the coronavirus, even at the level of language, and resist and challenge the reality it has created.

Together, the various types of Corona *samhaengsi* shown and discussed above give voice to multiple experiences, feelings, and reflections inspired by the pandemic. They cover a wide range of topics—the impact of the pandemic and new social measures on people's lives, coping strategies, and messages of hope and solidarity—all captured in three succinct lines with varying degrees of literary skill. Most of the poems are light and humorous in nature, and, as with all three-line acrostic poems, are accessible and memorable. It is important to note that most of these poems appear not as individual poems but as groups of poems on blogs and social media platforms. They are products of mass literary games that exist in long chains of digital text which can be added to, commented on, and shared.

All in all, Corona *samhaengsi* offer diverse significations of the pandemic. As representations, the poems reflect "contested meanings, ideological struggles, and negotiated differences" concerning the coronavirus and its impact on people and their lives (Levina 4). Indeed, the poems helped expand the "outbreak narrative," which through history has encompassed mythological and ideological properties of language (Wald 4) and often embodied officially sanctioned views of the disease and the diseased. The poems have led to the creation of diverse outbreak narratives reflective of the diverse populations that contributed to this massive online poetry play.

Besides "Corona," there were other three-syllable words that inspired the creation of COVID-19-related acrostic poems. These words include "mask," "*Himnaeyo*! (Be strong!)," "*Igija*! (Let's beat this!)," and "*Uiryojin* (Medical workers)" (Jang). Most of the poems based on these words contain message of encouragement for those involved in the fight against the virus and highlight the importance of shared efforts. In some cases, the poems were presented as gifts to frontline workers as a show of support (Ha; Kim D). Alternatively, the poems also were sites for criticism of certain events. The word that attracted most negative acrostic poems was "Sincheonji," an offshoot Christian religious organization, whose mass gathering and cover up led to a major outbreak in the city of Daegu in February 2020. Acrostic poems on Sincheonji circulating on the internet accuse the organization of breaching social distancing rules and putting the population at risk (Scruple).

Contests, Social Activism, Consumerism

Given the history of political uses of acrostic poetry in South Korea, from the start of the pandemic the government was quick to promote new behavioral rules through acrostic poems. To introduce the mandatory mask wearing rule and a fine for violation, in October 2020 the Office of Prime Minister Jeong Segyun published a poster featuring the following *samhaengsi* on mask:

Ma: If you do not wear a mask
S: or if you lower your mask in secret,
K: you will be asked to pay a huge fine of ₩100,000.

마: 마스크를 쓰지 않거나
스: 스리슬쩍 마스크를 내리면
크: 크나큰 과태료 10만 원이 부과됩니다.

The poster also included a cartoon drawing of the prime minister peering down with a scrutinizing look at a woman without a mask and a man with a lowered mask. In a news release, the office stated that the purpose of the poster was not to intimidate the public but to ensure widespread mask wearing to stop the spread of virus (Sin). Prime Minister Jeong also joined a popular morning radio show to publicize the new rule through the poem (Bak S). In three succinct lines, the poem effectively communicates the terms of violation and the amount of the fine (equating roughly to $100 USD).

The composition of Corona acrostic poems was also promoted outside of Korea through a contest with cash prizes by the Korean Consulate General's Office in Sapporo, Japan. The contest, designed for Japanese learners of Korean language, invited participants to compose Corona *samhaengsi* in Korean. The Consulate General's Office stated that the contest was created to provide an opportunity to reflect collectively about the shared experiences of the global pandemic (Yi H). These two examples demonstrate the South Korean government's use of acrostic poetry domestically to inform the public of the new policies and to foster good will and solidarity internationally.

Even more so than these official uses, it was Corona *samhaengsi*'s connection to social activism that allowed this unique digital, literary, and ludic phenomenon to have such

profound and overarching impact on everyday experiences of the pandemic in South Korea. The poems were the products of online poetry games and contests, created and sponsored by various social groups, corporations, and businesses across a wide range of spectrum. Numerous non-profit organizations, communities, churches, hospitals, educational services, and clubs organized online acrostic poetry contests to engage and support their members. These include organizations such as various arts associations, Young Mothers' associations, Small Business associations, and Apartment associations (Haebaragi; Yujinmam2munseong; Masojang; Dolbomnanumdungji); community centers such as Senior Wellness Center, Lifelong Learning Center, Support Center for People with Disabilities, and Family Law Online Community (*Gangwon ilbo* Aug. 25, 2020; Jang; Ddaenggeuri; Seeukssaksseukssak); hobby groups such as Ping Pong Club, Acoustic Guitar Club, Mountain Bikers' Association (Daegu Ping Pong; Hwolhwol; Bak Sangjun); and private educational and athletic services such as Taekwondo schools, dance studios, and after-school academies (Kim J; Jjangi; Mongddangssaem; Serassaem).

All of them used their online platforms to reach out to their members and larger community through fun Corona *samhaengsi* contests with prizes. In most cases, the prizes were small, from face masks and vitamins to Starbucks coffee and McDonald's combos (Hyeseong Sanbuingwa). What mattered was not the prizes themselves but the sharing of pandemic experiences in a fun and playful way, reading each others' poems and commenting on them, and strengthening a sense of community during the time of mandatory social isolation. Indeed, these organizations and groups used acrostic poetry and poetry contests as a means for creating positive social change built on communication and cooperation. At the same time, the ways in which these contests were run demonstrate the close connection to consumer culture that aligns with the general developments of acrostic poetry phenomenon in South Korea discussed earlier in the paper.

In fact, many small businesses and corporations used pandemic-related acrostic poetry and poetry contests as opportunities to advertise their goods and services. Numerous restaurants and stores organized online Corona *samhaengsi* contests to attract customers with coupons and giveaways (Ddalsetmam; Gwail Abba; Book & I Children's Bookstore). Poems were featured on consumer product packaging: for example, an acrostic poem on "mask" was included on the packaging of children's face masks (Gaeul Gyeoul Mam). Some companies organized poetry contests for their employees to increase engagement and communication as well as to build brand awareness. For example, in October 2020, Samsung SDI, a branch of Samsung specializing in storage battery manufacturing, held a Corona poetry contest for its employees. The contest generated positive media coverage and improved the brand image as a caring company (Kim H).

Additionally, acrostic poetry was used in charity events. In April 2020, MBC, one of South Korea's largest broadcasting companies, organized a fundraising poetry event to support small businesses affected by the pandemic. For every online submission of acrostic poem based on the three-syllable expression "Be strong!," MBC donated an equivalent of $1 USD to the cause (Cha). Prizes were also given to select participants through a draw. Events such as this demonstrate an effective blending of social campaign and brand building by way of digital acrostic poetry games and contests. Such developments demonstrate the interconnectedness of the virtual and the offline world and how actions taken in one can influence the other (Ketchum 56).

Viral Poetry and Networked Selves during the Pandemic

The multifaceted development of the coronavirus-inspired digital acrostic poetry in South Korea is a great example of the complexity and interdisciplinarity of digital poetry in the twenty-first century. As shown throughout this paper, Corona *samhaengsi* and the various games and contests designed for their composition and dissemination intersected multiple spheres, including self-expression, entertainment, education, social activism, politics, advertising, and consumer culture.

The Corona *samhaengsi* phenomenon reveals the complexities and multifariousness of twenty-first digital poetry. While exhibiting the process of intermediation, defined as "the dynamic, mutant nature of digital textuality and aesthetic human-machine interaction" (Ensslin 32), the recent developments in digital acrostic poetry in South Korea illuminate how digital poetry transcends the domains of literary text and aesthetic experience into everyday lives of people in the forms of social media postings, educational programs, entertainment shows, online games and contests, consumer products, and social and political campaigns. The fluidity of the event, and the ways in which it combines digital and non-digital worlds, offer us a new window into exploring and understanding the rapidly evolving digital textuality of our times.

