Lucas Graduate Conference 2021: Reinventing Boundaries in Times of Crisis

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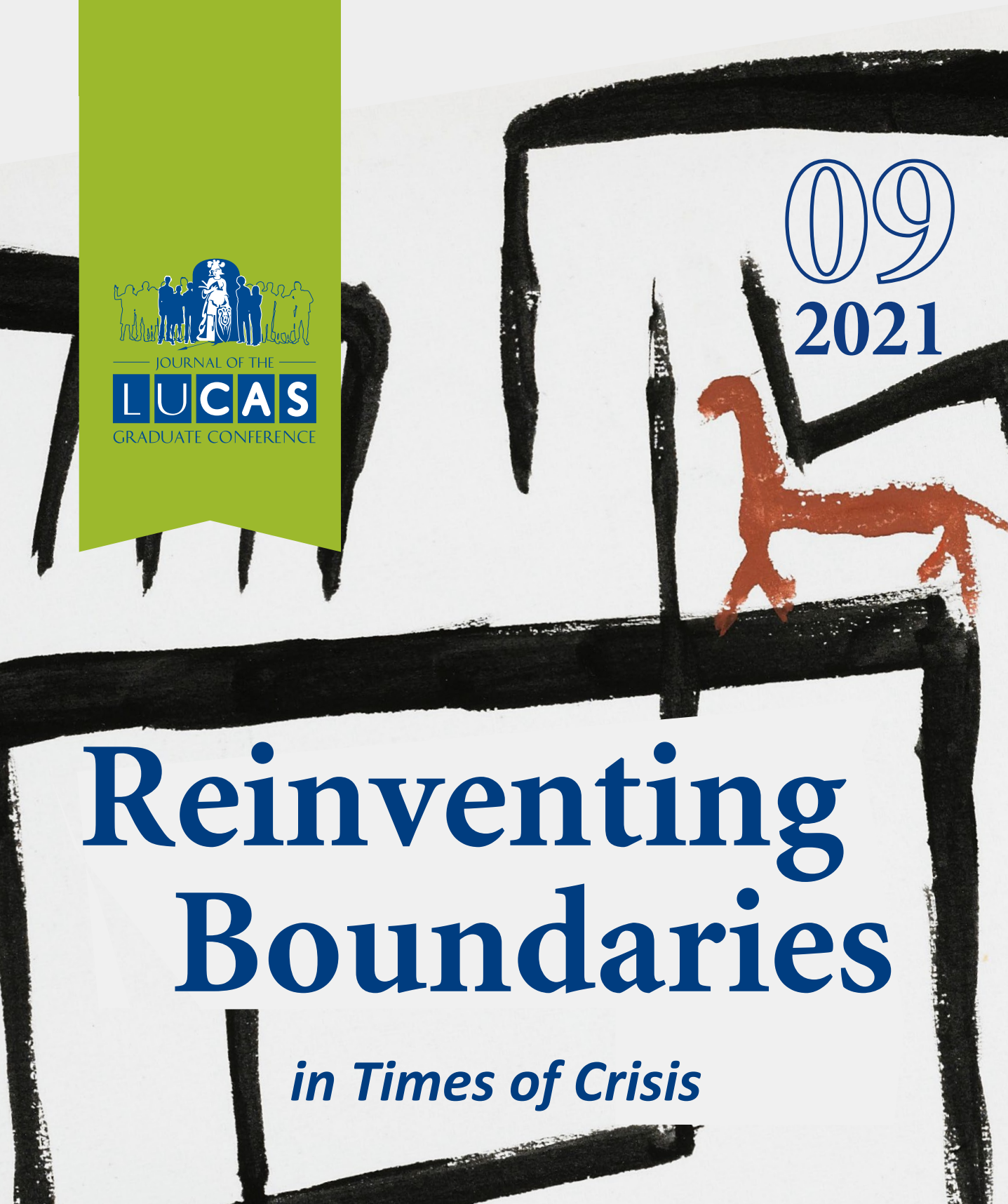

Reinventing Boundaries

in Times of Crisis

The Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference was founded in 2013 to publish a selection of the best papers presented at the biennial LUCAS Graduate Conference, an international and interdisciplinary Humanities conference organized by the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS). The peer-reviewed journal aims to publish papers that combine an innovative approach with fresh ideas and solid research, and engage with the key theme of LUCAS: the relationship and dynamics between the arts and society. Due to COVID19, this special issue of JLGC is exceptionally not related to any conference – as we were unable to gather on campus – but the central theme is therefore explicitly linked to the corona crisis, viral infections, isolation, and other close themes that are highlighted.

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike any other crisis in recent decades, the Covid-19 pandemic struck the entire world at more or less the same time. Nationally organised responses varied wildly, leading to discussions that crossed national and continental borders. Travel bans, closed borders, quarantines – people across the world saw their much-cherished freedoms brutally restricted for sanitation and safety reasons. In the global response to the pandemic, old lines of division between countries, continents and people were starkly put under a spotlight. For example, richer countries and continents have claimed much of the world's vaccine doses, and are reluctant to ease legislation on patenting that could make it easier (and cheaper!) to share these life-saving technologies with the rest of the world. In a context where 'every man fends for himself', weaker nations again draw the short straw. Global organisations such as the WTO are attempting to level the scales, but their efforts are painstaking, and partly fall on deaf ears. The startling differences in the worldwide vaccination programmes are just one example of how Covid-19 – or indeed any crisis – puts a spotlight on the cracks in a system that many thought could last for centuries; and highlights boundaries that people thought were slowly and definitively fading.

In national media at home and abroad, scientists have probably never been more present than in the last few months. Virologists, epidemiologists, sociologists and many other specialists not only shared their opinions on the

development of the pandemic and on possible measures to halt it, but were also put in the role of decision-makers, advising governments on the paths to follow. However, the omnipresence of scientists in the context of Covid-19 has had a double effect: some applauded the fact that national strategies were informed by academic insights, while others were more critical. These critics could be skeptical of the fact that scientific Covid-19 boards were too one-sidedly focused on the epidemiological side of the story, while closing their eyes to the sociological side-effects of the pandemic (and the governmental measures), such as increased poverty through unemployment, domestic violence, learning disability, loneliness, etc. However, a minority of fiercer critics went – and are still going – further to dismiss science and the media that broadcast its insights altogether.

Against the background of the medical and sanitation specialists that informed government responses, voices from the humanities have been voicing their insights on the broader picture around the pandemic. Historians have pointed towards similar occurrences in human history and have looked into differences and similarities between the responses back then, and now. References were made to the Spanish Flu (1918-1919), a viral influenza pandemic not unlike the present Covid-19 virus. Print and social media were littered with uncanny old black-and-white pictures of overcrowded hospitals or people wearing face masks. Medieval historians did their part by referring to the Black Death, which plagued Eurasian societies repeatedly through history. The deadliest episode occurred in the fourteenth century, when an estimated third of all Europeans perished. Even if this period is less documented than that of the Spanish Flu, here too, medieval manuscripts and paintings provide images and stories that are very recognisable to people today: mass burials, facemasks, social distancing, etc.

Throughout the ages, periods of crisis such as pandemics have resonated in the arts. One need only consider the many altarpieces that were donated

to hospitals caring for the victims, such as Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512-1516). While governmental bodies were – and are – predominantly focusing on containing the crisis, looking for culprits to blame or stressing their competence (or indeed masking their incompetence), societies as a whole underwent a more encompassing process of healing, which can be traced through the arts. Be it in the form of visual arts, literary texts, performance, or architecture, the arts have always provided a sounding board for the pains and hopes of people lost in crisis. In the past as well as the present, artists not only acted as mirrors of what was happening around them, but add a layer of criticism or a vision for the future. Art in crisis often contains a core of optimism, looking forward to the better times ahead.

From this point of view, the editors of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* asked scholars to look not at the crisis itself, but at the perspectives that past and present crises create for the future. In today's context too, people across the world are questioning the sustainability of what was 'before', and are looking to shape what comes 'next'. Will we return to our way of life before the global pandemic? Or will the shock lead to sustainable change and alternative cultural commodities? In some areas, the vague contours of permanent change are becoming ever clearer. For example, intercontinental travel has been greatly curtailed and will probably take a long time to recover, as people are increasingly questioning the wisdom and necessity of global tourism or long-distance business trips. Another change that now increasingly seems permanently ingrained is working from home – this will lead to far-reaching effects on the way we organise our cities, our mobility, or indeed or family lives. In the past too, periods of crisis proved to be turning points.

Generalising from the dichotomy of pre- and post-crisis, the editors have invited scholars to look at the theme of *boundaries* in past, present, and future, and to incorporate in their analyses responses to crises in the arts in their broadest sense. Specifically, the Board welcomed cases that examined

the way in which humanity showed resilience in responding to times of crisis by redrawing and reinventing boundaries. We understood 'boundaries' in the broadest possible sense, so as to include boundaries between social groups, art forms, disciplines, as well as geopolitical frontiers. How did or will artists reflect on the themes of boundaries, reinvention or crisis? How did or will they provide comfort to the public after crises? How did or will crossing or breaking boundaries help to heal societies after or during crises? How did or will literature function as a crossroads of new ideas, laying the basis for renewal after destruction? How did or will policy makers and ordinary people cope with crisis and how did societies rebuild, reorganise and reinvent themselves?

The present collection of articles respond to the questions raised by the Editorial Board from various perspectives, be they time, discipline, and/or methodology. **Dimitris Kentrotis-Zinelis** opens the journal on a 'hopeful' note, by looking closely at the invocation of hope as coined in a verse by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney. In his play *The Cure at Troy*, Heaney included a verse bringing together the concepts of 'hope' and 'history'. When looking more closely at Heaney's text, Kentrotis-Zinelis finds that the Irish author played with the concept of 'boundaries', between present and past, hope and reality, and so forth. Heaney based his play on *Philoctetes*, a theatrical work by Greek playwright Sophocles, which dates the subject matter even further back in time. Kentrotis-Zinelis follows the phrase through its history, and highlights how it has been appropriated time and again to serve new goals and convey new messages. Heaney related his play to the Northern Irish Troubles, but in more recent times, the phrase has been used by politicians worldwide, including Joe Biden, at the Democratic convention that would establish his nomination for the American presidency. On its way from Heaney to Biden, the verse can be traced in the discourse of several politicians who may have inspired Biden or his speechwriter. A turning point seems to have been the visit by Bill Clinton to Northern Ireland, which inspired the former president to recycle the phrase in one of his political books. By taking a careful look at Sophocles' *Philoctetes*

and how exactly it inspired Heaney to take a stance on the Northern Irish Troubles, Kentrotis-Zinelis shows how the phrase of 'hope' and 'history' could attain such a universal meaning in later political discourse.

In the following paper, 'hope' is replaced by a rather more idealistic response to crisis. **Allison P. Marino** takes the reader back to the early sixteenth century, to a Holy Roman Empire threatened both from within, by peasant revolts, and from without, by the continuous threat of Ottoman invasion. Albrecht Dürer's response to the crisis in his homeland was to design ideal cities and instructions for fortifications, which went considerably further than redesigning the present defensive infrastructure. Indeed, his proposals, addressed directly to King Ferdinand I, entail a drastic reorganization of society as a whole. Cities become well-organised entities in orderly building blocks, centering around princely authority. In responding to what he and others perceived as a crisis, Dürer proposed to raise new borders, both in a literal way, by strengthening fortifications, and in a more metaphorical way, by starkly delineating and separating the social groups necessary for a functioning ideal society. Marino looks closely at Dürer's plan and compares it to similar, contemporaneous initiatives to redesign societies and cities, such as Thomas More's *Utopia*. This insightful comparison is followed by an interesting incorporation of Dürer's own context as an urban artisan, and a discussion of the way in which the organisation of his home town(s) and the observations he made during his journeys, influenced his vision of late medieval urban society.

As fictional as Dürer's plans is the fanfiction written by medievalist enthusiasts and common internet users interested in the medieval figure of King Alfred the Great. **Martine Mussies** has looked at this particular genre of fictional literature through the lens of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the ripples it caused in the corpus of fanfiction devoted to King Alfred. Her analysis shows that fan authors have been creative in mimicking the present Covid crisis in their medieval subject matter, for example by describing an Alfred struck by illness or under

threat of foreign intrusion. Salvation, surprisingly, often comes from female characters, who show that fanfiction explores the possibilities of non-normative persons to cross boundaries. Mussies provides an insightful look into a genre that has been understudied and shows how fanfiction allowed at least some of its authors an escape from the crises and challenges in their everyday lives. She focuses more closely on female roles and female agency in four fanfiction tales, showing how female characters often perform healing roles.

Ana Stefanovska's paper returns to canonical literature by addressing Albert Camus' well-known novel *The Plague* (1947), in which a fictional city is put into isolation because of an unknown disease. Its premise is strikingly similar to the threats and limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and its countermeasures, which makes Stefanovska's analysis of spatial and temporal restrictions recognisable to most readers today. Camus turns 'boundaries', both physical and less tangible, into story elements that drive his narratives, not only in *The Plague*, it appears. His work stresses and critically reflects on the absurd conditions in which he places his characters. While the author's message was aimed at Post-War France and intended to contribute to the discussion of France's colonial and imperial ambitions, a 'modern' reading of *The Plague* proves equally insightful for our vision of what lies ahead, post-Covid. Stefanovska guides the reader through Camus' novel with special attention for the development of the narrative of the disease and the restrictions imposed on the city and its residents in response to the crisis. At the end of the narrative, the restrictions are lifted and the city is 'liberated', but one of the novel's protagonists pays a price, indicating that no liberation is possible without consequence. However, the idea of renewal included in Camus' circular narrative is hopeful enough, and the author concludes by stressing the importance of happiness as well as solidarity, in facing the often absurd threats that loom over us all.

In the final article in this volume, **Liselore Tissen** describes an effort to cope with the inevitable that is in some way reminiscent of Camus' characters

dealing with their spatial and temporal restrictions. Tissen moves the perspective to the present day and discusses the impact of Covid-19 on museums and their ability to share their collections with audiences and interested scholars. Safety restrictions have had a profound impact on the workings of museums, and on their ability to reach out to their audiences. Consequently, digital reproductions have been the primary means for art enthusiasts to continue to cherish the works and objects of their interest. Through modern techniques such as 3D prints, it has become possible to produce truthful reproductions of admired objects of art that are normally confined to climatised and secured spaces, away from the tactile exploration of intrigued onlookers. Their value is in a way defined by their uniqueness, by their age and their relation to single artists. 3D prints, allowing for large-scale truthful reproduction, place the emphasis on the idea of 'authenticity' in art. Tissen sees the Covid-19 pandemic as a driving force in rethinking the role of museums in negotiating between artistic objects and large audiences. Building on the idea of 'convergence culture', she propagates a wider usage of 3D reproductions and other digital methods to deepen the connection between objects and audiences. The authentic object and the (digital) reproduction do not need to compete, but can be mutually reinforcing in reaching out to the audience. This is in line with the societal functions of museums and heritage institutions, operating with public funds in the service of society.

For the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the LUCAS Graduate Conference* too, these past months have proved a testing time. Not only did the pandemic and its restrictions prevent us from meeting as we normally do, it also coincided with the important decision to open up the journal to free contributions, instead of restricting itself to publishing the papers presented at the biennial 'LUCAS Graduate Conference'. With both instances converging, the Editorial Board saw fit to issue a call for papers that related in some way to the pandemic, while leaving enough room for scholars of the arts in any period to think about their research in society in new ways. We are very happy with the

diversity, and the quality, of the papers that resulted from this process, and we are looking forward to addressing new themes, with new authors, in the issues that follow.

Leiden, 21 September 2021

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WHEN HOPE AND HISTORY FINALLY RHYME SEAMUS HEANEY'S THE CURE AT TROY AND THE AFTERLIFE OF A VERSE

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Using Joe Biden's speech at the Democratic National Convention as a starting point, in which Biden quoted the famous verse by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney "make hope and history rhyme", this paper traces how Heaney's phrase has travelled across geographical, cultural, and conceptual boundaries. Heaney's invocation to hope was originally included in the theatrical play The Cure at Troy (1990), which is an adaptation of Sophocles' Philoctetes. By appropriating the Greek tragedy of Philoctetes, Heaney devised an ingenious way to comment upon the Troubles in Northern Ireland, exhibiting that only a common embracement of hope epitomized by the rhyming of hope and history could put an end to the sectarian division. Since then, Heaney's phrase has escaped the boundaries of literature to enter the domain of politics, as it is often quoted by political figures worldwide, with Biden being the last politician to recite Heaney's line. This paper aims to demonstrate how Heaney's encomium of hope has gradually become a synonym for change and progress in the political arena.

INTRODUCTION: THE RHYMING OF HOPE AND HISTORY

On 20 August 2020, at the Democratic National Convention, Joe Biden formally secured his presidential nomination for the upcoming US elections. This event marked for Biden a decisive step towards his subsequent victory over

Donald Trump to become the 46th US president. In the final remarks of his acceptance speech, Biden addressed the crowd by saying: "Are you ready? I believe we are. This is our moment to 'make hope and history rhyme'".[1] This is an assertion from which it can be argued that a sense of hopefulness and imminent redemption emanates. Biden's proclamation was meant to be a shot of optimism amidst unprecedented political polarization in the US and an ongoing global health pandemic. Therefore, Biden introduced a redeeming phraseology to portray his candidacy as a viable remedy to the Trump administration. Certainly, a political narrative that blends hope with history serves as a beacon of positivity during the most challenging of times. Upon closer inspection, however, one realizes that this statement was not originally Biden's, and it originated in different circumstances.

Joe Biden borrowed his statement from the Irish poet and playwright Seamus Heaney, and specifically from *The Cure at Troy* (1990), a theatrical adaptation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, a Greek tragedy that was originally performed in 409 BCE. Yet, despite its undeniable Greek ancestry, there is something peculiar about *The Cure at Troy*: from the moment of the first performance, Heaney's play became inextricably linked with the then-prevalent Northern Irish affairs. Composed during the heyday of the Troubles, *The Cure at Troy* premiered on 1 October 1990 at the Guildhall Theatre in Derry; the second biggest city of the Ulster region that was at the epicentre of the sectarian conflict from 1968 until the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, officially terminating the atrocities by the Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries:

> More than 3,300 people died in the course of this protracted struggle between the more extreme factions of the unionists (mostly Protestant), who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, and the nationalists (mostly Catholic), who favour some sort of united Ireland.[2]

1 Teo Armus, "'Make hope and history rhyme': Why Joe Biden loves to quote a passage from Irish poet Seamus Heaney," accessed 29 February 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/08/21/seamus-heaney-biden-dnc-speech/

2 Marilynn Richtarik, "The Field Day Theatre Company," in *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Irish Drama*, ed. Shaun Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 191.

By retelling Philoctetes' predicament, that is, the story of the wounded and abandoned warrior whose pride and self-pity hinder him from overcoming his misery, Heaney devised a powerful yet subtle metaphor to comment upon the longstanding deadlock in Northern Ireland.

Heaney found in *Philoctetes* an allegory that not only applied to the then *status quo* in Northern Ireland, but also provided, albeit in poetic terms, a way out of the violent stalemate. By "domesticating Sophocles and making the wound of Philoctetes emblematic of the trauma of Ulster's maimed and distrustful communities",[3] Heaney used Greek tragedy as a means to talk about the Troubles. What Heaney recommends in *The Cure at Troy* is not the supremacy of one group over the other, but the prevalence of compromise and reconciliation. Therefore, between the antagonizing Nationalist/Catholic and Unionist/Protestant communities, he steadfastly refrains from taking sides. Resisting further feeding the division, Heaney tries to bridge the gap between the two conflicting camps by making an appeal to likely prospects of healing. As such, through the revitalization of the age-old story of Philoctetes, Heaney discovered an indirect but genuinely effective way to tackle a set of well-entrenched issues that plagued Northern Ireland for the most part of the second half of the twentieth century.

Since Heaney did not have knowledge of Greek, he worked on the script of *The Cure at Troy* through "relying on three translations – a late-nineteenth-century version, a Loeb Classical Library text translated by Francis Storr (1912), and a modern translation by David Grene (1957)".[4] Here, it is crucial to highlight that the phrase that Biden borrowed from *The Cure at Troy* does not have an exact match in the ancient Greek text, but is an inclusion made by the Irish poet. That is, although Heaney has largely remained faithful to the plot, setting, and characters of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, he admits to having inserted two "extra speeches for the Chorus – at the very beginning and near the end – [which] were meant to contextualize the action, and not just within a

3 Patrick Croty, "All I Believed That Happened There Was Revision," in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2001), 204.

4 Michael Parker, "Back in the Republic of Conscience: Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*, its Politics, Ethics and Aesthetics", in *Textual Practice* 31.4 (2016), 3.

discourse that could apply to Northern Ireland politics".[5] It is in the third stanza of the second supplementary Chorus that Heaney notably writes:

> History says, *Don't hope*
> *On this side of the grave.*
> But then, once in a lifetime
> The longed-for tidal wave
> Of justice can rise up,
> And hope and history rhyme.[6]

The fact that Biden, thirty years after the premiere of *The Cure at Troy*, quoted Heaney's 'hope and history' line underscores that Heaney's adaptation of *Philoctetes* has proved relevant not only to the period of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, but to a variety of historical contexts thereafter. In truth, one could argue that Heaney's verse has basically served as the central slogan of the Biden campaign to enter the White House. On 29 October 2020, five days before the US elections, Biden uploaded to his official YouTube channel a video where he recites the entire Chorus passage accompanied by footage from the Black Lives Matter protests and other recent cataclysmic events where people stand united against adversity.[7]

Still, what is more remarkable is the realization that the phrase in question did not travel directly from Heaney's play to Biden's ear. In truth, there is a certain genealogy to be traced with Biden being the last link in a long chain of political figures that have appropriated Heaney's invocation to hope. Isabelle Torrance recounts the prominent politicians having quoted Heaney in their public addresses:

> These include Mary Robinson as President of Ireland; Bill Clinton as President of the United States; Jacques Santer as President of the European Commission; Dick Spring as Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs;

5 Seamus Heaney, "*The Cure at Troy*: Production Notes in No Particular Order," in *Amid Our Troubles: Irish Versions of Greek Tragedy*, eds. Marianne McDonald, and Michael Walton (London: Methuen, 2002), 173.

6 Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 77

7 Joe Biden, "The Cure at Troy by Seamus Heaney | Joe Biden for President 2020," accessed 29 February 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkCvwvcT1zE&ab_channel=JoeBiden.

Gerry Adams as leader of Sinn Féin; Joe Biden in his presidential campaign against Donald Trump.[8]

Given the above list of illustrious names, it becomes evident that the 'hope and history' motto has long since crossed the frontiers of literature to enter the domain of politics. Another example is the late South African novelist and antiapartheid activist Nadine Gordimer, who published a volume of political essays in 1999 under the title: *Living in Hope and History*. It is then fair to say that Heaney's phrase has travelled through space and time, overcoming physical and spatiotemporal boundaries, to the point where today it has become a sort of political mantra, ready to be applied when the occasion calls for it.

The overall goal of this paper is to delineate the journey of the 'hope and history' *dictum* from the theatre orchestra to the political arena, pinpointing where exactly Sophocles, Seamus Heaney, and Joe Biden stand. This is not only an attempt to construe how this captivating statement has proved resilient over time, but also an effort to comprehend why it has been applicable to an array of heterogeneous situations and historico-political contexts. As I will demonstrate next, conflict is understood as a wound that must be healed even at a cost that may, for the parties involved, seem too high, hence the significance of that rare moment when hope and history do rhyme.

In support of this argument, one primarily needs to look back to *The Cure at Troy* and examine the conditions under which Heaney alluded to the rhyming of hope and history, without omitting to investigate the role that the tragic story of Philoctetes played. This pursuit entails a trajectory that stretches from Classical Greece to present-day Western politics, along the way crossing geographical, cultural, and conceptual boundaries.

8 Isabelle Torrance, "Bodily Abjection and the Politics of Resistance in Tom Paulin's Greek Tragedies," in *Classical Receptions Journal* claa030 (2020), 8-9.

The Cute at Troy and its Relation to Sophocles' Philoctetes

As mentioned earlier, the verse 'hope and history' verse was an add-on by Heaney to the ancient text, enabling him to render his play topical and pertinent to modern events. Nevertheless, without *Philoctetes* as its skeleton, *The Cure at Troy* would not have emerged. Indeed, notwithstanding the number of deep-seated allusions to Northern Ireland, Heaney's play remains a retelling of the Sophoclean tragedy.

From a theoretical standpoint, *The Cure at Troy* can be labelled as a product of Classical reception. Classical Reception Studies (CRS) is a subfield of Classics that investigates the way that the Classical past communicates with subsequent time periods. Unlike conventional and fairly positivistic assumptions that the discipline of Classics "is something fixed, whose boundaries can be shown, and whose essential nature we can understand on its own terms",[9] CRS scholars focus on the reciprocal form of communication between past and present. Within this scheme, any work of art that shares a thematic affinity with the ancient world, ceases to be considered *a priori* subordinate to the classical source; as if the later work lacks any intrinsic value, serving only as proof of the lasting relevance of an unalterable antiquity.

On the contrary, according to a CRS methodology, such a relationship must be perceived horizontally and non-hierarchically. CRS induces a paradigm shift in the practices of the Classical tradition, since it acknowledges an epistemological interdependence between ancient precursor and modern version in terms of the production of meaning. Applying this approach to Seamus Heaney's reception of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, Hugh Denard claims that:

> Heaney's work boldly opened up a dialogue between its Sophoclean model and the culture and politics of Northern Ireland. To the Sophoclean representation of a wounded, embittered Philoctetes, Heaney brought the

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9 Charles Martindale, "Thinking Through Reception," in *Classics and the Uses of Reception*, eds. Charles Martindale, and Richard Tomas (Malden, Ma: Blackwell, 2006), 2.

> experience of suffering in Northern Ireland. To the Northern Irish crisis, the Sophoclean model brought a vision of miraculous redemption.[10]

The Cure at Troy is not exclusively thematically indebted to *Philoctetes*, but also allows the Greek tragedy to be seen from a different angle, thus expanding its scope. Likewise, any modifications to the tragic text, such as Heaney's handling of the Chorus, should not merely be seen as arbitrary and bound to the present time, but simultaneously as affecting perceptions about the Greek source. Before jumping to any conclusions as to why Heaney introduced the 'hope and history' verse, however, one has to recall the events narrated in *Philoctetes*.

Heaney detected that the central message of *Philoctetes* "was familiar to people on both sides of the political fence in Northern Ireland. People living in a situation where to speak freely and honestly on certain occasions would be regarded as letting down the side".[11] As such, one has to trace how this phenomenon is enacted in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* before moving forward with *The Cure at Troy*.

A SYNOPSIS OF SOPHOCLES' PHILOCTETES

Philoctetes must be read against the backdrop of the Trojan War. The Greeks learned from a prophecy that they would not win the war unless they brought Philoctetes to Troy. Philoctetes, however, had been abandoned by his Greek comrades on the island of Lemnos having been bitten by a snake, which had resulted in a terrible leg wound. Naturally, Philoctetes harboured a great hatred for the Greeks, holding them responsible for his misfortunes. Thus, the Sophoclean tragedy starts with Odysseus and Neoptolemus arriving on Lemnos, on a mission to capture Philoctetes and drag him to Troy.

Odysseus explained to Neoptolemus that the only way for them to succeed in their mission was through trickery. He instructed Neoptolemus to meet

10 Hugh Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-Visions," in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22.3 (2000), 2

11 Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*," (London: Faber and Faber, 2008a), 420.