Shakargy's concept of Internetica, "the sphere of intersections between the internet, social media and poetics" (326) provides an insightful lens through which to examine the Corona *samhaengsi* phenomenon as a dynamic manifestation of contemporary digital poetry. Shakargy observes that by integrating writing, publishing, and literary community building, poetry in the internet age has become "a way of life, a routine," liberated from the concerns of "originality and quality" (339). In this changed context, the act of writing a poem becomes "social playing" (334) and poets become "playing witnesses" (325). Everyday poems by people shared on social media illuminate and heighten the testimonial nature of poetry that allows for the preservation and passing on of collective memories of human experiences (333). These traits of digital poetry are clearly evident in the unfolding of the Corona *samhaengsi* phenomenon. By

writing and sharing the poems about their quotidian experiences as a mode of social playing, South Koreans became playing witnesses of the global pandemic. Their poems paint composite and disparate pictures of their collective memories.

And as discussed, online communities played a crucial role in this development. Shakargy explains the ways in which online communities affect "literary creation through dialogue, commentary and the provision of feedback during the creative work" (327), making writing a collaborative exercise (328). He compares this aspect of digital poetry to "dialectical poetry," composed to meet "community-oriented goals," making "community poetry-writing on the web … a lifestyle choice of young internet users" (329). While Shakargy focuses primarily on online literary communities in his discussion, the Corona *samhaengsi* phenomenon reveals that digital poetry creation does not have to be restricted to literary communities only. As shown, various organizations and interest groups organized their poetry games and contests to support and engage their members. We learn that offline and online membership to these existing communities played an important role in incentivizing people to participate in the poetry play. The fluid relationship between online and offline worlds was vital for the composition and distribution of the poems and for the social functions they fulfilled.

Shakargy's theory of Internetica builds on earlier theoretical explorations of poetry as play, in particular, Winter-Froemel's conceptualization of ludopoesis. Ludopoesis, or poetry-at-play, describes a way of writing and understanding poetry which recognizes that "poetic inspiration and language can be generated by various procedures, arbitrary constraints, and artificial means, or even by chance" (Winter-Froemel 2). Ludopoesis challenges the classical view that has long characterized poetry as a fruit of inspiration, individual genius, and solemn moral purpose. Ludopoesis celebrates the ludic nature of poetry as expounded by Huizinga in his seminal book, *Homo Ludens*. As Huizinga so aptly put, "all poetry is born of play" and "poesis, in fact, is a play-function" (132). The development of digital acrostic poetry games in South Korea demonstrates the various ways in which ludopoesis can play out in the digital sphere via social media platforms. It epitomizes digital poetry growing out of "collaboration, competition, and social exchange," a "technologically mandated and digitally mediated literary experimentalism" (Eburne and Epstein 2-3).

I would argue that one of the distinct contributions of the Corona *samhaengsi* phenomenon is that it pushes digital poetry beyond the boundaries of project-based work into a massively multi-author online poetry game, occurring concurrently yet independently through various channels, as tens of thousands of people explored creative ways to respond to the pandemic. Certainly, the scale of the pandemic played a key role in creating this massive poetry game. While acrostic poetry has been a part of everyday life in South Korea in recent decades, the pandemic generated an unprecedented number of acrostic poems, games, and contests, in which people from all walks of life participated. The implementation of social distancing and isolation, which led to drastically increased dependency on digital communication, also became a crucial factor in acrostic poetry's widespread uptake.

Indeed, the Corona acrostic poetry phenomenon exemplifies fundamental transformations in language in the post-digital world explored in depth by Johnston in his ontological reflections on digital poetry. He points out that since the dawn of the digital age, language has been undergoing "an ontological state change from inert to active, from isolated to interconnected, from tool to quasi-proto-organism" (6). Corona *samhaengsi* are examples of what Johnston terms "spoems," "languaged spaces where poets establish networks of resonance between things and experiences, memories and intuitions" (13). The poems, as products of "bursty, crowdsourced language play" (13), became "languaged spaces" where writers created collective resonances of the pandemic and their experiences and thoughts. Johnston further compares poetry to a "language virus that destabilizes pretentious perceptions or congealed opinions" and a digital poem to "a computer virus" (78). He describes digital poetry as "collective creations [that] mutate into poems" (3), and as such, rather than confirming selfhood, digital poetry as a viral growth "distends selves toward collectivities," engendering "networked" selves (2).

Johnston's analysis of digital poetry is particularly useful in contemplating the question of authorship in Corona *samhaengsi*. The authors of most examples of Corona *samhaengsi* circulated online are identified by their usernames and profile thumbnails. The date and time of their entry is marked next to their poems. Surely, these short whimsical wordplays are not "poems" in the traditional sense. But collectively, they are superb examples of collective wordplays that have mutated into poems in a particular socio-cultural and digital literary context. The spread of Corona *samhaengsi* shown in this paper clearly illustrates the viral growth of digital poetry and the formation of networked selves. In the context of the pandemic, it has allowed the participants in this massively multi-author online poetry game to cope with the global health crisis. Through their brief and witty acrostic poems, South Koreans experienced and redefined the predicament and became part of the digitally mediated sociality. They fought the virus with their viral wordplay.

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Bubbles & Bridges: A Family's Experience of Disability

Sheri Klassen[1]

[1] Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

Email: sheriannetteklassen@gmail.com

As we have worked hard to minimize the threat of a new virus on our families and friends, there has been a lot of talk about "bubbles." Stories of bubble-living during the pandemic, of its virtual boundaries, the protection it provides, and its tendency to create disconnection have all felt naggingly familiar. Recently, I recognized that bubble-living is how my family has been navigating life for many years. Any venture beyond the boundaries of our intimate family life has always come with risk.

My children live with neurodevelopmental disabilities. From the birth of our first child, both protective instinct and necessity helped to build our family bubble. Its inception, much different than the conscious and deliberate creation of COVID bubbles, this bubble has been formed reflexively and reactively by forces within and without. From within, our overriding motivations are of love and efforts to understand; from without, motivations (even well-intentioned) can be undermined by ableist perspectives and inadequate social structures and supports. On both sides, our family has had to manage a myriad of expectations which endlessly collide with the realities of who our children are, with what my husband and I can offer as parents, and with what the world can offer. Bubble living softens the impact of these collisions.

We also build a lot of bridges. We start with managing expectations, then we adapt and find ways to meet our children closer to where they are. In writing this, I am leveraging what is a current and widespread appreciation of bubble living – demanded by a virus – to foster understanding of what it is like for those of us who have lived in bubbles long before COVID.

Life inside our bubble feels comfortable in part because of the protection it provides, but also because, admittedly, we do have a lot going for us. Our bubble happens to be in a country that has relative economic stability and is able to offer my children social and medical support, as well as access to decent public education. My husband and I have had the ability to successfully engage in existing structures of advanced education, which has resulted in steady work as physicians. I am aware that many others' bubbles sit more precariously than ours does. I also know that sometimes there is no real threat to leaving our bubble; that I am operating from a place of defensiveness. Given the repeated challenges that our family has had to navigate inside and outside our bubble, we have become bruised and sensitive to the risk.

My husband and I created our bubble because our children's differences frequently confound all manner of expectations: ours as parents, institutional expectations, those created by the conventions of organized activities, and even those that define casual interactions and friendships. Preconceived notions of family life have made it hard at times for my husband and I to see our children clearly. Expectations have needed to shift to accommodate real neurodevelopmental challenges. Many assumptions have ultimately been restructured. Within the safety of our bubble, where outside forces are filtered, these shifts can happen more easily and graciously. That said, our process of adaptation is often messy and fragile and has as much to do with us as parents as it does with disability. Some expectations my husband and I hold are particularly resistant, and are taking years to shift, such as those that narrowly define "good behavior" and "achievement." However, in our role as loving parents we are motivated to recalibrate expectations so they resonate better with who we are, who our children are, and to make room for acceptance and honor.

Our commitment to restructure expectations, develop unique connections, and see new, previously unappreciated strengths in our children, fortifies our bubble from within. We forge patterns of communication and even physical movement that are shaped by our quirks and capacity rather than by social conventions. For example, my son is better able to listen when he does *not* make eye contact. As a result, common requests to "look me in the eyes to show you are

listening" have made my son feel everything from frustrated to unsafe. In our home, we no longer require that he look us in the eyes to show he is listening. When my daughter faces challenges, I have learned to circumvent conventions of "doing," "fixing," and even "talking about it." Sometimes it is only when such expectations are surrendered that she can move forward. For us, adaptations like these become the bridges inside our bubble.

Whenever we leave our bubble, we are quickly reminded that all the shifts and bridges we work so hard to build inside do not exist outside. Instinctively, I want to limit the exposure of our differences. While there are attempts at bridge-building outside our bubble, those involved are often caught unprepared, inadequately supported, and/or sometimes not equipped (emotionally, experientially, and/or strategically) to accommodate our family's specific differences. Interactions outside our bubble are therefore often mired in hesitation, tension, anxiety, and disappointment. Sometimes the process leaves me devastated. Other times, I am able to reflect on the years of work that were required to build our "inside" bridges and can be more gracious. I can offer tools and hard won perspective(s) to facilitate bridge-building "outside." Ultimately, however, staying within our bubble is the surest way to avoid being affronted by perspectives that presume inability rather than capacity, and to maintain both real and perceived safety.

School is one of the dominant institutions that exists outside of our bubble, one where both overt and unseen expectations abound. My children's experiences of school are very different from the confidence and ease I have always felt within the education system. Formal education provided a way for me to move beyond the constraints faced by my parents whose lives did not allow them to achieve high school diplomas. School is a place where my capacity and skills are consistently validated, a place I actively and repeatedly choose to go to seek new knowledge and challenges. For my children, however, school is often a place of struggle and uncertainty about how their neurological differences will be received. In his elementary years, it became clear that our son's differences were often positioned and/or viewed as deficit. One teacher erroneously assumed that my son could not write when, in fact, he was writing his own little books at home and neither we, nor his previous teachers, had been consulted about his capacity. In a later year, following this same pattern of presumed incompetence, one aide actually referred to him as a "zombie." It was no surprise when my son eventually expressed that he felt scared when receiving aide support.

I continue to highly value education and, as a parent involved in guiding my children through it, I have come to appreciate how complex it can be to teach diverse learners. Unfortunately, there have been many other instances where bridge-building was scarce, and I have been left reeling and disappointed in a system that I have trusted so deeply. Conversations with my son's Elementary administration about the tendency toward a deficit focus, inconsistent efforts at inclusion, and the sense my children were viewed as burdensome, were often met with complacency. I am grateful that we have had some well-supported school years and I know classrooms are challenging spaces, but I was confused when the administration resisted my efforts to provide government-funded therapists to offer additional support.

Outside of school, I marvel at the excitement of families when they register their children for summer camps or extracurricular activities, confident of the potential for participation and fun. They seem to carry little weight or worry beyond concerns about cost, scheduling, and availability. For our family, these activities require preparatory conversations with instructors to ensure accommodations can be made. Should our children be accepted, we are then compelled to share what we have learned from our bridge-building with both children and organizers. Sometimes, it also includes the frantic recruitment of an aide. Most parents do not seem to imagine their children could be rejected or sent home from a program for any reasons other than injury or ill-health. For us, even after all the effort and presumed accommodations, my children can still be rejected. Upon completing a lesson, a music teacher at a private studio once announced to a busy waiting room, that included my children, that they could not be taught music.

Established institutions and structured activities aside, I also suspect that beyond the navigation of naps, meals, and schedules, most families do not consider playground visits, playdates, or running into acquaintances as being much of an undertaking. But, I do. For me, all these seemingly benign events come with effort and risk. I wonder how my children will be perceived. I wonder if based on how they move or act, others will feel uncomfortable and then might come a variety of awkward glances. In those moments, the ability to build bridges feels beyond reach. Sometimes defensive, sometimes for good reason, I worry that not only at school but in the day-to-day, so much of who my children are – their uniqueness, humanity, and wholeness – will be perceived as deficit.

Long-standing bubble-living feels unfair. It feels unfair that "outside" is a place where our differences can be viewed as unwelcome or inconvenient. Created and sustained by exclusion and uncertainty, our bubble has become a source of protection, but also a source of increased isolation. I have even felt wary and vulnerable when someone from "outside"

seems to burst in and engage with our differences freely and with kindness. At first, it feels like a breach of our defenses and is a little threatening, and then it feels like a desperate longing has been quenched. Alternately, I have experienced an outsider's hesitancy to engage or sit in our bubble because our differences become uncomfortable.

Sometimes, especially after a rare birthday party (one of the most risky of bubble departures) or a rare play date that stretched my energetic and creative ability to keep it going, I want to retreat and stay put in our bubble. As tempting as that is, I know it is not good for me or for my kids to only live inside our bubble. Aside from detrimental effects on personal mental and physical well-being, it does nothing to weave diversity into my community, which is something I really want. So, we take tentative steps outside again and again. We have successes. We take hits. I am in awe when my children, for whom the outside world is often bewildering and painful, are still willing to take the risk.

Everyone needs a place to let their guards down, and my family will continue to rest in the comfort of all the supportive bridges we have built within our bubble. I also want to find more strength and stamina to build more and better bridges outside our bubble. I have seen how tensions are eased when there is a practice of flexibly shifting expectations on both sides. When advocacy is engaged thoughtfully, opportunities for connection and success are nurtured. When others are able to meet us part way, gaps can be bridged together. I also want my children to learn *self-*advocacy, experience agency, all while comfortably ***showing*** their difference. I want to create opportunities to quench that sense of longing and for all the amazing things my children have to offer to be received. I want their community to help them learn the beauty and power of reciprocity. I know that this can only be achieved when my children leave our bubble.

I am thankful for scientists around the globe who have helped us navigate COVID bubbles. My other bubble, the one that has been adapted and reinforced over the years – the one that has taught me that I do not need eye contact to know someone is listening and that sometimes the best thing to do is nothing – has real value and will likely never fully go away. But, as some of us continue the project of moving in and out of our more permanent bubbles, I feel I can draw on the wisdom of our public health specialists. At this time when COVID bubbles still remain in some places, they keep telling us that awareness and staying informed is key. They ask us to be kind and gracious, to be open and ready to shift expectations. They remind us that even within our bubbles, each of us can do our part; that we are all in this together.

Building Bridges: A Conversation between Friends, about Language, Laziness, and Long-distance Running

Matilda Tucker[1] and Hannah Clarkson[2]

[1] Independent Researcher, Berlin, Germany

E-mail: matildatucker@gmail.com

[2] School of Arts and Humanities, Royal College of Art, London, UK

E-mail: hannah.clarkson@network.rca.ac.uk

"Marco Polo describes a bridge, stone by stone.
'But which is the stone that supports the bridge?' Kublai Khan asks.
'The bridge is not supported by one stone or another,' Marco answers, 'but by the line of the arch that they form.'
Kublai Khan remains silent, reflecting. Then he adds: 'Why do you speak to me of the stones? It is only the arch that matters to me.'
Polo answers: 'Without stones there is no arch.'"
— Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

This conversation took place in a shared Google Doc over several occasions in April and early May 2021, between friends and colleagues, artists and writers, Hannah Clarkson and Matilda Tucker, in the context of an ongoing experiment in collaborative writing.