Philoctetes alone and try to fool him by promising to bring him back to his homeland. Neoptolemus would have to convince Philoctetes that he stopped at Lemnos alone on his way back from Troy, where he had wanted to collect the arms of his dead father Achilles, but the Greeks denied his request. Feeling disrespected, he had left the battlefield and was sailing back home. Odysseus believed that the homesick Philoctetes would agree to follow Neoptolemus to the ship, which, unbeknownst to Philoctetes, would not take him home but rather would sail to Troy.

Neoptolemus hesitated to execute such a dishonest deed but eventually succumbed to Odysseus' pressures. He faced Philoctetes and gained his trust. Philoctetes fell into the trap and begged Neoptolemus to take him home, which Neoptolemus willingly agreed to do. Yet, after seeing how Philoctetes suffered as a result of his wound, Neoptolemus decided to reveal to him the truth about their destination. Hearing this, Philoctetes became infuriated, demanding that Neoptolemus keep his earlier promise. Suddenly, Odysseus reappeared, and a quarrel broke out, the three protagonists unable to find common ground. This is the point when the ghost of Heracles manifested itself as *deus ex machina*, delivering an external solution to the standoff: Heracles ordered Philoctetes to travel to Troy, forecasting that he would find there a cure for his wound. The Sophoclean tragedy concludes with a redeemed Philoctetes bidding farewell to Lemnos, the deserted island that he called home for so long.

Alienation and lack of communication appear as the two main themes of *Philoctetes*. Wounded and stranded on an island, expelled from the Greek community, Philoctetes' identity has been influenced by these events. A mixture of isolation, bitterness, and self-loathing describes Philoctetes' state-of-mind. As such, he is forced to embrace his alienation as an essential part of his personality. When the time comes for the Greeks to realize Philoctetes' importance and to reach back to him, Philoctetes' immediate reaction is to reject any kind of interaction that would lead to his social reintegration, as the affliction of

his wound outweighs any prospect of remedy. Having assimilated pain and exile as the two main components of who he is, Philoctetes considers change a greater threat than his present predicament. Consequently, Philoctetes' preoccupation with his wound, together with his persistent denial of an improved future, epitomize the hero's unyielding behaviour.

With this in mind, Heaney spotted in the plot of *Philoctetes* a potential antidote to the Troubles, symbolically expressed via the treatment of Philoctetes' wound: "Heaney is in favour of a cure, or healing, and he uses Greek tragedy to distance and yet make familiar the major issues of conflict".[12] The startling resolution represented by Philoctetes' decision to re-unite with his former enemies represented for Heaney a mythical parable as to what should be the right course of action in Northern Ireland in attempting to overcome the sectarian division. Next I will assess the immediate socio-cultural environment that motivated Heaney to put forward Philoctetes' *exemplum* as a way to deal with the Troubles.

THE STORY BEHIND THE CURE AT TROY

Assessing Heaney's appropriation of the Philoctetean thematics in *The Cure at Troy*, a clear parallel between Philoctetes' obstinacy and the political standstill in Northern Ireland becomes evident: "Sullen, rancorous, inwardly gnawed by hatred and paralyzed by memories of past injustice, Philoctetes is Heaney's unlovely image of the sectarian North of Ireland".[13]

One might therefore expect that, in *The Cure at Troy*, references to Northern Ireland would be explicit and easily labelled. However, the truth is that "while there are parallels, and wonderfully suggestive ones, between the psychology and predicaments of certain characters in the play and certain parties and conditions in Northern Ireland, the play does not exist in order to exploit them".[14] What Heaney sought to avoid was a simplistic identification between

12 Marianne McDonald, "Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*: Politics and Poetry," in *Classics Ireland* 3 (1996), 133.

13 Terry Eagleton, "Unionism and Utopia: *The Cure at Troy* by Seamus Heaney," *The Eagleton Reader*, ed. Stephen Regan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 374.

14 Heaney, "*The Cure at Troy*", 175.

his protagonists and real-life persons or policies: for instance, for Philoctetes to be considered a crude personification of hard-line Unionism, suppressing any opposing view regarding how Northern Ireland should be ruled; or else Odysseus be seen as a mirror-image of the IRA, morbidly blinded by the mandate for Irish reunification. Heaney eschews unsophisticated, straightforward interpretations. As John Kelly, himself part of the original audience of *The Cure at Troy*, reminisces about the buzzing ambience at the play's premiere:

> One look around the Guildhall was enough to confirm my suspicions that the gang would all be there - sharpening their quills and watching for the first clear evidence that Lemnos was Ireland, that Philoctetes was the in the DUP […] etc etc (*sic*). But it was all too subtle for that. The themes were clear enough - but any attempt to plant Heaney's adaptation square onto one or other version of the Irish situation simply would not work.[15]

The Cure at Troy was deeply immersed in the political context of Northern Ireland—to the point that the audience in Derry was holding their breath to see how Heaney would transfer the clash in the streets onto the stage. Yet one surmises from Kelly's review that Heaney refrained from sketching one or the other side as enemy. This should be understood as an inclination on Heaney's part to transcend the ingrained stalemate, which always finds expression in restricting 'either/or' contentions. As Alan Peacock states:

> Anyone looking to Heaney for some *parti pris*, coded political stance of a sectional nature will be disappointed. The analogy works rather in the more generalized terms of division, resentment and a sense of grievance or injustice - plus the possible cessation of these for the greater good. The play is beyond any sectional pleading of a case in this respect.[16]

At this point, it must be underlined that *The Cure at Troy* was commissioned by the Field Day Theatre Company, an artistic and intellectual enterprise founded

15 Derek West, "Review: *The Cure at Troy*," *Theatre Ireland* 24 (1990), 12.

16 Alan Peacock, "Meditations: Poet as Translator, Poet at Seer," *Seamus Heaney: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Elmer Andrews (London: Macmillan, 1992), 243.

in Derry in 1980. From its conception, Field Day aimed at playing an active role in the political crisis in Northern Ireland by intervening dynamically in the public debate: "Field Day proposed – through plays, pamphlets and anthologies – a re-examination of fundamental assumptions about culture and identity in Ireland".[17] Other than Heaney, Field Day's board of directors consisted of a team of well-known Irish writers, including Brian Friel, Seamus Deane, Richard Kearney, Declan Kiberd, and Tom Paulin. This intellectual conglomerate envisioned forging "a new sense of cultural identity for Ireland, creating a space in which it might be possible to contemplate a settled existence beyond the brutal realities".[18] Inevitably, the appraisal of the Northern Irish impasse through literary means was integral to the Field Day project.

The main goal of the Field Day intelligentsia was to deconstruct the purportedly old and futile means of approaching the conflict through the design of a newfangled Northern Irish cultural discourse. In a nutshell, the Field Day project was an attempt to encourage the protagonists of the Troubles to come forward and talk to each other. As Brian Friel asserted, the project was founded "to create an opportunity for 'talking amongst ourselves', others can listen if they wish".[19] Arguably then, Heaney's interest in the thematics of *Philoctetes* did not emerge in a vacuum, but was resolutely influenced by Field Day's aims and objectives.

Considering the programmatic manifesto of Field Day, it suffices to realize that the 'political but not partisan' approach espoused by Heaney was not strictly personal but reflected to a certain extent the overall mission statement of the theatrical company prompting the production of *The Cure at Troy*. As endorsed by its directors, Field Day's *raison d'être* is to "contribute to the solution of the present crisis by providing analyses of the established opinions, myths and stereotypes which had become both a symptom and a cause of the current situation".[20] This mindset was intended as a counterweight to the toxic atmosphere of the Troubles, an artistic endeavour to regulate the rampant hostility by proposing a more nuanced point of view on the conflict.

17 Dennis O'Driscoll, "Heaney in Public," *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. Bernard O'Donoghue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008b), 56.

18 Stephen Regan, "Ireland's Field Day," *History Workshop* 33 (1992), 26.

19 Paul Hadfield, "Field Day: Over But Not Out," *Theatre Ireland* 31.1 (1993), 47.

20 Seamus Deane, *Ireland's Field Day*, (London: Hutchinson 1985), vii.

The choice of Derry as the headquarters of Field Day, and eventually the place where *The Cure at Troy* premiered, should also be taken into consideration. Derry is a placename with a contested nomenclature, known also as Londonderry amongst the Protestant population. Moreover, it is the city in the predominantly Protestant Northern Ireland with the largest Catholic representation. Being remote from the metropolitan centres of Dublin and Belfast, Derry was seen by many at the time as a no-man's land; a place of unrelenting dispute and enmity, considering also that Bloody Sunday occurred in Derry. For Field Day, however, Derry's outsider status represented an opportunity for the establishment of an artistic buffer zone. As Anthony Roche discusses on the occasion of Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980), Field Day's first ever production:

> The choice of venue in a town like Derry which until recently had no proper theatre was symbolically apt: the mayoral Guildhall with its legacy for the Catholics of gerrymandering and second-class citizens. Since then, all these features have changed; but the need for such change was highlighted by Field Day's activities. The first night in the Guildhall saw a complete political spectrum of Northern Ireland - from Sinn Féin and the SDLP on the Catholic side through Unionists of various shades on the other - sharing the same space and anticipating by several decades what was out in place by the power-sharing Executive.[21]

Roche's astonishment about the peaceful co-existence of representatives from both opposing blocs inside Guildhall, calling an informal ceasefire to watch Friel's play together, reinforces Field Day's pivotal role in the development of Northern Irish affairs. This is a manifestation that theatre in Ireland matters in a special way, going beyond considerations of artistic quality and aesthetic pleasure. Characteristic of a Field Day production, the boundaries between stage and public become blurred, whereas whatever is projected in the play has a direct impact on the audience's perceived reality.

21 Anthony Roche, *Contemporary Irish Drama,* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 179-80.

Such realization not only enables one to better grasp the potency of Heaney's invocation to have hope in the advancement of the peace processes in Northern Ireland, but also serves as a stepping stone towards deciphering the demonstrated resilience of such a message, bearing in mind its subsequent circulation within distinct historical contexts. What remains to be unearthed is the process of Hibernization that Heaney commences in *The Cure at Troy*, namely how Heaney foregrounds his version of the Greek tragedy as markedly Irish.

IRISH ALLUSIONS IN THE CURE AT TROY

While Heaney offers a disclaimer that any parallels between his version of *Philoctetes* and Northern Ireland "are richly incidental rather than essential to the version"[22], a close reading of *The Cure at Troy* reveals that the instances where Irish markers transpire are numerous. For example, with the introduction of a distinctive Northern Irish vernacular, Heaney establishes that his version of *Philoctetes* is placed within an irrefutably Irish context:

> With terms such as "slabbering, "canny" and "canniness," "hagged" (for "hacked"), "clouts," "is his head away?" "shake-down," "wheesht!" "that put me wild," "I am astray,"" blather?" "shilly-shallying," […] the vernacular Heaney gives to the Sophoclean [characters], […] is recognizably Irish.[23]

Heaney exploits the animosity and eventual reconciliation of Philoctetes with the Greeks paradigmatically, as both a reflection and a way out of the present state of affairs in his country. Although a complete overview of such a strategy will not be included in this paper, a brief delineation of its most characteristic manifestations will follow. In fact, given that "Heaney took more liberties with the Chorus speeches than with the dialogue passages in *The Cure at Troy* [in order] to highlight the relevance of the action to contemporary Irish concerns",[24] the emphasis in this section will be placed on two Choric odes, one introductory and the other concluding. This allows us to

22 Heaney, "*The Cure at Troy*", 175.

23 Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-Visions", 4.

24 Marilynn Richtarik, "Reality and Justice: Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*," in Estudios Irlandeses 13.1 (2018), 106.

trace how Heaney introduces the struggle and the ultimate amelioration he recommends at the play's finale.

Starting with the opening Chorus, Heaney launches the action as follows:

> Heroes. Victims. Gods and human beings.
> All throwing shapes, every one of them
> Convinced he's in the right, all of them glad
> To repeat themselves and their every last mistake.
> No matter what.
>
> People so deep into
> Their own self-pity self-pity buoys them up
> People so staunch and true, they're fixated,
> Shining with self-regard like polished stones.
>
> And their whole life spent admiring themselves
> For their own long-suffering.
> Licking their wounds
> And flashing them around like decorations.
> I hated, I always hated it, and I am
> A part of it myself.
>
> And a part of you,
> For my part is the chorus, and the chorus
> Is more or less a borderline between
> The you and the me and the it of it.[25]

The lines above describe a dual phenomenon of perpetual victimhood and self-righteousness. The whole excerpt is an expression of "the wounded one whose identity has become dependent upon the wound, the betrayed one

25 Heaney, *The Cure at Troy*, 1-2.

whose energy and pride is a morbid symptom".[26] Although this picture perfectly fits Philoctetes' predicament, it is not necessarily restricted to him. Rather, such vivid sketching of intransigence as consuming one's identity, specifically the reluctance to consider the opposing view, to the point that one is ensnared in a traumatic situation with no apparent way out, illustrates truthfully the scenario of the Troubles. The use of the neutral 'people' to denote the perpetrator of intransigent behaviour, in particular, suggests that the inclination towards obstinacy is indicative of both sides, be it Unionist or Nationalist. As such, the Chorus names fixation, fanaticism, and alienation as the omnipresent constituents of the sectarian discord, engulfing all in its vortex.

Yet, what is more striking is the awareness exhibited by the Chorus of its intermediary role. The Chorus, although openly detesting the deadlock it describes so acutely, simultaneously laments the fact that there is no escape from it. Instead, the Chorus acknowledges the stalemate as a basic constituent of its own complexion. On that note, in an interview, Heaney confessed that:

Anyone who grew up in the north of Ireland from their moment of consciousness was aware of, if you like, a public dimension to their lives, they were bonded into a group, one side or the other side. And they were also living in the, you know, a personal, private intimate, the theatre of your own conscience and consciousness. So, the demand for solidarity was there from the start with your group, and if you were growing into some kind of authentic individual life, the imperative for solitude or self-respect or integrity or self-definition was there also. So there was always that little, sometimes quite often, an ill-fit between the group line, the party line if you like, and the personal condition.[27]

What Heaney outlines about the constant struggle between individual self-realisation and obedience to the group as symptomatic in Northern Ireland, becomes allegorically transcribed in *The Cure at Troy*: Odysseus and Neoptolemus self-identify as "Greeks with a job to do".[28] When at one point

26 Heaney, "*The Cure at Troy*: Production Notes in No Particular Order", 175.

27 Lorna Hardwick, "Interview with Seamus Heaney," in *Practitioners' Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 7.1 (2016), 2.

28 Seamus Heaney (1990), 3.

Odysseus admonishes Neoptolemus by telling him "just remember: you're here to serve our cause",[29] Neoptolemus sarcastically replies "We're Greeks, so, all right, we do our duty […] Which boils down to a policy of lies".[30] Again, Neoptolemus, when Philoctetes urges him to listen to his conscience, defends his stance by saying: "I cannot / There's a cause, a plan, big moves, / And I'm part of them. I'm under orders".[31] Consequently, justifying the unjustifiable on the basis of obscure orders coming from above is the norm in the universe of *The Cure at Troy*, and by extension in Northern Ireland. Independent thinking is casually repressed, whilst most individuals are pawns in the hands of a faceless sectarian machinery.

Philoctetes' utterances are a howl of desperation coming from someone whose life has been totally consumed by the Troubles and who is looking to break loose: "Are you all just yes-men?"[32] Philoctetes yells at his enemies, while protesting that "My whole life has been / Just one long cruel parody […] Every day has been a weeping wound / For ten years now. Ten years' misery and starvation".[33] These words sound like a universal plea against the overall repercussions of the Troubles, as Philoctetes' grievance pertains to the agonies experienced by a person living under a hazardous regime. In fact, his next remark contains a sentiment that those who have experienced the Troubles at their fullest probably felt for themselves: "I managed to come through / But I never healed".[34]

Therefore, as the play progresses, imperatives of healing gradually come to the fore. Heaney, having succeeded in laying out the premises of the conflict, and the inevitability of despair that the present stalemate engenders, now puts forward the foundations of a cure. This is the moment when he invokes the rhyming of hope and history. In the second supplementary Chorus, Heaney writes:

> Human beings suffer,
> They torture one another
> They get hurt and het hard.

29 Ibid., 6.

30 Ibid., 8-9.

31 Ibid., 51.

32 Ibid., 58.

33 Ibid., 18-9.

34 Ibid., 18.

No poem or play or song
Can fully right a wrong
Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in gaols
Beat on their bars together
A hunger-striker's father
Stands in the graveyard dumb.
The police widow in veils
Faints at the funeral home.

History says, *Don't hope*
On this side of the grave.
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change
On the far side of revenge.
Believe that further shore
Is reachable from here.
Believe in miracles a
And cures and healing wells.[35]

Strategically positioned moments before Philoctetes reconciles with his enemies and agrees to sail to Troy to find a cure for his wound, the above Choric ode represents an exhortation for atonement. The message is clear: since the suffering in Northern Ireland is shared, putting an end to it also has to be a collective undertaking. As a result, Heaney insinuates that possibilities for redemption have not yet eclipsed, if blind retribution is somehow substituted for

35 Ibid., 77

mutual concession. On that note, Marianne McDonald specifically comments about the second stanza of the Chorus:

> Sufferings on both sides are mentioned: the hunger-striker is a Republican who dies in protest while imprisoned by the British or Unionists. The police widow is mourning her dead husband who supported the Unionist regime. The hope is for a peaceful settlement, and a healing of the wound of hate.[36]

Heaney showcases that a shared embracing of pain can bind even the bitterest enemies together. As such, Philoctetes' story becomes in Heaney's hands a forceful encomium of hope applied to the Ireland of his times, since it conveys an auspicious way of confronting and overcoming the obstacles set by history. As the Czech statesman and writer Václav Havel, whom Heaney repeatedly credits as a source of inspiration, has also argued: "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out".[37] Consequently, with the rhyming of hope and history, a break with the incessant reproduction of the existing division in Northern Ireland is called for, with Heaney classifying such pairing as belonging "in the realm of pious aspiration".[38]

Notwithstanding the tremendous political turbulence, Heaney saw a beam of hope on the horizon for Northern Ireland and appropriately adopted the myth of Philoctetes to communicate this to the others. Thus, Heaney succeeded in the construction of a language of compromise and cooperation, propounding a vigorous ethos of optimism that had not previously been considered feasible. Aptly, it is Heaney's apparent success in this task that made Stephen Wilmer point out that: "the Greek tragedies have been used by Irish poets not so much to express tragedy as to express hope – a hope that comes out of years of tragedy".[39]

36 McDonald, "Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy*: Politics and Poetry", 134.

37 Václav Havel, *Disturbing Peace* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990), 182.

38 O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones,* 421.

39 Stephen Wilmer, "Prometheus, Medea and Antigone: Metaphors for Irish Rebellion and Social Change," in *Didaskalia* 3.1 (1996), 1.

A PRAYER FOR HOPE AND HISTORY

Having completed the examination of the 'hope and history' dictum in its original theatrical context, it would not be an overstatement to argue that Heaney's verse had an immediate effect in Irish politics. In fact, evaluating the overall impact of The Cure at Troy, critics and scholars often mention that there are "few other dramatic texts which can claim to have acquired such prominence in the political affairs of modern times".[40] Yet, what is sometimes left unmentioned is the distinct role that the 'hope and history' phrase has played in this. As I will show in the following examples, the rhyming of hope and history has come to function almost as a prayer, denoting a desire for change and progress in the political arena.

On 3 December 1990, two months after the premiere of *The Cure at Troy*, Mary Robinson, in the conclusion of her inaugural address as president of Ireland, became the first politician to borrow Heaney's line:

> May God direct me so that my Presidency is one of justice, peace, and love. May I have the fortune to preside over an Ireland at a time of exciting transformation when we enter a new Europe where old wounds can be healed, a time when, in the words of Seamus Heaney "hope and history rhyme".[41]

Five years later, on 30 November 1995, Bill Clinton visited Derry, in an attempt to assist the ongoing peace processes in the region. Nowadays, Clinton's historic visit to Derry is viewed as the catalyst triggering the successful outcome of the peace talks in Northern Ireland, putting an end to three decades of blood-stained turmoil. Standing in the square containing Guildhall (basically in front of the building where Field Day staged *The Cure at Troy*), Clinton bid the jubilant crowd farewell:

40 Denard, "Seamus Heaney, Colonialism, and the Cure: Sophoclean Re-Visions", 2.

41 Mary Robinson, "Address by the President, Mari Robinson, on the Occasion of Her Inauguration as President of Ireland," accessed 24 March 2021, https://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/address-by-the-president-mary-robinson-on-the-occasion-of-her-inauguration

> Well, my friends, I believe. I believe we live in a time of hope and history rhyming. Standing here in front of the Guildhall, looking out over these historic walls, I see a peaceful city, a safe city, a hopeful city, full of young people that should have a peaceful and prosperous future here where their roots and families are. That is what I see today with you.[42]

One year later, in the lead up to his re-election as US president, Clinton would publish a book about what he considered the fundamental principles and values of his administration: *Between Hope and History: Meeting America's Challenges for the 21st Century* (1996). Following Clinton's example, Gerry Adams, the president of the Irish Republican Sinn Féin party, would also publish a book entitled *Hope and History* (2003), discussing his involvement in the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement. Within this tradition, Joe Biden, whose speech at the Democratic National Convention instigated this paper, is the latest politician to quote the 'hope and history' line. That is until—as will undoubtedly happen—the next statesperson comes along and extends the phrase's lineage.

What these examples reveal as a whole is the pertinence of Heaney's phrase to tangible situations. That is, the examples above illuminate collectively how the "utopian impulse that is inscribed in the concept of rhyming hope and history", can be applied to an array of concrete historical events.[43] With this, the multivalent usage of the 'hope and history' verse translates to a singular appeal: the advancement of the idea that the healing of any wound is possible, that any crisis is solvable, when the right politics are exercised and reconciliation prevails.

This paper demonstrates the journey of Heaney's phrase: from its origin as the central message of *The Cure at Troy*, to nowadays being considered a synonym for change and progress in the political arena. Arguably, the maxim of 'hope and history' not only went beyond the boundaries of literature to enter the

42 Bill Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Londonderry, Northern Ireland," accessed 24 March 2021, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1995-book2/pdf/PPP-1995-book2-doc-pg1809.pdf

43 Aidan O'Malley, "Rhyming Hope and History in the 'Fifth Province'," in *Exploring the Utopian Impulse: Essays on Utopian Thought and Practice*, eds. Michael Griffin, and Tom Moylan (Oxford: Peter Land, 2007), 293.

domain of politics, but also established its status within the realm of politics, which has changed over time. Instead of its specific application to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the connotations of the phrase have been altered gradually and extended to indicate a numinous code of political conduct.[44]

44 I would like to personally thank Professor Peter Liebregts, whose talk on Heaney at a recent LUCAS meeting of the "Modern and Contemporary" research cluster, as well as his interview on the Dutch NPO Radio 1 about "The Healing Poetry of Seamus Heaney", was seminal for the publication of this paper.

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ALBRECHT DÜRER'S IDEAL CITY

DECONSTRUCTING ITS BIASES, MEANINGS, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Prompted by the threat of Ottoman invasion and the recent peasant revolts, in 1527 Albrecht Dürer dedicated his Etliche Unterricht zur Befestigung der Städte, Schlösser und Flecken (Instruction on the Fortification of Cities, Castles, and Towns) to King Ferdinand I. Included in his treatise was a plan for a city that he claimed would successfully respond to these issues. This paper takes a close look at this understudied plan specifically in relation to the latter issue – the internal social tensions splintering Ferdinand's territories – to unveil some of its problematic elements, including an unfavourable attitude towards the lower class pervading it. Examined alongside other "ideal" cities created in the period, and within the historical context in which it was produced, Dürer's city is one of several influenced by its creators' disregard for the poor, his penchant for social and economic distinction, and his preference for authority. Responding to the peasant unrest that many perceived as a crisis, Dürer designed a city that he saw as ideal for the craftsmen it was built for and for the King, who desired fortified, cooperative towns. As we will see, however, the borders that he, and others working under similar conditions, drew were not ideal for everyone.

INTRODUCTION

In 1526, Ferdinand I was elected King of Bohemia and Hungary after his brother-in-law, King Louis II, died at the Battle of Mohács against the Ottoman

Turkish Army the previous year. Since the Ottomans had taken Constantinople in 1453, the Holy Roman Empire feared their hastening advance. Louis' death only exacerbated the threat in Ferdinand's mind. Making matters worse, thousands of peasants took part in various anti-tithe rebellions in the summer of 1524 and the later, more devastating revolts of 1525. These uprisings stirred tensions between peasants, members of the upper and middle classes, and the aristocracy. The social and infrastructural damage that resulted made many areas susceptible to possible Ottoman attacks. The King began implementing administrative and financial reforms to centralize the government and unite his territories.[1] He also began strengthening the fortifications of towns and cities at his borders.[2]

A member of the Nuremberg City Council since 1509, Albrecht Dürer knew about the Ottoman threat and the social fractures within Northern Europe.[3] In an attempt to aid Ferdinand in solving these perceived crises, in 1527 Dürer dedicated his *Etliche Unterricht zur Befestigung der Städte, Schlösser und Flecken (Instruction on the Fortification of Cities, Castles, and Towns)* to the King.[4] He addressed the issues immediately, in the first sentence of his introductory paragraph: "…so that not only is one Christian protected from another but also that those lands bordering on the Turks be saved from their aggression and bombardment.".[5] The book contains approximately 60 folios of instructional text in which Dürer advised the King on constructing bastions, a protected fortress, and a fortified town, as well as improving existing fortifications. Dürer complemented his writing with several woodcut illustrations. Unlike his previous books on measurement and human proportion, Dürer's fortification treatise was disorganized. It did not contain section headings and his text was "clumsily written".[6] To suggest that Dürer wrote it in haste is not to imply that his instructions were not well thought out, but rather to prove that he saw the Turkish threat and the widespread social tensions as significant issues that urgently needed to be resolved.

Near the end of his treatise, Dürer proposed a solution for the latter issue by including an incredibly detailed plan for an ideal city. Alongside approximately

1 Jean Berenger, *A History of the Habsburg Empire 1273-1700* (London: Longman, 1994), 166-168.

2 Jeffrey Ashcroft, ed. and trans., *Albrecht Dürer, Documentary Biography,* vol. 2 (London: Yale University Press, 2017), 833; Rainer Schoch et al., *Albrecht Dürer: das druckgraphische Werk,* vol. 3 (München: Prestel, 2001), 283.

3 Jane Campbell Hutchison, *Albrecht Dürer: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 98.

4 Albrecht Dürer, *Etliche vnderricht zu befestigung der Stett Schlosz vnd flecken* (Nuremberg: Hieronymus Andreae, 1527), https://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0008/bsb00084366/images/

5 Ashcroft, Albrecht Dürer, 2, 837.

6 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 834; Schoch et al., *Dürer*, 3, 283.

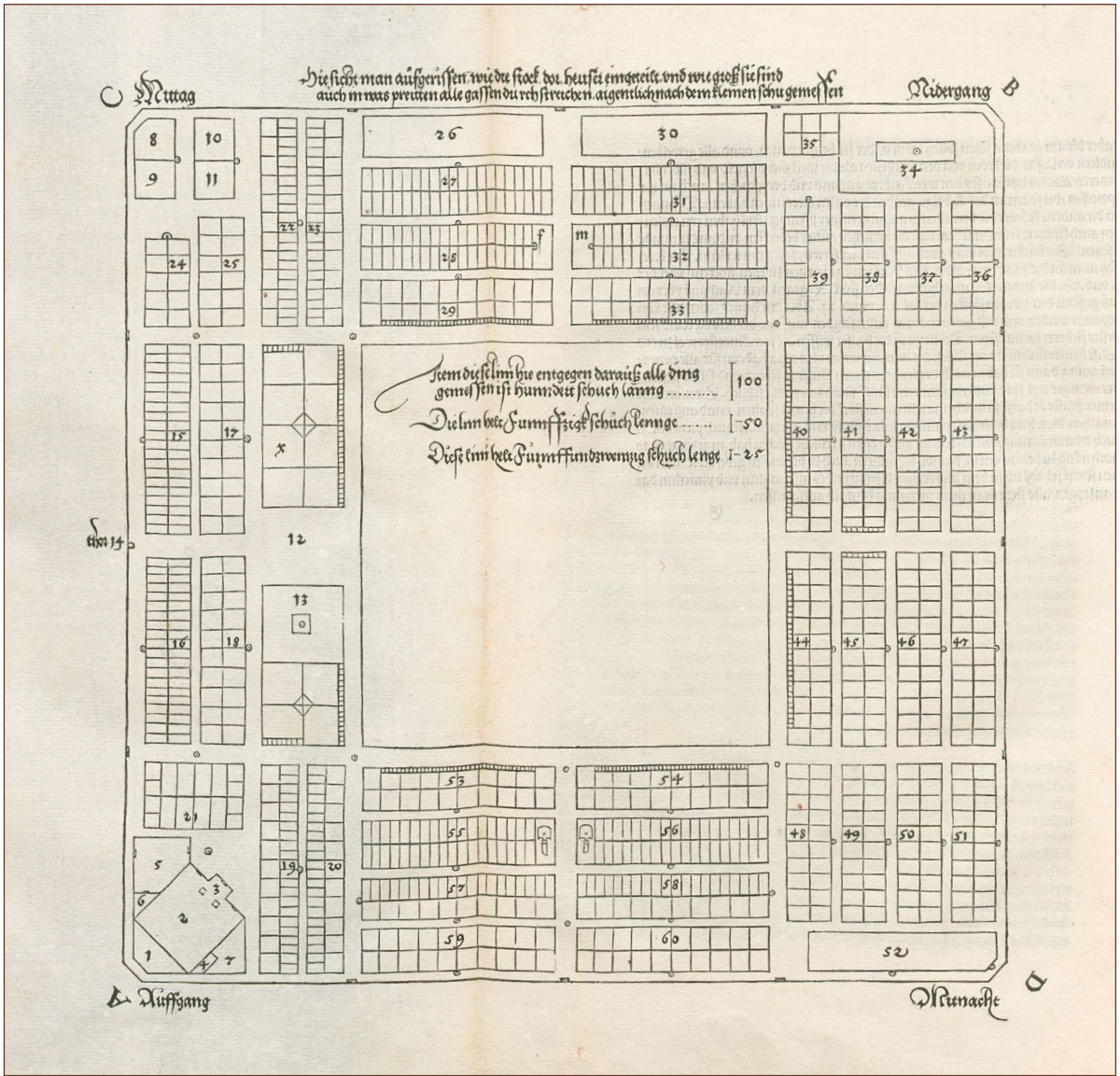

Fig. 1. Albrecht Dürer, Plan for an Ideal City. Woodcut
Dürer, Etliche vnderricht zu befestigung der Stett Schlosz vnd flecken
(Nuremberg: Hieronymus Andreae, 1527).

10 folios of text describing his plan, Dürer added a woodcut image of it (Fig. 1). A fortified royal residence is anchored at the centre of his city. Surrounding the palace is a large area delimited by a square border in which Dürer instructs that the King's counselors, servants, and craftsmen are to live.[7] Every area in Dürer's city serves a purpose. Most buildings are hybrid residences-workshops for inhabitants, though he also includes a marketplace (area 12), a religious sector (buildings 1-7), residences for the King's visitors (buildings 40, 41, 44, and 45), and twelve taverns (buildings 29, 33, 40, 45, 53, and 54). Dürer left only a few dwellings unspecified for the King to house essential people whose trades do not require special buildings.[8]

Dürer prioritized the needs and comfort of the artisans for whom he designed his town. He located the four foundries in corner C so that the winds blow the poisonous fumes away from the city.[9] He also housed artisans close to their shops or work sites. Near the church, Dürer designated buildings 19, 20, and 21 - each containing multiple dwellings - for "people whose trade lets them live a quiet life".[10] He housed the carpenters and woodworkers in separate dwellings in buildings 27 and 31, close to their factory and storage (building 34). The six dwellings attached to the factory (building 35) are to house workers permanently employed there.[11] Similarly, coppersmiths, molders, turners, and other "smithy workers" are to live in buildings 22, 23, 24, and 25 near the foundries where they work.[12] Dürer's own experience as an artisan and as the son of a goldsmith surely made him more aware of the importance of these accommodations.

While Dürer focused most of his treatise on fortification strategies that Ferdinand could implement to defend his towns against Ottoman attack, Dürer's city plan dealt also with the other pressing issue: the "peasant problem" in Northern Europe. His was one model within a larger set of approaches to city design that reveal a negative public perception of the lower class during the period, in addition to a widespread fondness for centralized authority and

7 Ibid., 855.

8 Ibid., 850.

9 Ibid., 845.

10 Ibid., 845.

11 Ibid., 848.

12 Ibid., 847.

tightly controlled civic life. Analyzing Dürer's plan for his ideal city alongside other built and unbuilt "ideal" towns uncovers that Dürer and his contemporaries valued distinction, a side effect of their socio-political environment, and this shared value pervaded their approaches to city planning. Urban design became foremost about structuring social order, and urban designers capitalized on planning's potential to elevate some groups and suppress others, Dürer being no exception.

Introducing Ideal Urban Designs in the Age of Dürer

Dürer was one of many artists interested in city planning during the period. The socio-political turbulence of the sixteenth century and the colonization of the New World, during which the Spanish restructured many indigenous towns, demanded that artists thought more about how to construct "orderly" and productive cities. Issues of urban design and structuring social order within cities were at the forefront of humanist thought.

A critical publication on civic theory was Thomas More's 1516 fiction, *Utopia.* Scholars often cite *Utopia* as a source for Dürer's plan.[13] While the evidence that Dürer referenced it to create his city is speculative, the vast influence of More's text in Northern Europe makes it a valuable point of comparison for Dürer's ideal plan. *Utopia* tells us how theorists envisioned a "perfect" society and how an egalitarian social order would function. By reading Dürer's ideal city against this "baseline" example of an equal civilization, we can identify the ways that he implemented social- and class-based stratification in his plan.

Defining Utopia: Defenses and Social Life

Dürer's entire treatise is about fortifying and defending. He provides explicit instructions for barricading cities with high walls and rock-filled ditches. The only weapons that he designed are made to sit in these protective walls and

13 Tessa Morrison, "Albrecht Dürer and the Ideal City," *Parergon* 31.1 (2014), 137-138; Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 854.

counter approaching attacks. Dürer did not advise the King on offensive strategies nor did he suggest sending armies to engage the Ottomans. One similarity between Dürer's town and More's description of the fictional city "Amaurot", the capital of Utopia, is their reliance on fortification and defensive war strategies over combative ones. More wrote that the Utopians detest war. They refuse to rashly engage in it, yet both soldiers and workmen train daily so that they can defend Amaurot if it is attacked.[14] Moreover, Amaurot is protected by "high and thick wall[s], in which there are many towers and forts" and a broad, deep, and dry ditch filled with thorns.[15] Aside from storage arsenals for weapons and artillery and housing the soldiers close to the city gate, the military presence inside Dürer's city is small. Dürer and More's philosophies are nearly identical in that they embrace offensive strategies only when necessary.

More and Dürer's cities are also similar in that every citizen has a role. In Amaurot, "no man may live idle".[16] A citizen may learn more than one trade, but settles with the one that they prefer or society has a greater need for.[17] It makes sense that Dürer was drawn to More's city, which is not threatened by civic unrest and where the king lives respected by his people. More's tradesmen have so much civic pride that they never revolt, an ideal state which would eradicate uprisings like those that Dürer witnessed.

However, Dürer's city differs from More's in terms of social order. More envisions his perfect society as one characterized by egalitarianism and limited noble control. On the other hand, Dürer positions citizens within his city according to their status and puts princely authority at its core. Amaurot's citizens are equals and their king lives among them, distinguished only by his title, while Dürer's model revolves around a prince physically and hierarchically at its centre. Dürer instructed the King to locate the most prestigious trades closest to his castle.[18] He also advised that "the best places there on the king's moat shall be occupied by the shops of the richest ones...."[19] Vendors who do not sell expensive goods are to build smaller shops at lesser locations.

14 More, *Utopia,* 155.

15 Ibid., 73.

16 More, *Utopia,* 80.

17 Ibid., 80.

18 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 850.

19 Ibid., 850.

Merchants, on the other hand, are entitled to superior, stone-vaulted spaces.[20] These instructions oppose More's, who wrote that in Utopia no trade is more esteemed than others.[21]

Separating craftsmen of fine goods from vendors of inexpensive ones was not a result of Dürer imparting unsubstantiated class biases to his plan. Rather, this was the system that he knew. Nuremberg was commercially successful. Its central location meant that the town exported many goods throughout the Holy Roman Empire. Artisans mastered niche crafts to set themselves apart from competitors, but society was divided.[22] The patricians were smaller in number than the middle and lower classes but owned most of the wealth, and the poor were property-less and politically uninvolved.[23] Artisans existed on either side of this division (i.e. Dürer as a wealthy council member). However, for the most part, craftsmen belonged to a lower middle class, the *Kleinbürger*, who were distinct from both the patricians and the proletariat.[24] Wealth distribution varied widely in this middle class, but even within individual professions, some artisans were more financially successful than others.[25]

While Dürer's delineation of these hierarchies in his town was a product of his environment, it may have been exacerbated by his personal biases. In his letters to Pirckheimer from Italy, Dürer frequently remarks on the fact that there he is a *zentilam* (gentleman, nobleman) while in his native Germany he is viewed as merely average.[26] In the diary from his trip to the Netherlands, Dürer praised the opulence of Antwerp: "At Antwerp they spare no expense… for they have money in abundance".[27] In that same entry, he documents his experience watching the great procession from the Church of Our Lady in August 1520. He specifically noted that the traders were "most richly dressed according to their status" and that each rank and guild wore an identifiable badge.[28] These examples demonstrate that Dürer valued wealth and status. His frustration that only in Venice did his talent and prestige set him apart from other artisans, and the fact that he felt it important to relay to Pirckheimer

20 Ibid., 850.

21 More, *Utopia,* 79.

22 Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1966), 129.

23 Christopher R. Friedrichs, "Mobility and Class Formation in the Early Modern German City," *Past & Present* 69 (1975), 24-25; Thomas F. Sea, "Imperial Cities and the Peasants' War in Germany," *Central European History* 12.1 (1979), 7.

24 Friedrichs, "Mobility and Class Formation," 25.

25 Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, 205-208.

26 Jeffrey Ashcroft, ed. and trans., *Albrecht Dürer, Documentary Biography,* vol. 1 (London: Yale University Press, 2017), 152.

27 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer*, 1, 557.

28 Ibid., 557-558.

that tradesmen were grouped by status in the Antwerp procession, suggest that Dürer was not interested in abolishing the strata among artisans. While he advocated making their lives and work easier in his plan, he did not champion to make them equal.

Dürer's town also seems to deny its inhabitants any control of their own lives or work. As Jeffrey Ashcroft somewhat cynically posits:

> The functional grid he sets out…programmatically excludes the vibrant mixed neighbourhood community he grew up in…Military hegemony bars any civic structure that could give recognition to the public value and functions of art, which could confer marks of meritocratic social esteem on the artist. Whatever impelled [Dürer] to include the description of this embattled encampment for the subjects of a royal military dictator, it denies all that in reality he must have valued in the city in which he lived his creative life.[29]

In Ashcroft's view, Dürer designed an authoritarian society. He removed autonomy from the craftsmen, who only live there if the King decides that he needs a settlement on the land surrounding his castle in the first place.[30] Ashcroft is right to observe this strict power structure. It opposes the Council system that governed imperial Nuremberg in the sixteenth century.[31] In Dürer's Nuremberg, the patrician Lesser Council (the *Rugsherren*) tightly regulated the trades deemed "sworn crafts", which encompassed those that served the city's economic and military needs, such as blacksmithing or shoemaking. Artisans of sworn crafts were denied any legal or political autonomy and prohibited from forming guilds after the craftsmen rebellion of 1348-1349.[32]

By contrast, artisans of the "free arts" (i.e. painters and sculptors) answered directly to the Council. While they were also prohibited from forming guilds, they were not constrained by as many regulations because the patrician council

29 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 855.

30 Ibid., 854.

31 Rainer Brandl, "Art or Craft? Art and the Artist in Medieval Nuremberg," *Gothic and Renaissance Art in Nuremberg 1300-1550,* ed. John P. O'Neill and Ellen Shultz, trans. Russell M. Stockman (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1986), 51-53.

32 Ibid., 52.

members realized Nuremberg could attract more artists to the city with an "open market" system.[33] The absence of guilds gave patrician families and council members the power to make decisions that benefited Nuremberg's economy above the craftsmen. Since there was no recognized collective to advocate for the craftsmen's needs and wants, the council could, for instance, implement policies to increase production, even if this meant abusing the craftsmen's labour and reducing their profits.

As the son of a goldsmith and himself a tradesman before becoming a free artist, Dürer was conscious of the rules that constrained sworn artisans. As an artist, he benefited from the Council's laissez-faire attitude towards the free arts. But as a patrician council member, he favored a system that suppressed the craftsmen's autonomy. For Dürer to design a city with a king at its nucleus suggests that the latter guided his thought process. As Ashcroft argues, since Dürer did not describe a Council in the text accompanying his plan, we assume that the ruler, likely aided by some elite group, closely regulates all trades, even the prestigious ones closest to his castle. The ever-present surveillance of a king would also discourage any uprisings. Dürer's preference for centralized authority in his plan must have been reinforced by the circumstances in which it was produced. Still, from it, one can distill issues of control. Dürer's preference for centralized authority in his plan must have been reinforced by the circumstances in which it was produced.

Further qualifying Dürer's plan as a problematic response to the peasant uprisings is the fact that, aside from a brief sentence in his introduction, he did not propose a meaningful solution for the peasants' economic concerns. In a small section dedicated to justifying the cost of his designs, Dürer wrote: "Should the lords have many poor subjects who otherwise are dependent on charity, then pay them wages by the day, so they will not need to beg and will have less excuse to rebel.[34] While this is, technically, a solution benefiting the lower class, it does not address the extent of their concerns leading up to the rebellions.

33 Ibid., 52-53.

34 Ashcroft, Albrecht Dürer, 2, 838.

While economic tensions had been growing since the late fourteenth century, the peasants' frustrations about taxes on agriculture and an overall lack of support from city authorities erupted in a series of violent uprisings in southern Germany in 1525.[35] The Nuremberg authorities restrained these revolts and the city was relatively unaffected by them.[36] However, it was shaken by the anti-tithe rebellions of the previous year. Poor citizens outside the city gained support from lower-middle-class residents inside it and this large body of dissenters threatened Nuremberg and its council members, who eventually abolished the tithe collection in 1525 to appease the protestors.[37]

The 1525 revolts damaged many towns besides Nuremberg.[38] Nobles eventually (and forcefully) suppressed the peasants, but this result was expensive and tiresome.[39] They, including Ferdinand, deployed their militaries and had to pay to repair fortifications and infrastructure within the city.[40] As a member of the Nuremberg council, Dürer was dealing firsthand with the social and financial ramifications of these uprisings. The revolts drained resources that were necessary to defend against the Ottomans. It is reasonable to assume that Dürer disliked the peasants for having damaged Nuremberg in ways that he then needed to fix. Perhaps, then, it was his lack of sympathy for the peasants' cause and his negative opinion of the class that deterred him from pondering social reforms that would eliminate the economic divisions and instead compelled him to exclude the peasants from his town and fill it with what he saw as productive, unproblematic citizens: craftsmen. We can read this exclusion, as Ferdinand or one of Dürer's contemporaries would have, as Dürer blaming the peasants for the rebellions in Germany. His decision to ostracize them from his town instead of calling on the nobility to implement fairer economic policies reflects his unsympathetic attitude towards the community.

However, it is also possible that Dürer remained silent about the peasants' concerns not out of spite, but out of ambivalence. Dürer's design for his so-called *Peasant Monument (Bauernsäule)* in his *Painter's Manual* of 1525 gives us a hint

35 Sea, "Imperial Cities," 5; R.W. Scribner, "Images of the Peasant, 1514-1525," *The German Peasant War of 1525,* ed. János Bak (London: Routledge, 1976), 31-32.

36 Sea, "Imperial Cities," 9-10.

37 Lawrence P. Buck, "Opposition to the Tithes in the Peasants' Revolt: A Case Study of Nuremberg in 1524," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 4.2, 11-13.

38 Smith, *Dürer*, 327; Thomas F. Sea, "The German Princes' Responses to the Peasants' Revolt of 1525," *Central European History* 40 (2007), 219-220, 226-229.

39 Smith, *Dürer,* 327.

40 Sea, "The German Princes' Responses," 226-227.

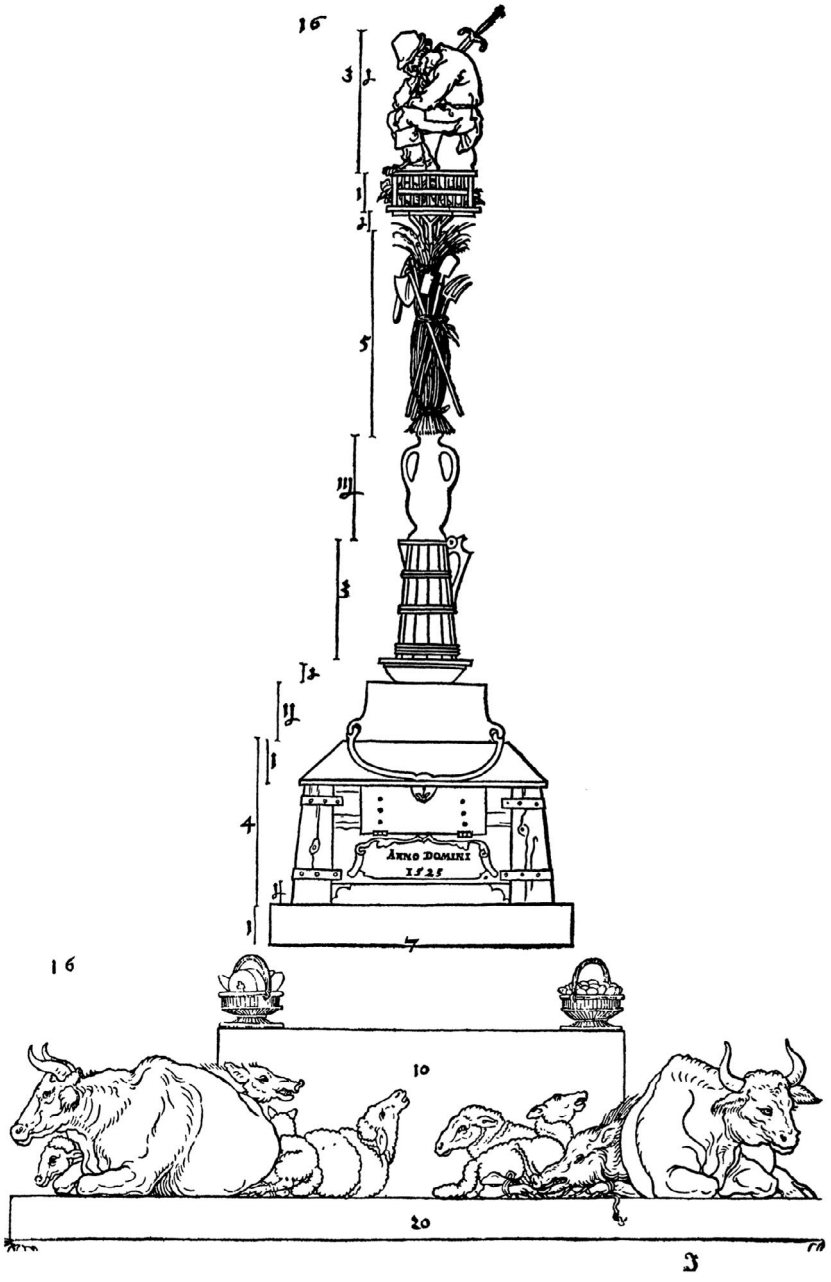

Fig. 2. Albrecht Dürer
Design for Peasant Monument
("Monument to Commemorate
a Victory"). Woodcut
Dürer, The Painter's Manual (1525).

of such a possibility (Fig. 2). Scholars have long debated whether this monument commended the peasants or satirized them, though the claim that Dürer meant to celebrate the peasants' defeat and decry the uprisings is most common.[41] What caused such a fluctuation in scholars' opinions is that Dürer included design elements that both contemporary viewers and modern critics could interpret as either pro- or anti-peasant. The most debated of these elements is the stabbed peasant figure at the top who could either symbolize a helpless and defeated class or recall the "Christ in Distress" pose, eliciting a sympathetic response from the viewer. Had Dürer truly detested the peasants, this would have been the opportunity for him to declare that, and he would have left no room for viewers to debate his opinion. Instead, the work's ambiguity suggests that even if Dürer looked down upon the peasants, he remained partially sympathetic towards them.

If we consider the monument in this way, then we might observe a similar uncertainty characterizing Dürer's city plan. Perhaps omitting peasants from his town was not to suggest that they were disposable, but was instead the result of Dürer's own cognitive dissonance. Knowing that Ferdinand likely shared the societal bias against the "disruptive" lower class, Dürer might have been cautious in proposing a solution for their concerns out of fear that he may have come across as "on their side". So, he chose instead to underscore the importance of a *productive* population. Such is the case when he instructed, "The king should not have useless people living in his castle, rather skilled and capable, intelligent, brave, experienced, and resourceful men, good craftsmen…"[42]

Regardless, Dürer's "solution" remains problematic because it was impractical. Pushing the peasants out of his ideal city may have seemed to Ferdinand and other elite viewers a viable short-term solution for avoiding uprisings, but the residents of the city would not survive without them cultivating their food. Dürer would eventually need to address, at length, the peasants' many valid concerns for his city to have a consistent food supply, in addition to it being the moral thing to do.

41 Stephen Greenblatt, "Murdering Peasants: Status, Genre, and the Representation of Rebellion," *Representations* (1983), 5-9; Erwin Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), 233.

42 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 843.

HISTORIC UTOPIAS AND CONTEMPORANEOUS URBAN MODELS

More and Dürer were not the first to be engrossed by the challenge of creating the ideal city. Ancient theorists often tried to conceptualize the perfect spiritual and moral sites. Plato described an ideal town in the Fifth Book of his treatise on *Laws* and revisited his imaginary plan for his island of Atlantis in his books *Timaeus* and *Critias*.[43] Ezekiel described the Messianic Temple and its surrounding city (chaps. xl-xliii).[44] A description of the "Heavenly City" is included in the Book of Revelation and Moses recounts distributing the Promised Land to the twelve tribes of Israel, coining six areas "cities of refuge" that Israelites guilty of manslaughter could flee to.[45] Artists and theorists remained interested in designing the ideal city throughout the Middle Ages. During this long period of social and religious upheaval, they began to shift their focus from theorizing the perfect spiritual sites to inventing towns that benefited real people.[46] Renaissance theorists furthered this medieval effort to create more secularized societies, though there remained some interest in visualizing biblical sites. Anton Koberger printed a woodcut of Nicolaus de Lyra's *Floor Plan of the Temple of Solomon* in 1481.[47] For the most part, Renaissance plans were influenced stylistically by the precision and organization of ancient architectural principles and thematically by a society more defined by economic strata.[48]

The sources that could have influenced Dürer are numerous. We know that he drew on Vitruvius's city description from his *De Architectura Libri Decem* because he referenced Vitruvius in the text accompanying his plan.[49] However, he was unclear about what elements from *De Architectura* inspired him, and according to Ashcroft, this source could not have provided him with more than ancient generalities.[50] Dürer did not specify any authors, other than Vitruvius, that impacted his writing. This uncertainty has frustrated scholars of Dürer's treatise who have devoted much of their attention to pinpointing his influences.[51] My objective here is not to argue which sources I believe inspired Dürer, but rather to analyze his city against those produced by his

43 Helen Rosenau, *The Ideal City: Its Architectural Evolution in Europe* (Abingdon; Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 11.

44 Ibid., 18.

45 Ibid., 18; Lewis, *City of Refuge*, 11.

46 Rosenau, *The Ideal City,* 23-39.

47 *Dureriana: Neuerwerbungen der Albrecht-Dürer-Haus-Stiftung e. V. Nürnberg,* exhibition catalogue, 21 May-30 September 1990, Albrecht Dürer Haus and the Stadtgeschichtlichen Museen, Nürnberg, 18.

48 Rosenau, *The Ideal City,* 42-43 and 66.

49 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 835; Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities,* 37.

50 Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 835; Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities,* 43.

51 See Ashcroft, *Albrecht Dürer,* 2, 834-835, Schoch et al., *Dürer,* 3, 284, and Morrison, "Dürer and the Ideal City," 152. Johann Tschertte (1471-1552), a friend of Pirckheimer and Dürer, may have advised Dürer on fortification design. Dürer may have heard of Leonardo's ideas through Lorenz Beheim or Galeazzo de San Severino. Christoph III (1479-1537) and Johann von Schwarzenberg (1463-1528) may have also influenced Dürer. Other suggestions include Niccolò Machiavelli's

contemporaries, who lived in similarly tumultuous environments, to deduce whether Dürer's approach to fixing the "peasant problem" was in line with how others perceived the issue, and the lower class at large, during the period. These comparisons ultimately reveal that others shared Dürer's preference for centralized noble authority and undertook similar approaches to relegate peasants to spaces unheard and unseen.

The most commonly identified source is Leon Battista Alberti's *De Arte aedificatoria* (1486).[52] Alberti's treatise comprises ten books that he wrote over the course of several years.[53] Alberti was not driven by any specific stimuli as Dürer was. This book was one of the various treatises that he authored throughout his career.[54] Alberti discussed information relevant to constructing an ideal city in three of his books. In the others he instructed the reader on using materials, decorating different types of buildings (sacred, public secular, private), and restoring existing buildings. Though he was not as focused on military architecture as Dürer, he did advise on building defensive walls, gates, bridges, drains, and a harbor, and the importance of building a city on terrain that is fruitful but not coveted by potential foreign attackers.

As the foundation of his ideal city, Alberti relies on demarcating different social groups. In Book 4, he identifies three building types that are necessary for an ideal plan: those appropriate for society as a whole, others for foremost citizens, and those for the common people.[55] He expounded upon these building types in Book 5. A just king should have his residence in the centre of the city, decorated elegantly and not ostentatiously, as opposed to a tyrant who should site his fortress neither inside nor outside the city to protect himself from both foreign and internal citizen attacks.[56] Alberti divides his city into two concentric circles delineated by a wall.[57] The wealthier citizens are to reside in the larger outside circle since they favour "more spacious surroundings and would readily accept being excluded by an inner wall".[58] Poulterers, butchers, cooks, and other poorer citizens are to reside in the smaller inner circle, but far enough

Libro dell'arte della guerra (1521), Francesco di Giorgio Martini's *Trattato di architettura civile e militare,* which was completed in 1482 but remained in manuscript form until being published in 1841, and Filarete's *De re aedificatoria* was written around 1464 but was not printed until the nineteenth century. There is little evidence that Dürer saw any of these.

52 Joseph Rykwert et al., trans., *On the Art of Building in Ten Books / Leon Battista Alberti; translated by Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, and Robert Tavernor* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), xviii.