In their individual and collective practices, Clarkson and Tucker explore potential embodiments in language(s) of thinking and dwelling in the 'here and elsewhere' of places and spaces they may not physically be in, across cultural, geographical and/or emotional distance. They are interested in how language can be employed as a tool for empathy beyond concrete linguistic understanding; how translation as method opens up to modalities of fictioning and collective storytelling; and writing as an experiment in sharing everyday struggles and building collective narratives of care.

An attempt to bridge gaps between the here and elsewhere of Stockholm, Berlin and all the other places that in this time of pandemic we cannot be, the text below is not a conclusion but a conversation. It is a thinking out loud - or rather, on screen - together, on themes of language and translation; belonging and resisting; work and laziness; former and formless selves.[1]

Keywords: language, politics of home, laziness, translation, care

[1] This piece came into being as part of Tucker and Clarkson's development of collective methodologies in the Fiskis Collective. Founded in Stockholm, the collective is comprised of four artists – Clarkson (UK), Tucker (US/Germany), Konstantina Pappa (Greece), and Milagros Bedoya (Peru) – with backgrounds as various as visual arts, writing, and architectural practice, focusing on the potentialities of storytelling for empathy and political agency. Faced with the geographical limitations of the pandemic and the challenge of staying connected when the collective's members are confined to different geographies spanning from Stockholm to Lima, Berlin, Agrinio, and Cambridge, together they ask the question: How to inhabit a place we are not physically in? (https://www.fiskiscollective.com/info)

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Мио, мой Мио!

-Astrid Lindgren

Matilda: I've been interested in the different ways you can open up how to approach a new language. Like your new friend, let's say. If you have many languages at your disposal, how would it change what you're doing if you don't use English, for example, but French to learn Russian? Yesterday I listened to a recording of Astrid Lindgren's *Mio my Mio* in Hebrew. I only understood about 80 percent, but I imagined all the young Israelis, listening, and imagining what it would be like to be Swedish in the sixties, as the Israeli narrator struggled to pronounce the names Wilhelm, Bosse, and Västerbrogatan.

Hannah: I used to sit on the bus when I first moved to Sweden and repeat all the names of the stops as we passed them. One day, and then every weekday after that, a little girl came and sat next to me on the high up seat at the front of the bus, and asked me my name, where I came from, my age. We had the same conversation each day on our way to our respective schools, and I began to feel at home, at least with those questions and those words. Then I moved to another part of town, and I never saw the little girl again. I guess she is taller now.

Matilda: It's rare that strangers come up to you without prompting in Sweden, in my experience at least. Even rarer that anyone opens up to you.

Hannah: Opening up, what does that really mean when we think about it? Opening one's mouth and chewing on all these new words, trying to spit them out again but they sound strange and unfamiliar. Like the first time you eat an apple pie that was not made by your own grandmother, and realise that not everything is the same, even if there is a certain familiarity there.

Matilda: Someone, a very advanced, autodidact genius-type person, once told me that he retains so much knowledge with such ease because he imagines every new book he reads as a conversation with the author. Before he begins reading, he flips to the author page and studies the photograph, intensely visualizing what that person would be like if they were sitting in front of him in the flesh. That way, every book was an intimate conversation with a new friend. Not sterile information, but heartfelt life advice.

For me, a new language can be a similar friend. Or maybe for now just an acquaintance who you only run into at parties where they've drunk too much (back when we used to have parties, anyways).

Hannah: I feel that way too with authors, and also artists whose work I admire. I wonder what it means to have such a one-sided relationship with someone I have never met, who might even have lived long ago or in a distant context, though I often feel I know them intimately. They live inside my head, and sometimes I even make objects for them - a jacket belonging to an older brother which allowed a young woman access to a male-only art academy; a bowling alley to help a factory owner to realise his sporting dreams - perhaps to materialise our relationship in some way, or to give something in return for all the words and thoughts I have borrowed from them. We create our own language in this exchange, and these semi-fictions which emerge are a conversation, though contorted in space and time. Does a conversation only happen between two people in the same time, in speech or writing, or can it exist otherwise?

Matilda: I suppose our inner worlds mirror each other in a whole lot of ways. I think I've mentioned this to you before: what gets me through many a difficult day is the realization that there is a planet - a plane of existence if you will - where all of us people with too many roots and geographical flux and scattered lives, whatever you want to call it, convene together. Because there it makes sense that you'd choose to distribute yourself thusly that you live in country A, you commute for work projects in country B, your family is distributed across countries C.1 and C.2, and your social life is mainly in country D, where you lived last. Possibly you also have a long-distance relationship in another location (not) of your choosing.

Hannah: To live like that is exhausting and exhilarating at the same time.

Matilda: And also a great escape, whatever that means to you.

Hannah: I have realised (perhaps this ought to have been obvious to me before) that I always take myself with me wherever I go, even if that me changes each time my body shifts location.

Side note: I often get a spark of discord when you spell 'realise' with a 'z', and I wonder what that says about me as a supposedly decolonial thinker towards language. But ultimately it doesn't matter, because when we talk or write together, what happens is so much bigger and more exciting than that 's' or 'z', and it is colo(u)rful whether there is a 'u' in there or not, because you and I becomes we.

Matilda: Haha, just seeing you type this right now I'm getting flashes of the corrective impulse I get whenever I see you write "decolonize" without a "z" ...

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"Wie gut spricht eigentlich ein*e Muttersprachler*in die eigene Muttersprache? Eher auf dem Niveau von Goethe oder dem von Dieter Bohlen?"[1][2]

-Olga Grjasnowa, *Die Macht der Mehrsprachigkeit: Über Herkunft und Vielfalt*

Matilda: You know, I had the realization yesterday that you and I were among the three only people in our seminar who speak English as a mother tongue. And what an incomprehensibly great privilege it is! Even though we counted back then and we had something like 18 languages in the room, to which our knowledge contributed in no small way, the unrelenting presence of this "upper hand" seems absurd. Also, what on earth is a "mother tongue?"

Hannah: I wonder whether that is why we are the two who speak the most in seminars…is it to do with language, or just that we always have something to say? I sometimes feel embarrassed that my voice is often one of those most heard, but then I think it's a shame to leave silence after someone has been so generous with their words or thoughts in a presentation or seminar. To respond is a sign of sharing and appreciation, I feel.

Matilda: Or maybe we're just those annoying people who like hearing themselves talk.

Hannah: Also, regarding the 'mother tongue', my mother definitely speaks more than my father does - perhaps that's why I pronounce certain words with a Northern Irish lilt, though that accent has migrated south somewhat since I met L. If we ever have children, I wonder if they will have a 'father tongue' instead, since he talks even more than I do.

Matilda: Wait, I need to think for a second.

Hannah: Take all the time you need.

Hannah: We have a lot of time right now.

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"Ich bin geimpht!"

-Matilda's Pap

Hannah: Language is also a time-based medium. It takes time to learn a new language, how to speak or read, and even longer to write it, just as it takes time to get to know a new friend, to truly understand them, their quirks and stammers and what they really mean when they use certain words. To think beyond capitalist understandings of investment, to learn a language is to invest time, to care, to try to empathise with a person or place. Perhaps, as with any investment, we still expect something in return, but that expectation is more a longing to belong, to feel at home, to express oneself in relationship with others.

Matilda: Sorry for my return bar mishaps. I think my problem with the term "mother tongue" is the implication that we need to dig for an "original" language. That the first language you learn to speak should also be the one that you are most comfortable in. That there must be a language in which you understand all the niceties and underhand implications and double meanings and references. That to have a language in your life would mean to know it "to the end." That that is what being at home in a language means. That, for example, a child whose family moves, who has to learn many languages to adapt to new surroundings and maybe struggles with that, forgetting and relearning in turn—and as a result floats between a number of languages, not quite "at ease" in any in specific periods of time until they get used to it—would have something "untrue" or "treacherous" within them. Because there is that strange standard of what it means to "know" a language.

Hannah: It is interesting then, as artists and writers, that we feel the urge to find our own voice, our own language or style, in the way that we write and the things that we make. As though the language(s) we were 'born into' is inadequate to express who we are as individuals. Does this happen to the same extent when we work collectively? I feel like you and I have definitely developed a certain mode of thinking that allows us to communicate and create together as one brain.

Matilda: Definitely. I see this kind of collective writing methodology also tapping into parts of myself which I don't

[1] How well does a German native speaker speak their own mother tongue? More on the level of Goethe or on that of Dieter Bohlen? After all, both are native German speakers.

[2] Translations are the authors' own.

have access to otherwise when I'm writing on my own because I see certain things in you that I recognize or bounce off of or, in other cases, that confuse me.

Hannah: Maybe that's also what language is for in its function as communication – in conversation, we find thoughts we didn't have to articulate so perhaps subconsciously didn't bother to fully form. But in sharing, things start to make sense. Or they don't, but become something else, however lucid or confused.

Matilda: And also, as far as how artists and writers relate to the languages they are born into, no one is "interrogating" how good of a "native speaker" the guy down the street is compared to the poet laureate…

Hannah: Hmmm, that's interesting. I was talking to L about this the other day, in relation to a book written about Germany, in French, by an American author, which won the Prix Goncourt (*Les Bienveillantes* by Jonathan Littell). Often the books that win that particular prestigious prize are written in 'high' literary French, but in this case there seems to have been an acceptance that as the author is not a native speaker, allowances could be made for occasional clumsy use of language, due to the superb detail of research and storytelling in the novel's contents. Incidentally, the book also won a British annual prize for the worst description of a sex scene, though I'm not sure if that is then down to the author, or the person who made the English translation?

Matilda: That's pretty funny. I will just drop a few breadcrumbs from Olga Grjasnowa's book *Die Macht der Mehrsprachigkeit: Über Herkunft und Vielfalt*, because I cannot help myself and it's just "drippingly" dense with thoughts about all of this considering what a short read it is. She points out the lengths it takes to be taken seriously as a German speaker, how people are scrutinized for tiny mispronunciations or case mistakes if they apply for university, for instance. Terms like *Halbsprachigkeit* are used. But when Prince Charles gave a speech in front of the Bundestag, in which he kept switching to English because his German was very rusty, essentially speaking English half the time, the German newspapers still ran a headline that said that Prince Charles had delivered his speech in German.. No mention of *Halbsprachigkeit* (Grjasnowa 66-7).

Hannah: I mean, I suppose he did give half a speech in German, or a speech in his version of German. But I see your point about the double standard there. I recently had a conversation about that in relation to University applications here in Sweden too - essentially you can't do a Bachelor's unless you have a piece of paper saying you speak Swedish (same thing in England actually), even if you speak or write well enough to fully engage in the education but never formally studied the language.

Matilda: Grjasnowa lays out these problems in the German context very clearly. It is no innocent accident that "Heimat," the German word for home, is always in the singular. A culture championing monolingualism, after all… It's an expression of ethnic nationalism. She writes,

> Der Begriff „Muttersprache", eines der deutschesten Wörter überhaupt, impliziert hier wieder, dass man nur eine Sprache haben kann, wie man nur eine Mutter hat. Die Muttersprache wird als etwas „Natürliches" hingestellt, die Kultur wiederum als etwas Biologisches und Angeborenes. (49)

Do you need to do a language test for a residency permit or citizenship test in Sweden?

Hannah: I don't think so for residency (at least not as a white European), but perhaps for citizenship you do... and I'm pretty sure it's a requirement if you are not from an EU/EEA country. The citizenship tests in the UK are pretty ridiculous, no person born in Britain would know the answers (and some of the facts are actually even wrong!)

Matilda: Interesting. This reminds me of how different foreigners are put into boxes in Germany –especially in the non-EU visa lines (the short ones are for USA, New Zealand, Australia etc, the long ones are everyone else). And, my own father, a non-German from that short-line group I just mentioned, who has embodied a very conflicted non-Germanness all my life, just now texted me in German:

> *Ich bin geimpht!*
>
> (*I am vaccinated!* But he mixed up the "f" sound, it should be "geimpft.")

Hannah: Does it mean something else with the 'ph'? I like how it becomes like an acid test, literally testing how hot you are at the language.

Matilda: Haha. No, it means nothing else. But it's that weird disconnect, twisted recognition thing again that I can't quite put into words yet. Same as when I saw the Yiddish Corona poster in Stockholm, thought it was Hebrew, only to discover German meaning inside the letters after much puzzling… and then later learning that Yiddish is an official minority language in Sweden.

Matilda: Which leads me back again to seeing a language through the eyes of another language… you've got the rules of reality and gravity and up and down (i.e. spelling, the

feel of a language) so ingrained that it's hard to do anything but transfer it onto the new language. If you are living a monolingual reality, at least.

Hannah: Haha. I feel the same about Sweden sometimes, the bureaucracy is so boxy that it can't accept that I am both British and Irish (thus European)... I'm like, fine well I was planning to leave soon anyway, so yah boo, shucks to you! (as my sister would put it).

Matilda: Same if German white people study Arabic, it doesn't have to be *anywhere* near the level that say a Syrian professional's German must be to work as a journalist.

Matilda: Also, Grjasnowa brings up Nabokov's *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle*, in which he is constantly jumping back and forth between French, Russian and English, which was apparently a nightmare for translators to work on, and only really makes sense completely to people who speak all three languages (I haven't read it).

But I'd like to go into that kind of territory more.

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Rad je bolest (Karl Marx)/ Work is Disease (Karl Marx)

-Mladen Stilinović

Matilda: Off the bat, I'm pulled back to our conversations about the puritan work ethics of North America and the UK whose yokes we have "suffered" (?) from our whole lives, and which we don't seem to be able to free ourselves from completely… because deep down somewhere, we truly subscribe to them, we buy into them. Perhaps we even get our sense of worth from them.

I also see in this short piece an intriguing intersection of some key components of our individual work in a way that we haven't quite put them into conversation with each other yet: care - the body - the intensity of non-doing, of non-action. I'm curious to hear your thoughts on "work is a disease."

Hannah: If work is a disease, then disease could be defined as anxiety, perhaps. And if anxiety and disease are two sides of the same coin, then that separation between mind and body necessary for capitalism to function at its most profitable – and destructive – is undermined. An awareness of the body and its entanglement with thought and feeling does not come naturally anymore. We are trained to think only of the body when its supposed needs can be satisfied by spending the money we beget by work: a prepackaged sandwich and an overpriced coffee grabbed in a short lunch break from an office desk; a gym membership, sometimes paid for by the boss of said office, in order to keep the body and mind healthy, thus better able to work more; a rented room – shelter – in a faraway part of town, requiring longer working hours to pay for, and an hour and a half on crowded transport to reach.

Matilda: If work is a disease, what could healing look like concretely? If work is a disease, what could preventative care look like?

Hannah: To be over simplistic, Universal Basic Income? Seriously though, I think if we reassess what we think of as work, and value various kinds of labour equally – domestic, artistic, service, or if people still choose it, office work – then attitudes around work could begin to be healed. It is perhaps not work itself that is the disease, but the way in which we value or negate it in its various forms. If motherhood, or artistic practice, or other kinds of nurturing, were to be named as the work that they are, care would become more inherent in our understandings of work and the people who enact it.