53 Rykwert et al., *On the Art of Building*, xvi-xviii.

54 Ibid., xiv-xviii.

55 Ibid., xiv-xviii.

56 Ibid., 117 and 121.

57 Ibid., 118.

58 Ibid., 118.

away from the prince that they cannot disturb him.[59] Ensuring that poorer citizens do not socialize with the more prosperous ones will make them "less of a risk and less of a nuisance".[60] Alberti includes a granary, treasury, and arsenal in the centre of his city, as well as a military camp, senate house, multiple temples, and a separate building where the priest can bless people.[61] Unlike Dürer, Alberti identified villas outside of the city purchased by the wealthy and other countryside residences for agricultural workers.[62] Artisans who have shops located below their houses should ensure that their shops have windows to attract customers and are "better fitted out than his dining room, as would appear more in keeping with his hopes and ambitions".[63] In Book 7, Alberti argued that an unorganized city could not be commodious or charming and allocated artisans' workshops to distinct parts of the city. Silversmiths, painters, and jewelers are situated on the forum. Spice shops, clothes shops, and all trades that "might be thought more respectable" are located next to them. Any trades that produce foul smells should be located to the north to take into account the wind direction.

There are many similarities between Dürer's and Alberti's plans. Dürer seats the king at his city's centre. This decision may be the result of Dürer perceiving centralized authority as vital to maintaining order in his city, and not a conscious effort to follow Alberti's recommendation that centrality signifies justice. However, it is possible that Dürer incorporated this aspect of Alberti's plan to flatter Ferdinand by implying that he is a virtuous leader. Both planners see the necessity for organization and hierarchy among trades. Moreover, both adopt a "better unseen and unheard" attitude regarding the position of the lower class in society. For Dürer, this takes the form of making no mention of peasants in his plan. Though Alberti does specify spaces available to the poor, his approach involves locating poor agricultural workers outside his city (while still separate from the wealthy who vacation in the countryside) and separating the poor from the prosperous so that the latter may live as though the former do not exist. In their city plans, both designers render peasants invisible.

59 Ibid., 118.

60 Ibid., 118.

61 Ibid., 129-138.

62 Ibid., 140-145.

63 Ibid., 152.

Differences between the plans include Alberti relying more on individual citizens' wealth to organize his city and Dürer's layout being more specific. Alberti wrote about workshops for only two paragraphs whereas Dürer imagined an entire city *for* the king's artisans. This difference is not to be understood as a testament to Dürer's narrow-mindedness, nor to Alberti's disinterest in advocating for artisans. Rather, one might interpret Dürer's plan as a statement of advocacy for the craft class, and/or as a tribute to the honour and significance that he perceived artisans to have. For him to populate his ideal city almost entirely with craftsmen suggests that he regarded them as the ideal citizenry.

The most glaring difference is that Alberti invented a well-rounded environment that fulfilled its inhabitants' needs in daily life (i.e. education and leisure). Dürer created a plan that facilitated production and comfort for its merchants and artisans, but aside from the church district at the bottom left of his plan and some taverns, he did not consider their desire for anything but work. Michael J. Lewis makes an important distinction between an ideal city and an ideal society: "An ideal city seeks to make its physical form perfect, while an ideal society seeks to make its human relationships and social structures perfect".[64] Though in comparison to Alberti's plan it seems as if Dürer was more focused on designing a town where every space served a purpose than inventing a way of life for its inhabitants, it is an oversimplification to label Dürer's plan as an ideal city and Alberti's as an ideal society. Dürer was trying to resolve the problems of his contemporary world and make life ideal for artisans, but he did not address lifestyle to the extent of other social theorists, including Alberti and More. Perhaps this was because Dürer was not a social theorist. More likely it had to do with the Ottomans pushing rapidly westward, putting pressure on Dürer to produce something quickly for the King. Given the tumultuous circumstances under which it was produced, one cannot fault Dürer for not describing what domestic life looked like for the artisans' wives and children, or how his town fostered community among its inhabitants. However, his missing descriptions of domestic life and daily

64 Lewis, *City of Refuge,* 17.

activities do leave a viewer to ponder how he may have envisioned other aspects of his ideal society.

Prejudices in Practice: A Realized Ideal Site

A built ideal city close to Dürer's vision was the Fuggerei, constructed between 1514 and 1523 in Augsburg.[65] Still inhabited today, the Fuggerei is a large complex where needy Augsburg citizens reside. Rent is extremely low, and every resident is provided with a job in the community. Thomas Krebs was the architect, and Jakob Fugger sponsored the project. The Fuggers were a powerful German banking family. In addition to their extreme wealth, they possessed great political power as close affiliates of the Habsburg family. The settlement contained more than 50 houses with two flats in each and over 100 small apartments.[66] Each house could accommodate two families and the apartments at least 100 more.[67] Fugger commissioned the complex for Augsburg's laborers and craftsmen.[68] Among other qualifications, potential residents had to demonstrate their financial need to reside there.[69] In comparison to Dürer's town, which excludes poor residents, the Fuggerei invites them in.

The Fuggerei was a charitable solution for some of the same problems that plagued Nuremberg. Augsburg patricians owned most of the wealth while the poor struggled. Augsburg was also rattled by the peasant revolts and artisans faced enormous income disparity within their class.[70] The Fuggerei was a city constructed within the city, complete with a garden and open air spaces.[71]Inside the establishment, there was no obvious social distinction. The craftsmen lived equally and there were no noblemen within the walls.[72] Yet, the inhabitants' cognizance that they lived there *because* of the financial and political power of the Fugger family certainly made them hyper-aware of the power hierarchy looming over the city. Heightening this awareness, the settlement's gates were closed every night, and should someone in power have decided to get rid of the Fuggerei, its citizens would have had nowhere to go.[73]

65 Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities,* 41; Schoch et al., *Dürer,* 3, 309; Wilhelm Waetzoldt, *Dürer und Seine Zeit* (Vienna: Phaidon Press, 1935), 323; Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 257.

66 Ibid., 323.

67 Jacob Strieder, *Jacob Fugger the Rich, Merchant and Banker of Augsburg, 1459-1525,* ed. N. S. B. Gras, trans. Mildred L. Hartsough (New York: The Adelphi Company, 1931), 175.

68 Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities,* 41.

69 Ibid., 41.

70 Tlusty, *Augsburg During the Reformation Era,* 67-68.

71 Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities,* 41.

72 Schoch et al., *Dürer,* 3, 309.

73 Morrison, *Unbuilt Utopian Cities,* 41.

Scholars idolize Fugger for his charity, yet the act of resituating poor citizens into their own walled civilization within the larger city seems innately elitist. The financial, social, and administrative privilege available to Fugger was immense for him to be able to move the poor into a controlled environment within Augsburg while the rest of it remained inhabited by the wealthy and powerful. I do not wish to disregard the good that Fugger's contribution did and continues to do for its inhabitants, but rather to argue that even this built example of city planning is based on separating the rich and the poor. In both Dürer's city and the Fuggerei, urban design functions as a tool for social control. Similar to how Dürer removed the peasants from his ideal city, Fugger relocates them out of his inhabited one. Dürer's preference for regulation and central political authority is also echoed by the control that the Fuggerei exhibits. While there is no noble inside of the complex, citizens know that they are subjects to a more powerful authority outside of it, a sentiment still ceremoniously echoed every night when the gates lock until the next morning.

RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE

The several reprintings of Dürer's treatise prove that readers were intrigued by his work after 1527. The German scholar Joachim Camerarius printed a Latin edition of Dürer's treatise in 1535.[74] Christian Wechel, a French printer, also printed a Latin version in the same year.[75] Various German editions may have been printed in 1530 and 1538.[76] Despite this later interest, there is no evidence that Ferdinand I ever received it.[77] Dürer's plans for his bastions and towers were eclipsed by Italian inventions in military architecture, causing his contemporaries and modern scholars to overlook his work.[78] Twentieth-century scholars argued that Dürer inspired later buildings in Ulm and Ingolstadt, the Rogendorf moated castle in Poggstall, and the reconstruction of Nuremberg's own walls a decade after his death.[79] Sebastiano Serlio did recognize Dürer in his *Tutte L'opere D'architettura et Prospetiva* in the late 1530s.[80] Perhaps the most interesting of cities resembled after Dürer's plan is

74 Schoch et al., *Dürer,* 3, 283.

75 Albrecht Dürer, *Alberti Dvreri Pictoris Et Architecti Praestantissimi De Vrbibus, Arcibvs, castellísque condendis, ac muniendis rationes aliquot, praesenti bellorum necessitati accommodatissimae : nunc recens è lingua Germanica in Latinam traductae* (Paris: Christiani Wechel, 1535), https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11199644_00001.html.

76 Schoch et al., *Dürer,* 3, 282.

77 Jeffrey Chipps Smith, "The Early Collecting of Dürer's Prints," *Prayer Nuts, Private Devotion, and Early Modern Art Collecting,* ed. Evelin Wetter and Frits Scholten (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2017), 146.

78 Morrison, "Dürer and the Ideal City," 142.

79 Schoch et al., *Dürer,* 3, 284.

80 Ibid., 308.

Freudenstadt, a realized ideal city complex commissioned by Duke Friedrich I of Würrtemberg in 1598 and built by his architect Heinrich Schickhardt.[81] Friedrich intended the sanctuary for Austrian Protestant refugees, but the effort also benefited him politically.[82] He could employ the refugees that Freudenstadt attracted to work in his silver and copper mines.[83] Friedrich also hoped to conquer the bishopric of Strasburg on the other side of the Rhine.[84] Freudenstadt thus functioned as a bastion at the western edge of his territory, providing his militia with an elevated vantage point over the river and defending the border from any retaliative attacks.[85]

The Duke was motivated by different reasons from Alberti, Dürer, and More. His city appealed to citizens facing religious oppression as opposed to economic. What makes Freudenstadt fascinating concerning Dürer's city is that Schickhardt relied heavily on it throughout the construction process.[86] And, because Schickhardt recorded the entire process of Freudenstadt's construction, we can study exactly how he developed Dürer's ideas.[87] Freudenstadt also had four gates, long blocks of houses, and a fortress for the ruler at its centre.[88] Friedrich never inhabited the noble residence, perhaps having realized, for whatever reason, that it did not serve him as well as he had hoped.[89] Since Freudenstadt was intended for Protestant refugees and Schickhardt drew upon Dürer's town to build it, Dürer's plan became by association a popular reference for Protestant scholars and urban planners.

Of particular interest is Freudenstadt's shape: a perfect square that, in spite of the many changes that Schickhardt made to Dürer's plan, he never abandoned. In Schickhardt's first and second designs, the noble residence was located at the corner of his design (Fig. 3). He moved it to the centre for his final plan because its walls protruded from the town and he refused to compromise the rectilinear form (Fig. 4).[90] In the Biblical tradition, squareness represented religious ideality. For instance, when Ezekiel described the ideal plan for the Messianic Temple, it was rectilinear.[91] In the New Testament, orderly division

81 Daniel Burger, "Albrecht Dürer's »Unterricht zur Befestigung« (1527) und der deutsche Festungsbau des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Das Dürer-Haus. Neue Ergebnisse der Forschung,* ed. G. Ulrich Großmann and Franz Sonnenberger (Nuremberg: Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 2007), 273.

82 Lewis, *City of Refuge,* 57-58.

83 Lewis, *City of Refuge,* 58.

84 Ibid., 58.

85 Ibid., 58.

86 Ibid., 59.

87 Ibid., 58.

88 Ibid., 59-61.

89 Ibid., 64.

90 Ibid., 10.

91 Ibid., 20-26.

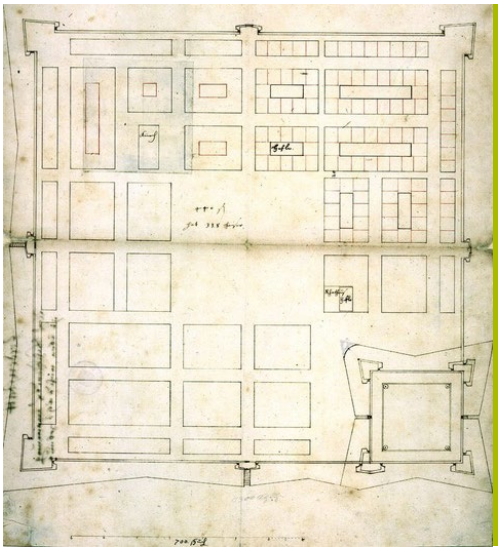

Fig. 3. Heinrich Schickhardt
Plan of Freudenstadt, First Project
Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

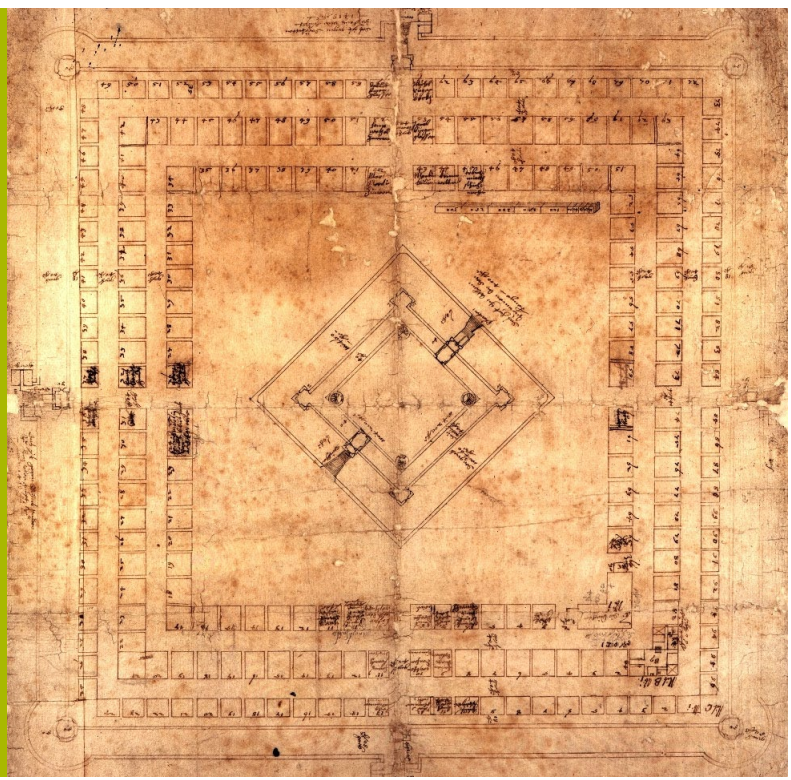

Fig. 4. Heinrich Schickhardt
Plan of Freudenstadt
Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart, Stuttgart, Germany

came to symbolize the need to make "straight those things that are now crooked and irregular" to prepare for Christ's second coming.[92] Dürer's city is defined by the same 'sacred squareness' that characterized religious refugee cities such as Freudenstadt and Andreae's Christianopolis.[93] However, since he never claimed explicitly to have been engaging with this motif when designing his plan, it is just as possible that Dürer was imparting a "holiness" to his city as it is that this similarity in shape is coincidental.

In fact, Dürer told us little about how to perceive his city. The notion of the "ideal city" associated with his plan has been assigned only retrospectively by scholars. As far as the evidence tells us, Dürer's model was no more than a fast reaction, albeit a comprehensive one, to dire circumstances. When compared to other ideal cities developed by his contemporaries, Dürer's is rather average. His social hierarchy was more pronounced than More's or Fugger's, but less so than Alberti's. His solution for the peasants' concerns was not sympathetic, but he did not villainize them as nuisances or risks in his text, as did Alberti. Interestingly, the segregated living that most of these authors employed belies the "mixed-use" housing that dominated Renaissance urban planning.[94] Apart from this small circle that one finds Dürer in, planners valued a social mix that ensured the "viability of goods and services on every street".[95] Dürer's city had everything, but goods were assigned to certain parts of the city.

The absence of Dürer's own commentary alongside his plan or following its production leaves one to speculate about the significance that he wanted it to have. Perhaps Dürer's formation of a world is akin to his "playing God" in his 1500 *Self-Portrait*.[96] One might position his city as a similar exercise in blurring the lines between artistic and worldly creation. Perhaps its bland, authoritarian nature that Ashcroft described suggests that Dürer viewed the world as apocalyptic, fractured by religious strife, and thus was less concerned with artistry than humanity's survival. Or, perhaps, Dürer really did seek to create a town ideal for such artisans as himself and his family, and though he did not

92 Ibid., 29.

93 'Sacred squareness' is taken from the title of Michael J. Lewis's chap. 2, "The Sacred Squareness of Cities" in *City of Refuge*.

94 James S. Ackerman and Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "Social Stratification in Renaissance Urban Planning," *Urban Life in the Renaissance,* ed. Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 39.

95 Ibid., 39.

96 Joseph Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 67; Martin Bailey, *Dürer* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 68; Francis Russell, *The World of Dürer, c. 1471-1528* (New York: Time Inc., 1967), 89.

have the time to idealize aspects of their lives outside of work, had their best interests at heart. What is certain is that practicality was not Dürer's only goal. This understudied plan provides an interesting glimpse into the artist's mind, and shows us what he valued, whom he valued, and who valued him.

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HEALING WOMEN

THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND ALFREDIAN FANFICTION

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This article explores female agency and the healing role of women in medievalist fiction on Alfred the Great. Alfredian fanfiction written during the pandemic mixes neo-medieval elements with current themes and preoccupations, such as illness, pain, solitude, hope, female agency, and border crossings. The fan authors have constructed a 21st century "neo-medieval-based culture" that mirrors events in current society. Their stories often take place against the backdrop of other times of crisis, such as wars against intruders. The authors use the illness of King Alfred as the Romanticised pandemic, thus reviving horrors with playfulness and humour, as the power of the past is to provide for hope in similar circumstances. This fanfiction also explores how non-normative persons are crossing borders and forming new traditions by reiterating as well as changing elements of their heritage.

As fanfiction mirrors the context in which it is written, it is no surprise that in these times of the coronavirus pandemic, many fans are writing new stories that revolve around viruses, plagues, and other diseases, combined with themes of social isolation and overcoming loneliness. Various examples of this phenomenon can be found in fanfiction about Alfred the Great (848/49 – 26 October 899 CE), set in the contexts of the neo-medieval series *The Last Kingdom* and *Vikings* (both available on Netflix). Although the historical King Alfred has been dead and buried for eleven centuries, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the

mythical Alfred is still alive and kicking. Historically, the depiction of Alfred the Great has always mirrored the Zeitgeist of the times, in which Alfred consistently overcame the difficulties of that era.[1] As this paper will show, in 2020 this is still the case, although he cannot do that all by himself – in situations of (life threatening) crisis, the fan-fictional King Alfred is often saved by female strangers. To illustrate this, after some general remarks about fanfiction in times of Corona, I will discuss four works of medievalist fanfiction on Alfred the Great written during the 2020 COVID pandemic. All four revolve around the themes of female agency and the healing role of women. By connecting these works to both their story worlds as well as their authors' contexts, this analysis will show how this genre can be viewed as contemporary reception history. Moreover, it will become clear that through these works of fanfiction, non-normative persons are crossing borders and "rewriting the stories" (to paraphrase Haraway) by forming new traditions by both reiterating and changing elements of their heritages.[2]

PANDEMICS IN FANFICTION

The novel coronavirus has pervaded every aspect of our lives, including fanfiction. The internet is rife with works featuring quarantine, social distancing, lockdowns, and panic buying of toilet paper. Sites such as Wattpad and Archive of Our Own (AO3 for short) serve as safe spaces where people can connect by producing and consuming fanfic. This is particularly the case because many people have been involuntarily confined to their homes and books are slow to come by. As such, fanfiction is thriving.[3] For many, invoking classic fanfiction tropes to be ways of instituting a feeling of control in a situation that feels outside their control.[4] On the whole, fanfiction has become a means of coping with quarantine and other safety measures introduced to control the coronavirus pandemic.

1 Joanne Parker, *'England's Darling': The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)

2 See for example: Donna Haraway, "It Matters What Stories Tell Stories; It Matters Whose Stories Tell Stories," *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 34, no. 3 (Sep. 2019), 565–75 Martine Mussies, "Queering the Anglo-Saxons through Their Psalms," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 31 (2019)

3 Palmer Haasch, "Coronavirus Is Starting to Show up in Fan Fiction, Placing Iconic Characters in Quarantine," *Insider*, 17 March 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, https://www.insider.com/coronavirus-fan-fiction-quarantine-social-distancing-shipping-escapism-ao3-2020-3

4 Katherine Shwetz, "Apocalyptic Fiction Helps Us Deal with the Anxiety of the Coronavirus Pandemic," *The Conversation*, 18 March 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, https://theconversation.com/apocalyptic-fiction-helps-us-deal-with-the-anxiety-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic-133682

The fact that fanfiction is thriving during this pandemic gives credence to the statement that art is a reflection of life. This is especially true in this case because fanfiction writers and readers hold up a mirror to their deepest fears about the present and explore different responses to their realities. Notably, plague fiction is not a new phenomenon –indeed, the theme of infectious diseases has been around for a long time.[5] This is evident from the scores of books that have regained popularity and resurfaced recently such as Albert Camus' novel *The Plague* (1947). Other prominent examples include Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* (1842), Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014) and Lawrence Wright's *The End of October* (2020).[6] Additionally, there are dominant topics or tropes which have surfaced in fanfiction due to pandemics. Illustratively, the lockdowns and quarantine measures that have been put in place have inspired a new present-day romance trope –lovers brought together by quarantine. Notably, quarantine measures are used as a springboard for stories where characters fall in love after being trapped near to each other and grow closer with time.[7] Even though it is cold comfort, fanfiction serves as a means of coping with the pandemic that is ravaging the world at the moment. Moreover, through their shared fandoms, the writers of fanfiction experience a sense of togetherness whilst in solitary confinement, which contributes to their physical and mental health. For this paper, I will focus on four works that explore how the aforementioned topics come to play in fanfiction about the legendary King Alfred the Great. Special attention will be devoted to the role of the "healing women" in these narratives.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This paper features a close-reading of four pieces of non-AO3 fanfiction about Alfred the Great, written during the COVID-19 crisis: an untitled piece ["Alfred / Modwenna / Wyrm"] by Surakian (April 2020), an untitled Spanish King Alfred fanfic by marithesoprano (April 2020), the short story "Like an Angel in the Night" by BigHeartBigFart (March 2020) and "The Last Kingdom Fanfiction"

5 Katherine Voyles, "Plague Stories Are Cold Comfort: On the Limits of Fiction," *War on The Rocks*, 11 May 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/plague-stories-are-cold-comfort-on-the-limits-of-fiction

6 John Dugdale, "Plague Fiction – Why Authors Love to Write about Pandemics," *The Guardian*, 1 August 2014, accessed 20 September 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/aug/01/plague-fiction-writers-infectious-disease

7 Aya Romano, "Quarantine Love Stories Are Becoming a Romance Trope," *Vox*, 25 March 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, https://www.vox.com/2020/3/25/21191148/quarantine-love-stories-reddit-husbands-coronavirus-ao3-fiction

by jasminecanada (June 2020). What these four works of fanfiction have in common is their narrative of a healing woman rescuing King Alfred. The image of the healing woman in these pieces of fanfiction resembles the trope of "The White Magician Girl", a stock character often present in fantasy literature and role-playing games, that acts as "the party's resident healer, nurturer and source of feminine wisdom".[8] As this paper will show, in both medieval and neo-medieval texts, the fictional worlds that encompass medieval literature have depicted creatures, prophesized events, and included magical items that gave colour and memorable character to several tales. Women play a vital role in these narratives and their first appearance; these figures fit into a tradition in which they are idealized as healers or helpers. However, this role comes with its challenges. They also have to wage battles to maintain this role as rescuers. For instance, in the case of Jacqueline Felice de Almania (early 14th-century), she was placed on trial for practising medicine, and had to question the intention of male physicians and their attempt to discredit women.[9]

Although surprisingly similar in terms of content, the case studies chosen for this paper come from very different sources. It is no surprise that most scholarship on fanfiction uses examples from the AO3, as it is not only the largest and most well-known fanfiction archive, but also very easy to browse. However, it is important to understand that the "open access" fanfiction of AO3 is the tip of the iceberg when it comes to fanfiction – there is also much to discover in more "hidden" places, such as on other social media, like Tumblr and Facebook and more locally orientated equivalents like LiVEJOURNAL, on forums dedicated to specific fandoms, and in diaries and letters shared in more private forms of correspondence such as mail groups. These more hidden fanfics are often to be found through networks of minority groups, such as autism, queer, and/or non-binary support groups. Following Abigail Derecho, fanfiction texts are often described as "archontic".[10] This is based on Derrida's ideas of texts being archives.[11] As Peter Güldenpfennig explains, when we view fanfiction as archives, we can "see the text as an entry to an open archive with the original

8 See for example: Tropedia, "White Magician Girl," accessed 20 September 2021, https://allthetropes.fandom.com/wiki/White_Magician_Girl

9 F. Edward Cranz et al., "Memoirs of Fellows and Corresponding Fellows of the Medieval Academy of America," *Speculum* 61, no. 3 (1986), 759–69.

10 Abigail Derecho, "Archontic Literature: A Definition, a History, and Several Theories of Fan Fiction," in *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, ed. Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse (Jefferson, NC: McFarland.), 61–78.

11 Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995), 9.

artefact as the basis for this same archive".[12] My focus here is on depictions of crisis and connection in more hidden fanfiction about King Alfred, in order to open up the archives of non-normative fans' experiences and wishes during the coronavirus pandemic.

All the case studies discussed take place in the fictional world of *The Last Kingdom*, a Netflix series based on Bernard Cornwell's historical book series *The Saxon Stories* (2004-2020), centring on a fictional depiction of Alfred of Wessex as the first king of the Anglo-Saxons and the "creator" of England (in Cornwell's historical interpretation). As is not uncommon in fanfiction, three of the four writers discussed have merged this fandom with another, to create

12 Peter Güldenpfennig, "Fandom, Fan Fiction and the Creative Mind," MA thesis, (Tilburg University, 2011), 14, accessed 20 September 2021, https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=120621

David Dawson as Alfred. Still from Jon East, dir. *The Last Kingdom*. Season 3, episode 5. Aired 19 November 2018, on Netflix.

a "cross-over". Moreover, all authors have included names and quotes from vastly different texts to arrive at what Judith May Fathallah calls "a pastiche of texts from supposedly different sources".[13] By carefully gluing together their collage-like stories, the authors build bridges between fans and fandoms, thus creating social cohesion and closeness in times of isolation. Generally, in most fanfics featuring Alfred of Wessex, the king is the most powerful figure in the stories. For example, in Robyn aka DxTURA's untitled work from January 2020, it was King Alfred who saved the main character of *The Witcher*, Geralt of Rivia.[14] But in the case studies written during the COVID-19 lockdown, even mighty Alfred needs a little help from his friends. The authors clearly reference *The Last Kingdom* episode S3E9, in which the king dies, and in their rewritings of the story, the fans add a new layer to the centuries-old traditions of storytelling around the immortal King Alfred.

SURAKIAN – AN UNKNOWN DISEASE, BODILY PAIN, AND SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

The first case study is an untitled story from April 2020, written by Surakian, a female author who only posts M/M fantasies (aka "slash fiction") on her AO3 account, but also writes works that fall in other categories, such as this case study.[15] Alongside Alfred, the main characters in Surakian's work are two non-canonical entities, Modwenna and the Wyrm, whom have been added to the intermedial storytelling by the author because they symbolise elements that communicate the narrative's message.[16]

The name Modwenna is mainly associated with Ireland and some historical records claim that King Alfred received much of his education, from the years of his sickly childhood to his early youth, in Ireland.[17] According to Mooney's benchmark publication *A History of Ireland* (1845), it was during this period and upon the occasion of his illness that the young king was sent to a certain Modwenna, a religious lady in Ireland, for healing.[18] Notably, Modwenna

13 Judith May Fathallah, *Fanfiction and the Author: How Fanfic Changes Popular Cultural Texts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 195.

14 Robyn/DxTURA, "The Witcher x King Alfred," accessed 20 September 2021, http://martinemussies.nl/web/the-witcher-x-king-alfred

15 Surakian, "5 Works by Surakian," accessed 20 September 2021, https://archiveofourown.org/users/Surakian/works

16 Surakian sent me this *The Last Kingdom* fanfiction via private messaging, on 11 April 2021. With her permission, I posted it with an introduction at my own website http://martinemussies.nl/web/alfred-modwenna-wyrm

17 There are many connections between King Alfred and Ireland. See, for example: Ruth Wehlau, "Alfred and Ireland: Irony and Irish Identity in John O 'Keeffe 's *Alfred*," *European Romantic Review* 22, no. 6 (Dec., 2011), 801–17, doi.org/10.1080/10509585.2011.615995.

18 Thomas Mooney, *A History of Ireland, from Its First Settlement to the Present Time, Including a Particular Account of Its Literature, Music, Architecture, and Natural Resources ... Illustrated by Many Anecdotes of Celebrated Irishmen, and a Series of Architectural Descr* (n.p.: Creative

was also the name of a seventh century nun and saint in England who was celebrated in sanctity for performing holy miracles in Staffordshire (a land-locked county in the West Midlands of England) at Burton Abbey, which she founded.[19] It has been noted that Modwenna sought the help of King Alfred at a time when her abbey was on the verge of collapse. Often, there is some confusion registered between Modwenna, also known as Saint Modwen and Modwenna, also known as Saint Monnine.[20] The latter was one of Ireland's first female saints who lived in the fifth century – two centuries before the other Modwenna, who in turn lived two centuries before the rule of King Alfred.[21] As well as founding the monastery at Killeavy, Saint Monnine is also commemorated for her charity work and all the miracles she performed. By using the name Modwenna in her fanfic, Surakian adds another layer to this confusion, while adding an element of time travel to the story.

The term "wyrm" can be used to describe a variety of ideas.[22] The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines a "wyrm" as a dragon without legs or wings.[23] Other dictionaries define "wyrm" as a large snake. The general consensus is that in Middle English the term "wyrm" refers to the earthworm and similar creatures, such as dragons and snakes. Nonetheless, it can be argued that there is no standard definition for the term in fantasy genres. Various mythologies have their own unique definitions and uses of the word. Most Western mythologies depict "wyrms" as long-bodied fire drakes that are flightless.[24] Within the biblical text *Genesis*, in its retelling of the sin, the word "wyrm" makes an unlikely appearance and is used to describe the well-known serpent in hagiographical literature. In *Beowulf*, the term "wyrm" is used to describe the final monster which is a dragon, as seen in the statement "then the wyrm awoke, accusation was renewed".[25] And Gifer is the name of the leader of the decomposing worms in Beowulf. Germanic cultural art, in particular the tales of Beowulf, conveys a strong belief in the boar protector and often featured dragon and snake-like monsters which were referred to as "wyrms".[26] Evidently, the word in question is used to describe a wide variety of serpentine creatures.

Media Partners, 2018), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=VZtsvgEACAAJ

19 London, British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra A.ii

20 David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 311.

21 Lisa M. Bitel, *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender from Early Ireland* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).

22 Martine Mussies, "Wyrm," *Musings* (blog), 10 December 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, http://martinemussies.nl/web/wyrm

23 *The Oxford English Dictionary* (London: Clarendon Press, 2001).

24 Ranait Flanagan, "The Early Bird Is the Wyrm: If and How the Literary Use of Wyrm in Genesis A & B and Beowulf Informs Its Linguistic Meaning?," *Innervate* 10 (2017), 91-97, accessed 20 September 2021, https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/documents/innervate/17-18/q33221-ranait-flanagan.pdf

25 Kevin J. Wanner, "Warriors, Wyrms, and Wyrd: The Paradoxical Fate of the Germanic Hero/King in Beowulf," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 16 (1999), accessed 20 September

Majority etymological research argues that the word in question is used to mean dragon and is of Germanic origin.[27] Its equivalent in Old High German is "wurm".[28] These words were replaced by the Latin term "draco", "draconic" which was borrowed by Germanic languages in the Middle Ages. In 1967 Hayo Vierck, the German archaeologist coined the term "wurme" to classify a group of creatures portrayed in ancient art, characterized by snake-like bodies and variable heads.[29] In Germanic languages, the term "wurme" is widely used to denote all saurian-, worm-, drake-like or snake-like creatures. On the whole, it can be argued that the term "wyrm" is used to refer to creatures resembling worms or snakes.

By writing a story about King Alfred, Modwenna and the wyrm Gifer, Surakian's story might seem like an ordinary neo-medieval "mash-up" fantasy. But at another level, various elements relating to the coronavirus pandemic are at play here. In this paper, I will discuss the three most obvious ones in some more detail. First, the idea of a disease for which current treatments have no cure. Surakian has incorporated this frightening idea that we are hearing and seeing all around us into her story, which takes place in an Anglo-Saxon (Early English) context, using the wyrm as a symbol for it. Because common mortals cannot cure the wyrm's disease, King Alfred needs a deus ex machina, which comes in the form of the holy Modwenna. When she asks the king how he can withstand this suffering, he answers: "I did not dare, against the Lord's word, bow or break." This is the translation of a quote from the Old-English poem "The Dream of the Rood": "Thær ic tha ne dorste ofer Dryhtnes word būgan oþþe berstan". In this poem, these lines are about the cross – and "the cross's inability to influence events" – the ultimate symbol of Christ's resurrection by Divine intervention.[30] Humans are powerless and have to wait for a miracle.

Secondly, there is the fear of bodily pain. "The night seemed to stretch on endlessly for Alfred as his pain worsened, greater than any pain he had ever suffered in his lifetime thus far." At the time when this fanfiction was written,

2021, https://www.medievalists.net/2009/12/warriors-wyrms-and-wyrd-the-paradoxical-fate-of-the-germanic-heroking-in-beowulf

26 Stephen O. Glosecki, "Men Among Monsters: Germanic Animal Art as Evidence of Oral Literature," *Mankind Quarterly*27, no. 2 (Winter 1986), 207.

27 J.T. Lionarons, *The Medieval Dragon: The Nature of the Beast in Germanic Literature* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1998), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.com.bn/books?id=UDBcAAAAMAAJ

28 Martyna Katarzyna Gibka, "Meet the Dragon: A Brief Study of Dragons in the *Harry Potter* Series and the *Inheritance* Cycle," in *Imaginary Creatures in Medieval and Modern Fantasy Literature*, ed. L. Neubauer (Kraków: Wydawnictwo LIBRON – Filip Lohner, 2016), 145-58, accessed 20 September 2021, http://www.gibka.pl/06_Martyna%20Gibka%20-%20Meet%20the%20dragon.pdf

29 Hayo Vierck, "Ein Relieffibelpaar Aus Nordendorf in Bayerisch Schwaben," *Bayerische Vorgeschichtsblätter*, no. 32 (1967), 104–43.

30 C. Hough and J. Corbett, *Beginning Old English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 82, accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=TaaFQgAACAAJ

various clickbait horror stories were going "viral" on social media. Most of them were about recent cases of COVID-19, but one of them was an older story about a French woman, who had a canine tapeworm in her spine (as described by *The New England Journal of Medicine*).[31] This resonates with Isidore's description of the serpent (anguis) as "created from the spinal cord of dead humans, thus while they kill humans they are also born from them". In her fanfiction, Surakian describes Alfred of Wessex having a similar experience, writing about "an inflamed spot that has been the source of the pain rolling through his body". This seems to be a quite realistic representation, for according to physiotherapist Jolanda Myers-van der Veer, such an inflammation leads to oedema, which causes compression on a nerve or even on the entire canal, so that neurological failure with severe pain could indeed be the result.[32] This realistic description mirrors a human fear that was topical during the coronavirus pandemic, as severe discomfort is a realistic result of getting infected with COVID-19.

Thirdly, there is solitary confinement: "Alfred laid alone, having long since sent his wife and children away to another hut along the marsh, hoping to spare them from catching the illness wrecking his body. He refused to put them at risk."[33] This is also a familiar situation during the current crisis, with some people not seeing family members for months because they want to protect them. Altogether, by mixing her neo-medieval fantasies with elements from today's events, Surakian's fanfiction mirrors the context in which it is written.

MARITHESOPRANO - CROWNS, COMBINED RITUALS & TALKING TREES

The second case study is an untitled Spanish work of fanfiction about "El rey Alfred" by Venezuelan Tumblr user marithesoprano. The narrative is similar to that of Surakian's story – the great King is sick and a female visitor tries to heal him. In this case, the woman in question is Lagertha. Through this insertion, marithesoprano connects *The Last Kingdom* to another major TV series,

31 Marine Jacquier and Lionel Piroth. "Vertebral Hydatidosis," *New England Journal of Medicine* 379, no. 2 (2018), e5.

32 Private correspondence.

33 Surakian, ["ALFRED / MODWENNA / WYRM"], *Musings* (blog), 12 June 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, http://martinemussies.nl/web/alfred-modwenna-wyrm

Vikings (2013-). This crossover has been done before, for example in Bandi Crawford's 2019 story *Æthelflaed and Lagertha*, which centres around the bi-romantic feelings of the two characters in the title.[34] In this untitled fanfic, Alfred gets sick after he is visited (in a dream?) by a lady wearing a crown. Lagertha tries to heal the King and is assisted by a male personage, namely Athelstan. While Lagertha and Athelstan are performing rituals to save the King, something unexpected happens in the narrative. King Alfred has a vision of an old willow who informs him of the attempts of the two people close to him to help him overcome this peculiar illness. After this vision, another one follows. The King feels a breeze from behind him and turns around to see a beautiful woman. When he asks her for her name, she answers "Stephanie", which also means "crown" (from the Greek word Στέφανος), just like "corona".

In *Vikings*, Athelstan is a monk at Lindisfarne during the Viking raids, who was taken to Kattegat by Ragnar. Later in the story, it becomes clear that Athelstan is the father of Alfred the Great. In *Vikings*, he is already dead before his son Alfred is born, but his soul returns to greet and bless the two masters he served in his earthly life, namely the Viking King Ragnar Ragnarsson, former husband of Lagertha, and the Wessex King Ecbert who would later become Alfred's grandfather and protector. Although the name Athelstan might suggest that this character is based on King Æthelstan (c. 894-939), the first King of England and one of the greatest Anglo-Saxon kings, his story seems to be more inspired by the historical scholar, clergyman, poet and teacher Alcuin of York, born in Northumbria in around 735, who wrote letters on dealing with the Viking attack on Lindisfarne in 793. In any case, Athelstan is a devoted Christian. Whereas in Surakian's work the king is saved by prayer and Celtic rituals, for marithesoprano, the combination of Viking and Christian beliefs does the trick: "She then placed the candles in strategic places in the room and began to dance near the king while she chanted ancient songs and the monk prayed".[35] Thus, Vikings and Christians set aside their differences to work together towards a common goal: the fight against the illness brought by the crowned lady.

34 Mussies, "Queering the Anglo-Saxons through Their Psalms."

35 "Colocó después las velas en sitios estratégicos de la habitación y comenzó a danzar cerca del rey mientras pronunciaba cánticos antiguos y el monje rezaba." Trans. Martine Mussies.

The nursing characters are helped by an old willow. Just like the wyrm in Surakian's story, this idea of a talking tree is a clear signifier of medievalism, which was not present in the canon of *The Last Kingdom* (nor in *Vikings*, for that matter), but has a long history in medieval texts. The seventh-century scholar Isidore of Seville provides a comprehensive medieval definition of trees in his *Etymologiae*. According to the scholar, the term "tree" is derived and modified from the word "field" because these are plants that cling to the earth with their fixed roots.[36] Notably, different trees had different meanings in the medieval times. For example, the palm tree was a symbol of victory as evidenced by its remarkable height and leaf retention. Some trees were considered holy trees and served as places of worship, such as the ash tree among the Vikings.[37] One of the most striking salient qualities of trees in medieval times, particularly in medieval literature, was that of sapience. The talking tree – a sapient tree from mythologies and stories – is a common occurrence in medieval literature.

Some of the most prominent mentions of talking trees include the talking trees in Alexander's letter to Aristotle. Notably, Alexander the Great wrote a letter to Aristotle elucidating the wonderful things that he had encountered in India and the *Liber Monstrorum*. In these narrations, Alexander speaks of monsters, wild animals, fantastical poisonous snakes, and men clothed in tiger skins as well as talking trees.[38] Alexander gives vivid and clear descriptions of the talking trees and the message of doom that these trees prophesied to him. The male tree of the sun and the female tree of the moon which were prophesied in Greek and Indian are described as defying the laws of nature, thereby alluding to the presence of divinity within or around the trees.[39] This is not a medieval novelty, as the idea of divinity surrounding talking trees could already be found in Greek mythology, for example in Herodotos' description of the oracle of Dodona (Δωδώνα), which was devoted to a Mother Goddess.[40] The tall trees in the Dodona grove – a forest beside the sanctuary of the Greek god Zeus – are said to be blessed with the gift of prophecy.[41] These trees, oaks to be precise, spoke and delivered oracles, both in living state and when they

36 S.A. Barney et al., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=6IrMQwAACAAJ

37 F.J. Simoons, *Plants of Life, Plants of Death* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=KEUAbrBoeBAC

38 Lloyd L. Gunderson, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle about India: An Analysis and Reconstruction* (University of Wisconsin, 1966), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=f6CAAAAAMAAJ

39 M. Lapidge, M. Godden, and S. Keynes, *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=–wbwVa7WCUC.

40 Philipp Vandenberg, *Mysteries of the Oracles: The Last Secrets of Antiquity* (London: Tauris Parke, 2007).

41 Luís Mendonça de Carvalho, Francisca Maria Fernandes, and Hugh Bowden, "Oracle Trees in the Ancient Hellenic World", *Harvard Papers in Botany* 16, no. 2 (2011), 425–27.

were cut down and built into the ship *Argo*.[42] Similar ideas also found their way into later examples of storytelling, such as Tolkien's medievalist fantasy. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the forests of Middle Earth include the Forest of Fangorn, home to huge walking and talking trees that were responsible for the destruction of the evil Saruman's stronghold in Isengard.[43]

BIGHEARTBIGFART – BORDER-CROSSING FIGURES & EXPERIMENTAL MEDICINE

The third case study is a piece of fanfiction called "Like an Angel in the Night".[44] Written at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic (March 2020), this piece by Tumblr user BigHeartBigFart combines characters from *The Last Kingdom* with one from another Netflix series: *Outlander* (2014-). This series – based on the books by Diana Gabaldon – tells the story of Claire Beauchamp, a British nurse. Claire and her husband were separated during the Second World War and after the end of the war in 1945, they decide to go on a honeymoon in Scotland. There they visit a stone circle, through which Claire suddenly gets transported to the year 1743. Because of time travelling, *Outlander* has often been characterized as a work of speculative fiction.[45] As Mary Ann Potter explains, the purpose of the genre "is to center on the re-imagining, and even dissolution, of absolute categories of time, space, and gender".[46] As the following paragraphs will show, the border-crossings between these "absolute categories" are examined, questioned and worked out further in fanfiction.

In "Like an Angel in the Night" (the third case study), Claire emerges in medieval Wessex, just in time to heal its king. The narrative involves the same three elements as in the first case study – a miracle to cure the disease, the fear of bodily pain and the issue of loneliness. However, this time, what is bothering the king is not a mysterious illness caused by a wyrm, but a realistic depiction of Crohn's disease, which allows scope for an added layer of creativity in the description of the preparation of a medicine.[47]

42 Caroline Jane Tully, "Trees and Boats", in Id., *The Cultic Life of Trees in the Prehistoric Aegean, Levant, Egypt and Cyprus*, vol. 42 (Peeters Publishers, 2018), 101–22.

43 Gavin H.M. Holman, *In the Land of Mordor Where the Shadows Lie: Good, Evil, and the Quest in Tolkien 's Middle Earth*, BA thesis, (Leeds Polytechnic School of Librarianship, 1981).

44 With the author 's permission, I republished this work at http://martinemussies.nl/web/like-an-angel-in-the-night

45 Valerie Estelle Frankel, *Adoring Outlander: Essays on Fandom, Genre and the Female Audience* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2016), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=w7WaCwAAQBAJ

46 Mary-Anne Potter, " 'Everything and Nothing ': Liminality in Diana Gabaldon 's Outlander," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 21, no. 3 (2019), 282–96.

47 David Pratt, "The Illnesses of King Alfred the Great," *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), 39–90.

Claire needed to think faster, if she was to save this man. She needed antibiotics. She racked her brain with medicinal herbs, thanking her lucky stars that she took the time to study natural remedies in her spare time.
"I need Garlic, honey, clove…" Claire began to shout. "I also need water, alcohol, and fresh cloth!"

David Dawson as Alfred.
Still from Jamie Donoughue, dir. *The Last Kingdom*. Season 2, episode 6.
Aired 20 April 2017, on BBC Two.
Image retrieved from https://the-last-kingdom.fandom.com/wiki/Alfred?file=Season+two+Alfred.png

As the title indicates, in Alfred's world view, time-travelling Claire is an angel, sent by the Lord. The Christian connotations of the story are confirmed by the third character, Father Beocca. In *The Last Kingdom*, Father Beocca is a priest in the household of main character Uhtred as well as the Court Chaplain of Wessex, serving under King Alfred the Great. In these two roles, he always serves as a mediator between the pagan and Christian traditions. In this sense, being between heaven and earth, Father Beocca is a figure who crosses borders himself. This is confirmed later on in the *The Last Kingdom* canon, as Beocca marries a Viking lady, namely Uhtred's adoptive sister Thyra Ragnarsdottir.

JASMINECANADA - POLYGLOT WOMEN, THE CHI RHO & RESURRECTION

The fourth case study is simply called "The Last Kingdom Fanfic'', and was written by jasminecanada. In this story, King Alfred gets very sick and is cured by princess Gisla, who has come to attend a royal wedding with her husband Rollo. When Alfred takes off his crown, he already feels better, but he is not completely healed. Gisla finds a prayer to heal him in his Enchiridion (his notebook), in which she draws a Chi Rho sign. Alfred and Gisla talk about friendship between their peoples and Alfred explains how friendship feels for the Anglo-Saxons. Since readers might wonder how Gisla and Alfred could understand each other, jasminecanada has given them a dialogue to explain how elite women move across linguistic borders to cement dynastic marriages, a statement backed up by modern scholarship, such as that of Elizabeth Tyler.[48]

Thus, in this neo-medieval "mash-up", the King can only survive with the help of a princess called Gisla and the healing powers of a symbol, the Chi Rho.[49] Gisla (or Gisela) of France was a legendary tenth-century Frankish princess who, according to tradition, was married off to Viking leader Rollo of Normandy.[50] For her fanfiction, jasminecanada was most likely inspired by the character of Gisla in Netflix' series *Vikings*, a character based on the tales surrounding Princess Gisela of France but also influenced by stories of Poppa/Popa of

48 Elizabeth M. Tyler, "Crossing Conquests: Polyglot Royal Women and Literary Culture in Eleventh-Century England," in *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in England, c.800-c.1250*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler, vol. 27, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2011), 171–96.

49 Suzanne Lewis, "Sacred Calligraphy: The Chi Rho Page in the Book of Kells,"*Traditio* 36 (1980), 139–59.

50 Martine Mussies, "Gisela of France," in *World History Encyclopedia*, 2020, accessed 20 September 2021, https://www.worldhistory.org/Gisela_of_France

Bayeux and Jeanne d'Arc (c. 1412-1431 CE). Through this addition, the author not only creates a crossover between *The Last Kingdom* and *Vikings*, but also a border crossing through time, as the historical princess Gisla lived one century after King Alfred. Still, there is a strong connection between the two: their Christian faith.

In all the works of fanfiction discussed in this paper, the authors use Christian acts and symbols, such as the cross, the Bible, and the Chi Rho symbol. In line with the argument of Daria Radtchenko, I consider these new artefacts to be "simulacra, referring not to the reality of the past, but, finally, to the texts about texts about the past".[51] This re-writing of the stories by placing new layers on top of them is very visible in the way jasminecanada uses the Christian Chi Rho. This symbol is a Christogram, a monogram based on the first two letters of ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ("Christos", "the Anointed One", is the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messias").[52] The Anglo-Saxons also used the Chi Rho symbol, as I witnessed when visiting Rochester Cathedral as part of the visiting choir.[53] In the *Textus Roffensis*, which is on display there, four Chi Rho symbols can be found, all written for King Æthelred II (or "Ethelred the Unready"). Other surviving Chi Rho attestations that might be linked to the historical context of King Alfred are those in the Book of Kells and in the Lindisfarne Gospels.[54] But jasminecanada explicitly adds a new meaning to the symbol: it is not only a marker that refers to Jesus himself, but also a sign of his immortality, the resurrection:

> Gisla having such faith in this, going back to her devotion to Christianity. Carefully and precisely she begins drawing a Chi Rho Sign, as Alfred watched her ministrations silently. Finishing the creation of the symbol Gisla broke the silence, "This symbolizes the victory of resurrection over death, may you overcome this illness".

51 Daria Radtchenko, "Simulating the Past: Reenactment and the Quest for Truth in Russia," *Rethinking History* 10, no. 1 (March 2006), 127–48.

52 "Χριστός," in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), accessed 20 September 2021, https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=xristo/s

53 Martine Mussies, "King Alfred & Rochester," *Musings* (blog), 16 September 2019, accessed 20 September 2021, http://martinemussies.nl/web/king-alfred-rochester

54 Robert G. Calkins, *Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Michelle P. Brown, *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (University of Toronto Press, 2003), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=sdOzz5HzxngC

ANALYSIS

All the texts analysed were written during the COVID-19 lockdown and explore themes that relate to those circumstances, such as the fear of an incurable illness. They fall into the realm of neo-medievalism, the modern revival of Medieval culture, as explained by Umberto Eco in his "Dreaming of the Middle Ages".[55] The elements of COVID within this culture mirror our current Zeitgeist, as can be seen on the @GTuronensis page on Facebook, for example, on which an anonymous 21st-century pseudo-Gregorius Turonensis describes our current predicament as "the Great Plague". Storytelling is a natural way in

55 U. Eco and W. Weaver, *Travels in Hyperreality* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=YFDOAwAAQBAJ

David Dawson as Alfred. Jon East, dir. *The Last Kingdom*. Season 2, episode 4. Aired 6 April 2017, on BBC Two.

which to make the incomprehensible recognizable.[56] By interpreting, organizing observations and creating cohesion within a story, people make sense of the world around them.[57] The need for explanatory stories seems to be even stronger when events force an entirely new storyline.[58] In order to get a crisis under control, the construction of stories is inevitable: we describe what is happening so that we can understand it.[59] In this way, storytelling seems to be an inevitable response to adversity. As the story changes continuously, it greatly affects the narrator and the narrator's vision of the past, the present, and the future.[60]

With their rewritings of the "canon" of *The Last Kingdom* and *Vikings*, these authors have followed in the footsteps of King Alfred of Wessex himself, as his translations/retellings of canonical texts were also informed by his personal experiences.[61] Moreover, while the historical Alfred was likely more like a rough and weathered stone, the fantasies of present-day fanfiction authors present the king as a smooth and shining gem. And they keep polishing him. The case studies analysed above show a version of Alfred that is polite, modest and wise, a model of the post-WWII ideals of masculinity: the autodidact intellectual, the self-disciplined leader, the morally responsible friend, and the companionate family man. Their Alfred is humble and vulnerable and seems to surpass the tensions of historical fiction in terms of outdated, regressive and hazardous ideas around gender and sexuality. He is a blank canvas, a neutral projection screen for the fans. Alfred's neutrality enables readers to use him as a proxy through which they meet the larger-than-life women who can cure mysterious diseases.

As the above examples show, thanks to these fierce females, the mythical King Alfred is still very much alive. In the words of BigHeartBigFart: "Claire looked into the eyes of a man who appeared to have come back from the dead, and all she could do was smile." Since Alfred keeps overcoming death, he might be considered immortal and some congregations/denominations consider him to

56 Martine Mussies, "Autiethnography," *Transformative Works and Cultures* 33 (June 2020), doi.org/10.3983/twc.2020.1789.

57 Michele L. Crossley, "Narrative Psychology, Trauma and the Study of Self/Identity," *Theory & Psychology* 10, no. 4 (Aug. 2000), 527–46.

58 Ingrid Baart, *Ziekte en zingeving. Een onderzoek naar chronische ziekte en subjectiviteit* (Dissertation Universiteit voor Humanistiek, Utrecht, 2002).

59 Jan Olthof and Eric Vermetten, *De mens als verhaal. Narratieve strategieën in psychotherapie voor kinderen en volwassenen* (Utrecht: De Tijdstroom, 1994), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=9mZPXwAACAAJ

60 A.W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics,* 2nd ed.(University of Chicago Press, 2013), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=qacxAQAAQBAJ

61 Richard Philip Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship, and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Longman, 1998), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=eQOwQgAACAAJ

be a saint. But as Alicia Spencer-Hall explains: "the line between resurrection and resuscitation can be very blurry".[62] Although in theory both may involve divine intervention, in the pieces of fanfiction discussed it is not a quality of Alfred himself that he arises from the (near) death, but he is saved through the actions of female healers from all corners of the world, such as Modwenna, who "had achieved many miracles".[63] As Polina Ignatova explained in her presentation "Ravens and Dogs and Bears, Oh My!" at the virtual International Medieval Congress 2020, there is a connection between St Modwenna and the shape-shifting walking dead. Geoffrey of Burton's "Life and Miracles of St Modwenna" (c. 1126) features a scene in which two peasants sin, upon which St Modwenna strikes them dead. After this, St Modwenna turns them into walking corpses.

In order to examine how emancipation happens by re-writing stories, we need to help "Cherchez la femme" as Professor Barbara Olsen writes.[64] Her appeal to search out unknown women at the heart of a mystery, is as relevant to ongoing research into 9th century Anglo-Saxon England as it is to her own period of expertise, Greek Antiquity, where, in her words, "so often women have been shrouded in myth, notoriety or obscurity".[65] Although Judith M. Bennett remarks that "[f]eminist work in medieval studies is a thriving enterprise with a distinguished past and a promising future", 28 years later, there is still much work to do.[66] As amateur medievalists, writers of fanfiction for *Vikings* and *The Last Kingdom* are also engaging with this feminist agenda. These present-day storytellers are filling the gaps by adding female heroes to the intertextual storytelling around King Alfred.

By writing about their female inspirations, the authors of fanfiction about King Alfred are adding a new and border-crossing layer to the myths surrounding the immortal king. In their stories, the females have agency, in the definition of Duits and Van Zoonen: "the purposeful actions of individuals, leaving aside the question of whether these actions are autonomously arrived at, or are

62 A. Spencer-Hall, *Medieval Saints and Modern Screens: Divine Visions as Cinematic Experience*, Knowledge Communities (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=i4dIDwAAQBAJ

63 Surakian ["Alfred / Modwenna / Wyrm"].

64 Barbara A. Olsen, *Women in Mycenaean Greece: The Linear B Tablets from Pylos and Knossos* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1, accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=pxZxAwAAQBAJ

65 Olsen, *Women in Mycenaean Greece*, 1.

66 Judith M. Bennett, "Medievalism and Feminism," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (1993), 311-12.

results of structural forces".[67] Kjartan Birgir Kjartansson notices "considerable differences between the two religions when it comes to gender roles in [the canon of] *The Last Kingdom*, with the pagan religion being a lot more tolerant to women making their own decisions compared to the Christian women who are mostly powerless".[68] But in the case studies discussed, all women – both Christian and pagan – are powerful, for they are the ones who can beat the unknown disease, thus saving the king from death. Gisla is definitely a devoted Christian, Modwenna is a – probably Celtic – Christian who also uses spells, Lagertha relies on Viking customs and Claire is a woman of 20th century medicine. All together, these four stories point towards the idea of a global sisterhood, as women from different countries, religions, and cultures work together to fight the disease. And without these fierce females, King Alfred would have died.