Matilda: I agree. I think bringing "care" and "work" in direct proximity of one another, as terms, as concepts etc. is more than overdue. Perhaps it would make more sense to start thinking of most types of work as manifestations of care, rather than focusing on presenting and valuing care as a form of work, as I see it being discussed more and more right now. I still think that this is important, but I'd like to go further.

Hannah: I also think it's important to think about who takes on the work of care and in what sense. I was reading Françoise Vergès' *Capitalocene, Waste, Race, and Gender* recently, in which she points out the invisibility of the (often black and female and in their forties-ish) people who create the conditions for white corporate bodies to take care of themselves very visibly, with their power smoothies and early morning runs, at the same time that those who clean their offices and gyms are taking the bus exhausted home to care for their own children before heading to a rich neighbourhood to look after someone else's. It also made me think about where we sit in that? As non- or low-earners but still engaging in some of those same 'wellness' practices... I guess the difference is that we run to take care of ourselves and lessen the anxieties of being 'out-of-work' or investing so much emotional energy in the work of making art and being in the world in a way that is ethical and politically engaged.

Matilda: We live in this self-care generation. I think it's really weird that I turned into a young adult who exercises. My teenage self would be really weirded out to see me doing calisthenics and yoga. The sports people were the horrible people in school time. Sports and moving your body was the opposite of me or anything remotely desirable. Flying balls were to be avoided at all costs. And yet here we are, running around, staying fit.

Hannah: Oh me too! I could never have seen myself running, let alone enjoying it! But in some sense I am aware that, given my medical history and the 'wasted time' of being ill in my teens, I am now running away from that body that once (or many times) failed me, and sometimes still does.

Matilda: That makes sense. Also the small detail that it's good for you to take care of your own body, but that overlooks that sports in teenage time (or anytime) = organized fun.

Hannah: And therefore NOT FUN!!!

Matilda: In the early labor struggles in the United States, the rallying cry called for eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours "for what we will" (Weeks 169). I have spent a large portion of this year asking myself what this "for what we will" actually means. It takes surprisingly many different faces once you try to pin it down, and it is an opening to possibilities. Could (preemptive) care in this sense be about un-learning how to do and relearning how to be lazy, so that we can come up with new approaches for what to do with our time?

Put more bluntly, I think this is the first time I see a direct connection between your interest in care and mine in free time and "nothing time"… or rather, the direct implications of care of the latter.

Hannah: Yes, I think that nothing time needs to be cared for, rather than taken care of by filling it with activity in order to assuage the guilt of laziness or nonproductivity. Or the guilt of spending time doing something because it is enjoyable, not because it will earn you money or make you a better person. Like, I should be working right now; or I should cook a healthy meal; or I should exercise; or I should read a book instead of watching TV.

Matilda: Right. Where does all this guilt come from? A vague image of self-flagellating monks playing on some projection screen lodged somewhere in the back of our minds?

A communal pressure to do the right thing… manifest destiny… grand narratives… societal expectations… this could go on forever.

Hannah: Protestant work ethic, or some kind of puritanism... but what about those who are not religious at all? Perhaps society has just retained all the bad parts of the religions it was built on, and invented 'wellness and spirituality' to replace the good parts it left behind? But how do we define good and bad anyway? Maybe it's to do with running? Going back to running, maybe it is a running towards, rather than a running away as I said before...which in principle sounds positive, but it definitely sets up a dynamic of achievement and failure, a capitalist mindset of working towards a goal...

Matilda: Sometimes, running and writing as "productive" activities become almost the same in my mind - in the sense that both can be about discipline and pushing yourself, striving towards something. But both can also be meditative and goal-less in a meditative, freeing sort of way. For you too?

Hannah: Definitely, the latter is better, but maybe a sweet spot could be somewhere between the two? Maybe this is the fear of laziness talking... but I do think a certain amount of discipline is sometimes required to do something you know will make you feel good.

Matilda: Agreed. And I'd also say that fear plays a very big role in all sorts of ways. Also fear of doing (sometimes). Or fear of not doing.

Hannah: Yes, I think for me I have spent a long time being afraid of resting, for fear if I stop I won't get going again.

Matilda: THIS I relate to so much! Probably why I avoided moving to Berlin for so long, because this whole place is like one big work break.

The opposite of Stockholm, in many, many ways. Zero scramble to survive, very easy life.

Hannah: And why do we find the idea of that so hard to deal with?

Matilda: Because there IS a kernel of truth in the work-hard ideology. Because making things, real things, happen, doesn't happen without a great effort. And honestly the whole thing of people taking a rest and getting too comfortable and just never getting up again is all-too-real. Berlin is full of people who are like "yeah I've been working on this film project for like two years, but you know that's my work style, that kind of project *needs* time..." I'm so afraid of becoming like that. But I'd also say

that fear and anxiety are the great engines of human ingenuity. Maybe that's why we've been so interested in knowledges of necessity also?

Hannah: Yes, perhaps...and also discourses and embodiments of care?

Matilda: I think so, yes.

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Working Together While Being Apart: A Pandemic Life

Lauren McLean[1]

[1] School of English and Theatre Studies, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

E-mail: lmclea05@uoguelph.ca

Zoom or Teams?
We aren't
A team
Me. You. Them.

Bright screens
And open tabs
Alone
Each of us.

Maybe at home
An office
A couch
A bedroom.

Surrounded by
Heavy news
Family, pets, plants
Other responsibilities.

Maybe not fully alone
But certainly
No team
Bing!

Reminder:
Meeting at 10:30
Rushing
To make it.

Sign in
Or find the link
Buried amongst
Endless emails.

Video on?
Video off
Mute,
Unmute
Mute again.

I'm struggling
Reminding myself to care
For the work, for the "team"
For myself.

Myself
I repeat, myself
Where is the "bing" for self-care?
Bing!

The day, today
Repeats
Remaining connected
While being apart

Zoom or Teams?

The lake, the birds, and the people

Rahmawaty Kadir[1]

[1] Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: Rahmawat@ualberta.ca

I saw my *nene* in my dream last night.
She was beautiful with her *kerudung*.
She said to me, *"Nou, donggo motota yio mohulondalo?"*
I said *"motota watiya nene, openu bo ngoputu ngoputu."*
She smiled.

She left, leaving me awake for the rest of the night.
I talk in my silence.
O you, the daughter of *Holondalangi*. Have you found your dream yet?
Your tongue must have been numb. Does it still dance as it should be?
"Moalato." It said to me.
Dan akupun terdiam.

I hear the mother, *Limboto* lake, calling my name from faraway.
"No'u, pohuwalingo pomayi. I am drying, dirty, and dying."
The lake cries as her water dries up.
Leaving her alone with mud and stone.
I paused.
I sob.

I hear the *Bondula* sings a sad ballad. The saddest one I have ever heard.
They have been hunted, trapped, and killed.
"Alas, tingga pongolomu" kata mereka.
The wind blows their melody to this majestic land tackling the same fate.
I grieved.

Gathering my sense, I walked my mind passing the time.
I heard a little boy counting *"satu, dua, tiga."*
His grandma asked him, "what language is it?"
He said, "it is the language on TV, a language that unifies us."
Grandma weeps and walks away.
Enough I told. But, It is not the end yet.

My *nene* is there, singing *Lohidu lo Hulondalo*.
"Strangers in our door," she began.
Asked us to repeat our words.
We said them once, twice, thrice. But they asked for more and more.
Till our tongue got bitter and sore. No more.
The *Bone* River flows in your vein, but you just watch us from faraway.
Pain. *Mongoto.*

The canting is still there, *wunugo lo Hulondalo.*
Calling the name of *Bulalo lo limutu, Bandula lo limutu, Holondalo nga'a mila.*

But still the lake cries its water,
the bird sings its song,
and the language calls its people.