In this 21st-century pandemic, nursing women are on the frontline – side by side with their fellow male health professionals – and within the intertextual storytelling, there is an ongoing emancipation of the women featured. The fans' changes to the original storylines are increasing the agency of their characters and making the portrayals more feminist, showing a sense of autonomy and beliefs about equality in their actions. Historically, female nurses have often been portrayed as the female helpers of the male doctors, who "know best".[69] But in contemporary fanfiction, the acts of nursing and healing help build feminist characters and establish agency. As Jolien de Waard explains, there is a scene in the Netflix version of the *Outlander* series that was not in the books by Diana Gabaldon (on which the series is based). Around WWII, "albeit out of necessity, Claire was living in a time where small steps were taken towards more gender equality."[70] This added scene, the opening of S1E3 "The Way Out", is a flashback to the beginning of the War, as Claire and her new husband Frank are at the train station (00:02:26-00:04:12):

67 Linda Duits and Liesbet van Zoonen, "Who 's Afraid of Female Agency?: A Rejoinder to Gill," *European Journal of Women 's Studies* 14, no. 2 (May 2007), 161-70.

68 Kjartan Birgir Kjartansson, *Christianity Under Fire: An Analysis of the Treatment of Religion in Three Novels by Bernard Cornwell*, BA thesis, (University of Iceland 2015), 9, accessed 20 September 2021, https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/21491/1/BA%20ritger%C3%B0%20Kjartan%20Birgir%20Kjartansson.pdf

69 Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, Glass Mountain Pamphlet (Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=1IwLAQAAIAAJ

70 Jolien de Waard, *Adapting Claire 's Feminist Beliefs and Female Agency: A Comparison Between the First Outlander Novel and Its Television Adaptation*, BA thesis, (University of Utrecht 2018), 11, accessed 20 September 2021, http://dspace.library.uu.nl/handle/1874/367240

Frank: "Woe betide the man who stands between you and what you set your mind upon. And damned if that stubbornness isn't what I find so attractive about you!"
Off screen: "All aboard!"
Claire: "As they say, that's my cue."
Frank: "This is backwards! I should be the one leaving for the front lines..."
Claire: "Welcome to the 20th century!"

Apparently, it was Claire's decision to fulfil her duty at the front as a Royal Army Nurse, and she expected her husband to support her ambitions. This added scene emphasises the characterisation of the female protagonist as a feminist and this is built out further in fanfiction. Similar processes are at stake for the other women in our case studies. Thus, by travelling from the historical evidence – sometimes via the historical novel and/or through various Netflix series – into fanfiction, the women became more powerful. This is similar to the "Droste effect", a "mise en abyme" of a picture of a nurse recursively appearing within itself.[71] Through this loop of a text about a text about a text, the historical women break out of their moulds and take their places at the frontline of a crisis.

The border-crossing theme does not end there and even goes beyond the final frontier, because just like Claire, the other women mentioned also come from different times (if they even existed at all). Our first case study features the healing of the king by a presumably Celtic woman named Modwenna. If Modwenna is indeed a Celtic lady, this would be a case of time travel because, unlike the Vikings, King Alfred did not fight the Celtic people. In fact, he ruled over the Anglo-Saxon people, who were the product of the union between the Celts and the Saxons. Historical records show that the Celtic people, originally referred to as Britons, lived in Great Britain during the Iron Age, the Roman Era and the post-Roman era.[72] Following the departure of the Romans from Britain, the land was left to the Celts, who comprised the indigenous

71 *The Motivated Sign: Iconicity in Language and Literature 2*, ed. Olga Fischer and Max Nänny (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001).

72 John T. Koch and Barry W. Cunliffe, ed., *Celtic from the West 2: Rethinking the Bronze Age and the Arrival of Indo-European in Atlantic Europe*, Celtic Studies Publications (Oxford, UK; Oakville, CT: Oxbow

population of southern England. The peoples of what is now England suffered attacks from other Celtic tribes – the Welsh and the Scots – as well as the Vikings, but that was centuries later.[73] As a measure of protection, the Celts took in Germanic mercenaries to help protect their land and freedom. These mercenaries were paid in land. Over time, the population of Germanic mercenaries who were called Anglo-Saxons, increased and the Celtic tribes were pushed into the West and North of England.[74] Based on these historical facts, it is clear that King Alfred would have had little contact with the Celtic people.[75] Unless the king did meet a certain Modwenna.

Similar anachronisms and other instances of border crossing are at stake through the addition of Lagertha. According to twelfth-century Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus, Lagertha was "a skilled Amazon, who, though a maiden, had the courage of a man, and fought in front among the bravest, with her hair loose over her shoulders. All marvelled at her matchless deeds, for her locks flying down her back betrayed that she was a woman."[76] She is presented in Saxo's work as the first wife of Ragnar Lothbrok, who is also a legendary but historically dubious Viking. "Although his sons are historical figures, there is no evidence that Ragnar himself ever lived and he seems to be an amalgam of historical figures and literary invention," writes Katherine Holman.[77] Still, the storytelling around Ragnar is remarkably persistent – and persists in the present day. In *Vikings* season one, it was Ragnar who led the Viking Raid on Lindisfarne in 793, and in season five, King Alfred sealed an alliance with Lagertha as well as with two of the sons of Ragnar Lothbrok (Ubbe and Bjorn). But if Ragnar and Lagertha did exist, we should probably place them somewhere around the middle of the ninth century, well after Lindisfarne and well before the reign of Alfred the Great, who defeated the Vikings at the Battle of Edington in 878. However, as Emma Groeneveld states: "it is clear that [Lagertha] fulfils a role not immediately expected of historical women of that time but instead of a more legendary proportion: that of the warrior woman".[78] And therefore, to this day, the mythical Lagertha remains

Books, 2013), XVI.

73 Francis Palgrave, *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (London: William Tegg & Co., 1876), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=t8MsAAAAMAAJ

74 Markku Filppula, Juhani Klemola, and Heli Paulasto, *English and Celtic in Contact* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

75 Joanne Parker, *The Harp and the Constitution: Myths of Celtic and Gothic Origin* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

76 Saxo Grammaticus, *The Danish History*, book IX. Translated by Oliver Elton, accessed 20 September 2021, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Danish_History/Book_IX

77 K. Holman, *Historical Dictionary of the Vikings* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2003), accessed 20 September 2021, https://books.google.nl/books?id=NL4FAwAAQBAJ

78 Emma Groeneveld, "Lagertha," *World History Encyclopedia*. Last modified 2 November 2018, https://www.worldhistory.org/Lagertha

an inspiration. Moreover, marithesoprano's description of Lagertha's rituals resonate with the scene in the *Egill's Saga* in which Egill uses runes and a verse to counter poison, which could also be interpreted as a border crossing between the magical and the physical in Viking medieval thought.[79]

As these four case studies – written during the COVID-19 lockdown – show, Alfredian fanfiction written during the pandemic combines neo-Medieval elements with topical themes and current human fears, such as illness, pain, solitude, as well as the themes of hope, female agency, and border crossings. The fan authors have constructed a 21st century "neo-medieval-based culture" that mirrors events in current society. Their stories often take place against the backdrop of other times of crisis, such as wars against intruders (in Alfred's time, the Anglo-Saxons faced the Vikings; in Claire's time the British faced the Nazis). In every case study discussed, Alfred needs a female – be it Modwenna, Claire, Lagertha or Gisla – to save him from death. With this paper, I therefore hope to have made a relevant contribution to the flourishing study of (neo)medievalisms. Arguably, there is much more to the Afredian collages of present-day fanfic writers than the topics discussed in this paper. For example, in the first case study, Surakian writes how Modwenna describes the wyrm "causing the host great pain until they grow enough to consume them and break free from the host body", which resembles the popular 1979 science fiction horror film *Alien*, directed by Ridley Scott. Future research should further examine how the neo-medieval setting relates to tropes from the science fiction genre.

79 Catharina Raudvere, "The Power of the Spoken Word as Literary Motif and Ritual Practice in Old Norse Literature," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005), 179–202.

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IMPRISONED SPACE, FROZEN TIME, AND "ABSURD WALLS" THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ORAN IN CAMUS' *THE PLAGUE*

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In one of the most successful novels of Albert Camus, The Plague, the normal life of Oran is interrupted by the arrival of a disease that imprisons all the residents. By taking the spatial imprisonment and, consequently, the temporal suspension as the main elements of the structure of the novel, this article addresses Camus' reflection on the absurd through three different aspects of the plot, intrinsically related to the development of the main topic. The spatio-temporal dynamics of The Plague are tackled by the examination of the fictional city before the arrival of the plague, by the role of the "absurd walls" of Oran during its closure, and, finally, through the moment of liberation which concludes the long struggle of Oran's citizens and the novel itself. This article aims to analyse the spatio-temporal metamorphosis of the main setting of the novel, to reflect upon Camus' philosophy on the absurd, as well as to relate to the challenges we have been facing with the actual pandemic, mainly translatable into a modified perception of time and space.

INTRODUCTION

As can already be perceived in one of the authors' earlier characters, Caligula, whose desire to reach the moon leads him to a negative revolt, any human hope of overcoming "the divorce between man and life, between the actor and the decoration"[1] in Camus' imaginary is doomed to fail. The metaphor

1 Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 1992), 14.

of the limit, portrayed as a human barrier that forbids man to fulfil his desire for unity and clear vision is frequently used by the author to construct and stage some of the most poignant episodes of his work: Mersault in *The Happy Death* decides to isolate himself in attempting to finally achieve inner peace, Meursault in *The Stranger* expounds in the prison cell the most remarkable meditations on life, whereas Clamence, the protagonist of *The Fall*, is presented as the victim of an outdoor prison, the Amsterdam sky. In this regard, it is worth underlining that *The Plague*, published for the first time in 1947, was initially entitled *The Prisoners*. In his *Carnets*, Camus explains that the intention of giving this title to his novel came to mind as a tribute to the victims of the Second World War, thus marking a passage from the first cycle of his absurdist novels, situated outside of any socio-historical frame, to one including all humanity affected by the same issues and, consequently, tackling the question of revolt as one no longer dissociated from political commitment. In this context, the story of the plague that descends as a punishment on the citizens of Oran relates to the most significant moral problems of Camus' present: the struggle during the war and the dream of rebuilding the collective world, the reality of the French exploitation in Algeria and the author's harsh criticism of imperialist capitalism. Consequently, the insistence on the spatio-temporal imprisonment of the fictional representation of Oran paves the way for a rich and extensive interpretation of the setting that can be interpreted both as a reflection of a precise historical moment, as well as a representation of the human condition, denounced in its most tragic aspects.

THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN ORAN

The propensity for a realist narration in *The Plague* is primarily reflected in its narrative homogeneity. The chronicle narration guarantees a logical development of the narrated events which is particularly enhanced by the authors' choice to entrust the role of the main narrator to Dr Rieux, the only character able to represent the plague-related events almost plastically. The year 194°

that appears in the opening line[2] of the novel, although imperfectly, situates the narration in a precise historical context, while the space of the novel, the city of Oran, throughout the entire narration maintains a high degree of referentiality, allowing for the characters to easily map their movements inside the walls of the fictional city. Regarding Camus' choice to set the plot of the novel in Oran, it is also worth remembering that this city in the author's literary geography appears primarily charged with negative valences[3]. It is mainly the mineral landscape and the circular structure that endow the city with aspects of a dark and suffocating place, as is obvious from its initial descriptions in the novel:

> À première vue, Oran est, en effet, une ville ordinaire et rien de plus qu'une préfecture française de la côté algérienne. La cité elle-même, on doit l'avouer, est laide. D'aspect tranquille, il faut quelque temps pour apercevoir ce qui la rend différente de tant d'autres villes commerçantes, sous toutes les latitudes. Comment faire imaginer, par exemple, une ville sans pigeons, sans arbres et sans jardins, où l'on ne rencontre ni battements d'ailes ni froissements de feuilles, un lieu neutre pour tout dire? [4]

In this regard, it is interesting to underline Camus' decision to intentionally remove the *Boulevard Front de Mer* that exists in Oran, and, thus, deprive the characters of the view of the sea, the only spatial element symbolizing freedom and joy:

> Cette cité sans pittoresque, sans végétation et sans âme finit par sembler reposante, on s'y endort enfin. Mais il est juste d'ajouter qu'elle s'est greffée sur un paysage sans égal, au milieu d'un plateau nu, entouré de collines lumineuses devant une baie au dessin parfait. On peut seulement regretter qu'elle soit construite en tournant le dos à cette baie et que, pourtant, il soit impossible d'apercevoir la mer qu'il faut toujours aller chercher.[5]

2 "Les curieux événements qui font le sujet de cette chronique se sont produits en 194., à Oran. ", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 6.

3 In the essay *Le Minotaure ou la halte d'Oran*, Oran is presented as a large circular and yellow wall covered by a hard sky where the Oranians wander turning in circles and looking for the sea through the wild and oppressive streets before being devoured by the Minotaur: "On ne peut pas savoir ce qu'est la pierre sans venir à Oran. Dans cette ville poussiéreuse entre toutes, le caillou est roi. [...] Ce qui, ailleurs, tire sa poésie du végétal, prend ici un visage de pierre. [...] La ville entière s'est figée dans une gangue pierreuse. Vue des Planteurs, l'épaisseur des falaises qui l'enserrent est telle que le paysage devient irréel à force d'être minéral." in Albert Camus, *Œuvres, L'ÉTÉ, Le Minotaure ou la halte d'Oran* (Paris : Quarto Gallimard, 2013) 1104-1105.

4 Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 4.

5 Ibid. 5.

Regarding the timeline of the plot, the disease manifests itself for the first time on the morning of 16 April with the appearance of a dead rat noticed by Dr Rieux as he leaves his flat. As Valensi emphasises [6], this is a moment of fracture of the plot, where the whole decor of the monotonous and ordinary life in Oran starts to collapse and where the exceptional state of the city is being introduced. It is precisely from this moment when the appearance of the rats, nocturnal animals, begin to follow an upward movement (from underground to the streets and into the houses of the Oranians) marking the beginning of their long journey through the plague. The death of the caretaker signifies the precise moment when the city steps from the epoch of freedom to the stage where the official decision of the closure is announced:

> Le jour où le chiffre des morts atteignit de nouveau la trentaine, Rieux regardait la dépêche officielle que le préfet lui avait tendue en disant: Ils ont eu peur. La dépêche portait : "Déclarez l'état de peste. Fermez le ville." [7]

Once the epidemic is declared official, the signs of an imminent catastrophe and imprisonment begin to be inscribed in the overall setting, and nature seems to participate in the Oranians' tragedy as the days go by and the situation worsens:

> De grandes brumes couvrirent le ciel. Des pluies diluviennes et brèves s'abattirent sur la ville, une chaleur orageuse suivait ces brusques ondées. La mer elle-même avait perdu son bleu profond et sous le ciel brumeux, elle prenait des éclats d'argent ou de fer, douloureux pour la vue. La chaleur humide de ce printemps faisait souhaiter les ardeurs de l'été. Dans la ville, [...] une torpeur morne régnait. Au milieu de ses longs murs crépis, parmi les rues aux vitrines poudreuses, dans les tramways d'un jeune sale, on se sentait un peu prisonnier du ciel. [8]

6 Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, *La Peste d'Albert Camus* (Paris : Gallimard, 1991), 115.

7 Camus, *La Peste*, 58.

8 Ibid. 29.

The end of the first part of the novel, marking the decision to close the gates of Oran, is essential since it is precisely at this point in the novel that Camus' request for reflection begins to unfold. A phenomenon that is beyond human control is manifested, confronting the citizens to face reality as it presents itself, rendering them almost ridiculous at the very moment when a plague proves to be unavoidable.

ORAN'S "ABSURD WALLS"

Matoré uses a quote by Robbe-Grillet to describe the image of the labyrinth in literature: "a path which always seems to be guided by strict walls, but which, nevertheless, at every moment leads to dead ends and obliges one to go back, to pass several times over the same places on more or less long routes, to explore new directions and to fall back on a new impossibility" [9]. The labyrinthine structure that is introduced into the city after its closure corresponds exactly to Matoré's definition: completely separated from the rest of the world, Oran becomes a microcosm within which a progressive multiplication of closed spaces takes place. The long and detailed representation of the main setting is essential to the plot since the spatial closure follows the development of the disease, progressively preventing any hope of a possible escape and introducing the novel's fundamental motif of separation.

As the plague takes hold of the city, the condition of exile begins to be reflected everywhere: the streets become empty, the cafés are lit by "a single lamp over the counter, and people talk in low voices, for no apparent reason, in the thick, reddish air" [10]. Oran, plunged into complete darkness, seems "made of stone" [11], while the Oranians, grappling with the disruption in their ordinary lives, find themselves imprisoned "between the sky and the city walls"[12]. The usual bustle of the port is replaced by silence, the ships that were on their way to Oran turn away, access to the quays is forbidden by large gates and the movement of cars and people becomes circular. References to the outside

9 "Un chemin qui a toujours l'air guidé par des parois strictes, mais qui, néanmoins, à chaque instant conduit à des impasses et oblige à revenir en arrière, à repasser plusieurs fois aux mêmes endroits sur des parcours plus ou moins longs, à explorer une nouvelle direction et à retomber sur une nouvelle impossibilité." in Georges Motoré, *L'espace humain: l'expression de l'espace dans la vie, la pensée et l'art contemporains* (Paris: La Colombe, 1962), 168.

10 "(…) par une seule lampe au-dessus du comptoir, et les gens parlent à voix basse, sans raison apparente, dans l'air épais et rougeâtre.", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 90.

11 "Oran, plongée dans la nuit complète, [...] était de pierre.", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 154.

12 "(…) entre le ciel et les murs de la ville", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 173.

world are rare and the physical reclusion of the city is especially suffered by the foreigners who become victims of the plague by accident and who are not able to return to their countries: in the general exile, "they were the most exiled, (…) and constantly came up against the walls that separated their stinking refuge from their lost part"[13]. The unexpected arrival of the plague introduces a significant change in the use of Oran's public spaces, as their initial function is completely modified and subordinated to the fight against the disease. In particular, Oran's city stadium becomes the main quarantine zone, as well as the setting where the sense of loneliness and the inability to communicate with each other is best portrayed:

> Il est entouré ordinairement de hauts murs de ciment et il avait suffi de placer des sentinelles aux quatre portes d'entrée pour rendre l'évasion difficile. De même, les murs empêchaient les gens de l'extérieur d'importuner de leur curiosité les malheureux qui étaient placés en quarantaine. En revanche, ceux-ci, à longueur de journée, entendaient, sans les voir, les tramways qui passaient, et devinaient, à la rumeur plus grande que ces derniers traînaient avec eux, les heures de rentrée et de sortie des bureaux. Ils savaient ainsi que la vie dont ils étaient exclus continuait à quelques mètres d'eux, et que les murs de ciment séparaient deux univers plus étrangers l'un à l'autre que s'ils avaient été dans des planètes différentes. [14]

While the reclusion and the separation of Oran from the rest of the world is mainly associated with the enclosed public and private spaces, it is interesting to notice that the prison-like atmosphere in the fictional setting of *The Plague* is equally present in the outdoor environment. Even nature seems to contribute to the siege of Oran, given that the prevalence of the sun and the heat present themselves as the main threat during the summer, when the disease reaches its peak. This is the moment when silence, dust, sun, and plague blend on the streets of Oran:

13 "dans l'exil général, ils étaient les plus exilés, car si le temps suscitait chez eux, comme chez tous, l'angoisse qui lui est propre, ils étaient attachés aussi à l'espace et se heurtaient sans cesse aux murs qui séparaient leur refuge empesté de leur partie perdue.", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 65.

14 Camus, *La Peste*, 211.

> Le soleil se fixa. Des flots ininterrompus de chaleur et de lumière inondèrent la ville à longueur de journée. En dehors des rues à arcades et des appartements, il semblait qu'il n'était pas un point de la ville qui ne fût placé dans la réverbération la plus aveuglante. Le soleil poursuivait nos concitoyens dans tous les coins de rue et, s'ils s'arrêtaient, il les frappait alors. Comme ces premières chaleurs coïncidèrent avec un accroissement en flèche du nombre des victimes, qui se chiffra à près de sept cents par semaine, une sorte d'abattement s'empara de la ville.[15]

As observed by Fortier, "the sun takes on the appearance of a cosmic plague hunter, thereby establishing an equivalence with the disease" [16] and "Oran, surrounded by cliffs, with long plastered walls among streets with abandoned shop windows, transforms its inhabitants into prisoners of the sky"[17]. The synthesis of the enclosed space and the negative use of light is especially functional to the representation of one of the most ferocious deaths: that of Mr Othon's son. It is in this episode that the ferocity of the sun is revealed as the climax of the suffering, underlined in all the spatial elements that contribute to the creation of the oppressive atmosphere of the hospital room, the barred windows, the unbearable screams of the patients, and the excessive heat:

> La lumière s'enflait dans la salle. Sur les cinq autres lits, des formes remuaient et gémissaient, mais avec une discrétion qui semblait concertée. Le seul qui criât, à l'autre bout de la salle, poussait à intervalles réguliers de petites exclamations qui paraissaient traduire plus d'étonnement que de douleur. Il semblait que, même pour les malades, ce ne fût pas l'effroi du début. Il y avait même, maintenant, une sorte de consentement dans leur manière de prendre la maladie. Seul, l'enfant se débattait de toutes ses forces. [...] Le long des murs peints à la chaux, la lumière passait du rose au jaune. Derrière la vitre, une matinée de chaleur commençait à crépiter.[18]

15 Ibid. 9.

16 "Le soleil l'apparence d'un chasseur cosmique de la peste, établissant de cette manière une équivalence avec la maladie", in Paul Fortier, *Une lecture de Camus: la valeur des éléments descriptifs dans l'oeuvre romanesque* (Paris : Klincksieck, 1977) 145.

17 "Oran cerné par des falaises, avec de longs murs crépis, parmi les rues aux vitrines poudreuses, transforme ses habitants en prisonniers du ciel.", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 30.

18 Camus, *La Peste*, 191.

If the sky and the sun are charged with negative valences, the sole remaining positive space in the fictional setting of the novel is the sea. The Oranian's marine landscape assumes all the positive qualifications of liberation: as in the rest of Camus' fictional landscapes, it stands as the symbol of timelessness that unifies the knowledge and truth towards which man tends, or as an emblem of authentic life, of freedom, and of the union between man and nature, presented as "the only force capable of justifying existence and excusing death"[19]. The importance of this setting is especially underlined in the semantic charge of the sea in the novel's central episode where the two protagonists, Rieux and Tarrous, stand as symbols of respite and freedom from the plague while the fight against it is still ongoing, giving rise to the unification between human and superhuman time, nature and man, life and death, suffering and fraternal love:

> Ils s'installèrent sur les rochers tournés vers le large. Les eaux se gonflaient et redescendaient lentement. Cette respiration calme de la mer faisait naître et disparaître des reflets huileux à la surface des eaux. [...] Rieux, qui sentait sous ses doigts le visage grêlé des rochers, était plein d'un étrange bonheur. Tourné vers Tarrou, il devina, sur le visage calme et grave de son ami, ce même bonheur qui n'oubliait rien, pas même l'assassinat. [...] Rieux se mit sur le dos et se tint immobile, face au ciel renversé, plein de lune et d'étoiles. Il respira longuement. Puis il perçut de plus en plus distinctement un bruit d'eau battue, étrangement clair dans le silence et la solitude de la nuit. Tarrou se rapprochait, on entendit bientôt sa respiration. [...] Pendant quelques minutes, ils avancèrent avec la même cadence et la même vigueur solitaires, loin du monde, libérés enfin de la ville et de la peste.[20]

THE FROZEN TIME

The plague, beyond being a question of space, also becomes a question of time. The suffering of the Oranians caused by its long duration is seen first in the change of the narrator's exposition of the facts: from the moment of the

19 Roger Grenier, *Albert Camus : soleil et ombre* : *une biographie intellectuelle* (Paris : Gallimard, 1999), 192.

20 Camus, *La Peste*, 227.

city's reclusion, the chronicle becomes deprived of a well-defined structure, given that the plague becomes the only temporal unit, as well as the only reference point from which its victims can count the passage of months and the change of seasons. For this reason, even if the long wait is the only possible present to live in, the frozen temporality has a profound role within the narration, aiming to wake the inhabitants of Oran out of their previous lives and cause a profound personal and collective metamorphosis. To achieve this goal, the duration of the plague is presented in all its length, while the attitude to such a temporal experience is essential for understanding Camus' philosophy. From the moment that in Oran "time becomes fixed" [21], the city with all its citizens is condemned to a rupture and a crisis: the arrival of the disease presupposes a change in those who lived and survived the plague, highlighting their strong regeneration made possible mainly thanks to their transformed relationship with time. The enclosed space corresponds to a temporal perception that no longer coincides with the linear course of time, since it becomes substituted by a collective period of waiting.

The first and major change in terms of experiencing time in Oran is caused in relation to the concept of *tomorrow.* The plague takes away the greatest joy of its victims, i.e., their eagerness to think about the future[22]. From this point of view, in the Camusian process of constructing the absurd atmosphere in Oran, the question of the future stands out as the most pressing one. The importance of this temporal dimension, in relation to which "it does not matter whether the end is envisaged as a catastrophe, pure destruction, new chaos, the twilight of the gods, or the advent of the kingdom of God, what matters is that the end is promised to everything that exists, and moreover, that it is a relatively near end"[23] being strongly linked to the author's reflections on the absurd, becomes the main punishment for the Oranians in the initial phase of the plague:

21 "(…) le temps parut se fixer", in Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 2007), 57.

22 The importance of the future, strongly linked to the author's reflections on the absurd, is already present in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "Demain, il souhaitait demain, quand tout lui-même devrait s'y refuser – cette révolte de la chair, c'est l'absurde.", in Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 1992), 20.

23 Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman* (Paris : Gallimard, 1978) 295.