This poem describes the author's experiences as a speaker of Gorontalo, one of Indonesia's Indigenous languages. This language is listed as a threatened language in Indonesia by the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al. 2021) and the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2020). In this poem, she uses Gorontalo, Indonesian, and English to raise awareness of biodiversity and language endangerment in her community and the world.

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III

Cristian Guerra Maya[1]

[1] Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: cguerra@ualberta.ca

III

I can't help myself tasting your lips anymore.
I lie down myself down plains looking for you.
Your dilated pupils show me an unknown world
that always breathes on mine; yet drinking I was not.
The sky proudly wears jet grief
and our hands, with the edges lost,
blend with a silent harmony:
twilight songs breathing your fresh hair.

I can't help myself tasting your lips anymore.
My mouth makes its way into yours,
and roads stretch out deceptive mirrors.
Let me be the sea to touch your shy sands.
Let me be the tree where life starts
to stain with lava each petal of this ocean.
It is an inhospitable bravery
when I swim across my kin Stars,
who named you their sole heiress.
Windows paint your sleepy womb.
Inner thoughts bloom and
die down when I bite the dawn.

III

Saciarme de tus labios ya no puedo.
Al acostarme, entre sabanas te busco.
Tus pupilas dilatadas hablan de un mundo desconocido,
y que siempre respiró en las mías,
mas bebido yo no había.
El cielo se viste de azabache melancolía
y nuestras manos, de bordes perdidos,
se mezclan con silenciosa armonía:
música de ocasos que respiran tus frescos cabellos.

Saciarme de tus labios ya no puedo.
Mi boca se abre paso entre la tuya,
y caminos traspasan espejos ilusorios.
Déjame ser el mar y ensoberbecer tu arena tímida,
déjame ser árbol donde nace la vida
para manchar con lava cada pétalo de este océano.
Inhóspita valentía de bañarme entre las estrellas amigas
que te nombraron única heredera.
Hay ventanas que sobre tu vientre dormido pinceladas entregan
Refugiados pensamientos florecen
y agonizan mientras muerdo el amanecer.

Introduction

As for the inspiration for the poem theme, I invented a story of a Canadian front-line nurse who is soon to retire. Sadly, her husband, a former university professor of the same nationality—a Hispanist who has been an avid poetry expert on Spanish Golden Age and Latin American Romantics—is a critically ill patient with COVID-19. He developed respiratory failure and has needed ventilation support. Sitting to say goodbye on his deathbed, she writes and dedicates these verses honoring the love of her life with what he enjoyed most: a romantic poem with a baroque style loaded with metaphors.

I leaned for personal reasons towards an almost simultaneous process and product. I intended to develop a dual writing process where the original was not seen as authoritative (with "status and position"), and both poems had the same temporal value. That is, where both texts evolved almost in tandem. The English poem keeps pace with the other, and they even "give feedback" to each other. In this way, one could say that they are in dialogue as an analogy to the poem's theme: this is a conversation or the nurse's last words of farewell with her patient/husband/love of her life.

Introducción

En cuanto a la inspiración del tema, inventé una historia de una enfermera de primera línea canadiense que está pronto a jubilarse. Sin embargo, lamentablemente su esposo, un ex profesor universitario de la misma nacionalidad e hispanista

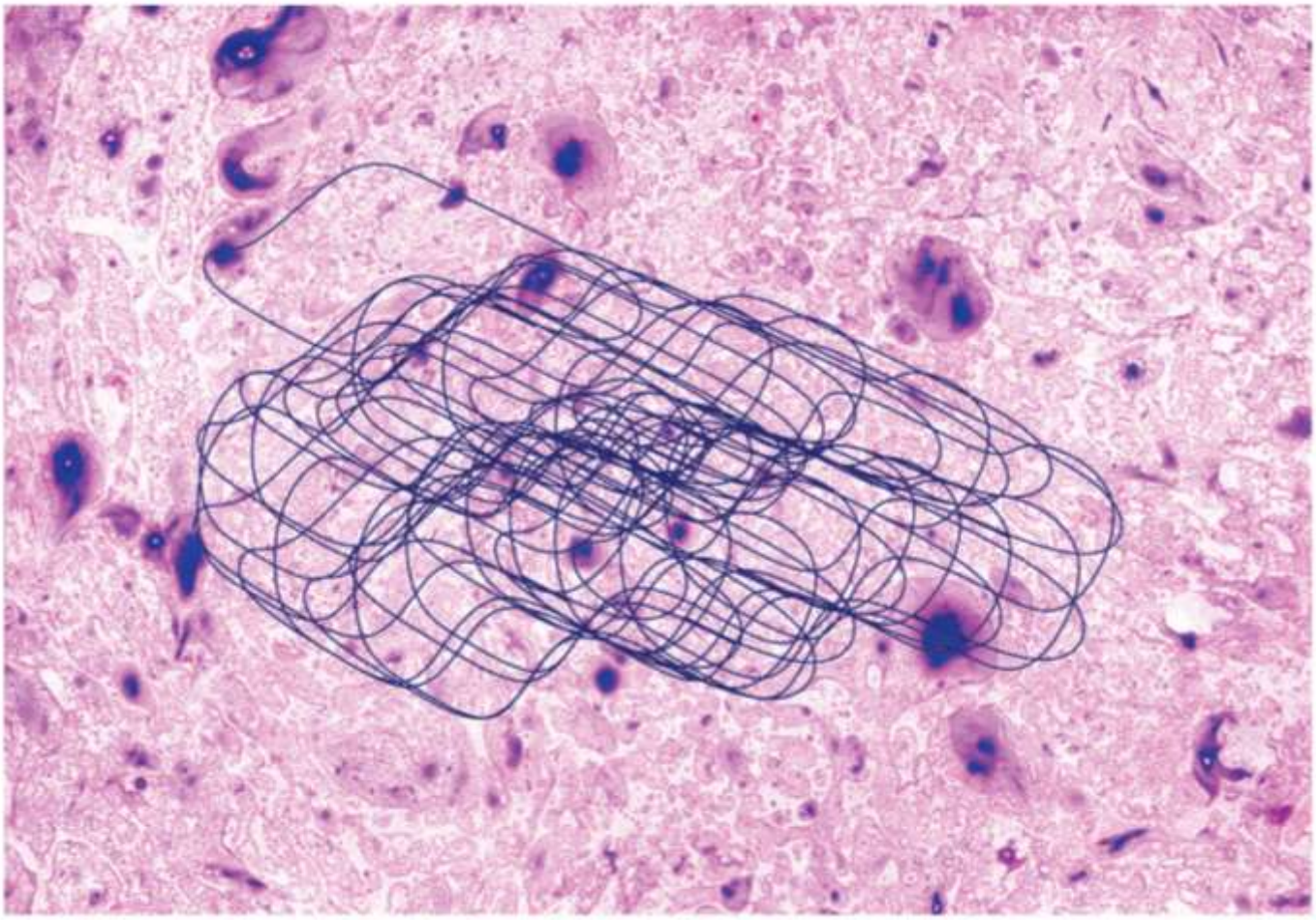
que ha sido un ávido experto en poesía del Siglo de Oro de España y poetas románticos latinoamericanos, ha enfermado de COVID-19 y está grave. Desarrolló una insuficiencia respiratoria y ha necesitado apoyo ventilatorio. Ella, sentada para despedirse en el lecho de muerte del amor de su vida, escribe y dedica esos versos honrándolo con lo que a él más le gustaba: un poema romántico con estilo barroco, cargado de metáforas.