> Cette séparation brutale, sans bavures, sans avenir prévisible, nous laissait décontenancés, incapables de réagir contre le souvenir de cette présence, encore si proche et déjà si lointaine, qui occupait maintenant nos journées.[24]

The anguish of the events that the future holds is replaced by an even more serious sensation: the lack of hope, the impossibility of dreaming and of feeding on illusions. Therefore, the more time passes, the more unbearable the fear and expectation in the plague-stricken universe. The "abstraction" begins to take hold in Oran, rendering the characters disoriented. Finding it impossible to think about the present, let alone hope for the future, the first main temporal refuge for the characters is offered by looking back at their past that, from a formal viewpoint, introduces continuous shifts from the present moment of the narration to recalling episodes from the characters' past. Nostalgia is, thus, the emotion that dominates the first stage of the experience of the plague in the exiled city:

> Car c'était bien le sentiment de l'exil que ce creux que nous portions constamment en nous, cette émotion précise, le désir déraisonnable de revenir en arrière ou au contraire de presser la marche du temps, ces flèches brûlantes de la mémoire. [...] Dès lors, nous réintégrions en somme notre condition de prisonniers, nous étions réduits à notre passé, et si même quelques-uns d'entre nous avaient la tentation de vivre dans l'avenir, ils y renonçaient rapidement, autant du moins qu'il leur était possible, en éprouvant les blessures que finalement l'imagination inflige à ceux qui lui font confiance.[25]

Nevertheless, recalling past events fails to offer long moments of consolation and happiness, since the suffering caused by the separation from the loved ones prevails over any other feeling. Since the loneliness experienced because of this imaginary life in a non-existent time does not offer any comfort, the Oranians quickly come to realize that forgetting is preferable to remembering

24 Camus, *La Peste*, 63.

25 Ibid. 63.

and being deprived of both the past and the future, the absurd men of Oran, before embracing their new reality, rather than conduct their lives normally, are forced to float as "wandering shadows":

> À ce moment, l'effondrement de leur courage, de leur volonté et de leur patience était si brusque qu'il leur semblait qu'ils ne pourraient plus jamais remonter de ce trou. Ils s'astreignaient par conséquent à ne penser jamais au terme de leur délivrance, à ne plus se tourner vers l'avenir et à toujours garder, pour ainsi dire, les yeux baissés. Mais, naturellement, cette prudence, cette façon de ruser avec la douleur, de fermer leur garde pour refuser le combat étaient mal récompensées. En même temps qu'ils évitaient cet effondrement dont ils ne voulaient à aucun prix, ils se privaient en effet de ces moments, en somme assez fréquents, où ils pouvaient oublier la peste dans les images de leur réunion à venir. Et par là, échoués à mi-distance de ces abîmes et de ces sommets, ils flottaient plutôt qu'ils ne vivaient, abandonnés à des jours sans direction et à des souvenirs stériles, ombres errantes qui n'auraient pu prendre force qu'en acceptant de s'enraciner dans la terre de leur douleur. [26]

As the sense of exile takes hold of the residents of Oran, time and plague unite in the same devouring presence: "the man deprived of choice is forced to situate himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy." [27] The question of how to experience the length of time is raised and answered by Tarrou in his carefully detailed notebooks: by following the struggle against death moment by moment. In this sense, the suspense inherent in the city's atmosphere opens the way to another wait, that of the plague's precise time course. One of the main characteristics of the plague itself is depicted especially through its own specific timeline: at dawn it seems to stop with the first remission, announcing a brief pause for the victims, or a temporal limit

26 Ibid. 65.

27 "L'homme privé de choix est contraint à se situer par rapport au temps. Il y prend sa place. Il reconnaît qu'il est à un certain moment d'une courbe qu'il confesse devoir parcourir. Il appartient au temps et, à cette horreur qui le saisit, il reconnaît son pire ennemi.", in Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 1992), 20.

that separates the dead of the night and the survivors of the day. Again, the function of space is interrelated with the representation of time: the rise of the sun becomes the antithesis of death, while the continuation of the struggle occurs at dawn:

> (…) au petit matin, des souffles légers parcourent la ville encore déserte. A cette heure, qui est entre les morts de la nuit et les agonies de la journée, il semble que la peste suspende un instant son effort et reprenne son souffle.[28]

In this sense, the plague in every house and hospital follows the same path, making its victims wait for the announcement of their fate at noon. The first time such uncertainty in the face of the plague is witnessed appears at the very beginning of the plot, when it is offered a detailed representation of the caretaker's experience of the disease:

> Après de longs efforts, hors d'haleine, le concierge se recoucha. La température était à trente-neuf cinq, les ganglions du cou et les membres avaient gonflé, deux taches noirâtres s'élargissaient à son flanc. Il se plaignait maintenant d'une douleur intérieure. "Ça brûle", disait-il, "ce cochon-là me brûle". [...] Le soir, dans tous les cas, le concierge délirait et, à quarante degrés, se plaignait des rats. Rieux tenta un abcès de fixation. Sous la brûlure de la térébenthine, le concierge hurla : "Ah ! les cochons!" Les ganglions avaient encore grossi, durs et ligneux au toucher. La femme du concierge s'affolait : "Veillez sur lui" dit le docteur, "et appelez-moi s'il y a lieu". [...] Et en effet, au matin, la fièvre était tombée à trente-huit degrés. Affaibli, le malade souriait dans son lit. "Cela va mieux, n'est-ce pas, docteur?" dit sa femme. "Attendons encore". Mais, à midi, la fièvre était montée d'un seul coup à quarante degrés, le malade délirait sans arrêt et les vomissements avaient repris. [...] Deux heures après, dans l'ambulance, le docteur et la femme se penchaient sur le malade. La femme pleurait. "N'y a-t-il donc plus d'espoir, docteur ?" "Il est mort", dit Rieux. [29]

28 Camus, *La Peste*, 105.

29 Ibid. 19.

Being employed as a function element for the growing awareness of a prison of unpredictable duration, the temporal suspension, along with the imminent death, cancels all attempts to escape and gives rise to the tangible reality of the plague which, consequently, results in the urge to live in the present moment. The collective destiny, instead, leads to the feeling of revolt:

> En fait on pouvait dire à ce moment, au milieu du mois d'août, que la peste avait tout recouvert. Il n'y avait plus alors de destins individuels, mais une histoire collective qui était la peste et des sentiments partagés par tous. Le plus grand était la séparation et l'exil, avec ce que cela comportait de peur et de révolte. [30]

One of the decisive conversations that mark the passage from the first stage of the plague to the second, characterised by lucidity, is that between Rieux and Tarrou, where the problem of the struggle against death is posed in ontological terms. The revolt that will be identified as the only necessary attitude of man in the face of absurdity is announced from this point in the plot onwards:

> "Croyez-vous en Dieu, docteur?" La question était encore posée naturellement. Mais cette fois, Rieux hésita. "Non, mais qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? Je suis dans la nuit, et j'essaie d'y voir clair. Il y a longtemps que j'ai cessé de trouver ça original." "N'est-ce pas ce qui vous sépare de Paneloux?" [...] Sans sortir de l'ombre, le docteur dit qu'il avait déjà répondu, que s'il croyait en un Dieu tout-puissant, il cesserait de guérir les hommes, lui laissant alors ce soin. Mais que personne au monde, non, pas même Paneloux qui croyait y croire, ne croyait en un Dieu de cette sorte, puisque personne ne s'abandonnait totalement et qu'en cela du moins, lui, Rieux, croyait être sur le chemin de la vérité, en luttant contre la création telle qu'elle était. "Ah!" dit Tarrou, "c'est donc l'idée que vous vous faites de votre métier?" [...] "Oui, dit-il, vous vous dites qu'il y faut de l'orgueil. Mais je n'ai que l'orgueil qu'il faut, croyez-moi. Je ne sais pas ce qui m'attend ni ce qui viendra

30 Ibid. 150.

> après tout ceci. Pour le moment il y a des malades et il faut les guérir. Ensuite, ils réfléchiront et moi aussi. Mais le plus pressé est de les guérir. Je les défends comme je peux, voilà tout." [...] "Après tout", reprit le docteur, et il hésita encore, regardant Tarrou avec attention, "c'est une chose qu'un homme comme vous peut comprendre, n'est-ce pas, mais puisque l'ordre du monde est réglé par la mort, peut-être vaut-il mieux pour Dieu qu'on ne croie pas en lui et qu'on lutte de toutes ses forces contre la mort, sans lever les yeux vers ce ciel où il se tait." "Oui", approuva Tarrou, "je peux comprendre. Mais vos victoires seront toujours provisoires, voilà tout." Rieux parut s'assombrir. "Toujours, je le sais. Ce n'est pas une raison pour cesser de lutter." [31]

By bringing this truth to the eyes of the inhabitants of Oran, the plague is presented above all as a question of human time, its duration, and its end, never possible to defeat, but always giving the possibility to rebel. Defeat is nothing but a new point of departure, and if at first the Oranians seek ways to escape from the crudity of the disease, as time passes, a change of attitude towards life takes place. From the moment when Oranians realize that the plague is a phenomenon that concerns them all, "because [...] it [has] appeared for what it was, that is to say, everyone's business"[32], finally, there is enough wisdom and strength for the revolt to appear as the only solution in the face of the experienced absurdity of existence itself.

THE SPACE AND TIME OF LIBERATION

The vicious circle of the frozen time in Oran is finally broken with the first cases envisaging a retreat of the disease. The end of the illness promises a new beginning, and, significantly, such a promise takes place at the end of winter, during the first days of February, when the gates of Oran open, heralding the arrival of the good weather. But the end of the suspense is not entirely achieved by the receding of the disease. There is a real surprise in the expectation of the

31 Ibid. 112.

32 Ibid. 119.

denouement, a twist, an unforeseen reversal that allows for a final increase in narrative tension, thus achieving the symbolic end of the imprisonment. This *coup de théâtre* is represented by the death of one of the protagonists of *The Plague*, Tarrou, the only character who experiences the disease as an inner pain too, as a disease of the soul and body. Tarrou is the real stranger in the city of Oran, the mysterious character who spends his days observing those who surround him, and whose dedication and courage during the long wait for the end of the plague are underlined more than in anyone else. Denouncing the impossibility of being a hero in a world where the absurdity of war and death exists, Tarrou embodies Camus' call for lucidity:

> D'ici là, je sais que je ne vaux plus rien pour ce monde lui-même et qu'à partir du moment où j'ai renoncé à tuer, je me suis condamné à un exil définitif. Ce sont les autres qui feront l'histoire. Je sais aussi que je ne puis apparemment juger ces autres. J'ai pris le parti alors de parler et d'agir clairement, pour me mettre sur le bon chemin. Par conséquent, je dis qu'il y a les fléaux et les victimes, et rien de plus. Si, disant cela, je deviens fléau moi-même, du moins, je n'y suis pas consentant. J'essaie d'être un meurtrier innocent. Vous voyez que ce n'est pas une grande ambition. [...] C'est pourquoi j'ai décidé de me mettre du côté des victimes, en toute occasion, pour limiter les dégâts. Au milieu d'elles, je peux du moins chercher comment on arrive à la troisième catégorie, c'est-à-dire à la paix.[33]

The death of this character therefore represents the true conclusion of Oran's enclosure. In this regard, the final episode, being the crucial point of the philosophical reflection of *The Plague*, employs a specific use of the space-time coordinates, firstly because in the face of the occurrence of the event that breaks the suspense, this death presupposes an additional wait for the development of the disease itself, and secondly, because it introduces the final uncertainty prompted by the disease in the face of the forthcoming liberation of Oran.

33 Ibid. 225.

Tarrou's final battle occurs during a cold, polar night, where the sky is clear and icy, but the stars are frozen, and the room is dark. The stages of the fever during the night are described with absolute accuracy, while the narrative tension is highlighted through the morning remission that implies uncertainty about the outcome. Nature seems to take part in the metaphorical representation of the plague: when the fever is at its peak, it manifests itself as a storm that shakes the body, "like a tempest, like a superhuman evil that burns, a shipwreck". The setting of this episode is achieved with specific spatial elements that endow the scene with the sense of further claustration and separation: the window and the entrenched space of the room in Rieux's flat contrast with the external festive world that is celebrating the return to normality after the long reclusion:

> Le docteur, pour la première fois, reconnut que cette nuit, pleine de promeneurs tardifs et privée des timbres d'ambulances, était semblable à celles d'autrefois. C'était une nuit délivrée de la peste. Et il semblait que la maladie chassée par le froid, les lumières et la foule, se fut échappée des profondeurs obscures de la ville et réfugiée dans cette chambre chaude pour donner son ultime assaut au corps inerte de Tarrou. Le fléau ne brassait plus le ciel de la ville. Mais il sifflait doucement dans l'air lourd de la chambre. [...] Les bruits familiers de la nuit s'étaient succédé dans la rue. Quoique l'autorisation ne fût pas encore accordée, bien des voitures circulaient à nouveau. [...] Des voix, des appels, le silence revenu, le pas d'un cheval, deux tramways grinçant dans une courbe, des rumeurs imprécises et à nouveau la respiration de la nuit.[34]

The official declaration of the end of the illness comes at dawn on a beautiful February morning. This event is reported by the narrator, one of those who survived and witnessed the final liberation of the city. Camus' decision to allow Rieux to continue to live, albeit a life reduced to "the knowledge and memory of tenderness and friendship", transforms this character into the spokesperson

34 Ibid. 253.

for the author's moral message: it is necessary to live to know and recognize the evil, to rebel with the flesh against injustice and to oppose it with all one's strength. Therefore, it is important to relate his experience of the plague with the mission he has been given: to tell the horror that Oran was forced to witness. With his most obstinate struggle, it is Dr Rieux who embodies more closely Camus' philosophy of the "eternal beginning", of the meaning of existence found in the choice to start again. The idea of the "recommencement", on which this character constantly insists throughout the fight against the plague, is once again translated in terms of setting: if the first appearance of the plague takes place the morning of 16 April on the landing of the doctor's building, it concludes with the final scene in which Dr Rieux is portrayed writing his account of the plague experience, an evening on the terrace of the old asthmatic. The repetitive structure that concludes Camus' novel illustrates the repetition of every aspect of what makes the world human: life and death, loss and hope. All the contradictions that are part of human life are materialized in the final words by Dr Rieux, which significantly serve as a conclusion of *The Plague*:

> Écoutant, en effet, les cris d'allégresse qui montaient de la ville, Rieux se souvenait que cette allégresse était toujours menacée. Car il savait ce que cette foule en joie ignorait, et qu'on peut lire dans les livres, que le bacille de la peste ne meurt ni ne disparaît jamais, qu'il peut rester pendant des dizaines d'années endormi dans les meubles et le linge, qu'il attend patiemment dans les chambres, les caves, les malles, les mouchoirs et les paperasses, et que, peut-être, le jour viendrait où, pour le malheur et l'enseignement des hommes, la peste réveillerait ses rats et les enverrait mourir dans une cité heureuse.[35]

CONCLUSION

Camus opens his *Myth of Sisyphus* by saying that while for others the absurd is nothing but a conclusion, for him this end is the starting point. Defeat

35 Ibid. 273-74.

experienced as triumph does not exist in Camus' thinking and, instead of being seen as the opening to an afterlife, life with all its absurdities must belong, according to the author, to this world. The meaning that can be found in nonsense lies in the acceptance of the absurd condition that man faces in the face of his fate. From the moment that he begins to reflect on this, he adopts a new position in relation to the world, inhabiting it with the awareness of its irrationality, and at the same time freeing himself from illusions and expectations. Therefore, the absurd man for Camus is the one who has time both to experience the absurd and to rebel against it and, consequently, prepare himself for a revolt.

With the arrival of the plague, the everyday life familiar to the Oranians is replaced by a world that reduces them to strangers among themselves, as well as strangers to the city where they live. The memories of the lost homeland fade away as the struggle against the absurdity of death is announced and the propensity to perceive reality wrapped up in hopes and ideals is made impossible the moment an epidemic arrives in Oran. The death that constitutes the absurd end is the central event of *The Plague*, which confronts all characters with the experience of the act of dying, making them understand "that no morality, [that] no effort is *a priori* justifiable in the face of the bloody mathematics that orders our condition."[36] In this sense, circularity becomes the fundamental structural element of the spatio-temporal construction of the novel's literary world. The victims trapped inside the absurd walls of Oran gain the possibility of a new start in the struggle and, paradoxically, the repetitive movements within the enclosed city provide the possibility of escaping from the absurd life, now when the level of absurdity - or of abstraction - is at its highest point. In their attempt to survive the night, Dr Rieux and his companions break the vicious circle, thus recognizing the plague as the inevitable element of human life.

The closing words of the story of the plague, "the happy city", deliver the author's final message: the importance of choosing happiness over everything

36 "(…) qu'aucune morale, [qu'] aucun effort ne sont a priori justifiables devant les sanglantes mathématiques qui ordonnent notre condition.", in Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 1992), 22.

else, even with the eternal threat of the plague bacillus. The Camusian Sisyphus struggles against the gods who have condemned him to an absurd destiny, but it is the ascent that makes him stronger. Similarly, the Oranians' battle against the plague comprises their decision, day by day, to recommence, by undertaking the perilous journey once again and it is precisely in this decision to start again after each defeat where they find their happiness, given that "the struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart".[37]

In addition to Sisyphus, then, the men of *The Plague* are the embodiment of the heroes of the revolt. Faced with the realization of the absurd, Camus' heroes choose to confront the world as it is. It is a revolt which, in Camusian thought, is initially personal and negative, but which gradually moves to the collective level, embracing the whole humanity. Notwithstanding the pessimism and criticism directed at the man and his contemporaneity, at false values and reality in continuous degradation, the author invites his characters, and consequently, his readers to deal with a problem that involves everyone and that underlines the deep need for a transformation of the world, or for regeneration that always arises after a crisis. From the moment that absurd man expresses his powerlessness in relation to creation, and especially from the moment that he transforms this negation into a positive view of the problem of the absurd, he arrives at the only modality of liberation: solidarity. It is only through this virtue that the real struggle against the absurd can be achieved: accepting the world and men as they are and arriving in this way at the sole possibility of authenticity, translated in the founding words of Camus' thought: "I revolt, therefore we are." [38]

37 "(…) la lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir le cœur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.", in Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 1992), 112.

38 "Je me révolte, donc nous sommes.", in Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris : Gallimard, Folio essais, 1997), 49.

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AUTHENTICITY AND MEANINGFUL FUTURES FOR MUSEUMS:

THE ROLE OF 3D PRINTING

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This article uses the COVID –19 crisis to re –evaluate the importance of reproductions – 3D prints – for art's authenticity, and their significance in keeping art museums meaningful in a rapidly changing world. The fixation on 'auratic experiences', inherent to artworks' materiality is integral to contemporary art theory and museum practice, resulting in a rejection of reproductions. However, the inaccessibility to engage with physical artworks due to the coronacrisis would suggest a loss of art's significance and the museum's importance. Yet, the opposite is happening, as engaging with artworks happened via anti-authentic: reproductions. Dennis Dutton's analysis of authenticity helps unfolding the various values an artwork can have beyond its physicality. Additionally, Henry Jenkins' convergence theory helps seeing our relationship with artworks as dispersed over mixed media, reaching beyond materiality. By considering museums as multifaceted mediums themselves, it becomes possible to understand the dynamics of authenticity in museums without physical borders. Authenticity is not static; it is a social construct allowing various perceptions that change over time, resulting in shifting appreciations of both artworks and 3D prints. Finally, ways are proposed in which reproductions can attribute to developing meaningful narratives that can take place with limited or no engagement with artworks or museums' physicality.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID –19 virus has changed the cultural landscape as we know it beyond recognition. As all public activities ceased or were delayed and there is an obligation for everyone to stay at home as much as possible and to keep a 1.5 –meter distance, museums have been faced with major challenges: the majority have closed their doors or restricted their opening hours, projects are delayed and exhibitions have been canceled, plus there is no indication of how long these restrictions are going to last. Right now, unable to visit museums, many have found themselves at home searching the internet for encounters with artworks outside the museum's walls and without the original artwork's materiality, via anti –authentic – namely digital – reproductions. Ever since German sociologist Walter Benjamin (1936 [2008]) described how reproduction (in his case photography) changes artworks' historic value – in Benjamin's words: 'aura' – into one of exhibition value, losing its artistic relevance and connections to the past, contemporary Western society has been highly fixated on the breath –taking encounter with the physical original artwork. [1] Moreover, we are nowadays capable of creating art reproductions beyond Benjamin's imagination as 3D printing has made its entrance into the art world. After a scan of a painting is made using a non –invasive photographic method, 3D printing uses the layering of hardening (ultraviolet) light –sensitive plastics and inkjet printing to make a one –on –one reproduction of any painting possible.[2] In contrast to other reproduction techniques (e.g. photography and digital methods such as augmented reality), 3D printing not only replicates the whole three –dimensional object including its colour but most of its material, aesthetic and physical details: its topography, colour, glossiness, and – to some extent – transparency can be closely mimicked. With just one click of a button, a painting can be reproduced at high quality in just a matter of hours.[3] However, 3D printing still faces some limitations: printing large complex structures and closely mimicking a painting's material appearance are still challenging. Furthermore, the technology is quite costly and requires specific

1 Walter Benjamin and Jim A. Underwood, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

2 Liselore N M Tissen et al., "Using 3D Scanning to support Conservation Treatments for Paintings," *Materials Science and Engineering* 949 (2020), 9.

3 Liselore N M. Tissen, "Authenticity vs 3D Reproduction," *Arts in Society. Academic Rhapsodies*, (2020).

technological knowledge. Nonetheless, although the technology needs some improvement, it is a promising vehicle for the art field and it is undeniably going to influence our perception of art and museum practice.

Despite our familiarity with reproductions as we see them everywhere on our phones, on billboards, or via our computers, Benjamin's focus on the divide between authenticity and replication has not diminished. On the contrary, sociologist Hillel Schwartz (1997) shows that the 'material turn' in the humanities and social sciences from the mid –1960s onwards has made us "obsessed" with an individual artwork's materiality as the ultimate proof of a historical connection.[4] Simultaneously, due to "stunning facsimiles", the increasing quality of copies, modern Western society's anxiety about "the real" is continuously growing. This is especially the case with 3D prints, as they are almost indistinguishable from their original counterpart, both visually and physically. Moreover, In museum practice, this means that safeguarding an artwork's materiality providing Benjamin's 'aura' has become a top priority of museums. This has resulted in a contemporary exhibition model in which the largely self –funded museum is largely dependent on the public's direct engagement with the 'real' physical artwork through organized blockbuster exhibitions, mass –tourism, attracting large groups of visitors and the organization of educational programs on location as ways to generate income. It is undeniable that visitor numbers will suffer due to capacity restrictions and a general concern about crowded indoor spaces, putting pressure on our no longer sustainable contemporary exhibition model.

As we are no longer able to see the original artwork, all opportunities of immersing ourselves in the original artwork's 'aura' – the quality of an artwork that stimulates a personal bond between the artwork and the beholder. This connection can only be provided by its unique material manifestation in time and space, protected within the walls of the museum as the guardians of the 'real' or 'genuine' experience have been entirely or partially eliminated. In the

4 Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles*, (Princeton: Zone Books, 2014)

context of Benjamin's theory, this would mean the end of art's significance, a cultural catastrophe: only in the presence of the artwork can a connection between the artwork and the beholder be forged, something no reproduction will ever be capable of achieving. Yet, it appears that the opposite is happening: the Dutch Museum Association's (*Museumvereniging*) yearly National Museum Research (*Nationaal Museum Onderzoek*) shows that despite and maybe even because of the virus and, consequently, the lack of engagement with the original artwork, the involvement with objects of museum collections is increasing.[5] Digital platforms such as *Google Arts & Culture* have helped provide a museum experience in COVID times and could also be a way to bring art into your home.[6] Yet, in my personal case, I did not have to rely on digital reproduction methods alone as I spent my lockdown at home with a physical 3D print of Carel Fabritius' *The Goldfinch* (1654) (Figure 1, 2 & 3.). Being with the 3D printed

5 De Museumvereniging, "Het Nationaal Museumonderzoek 2020," *De Museumvereniging*, accessed November 2020, https://www.museumvereniging.nl/media/nmo_2020_-_persbericht.pdf
De Museumvereniging, "Er Is Een Breed En Groeiend Draagvlak Voor Musea,", *De Museumvereniging*, accessed November 2020, https://www.museumvereniging.nl/er-is-een-breed-en-groeiend-draagvlak-voor-musea

6 Google Arts & Culture, accessed May 2021 https://artsandculture.google.com/

Fig. 1. The Goldfinch
Carolus Fabritius, 1654, 33,5 x 22,8 cm, Oil on panel
The Mauritshuis, The Hague, 605.

version strengthened the realization that the bond with the original artwork, its significance, importance and its 'aura' is still present even though I am not directly in its physical surroundings. To me, the 3D print has become the embodiment of the artwork that has experienced these confusing times with me – it became my 'corona buddy'. That way, the 3D print – a different material from the original artwork yet aesthetically identical – has provided me with a meaningful connection or value to the 'auratic' artwork safely stored at the Mauritshuis in The Hague.

Fig. 2. 3D print of The Goldfinch on my living room wall printed by Canon Production Printing B.V. Venlo.

Fig. 3. Close up of the 3D print of The Goldfinch

This shows that, unlike Benjamin's suggestion, which until today has remained the prevalent way of thinking within the Western art world, an artwork's 'aura' seems to be more than a fixed entity embedded in the object's role in a traceable past. On the contrary, the lack of physical contact due to the omnipresence of a deadly virus shows that art's significance reaches far beyond its material unicity and the museum's physical walls. Yet, how are an artwork's non –physical values constructed and how do these intangible characteristics originate from the artwork itself? Could a 3D print possibly take over any other non –perceptive authentic quality, thus becoming a genuine representation of the original painting? Could this mean that 3D prints, which in materiality are anything but the original artwork be meaningful to the original artwork's 'cult value' and the sustainability of the museum experience after all?

From the perspective of 3D printing, this article uses the COVID –19 crisis as an opportunity to re –evaluate the significance of reproductions for art's authenticity and the way they can contribute to keeping the art museums meaningful in our rapidly changing cultural environment. The first section of this article provides a brief introduction to the history and development of our contemporary obsession with an artwork's material unicity and the rejection of reproductions. Using philosopher David Dutton's approach to authenticity expressed in his essay *Authenticity in art* (2005) will unveil the way we nowadays perceive artworks and experience their authentic value.[7] This helps in unfolding the way an artwork's authentic value, and potentially that of a 3D print, can be constructed without relying on materiality alone. The third section introduces Henry Jenkins' (2008) theory of the culture of convergence to be able to understand our contemporary perception of and relationships with artworks as dispersed over mixed media in and beyond the artwork's materiality and the museum's physical walls.[8] Consequently, it will become possible to understand that although we have become more physically distanced from the artwork's material authenticity, it appears that 3D prints (and other reproduction methods, including digital) contribute to a deeper

7 Dennis Dutton, "Authenticity in Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, Oxford Handbooks Series (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2005).

8 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press (NYU Press, 2008).

connection to art than ever before. Based on this analysis, the article ends by proposing ways in which museums can use technologies such as 3D printing to adapt to the new circumstances enforced by this deadly virus. That way, new and meaningful narratives can be developed which can take place in a world where there is limited or even no engagement with the actual object or the museum as a physical space.

MATERIAL AUTHENTICITY: A POST –MODERN OBSESSION

Nowadays, when we go to a museum we expect to see 'authentic' artworks. As the Oxford English Dictionary exemplifies, 'aura' or 'authenticity' is the condition of being authentic, proving that an object or an artwork is *genuine*, created in a *traditional* way that faithfully resembles an original based on *reliable* and *accurate* facts, and that something has the quality of being *real* or *true*.[9] But what makes something real, genuine or true to us? Who decides what is considered 'traditional'? And which facts do people consider reliable and accurate? When we speak of authenticity in contemporary Western society, we usually mean an artwork in materiality that is single and unique, and is signed by an artist: everything a copy – or a 3D print if you will – is not. Examining the artwork's original material reveals the artwork's identity, which expresses the artist's intention. However, this contemporary fixation on the authenticity of the material object in tradition only covers a small period of our (art) history, as it has only developed over the past two and a half centuries.

During the Middle Ages, for example, art's authenticity was perceived as a collective phenomenon where the church decided whether or not something was authentic, and where truth or authenticity did not rely on material originality but on its function within society as the provider of a connection with the supernatural. As art historian Nicole Ex explains, unlike today, an artwork's meaning and importance were not bound to the individual artist who signed the object nor the artifact's unique traceable past. Art was seen as a collective

9 Oxford Dictionaries, *Authenticity*, accessed November 1, 2020 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/authenticity
Oxford Dictionaries, *Authentic,* accessed November 1, 2020 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/authentic

phenomenon that served the community as a whole.[10] However, Ex explains, in the subsequent centuries this medieval idea was rejected: time was no longer seen as circular, but as linear, meaning that art was a continuously evolving and self –improving entity.[11] The slowly increasing awareness of the differences between the past and present meant that artworks were no longer seen as replaceable and identical, but gained importance as individual historical artifacts that should be cherished.[12] During the Scientific Revolution (roughly 1550 –1700) in Western Europe in which the natural sciences such as mathematics, physics and astronomy advanced considerably and generated new insights into how we perceive and understand the (material) world around us. French philosopher René Descartes' (1596 –1650) famous quote *cogito ergo sum* (I know, therefore I am) perfectly describes the shifting philosophy that validity no longer relied on magic, rituals, or intangible superpowers, but instead, due to the development of tools in support of scientific breakthroughs (e.g. the telescope), it became measurable, personal and based on empirical facts.[13] The idea grew that art's authenticity is solely embedded in the scientifically provable qualities of the artwork as an object; hence the elements that make up its materiality and unique composition: its paint, impasto, canvas and *patina*, art scholar Thierry Lenain explains.[14] No longer was the likeness of visual characteristics and a plausible declaration of an artwork's identity sufficient in determining art's quality and granting an object its 'auratic' experience.