Con respecto al acto de autotraducción, ya sea el proceso o al producto de tal empresa, me incliné por razones personales hacia un proceso y producto casi simultáneo. Mi intención fue desarrollar un proceso doble de escritura donde original no fuese visto como autoridad (con "estatus y posición") y ambos poemas tuvieran el mismo valor temporal. Es decir, donde ambos textos evolucionaron casi a la par. El texto de inglés sigue el ritmo del otro e incluso se retroalimentan. De este modo, se podría decir que dialogan, como analogía a temática del poema: la conversación o últimas palabras de despedida de la enfermera con su paciente/esposo/amor de su vida.

Connection

Arianna Pace

E-mail: ariannapace17@gmail.com



A Young Woman: A Translation of Tamim Al Bargouthi's (تميم البرغوثي) صبية

Houssem Ben Lazreg[1]

[1] Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: benlazre@ualberta.ca

صبية (تميم البرغوثي)

قل للصبية تُحييني وتُرديني
لم يبق مني سوى ما ليس يبقيني
يا ظبيةً في قديم الشعر ما برحت
تُبكي الكريم بمنهلٍ ومكنون
رأيتُها وأنا في الحق لم أرها
لكنه طربٌ للشعر يعروني
تُحيل كل فتىً مرَّت بخاطره
وكل بنتٍ إلى ليلى ومجنون
تُميل من قدها ما قد تُميل به
أئمةَ الناسِ من دينٍ إلى دين
ولو رأى وجهها القديسُ قال لنا
لا بأس بالذنبِ بين الحين والحين
ويدخل النارَ فيها أمةٌ طمعوا
من حسنها في جنان الحور والعين

قد يُنقصُ الحسن قدراً مَن تَيَقنه
ولا كحسنٍ بظهرِ الغيبِ مظنونِ
وأعرفُ الحسن لكن لا أُعَرّفُه
يبدو لعيني ولا يبدو لتعييني
روحي بقايا سماءٍ أُسكِنت جسداً
ولم تزل للسماء الروح تدعوني
إن لم أطر حسبتني لم أطر كسلاً
واستنجدت بعباد الله تشكوني
فإن أحسَّت بأُخرى مثلها خفقت
طَرقُ المساجينِ أبواب الزنازينِ
هي الأسيرُ رأى في البُعدِ أُسرته
فصاح لا ترجعوا للدارِ من دوني
والروحُ تسعى وراء الروحِ تؤنسها
من غربة الدارِ بين الماءِ والطينِ

A Young Woman

Say to the young girl to resurrect and then kill me
All that is left of me will not suffice to keep me alive
O doe from classical poetry[1]
Who has never ceased to make the noble man weep
In secrecy and in public
I have seen her, when I actually have not
Yet the elatedness of poetry deluges me
Every young man and every young girl she passes by
Laila and Majnun[2] they become
With her graceful body, she sways
clergymen from faith to faith
If a saint sees her face, he will bless our sins
'It is totally fine to sin from time to time'
As her beauty drags a whole community to hell
For the virgins of heaven[3] they crave
It will be in vain to fancy her beauty
For charm, as the unknown, is inconceivable
I recognize beauty, but I cannot define it
It is visible to my eyes, invisible to my mind
My soul is the remnants of a sky
inhabited by my body
Still my soul urges me to join the heavens
If I fail to fly, she will complain about my indolence
The servants of God she will call out protesting me
And if she senses the presence of another like her, she will beat joyfully
Like prisoners' banging at the cell doors
She is the prisoner who, afar off, sees her family
And shouts 'Do not leave me here'
The soul seeks the company of another
To alleviate the alienation of the body

Commentary (Notes on translation)

This amatory poem (aka as Ghazal) underscores one's longing for the beloved's beauty in all its glory through various metaphorical images and figures of speech. Interestingly, numerous scholars and poets have attempted to translate "Ghazal" from their original language to English. However, the task is daunting, as keeping the literal meaning of each poem while respecting the rhyme, refrain, and length of lines is difficult, if not impossible.

This poem posits some challenges when translating it to English. On the cultural level, the comparison of the beloved with a doe is one of the major topoi of classical Arabic love poetry. Historically, poets associated their beloveds with does as they share beautiful features such as stunning eyes and pleasing contours of the body. Because there is no equivalent metaphorical image in the Anglophone literature, I decided to preserve the original image of the doe and added a footnote to explain the reference. This is what I prefer to call "cultural translation." The second example in this poem is the literary reference to the story of Laila and Majnun. Majnun, which means "possessed by spirits" or "crazy," was the name given to the seventh-century Arab poet Qays ibn Mulawwaḥ when he pronounced his obsessive passion for Layla in elegiac lyrics. The late 12th-century poet Nizami wrote the best-known version of this tragic story after he collected many of the widely dispersed traditional versions (of the story) and wove them into his great narrative poem. The third example that is worth mentioning are the concepts of "أئمةَ الناسِ" and "قديس". Coming from the semantic domain of religion, these terms already refer to various faith traditions where sometimes, in one faith per se, there are multiple denominations and differences in beliefs and practices, as well as nomenclatures. While I opted for a more general term (أئمةَ الناسِ: clergymen) as it refers to the official leaders of the religious activities of a particular group of believers (it can be Islam, Christianity, or Judaism), I kept "قديس" as "saint" because this concept is familiar across the various Christian denominations. According to encyclopedia Britannica, a saint [4] is a "holy person, believed to have a special relationship to the sacred as well as moral perfection or exceptional teaching abilities." The meaning of the verse in the poem requires that emphasis on the moral holiness that can be easily and willingly subverted.

On the stylistic level, I decided to break up some verses into two because they were long and for the sake of fluidity. Moreover, this poem is rife with verses that are marked by fronting and pre-posing. These rhetorical tools enable a speaker or writer to front whatever he/she wishes for purposes of meaning, or order of importance, or chronological order.

Overall, though Al-Barghouti eschews punctuation in this poem, his poetry usually employs a lean economy of images, allegories, and sentiments that flow smoothly from line to line. In an interview with Amira Howeidi from the newspaper "Ahram Weekly," Tamim Al-Barghouti attests

[1] The doe is admired for its intelligence, beauty, and elegant movement.
[2] This is a poem composed by the Persian poet Niẓami Ganjavi based on a semi-historical Arab story about the 7th century Nejdi Bedouin poet, Qays ibn al-Mullawah, and his ladylove, Layla bint Mahdi (or Layla al-Aamiriya).
[3] A Houri is one of the beautiful virgins provided in paradise for all faithful Muslims.
[4] https://www.britannica.com/topic/saint

that translating his poems into English tends to strip them of meaning. Despite this inevitable loss, I think that creativity is still key when translating to retain as much of the ambience of the original text as possible.

Translator's Bio

Houssem Ben Lazreg is currently a blogger, a freelance translator/interpreter, Ph.D. candidate, a teaching assistant for French/Arabic at the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta, and a French language instructor with the Canadian School of Public Service. His research interests include politics and translation, Middle Eastern graphic novels, and Islamist militant movements. His translations have appeared in journals such as *Transcultural*, *Transference*, and *Multilingual Discourses*, while his commentaries on international politics are published with *The Conversation* and *Sasapost*.

Poet's Bio

Tamim Al-Barghouti is a famous Palestinian poet, columnist, and political scientist. He is one the most widely read poets in the Arab World. He was a visiting professor of politics at Georgetown University in Washington DC from 2008 till 2011 and is currently a Consultant to the United Nations Economic and Social Committee for West Asia. He has published six poetry collections in both colloquial and classical Arabic, *Al-Manzar* (*The Scene*, 2000), *Maqam Iraq* (*The Iraqi Ode* 2005), *Fil Quds* (*In Jerusalem*, 2008), and *Ya Masr Hanet* (*Oh Egypt, It's Close* 2012), and two academic books on Arab politics and history (*Benign Nationalism: Nation State Building Under Occupation, the Case of Egypt; and The Umma and the Dawla: The Nation State and the Arab Middle East*).