The effects of the Scientific Revolution and the succeeding technical revolution it started with new reproduction methods (e.g. the printing press, etching and lithography) radically changed the art field. The expansion of humanistic thinking started a re –evaluation of society and increased the interest in the search for individuality and the unicity of materials – artworks – that attribute to one's agency. The romantic ideas of philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1754) – a reaction to these scientific and technical developments – mark the start of an increasing interest in authenticity as a topic for philosophical reflection.[15] He described authenticity as a manner of being: to be authentic is to

10 Nicole Ex, *Zo Goed Als Oud: De Achterkant van Het Restaureren* (Amsterdam: Amber, 1993), 130–48.

11 *Ibidem*, 52-53.

12 I must emphasize that although there was indeed an initial awareness of historicity and the idea of being able to trace objects back in time, this did not mean that all previous ways of handling art were rejected. The imitation and the reuse of ancient objects and artworks was still largely executed and remained of importance.

13 *Cogito ergo sum* can be found in René Descartes' Discours de la Méthode (1639), a book that argues that the truth can only be found in science.

14 Thierry Lenain, *Art Forgery: The History of a Modern Obsession* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 164–67.

15 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality: On the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (Auckland: Floating Press, 2009).

perceive the individual self in a way that is specifically our own, or simply put: to be authentic is to be unique in a moment, time and manner which cannot be strictly defined.[16] This romantic desire to create a distinct 'national identity that is specifically – in Rousseau's words – one's own, increased with the rise of nationalism in Europe, starting with the French Revolution in 1789. As many contemporary art scholars explain, to be able to express the desire for one's own unique identity, art and the artist became powerful players.[17] For this reason, Ex explains, it became important to conserve the objects that represent national identity. This romantic idea of the exploration and expression of the individual self drastically changed the way art was understood, and this can still be felt today.

Artworks, for the first time, became objects of elaborate study, as it became a priority to secure the unique lifecycle of the singular material object in time and tradition. The necessity of collecting and categorizing artifacts led to the development of the museum as a place to display and educate people about these important material remains of previous times, Lenain explains.[18] Furthermore, Ex clarifies, the nostalgic feelings an object's materiality envoked in the viewer meant that art no longer fulfilled a documentary function: an artwork becomes a relic of previous times, paving the way for the romantic idea that material deformations, discolorations and discrepancies that provide proof of the past should be cherished and, therefore, should remain visible for future generations. An object's decay, Ex argues, was no longer seen as a distortion or a negative effect, but, on the contrary, became one of art's most important assets.[19]

As Ex and Dennis Dutton remark, the fixation on individuality and the idea that the 'auratic experience' is inherent to an artwork's materiality has systematically become an integral part of twentieth–century art philosophy, theory and museum practice.[20] Western society today is still fixed on the *ego*: the belief that authenticity is unique to every individual and the only way to encounter

16 *Ibidem.*

17 Ex, *Zo Goed Als Oud,* 53-55; Lenain, *Art Forgery*.

18 Lenain, *Art Forgery*, 258–61.

19 Ex, *Zo Goed Als Oud*, 54-56.

20 Ex, *Zo Goed Als Oud,* 55-57; Dutton, "Authenticity in Art", 176-188.

'aura' is in an original artwork, that is, in a work of art with a unique composition of materials, characteristic of a fixed moment in time, and skilfully crafted by the autonomous genius. Although we are more familiar with technical reproducibility than Benjamin was at the time, his focus on the divide between authenticity and replication has not diminished. Analysing statistics of museum visits and tourism in the Netherlands provided by the Museum Association (*Museum Vereniging*) makes it clear that the opposite is happening: the fact that people from all over the world travel to see artworks in real life shows that Benjamin's prediction of an entire replacement of an artwork's 'cult value' by its 'exhibition value' has not happened.[21] Moreover, various art historians such as Ann –Sophie Lehmann (2015) and Mari Lending (2020) observe that since the 1990s there has been a significant growth in the focus on an artwork's material properties, a re-materialization, within art history, where the history, historicity and origin of materials and the materiality of things and objects have become the main topic of study within the art field.[22] Furthermore, art historians and museum experts such as Sarah Dudley (2010) and Eileen Hooper –Greenhill (2000) argue that the Western focus on materiality is largely shaped by museum practices. In a world dominated by reproductions, safeguarding an artwork's materiality as the only true provider of Benjamin's 'aura' has remained the priority of museums.[23]

MUSEUM MATERIALITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Historically, as an extension of the nineteenth-century *Kunst und Wunderkammer*, the goal of museums has been object-centred to a large extent: as private collections became public, the museum's function became one to collect, document, classify and take care of objects to be able to disclose these artifacts and to provide reliable information about our past, museum specialist Bettina Carbonell argues.[24] In this sense, I argue that a museum's mission has always been two-fold: on the one hand, it revolves around objects as it is there to conserve the materials of our past and present; on the

21 De Museumvereniging, "Museum Vereniging, Bijna 9 Miljoen Museumbezoeken in 2018 Met Museumkaart," accessed November 2020 https://www.museumvereniging.nl/bijna-9-miljoen-museumbezoeken-in-2018-met-museumkaart

22 Anne-Sophie Lehmann., Christy Anderson, Anne Dunlop, Pamela H. Smith (eds.), "The Matter of the Medium. Some Tools for an Art Theoretical Interpretation of Materials", *The Matter of Art: Materials, Technologies, Meanings 1200-1700*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 25-27.
Lending, M., "Returning to Distorted Origins", *The aura in the age of digital materiality: rethinking preservation in the shadow of an uncertain future*, (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2020), 57-63.

23 Sarah Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 1–21, 99-103,185-189; E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, Museum Meanings (London: Taylor & Francis, 2020).

24 Bettina M. Carbonell, *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (London: Wiley, 2012), 1–11.

other hand, it has always had a societal role that it has to attribute to and reflect the necessities of contemporary culture. Therefore, museums have always been involved with society, according to museum specialist McClellan.[25] By conserving and classifying objects, museums build their authority through providing legitimate cultural knowledge based on the authenticity and the material validity of the objects in their collection. From this point of view, the way these objects are interpreted is mediated by the museum whose authority is mainly based on the superiority of the artworks that form part of its collection. Therefore, McClellan says, the societal focus of museums and their communication to the public has mostly been dedicated to educating the public, curating and the exploration of museums' historical development through their objects.[26] Moreover, sociologist Tony Bennett (1995) adds, this emphasis on the material object has resulted in what he refers to as 'the exhibitionary complex', in which museums engage mainly in a one –way conversation of 'show and tell' about their objects.[27] Additionally, professors of pedagogy and art education Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo (2010) argue that the selection, legitimization, inclusion and/or exclusion of these objects, and the contexts and cultures they belong to results in museums becoming houses of institutional power as they obtain both material and symbolic power, with the curator as the gatekeeper of the real and genuine.[28]

As Hooper –Greenhill describes, this model of communicating information via the museum's collection has remained in museums for a long time, as museums remained largely unresearched and rather exclusive until the late 1980s. However, since the 1990s, museums have become more and more mainstream and a topic of re –evaluation.[29] This has caused a shift in museology, which art historian Peter Vergo (1997) classified as 'new museology', where there was a growing awareness of the social and political role of museums and the necessity to encompass community participation in curatorial practices.[30] Since that time, museums have started to reconsider their function in society as one that should focus more on the socio –cultural aspects of an artwork, its relationship

25 Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao*, Ahmanson Murphy Fine Arts Imprint (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), 5–19.

26 *Ibidem*, 19–33.

27 Tony Bennett, "The Exibitionary Complex," The Birth of the Museum, 1 (1995): 30.

28 Carmel Borg and Peter Mayo, "Museums: Adult Education as Cultural Politics," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 127 (2010): 35–44.

29 Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*.

30 Peter Vergo, *The New Museology*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), 22-29.

between people and objects and art's intangible values rather than on the object itself. Whereas museums primarily focused on collecting, conducting research and presenting the outcomes, nowadays educating the public has become more important, according to museum education specialists John H. Falk and Lynn Dierking.[31] Consequently, there has been an increasing awareness that the authenticity of original artworks, their copies and the museum as a physical space is not solely linked to their unicity as a physical object in time and space but reaches far beyond this. This has resulted in a pressing redefinition of the concept of the museum to one that is more inclusive, democratizing and polyphonic.[32] Today, the museum is defined as follows, according to the 2017 International Council of Museums' (ICOM) *Code of ethics*:

> "A museum is a non –profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the **tangible and intangible** heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."[33]

Although this clearly states the importance of art's intangible evidence, Dudley critiques that in reality, the object –focused policy still prevails in most Western museums. She explains that authentic objects are displayed 'as is', relying on the interpretation of their visual and aesthetic qualities, the more semantic and symbolic meaning, which is often not understandable without additional information. The increasing attention to museums in the mainstream, art's popularity and the resulting model of blockbuster exhibitions and mass events attribute to the objectification of authenticity. In order to support these demands evoked by these developments, museums have to create exhibitions that are generally interesting and which cover easily understandable themes that appeal to the majority of society. As Dudley describes, the easiest way a museum can do this is through its objects: the objects are actors expressing the truthfulness of the museum's message.[34] As Simon explains, a museum's

31 John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking, *The Museum Experience* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), i–ix

32 "Museums are democratizing, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing." – The International Council of Museums - https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/

33 The International Council of Museums, "The ICOM Code of Ethics," accessed December 2020, https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf

34 Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, 1–18.

processes of registration, classification and displaying of exhibits result in an authoritarian attitude and the creation of a one –way conversation between institute and visitor: museum missions claim that museums are public trusts but in reality, artworks are still owned by the museum, not the public. In a world where reproductions, 'fake news' and high –quality forgeries are omnipresent, museums are supposed to curate and communicate about 'the real (object)', rejecting almost every form of physical reproductions, whereas visitors are supposed to swallow what is presented without asking questions.[35] Additionally, the *Code of Ethics* shows that one of the museums' main tasks is to display primary evidence of history, resulting in a rejection of reproductions. If museums decide to use copies, reproductions and facsimiles, they should label them clearly as such.[36] Thus, art historian Fiona Cameron (2007) explains, it seems that museums have opted to create a world of true material objects that exist almost completely separately from any human concerns and the desires and conflicts of society.[37] However, Simon, Dudley and Hooper –Greenhill emphasize that museum objects never stand alone, as their significance is largely constructed through social engagements outside of the material object and the museum's physical walls. Moreover, Dudley emphasizes that museums restrict us compared to when we are outside: our senses experience and interpret the world, which is reduced not only by the museum's walls as a building but also through its choice of objects, mediums and frames to express its ethos.

Now more than ever, living in a world dominated by a pandemic, when there is no chance of seeing original works of art, let alone engagement with the museum as a physical space, it has become evident that our engagement with artworks and museums is able to continue. It may be that it is growing entirely without their 'authentic' material presence. As I am confined to my home with a reproduction of an original artwork, I have indirectly dedicated meaning and significance to the original artwork, as it became an artwork that has been through these tough times with me. The idea that an artwork's

35 Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (La Vergne: Lightning Source Inc, 2010), i–v, 120–35.

36 The International Council of Museums, "The ICOM Code of Ethics," 25–30.

37 Fiona R. Cameron, "Object-Oriented Democracies: Conceptualising Museum Collections in Networks," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 23, no. 3 (2008): 229–43.

significance is solely based on its materiality as a confirmation of 'truth' and the museum providing this 'authentic experience' is for this reason unattainable. Furthermore, it falls short in acknowledging the significance of art and the important societal role of the museum. The crisis pressurizes museums to grasp the meaning of artworks beyond their finalized materiality. But how do artworks generate meaning beyond their material? Does a museum need to rely on the physical encounter with objects alone? Thus, can a reproduction obtain significance after all?

TRANSCENDING MATERIALITY: THE INTANGIBLE QUALITIES OF ART

Nowadays, it has become evident that artworks are appreciated beyond their material qualities. For example, artists play with the idea of artworks as unique material objects (e.g. Dadaist Marcel Duchamp's ready –mades). Furthermore, contemporary artworks are often made of unstable materials, leading to their inevitable self –destruction or are not made of physical materials at all (e.g. Beeple's *Everydays — The First 5000 Days* (2021) (Figure 4.))

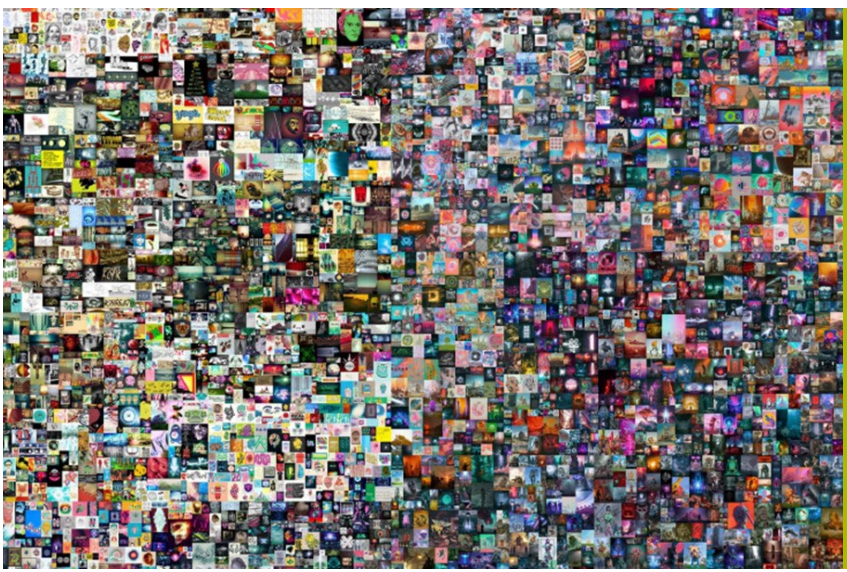


Fig. 4. Everydays —
The First 5000 Days
Beeple, 2011 –2020, NFT

challenging the concept of 'aura' as solely embedded in an artwork's physical presence. Moreover, due to globalization and digital interconnectivity, there is a rising awareness in museum practice that 'aura' is a dynamic characteristic, constructed through a multiplicity of interpretations depending on a variety of factors, among others culture and ethnicity.[38] Recent events such as the fire in the Nôtre Dame cathedral in Paris and the Islamic State's destruction of archaeological sites not only demonstrate the fragility of cultural heritage, they also underscore the socio –cultural value of artworks that reaches far beyond and are more long –lasting than materials alone. One author whose essay is useful in explaining how art's intangible qualities can be captured and explained and whose text is often referred to is philosopher Denis Dutton.[39] To me, he proposes an interesting yet comprehensive and concise scheme for thinking about an artwork's authenticity as an element that results from its external and more conceptual significance, rather than being based on its unique manifestation alone. He adopts an interesting approach to reproduction, arguing that an artwork's artistic experience reaches far beyond its physical form: it can be functional, material and conceptual.

Dutton sees authenticity as a "dimension word" as it depends very much on the context and the relation to what is considered to be authentic.[40] Dutton suggests that authenticity consists of two contrasting notions. Firstly, he distinguishes *nominal authenticity*, which correlates with the historicity of the object itself and is expressed by the correct identification of the origins, authorship, or provenance of an object. Thus, nominal authenticity is highly dependent on its material qualities, as it provides direct evidence of the object's connection to the past. This ensures that the artwork is properly named, rather than a forgery or a falsely portrayed version. Looking at a 3D print's material clearly reveals that it is nothing like that of Fabritius' original as it is made of plastic, a recently invented material that does not carry the same traces of time. Thus, the *nominal authenticity* of the 3D print is not the same as the seventeenth –century *Goldfinch*.

38 Dudley, *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*., 1-18.

39 Dutton, "Authenticity in Art."

40 Ibidem, 258-63.

Secondly, whether the nominal authenticity of an object or artwork and its materiality grants it some unique value, and whether it is irreplaceable, depends on *expressive authenticity*: a subjective approach to an artwork as an expression of the values and beliefs of an individual or society. What he means by this is that nominally a 3D print of Fabritius' *The Goldfinch*, in the context of its original, will never be (and can never be seen as) an original Fabritius. Yet, in its own assessment, it will be an original and authentic artwork of the copyist – or even the 3D printer – that made it. Thus, the nominal value depends on the context of the value judgment.

Although Dutton's theory seems simple, he adds something crucial to the assessment of value concerning authentic objects. In his text, Dutton quotes: "Too often discussions of authenticity ignore the role of the audience in establishing a context for creative or performing art."[41] Here, he emphasizes that authentication does not end with the confirmation of the nominal authentic object itself, but rather starts when the authentication has taken place, at which point the authentic object becomes the subject of constant re –evaluation. What makes something irreplaceable, authentic depends on more dynamic aspects other than just its static historicity, age value and its nominal authenticity. In his text Dutton questions himself:

> "Why then, do critics and historians of art, music, and literature, private collectors, curators, and enthusiasts of every stripe invest so much time and effort in trying to establish the provenance, origins, and proper identity — the nominal authenticity — of artistic objects?"[42]

Dutton continues by saying that the conventions of authenticity shift over time in response to changes in the context in which it is embedded, such as the socio-cultural environment the artwork originates from, the way it is displayed and interpreted. To him, artworks are first and foremost "[…] manifestations of both individual and collective values, in virtually every conceivable

41 Dutton, "Authenticity in Art," 269.

42 Dutton, 269.

relative weighting and combination."[43] In this sense, a 3D print of Fabritius' *The Goldfinch* could acquire its own significance when individuals or larger audiences appreciate it in a particular way. Furthermore, the assignment of value to a 3D print does not have to mean that the 3D print replaces the original: expressive authenticity allows Fabritius' original as well as the 3D print to exist side by side in harmony as they both attribute to the artwork's authenticity in their own particular way. Dutton argues that authenticity as a concept is hard to describe because it is complex and peculiar, and is a quality that is not static but a phenomenon that is always in flux. For this reason, it is hard, if not impossible, to construct a uniform definition of authenticity as it is different in every individual case.[44] For this reason, I argue that considering works of art only as materially valuable entities falls short in capturing what the authenticity of art truly entails. Based on this analysis, I believe that authenticity is something intangible that cannot be ascribed to a static state or object, to just the original artwork's material alone. Authenticity is always contingent, ever-changing, dependent on various factors and can be attributed to different qualities of an artwork. To use art historian Adam Lowe's words:

> "Objects are the repositories of compounded ideas, thoughts, materials, evidence, transactions and the actions of time. They are the counterpoint of the ephemeral communications of today – they require time and reflection but they deliver complex insights – they reflect and redirect every thought we impose upon them."[45]

Only a small part of the notion of authenticity depends on the artwork as a material expression of a set moment in time and space. Shifts due to the changing relationships of the individual (artist) in society, new scientific discoveries, changes in social networks and transitions in cultural perception and preference are far more crucial for the assessment of authenticity. 'Aura' is place and time dependent because it is inherently connected to fluctuations in the perception of a variety of values which influence the significance of both

43 Dutton, 270.

44 Dutton, 266–72.

45 A. Lowe, *The Aura in the Age of Digital Materiality - Rethinking Preservation in the Shadow of an Uncertain Future* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2020), 16.

original artworks and their 3D printed reproductions. For example, because of technical research, we know how *The Goldfinch's* materials have changed and discoloured over time. Using 3D printing, it becomes possible to reconstruct the painting the way it would have looked when Fabritius' had just finished painting the artwork; hence coming closer to the artist's intention. Thus, hypothetically speaking, if society's assessment of aura no longer relied mainly on material originality, but shifted towards conceptual similarity, the 3D print would become more 'auratic' than the version painted by Fabritius.

Now that we have concluded that a 3D print will never replace the original artwork's materiality but, in theory, can attribute to a painting's overall value, as authenticity is not static, singular and final but fluid, plural and dynamic, it is important to analyse the way this impacts museum practice. As this section has shown, in the COVID and post-COVID society the significance of artworks is and can be constructed – possibly entirely – outside of the artwork's original material and outside the museum's walls. It becomes clear that the object –focused approach that relies on material authenticity is no longer sustainable and should be re –evaluated. Right now, the consequences of COVID-19 highlight that society quickly adapts to limitations in physical contact. This emphasizes and confirms the idea of 'aura' as something that not only transcends the artwork's material itself, but also that of the museum as a physical space. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify how this conversion of authenticity from single and static to a more plural and fluid perception affects the interaction with museum objects, and, consequently, the museum experience. This will elucidate the role that 3D prints play in contemporary society and whether the significance of the original artwork can be applied in any way to these prints. It will then be possible to determine whether 3D reproductions can be useful for museums and their collections in enabling them to become more resilient and to ensure their longevity.

THE CONTEMPORARY CULTURE OF CONVERGENCE

One often-quoted way of understanding the contemporary perception of art and the role of (digital) art reproduction is provided by media theorist Henry Jenkins. In the book *Convergence culture* (2006), Jenkins emphasizes how media and digital technology not only contribute to but have also become crucial for the creation of art's significance. In his book, he describes that since the 1990s, when mass media, computer technology and the Internet took flight, our culture has changed significantly. Although Jenkins' text mainly focuses on new media technologies that are computational and the fact that he does not specifically mention 3D printing, his theory is still useful in understanding the changing contemporary relationship between the reproduction, the original, the museum and the museum visitor. In his theory, Jenkins recognizes the changing relationships and experiences with new media. The rise of (media) technology has made it possible to reproduce any form of information and it has facilitated the constant flow of content across different platforms, in which interaction, connection and meaning-making have become endless.[46] For example, one no longer needs to visit the Mauritshuis to see *The Goldfinch* as new media and the reproductions it creates has made it possible to engage with artworks anywhere at any time, for example on the Internet, through our smartphones, in printed media or via digital apps (e.g. AR, VR). The omnipresence of reproductions and the possibility to engage with new information and each other has caused culture to change from – in his words – *divergence* to *convergence*. To be able to better clarify this shift from divergence to convergence, I consider it essential to make a distinction between two facets which I will refer to as *media convergence* and *social convergence*.

Firstly, *media convergence* is quite similar to Dutton's explanation of the artwork's *expressive authenticity*. Jenkins explains that media convergence can be understood as a combination of new and old media within one single piece of work. Therefore, he argues, the significance of an artwork no longer relies

46 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 1–13.

solely on the artwork's material as displayed in a museum alone but, instead, is constructed through a multi-media network. Jenkins argues that the importance of art has become dispersed over a multiplicity of media. In a similar fashion to Dutton's statement, Jenkins emphasizes that reproductions that occur via already existing and new technologies – such as 3D printing – will not replace the significance of old media – the original artwork itself –, but it will add to its significance.[47] Eventually, he continues, these art reproductions dispersed over various media together with the artwork will eventually merge to the point where they all contribute to the artwork's significance. In the case of *The Goldfinch*, this means that Fabritius' original seventeenth-century painting at the Mauritshuis together with the 3D print I have at home – each having its own significance in a different context – contribute to the whole significance the artwork has for me and the experience it gives me.

This dispersion of information and the multiplicity of forms of engagement with artworks has not changed the perception of artworks alone, but has, consequently, also had its effects on our social behavior and ways of communicating. This change from social divergence to social convergence, according to Jenkins' theory, means that communication no longer relies on just one medium – the artwork – and one source – the museum – that are the providers of valid information. Instead, information is received and provided through the simultaneous and multiple uses of a variety of media, each conceived with the strengths of each medium in mind.[48] For example, whereas the Mauritshuis provides the artwork's real material, a 3D print allows me to touch the painting's brushstrokes, something I cannot do with Fabritius' original. Furthermore, the continuous flow of content and the accessibility of new information and interpretation across different forms of media, Jenkins argues, presents a back-and-forth power struggle over the distribution and control of content: information, creation and the way art is communicated is no longer under the control of one authority – the museum – but becomes accessible to everyone in the technical environment.[49] Because of the latter,

47 Ibid., 1–16, 112, 185–90.

48 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture,* 1–16.

49 Ibid. 215–16.

there has also been a shift in our behaviour, which I want to refer to as *social convergence*. What this entails is that instead of passively receiving information, the contemporary museum visitor has become more actively engaged, and hence more critical of the information that is served to them. Additionally, digital scholar Marc Prensky (2001) observes, today's generation and those to come are *digital natives*, meaning that they have been used to the interactive culture of computers from birth.[50] They are more accustomed to using technology, taking the collection of information into their own hands, and also more accustoms to engaging with artworks in ways that go beyond their original material. As art scholar Meredith Hoy describes, the way we learn and work is more remote, interactive, personal and individual yet global at the same time. Because of the latter, convergence culture is one of more engagement: where in the past people used to fulfil an individual role, they now find a collective process of social interaction. Their engagement with original artworks and their (digital) reproductions is therefore different from that of earlier generations, as to them, this engagement with multiple versions of an artwork is familiar. Today's generation rapidly and easily switches from one medium to the other, between artwork and (3D) reproduction. The shift from passive to active and interactive, from exclusive to global, from absorbing to criticizing is to me what defines the recent *social convergence*.

Yet, what does this convergence mean for museums in theory and practice? As Simon proposes, this shift of both social convergence as well as material convergence has caused a significant shift in the behaviour of museum visitors:

> "[…] people want to do more than just "attend" cultural events and institutions. The social Web has ushered in a dizzying set of tools and design patterns that make participation more accessible than ever. Visitors expect access to a broad spectrum of information sources and cultural perspectives. They expect the ability to respond and be taken seriously. They expect the ability to discuss, share, and remix what they consume."[51]

50 Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon* , 5 (2001): 1–6.

51 Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, ii.

Considering Simon's expression here in the context of Jenkin's theory of convergence explains why the Museum Association's report shows a significant increase in museum visitors between the ages of 19 and 25 since museums had to switch from physical/material to more digital tools to exhibit their artworks: the perception of art, the engagement with objects and the experience of art were no longer curated by the museum alone, but could be taken into one's own hands.[52] *Culture, Corona, Crisis : best practices and the future of Dutch museums* (2021) – an analysis done on the effects of the lockdowns on the Dutch cultural field – shows that although museums already presented their artworks via extra mediums and platforms (e.g. via digital collection studios such as the Rijksmuseum's *Rijksstudio*) to some extent, the limitations imposed by the virus and the consequent necessity to include new media has forced museums to drastically change museum practice and presentation formats.[53] In this sense, the report shows that museums have become increasingly dependent on hardware and software development, and the careful curation of their digital programming has become more important. Consequently, the inevitable shift has already started to take place from a previously more physical, analogue, massive, and passive relationship with art and the museum experience to one that is more remote, multi–medial, personal, and (inter) active, towards a museum approach that complies more with Jenkins' convergence theory.

We have discussed that an artwork's authentic value cannot only be considered as an element that is solely connected to its physical manifestation but instead should be seen as a constantly shifting concept that relies on discussion, interpretation, and individual socio–cultural experiences. *Het nieuwe normaal* (the new normal) has forced museums to let go of the prevalent idea of the museum as a physical space and the individualistic idea of the one and only artwork providing the 'auratic' experience. Because of the material and social convergence of society, museums have become part of a complex dialogue between visitors, users, artworks, and objects that on the one hand

52 De Museumvereniging, "Er Is Een Breed En Groeiend Draagvlak Voor Musea." (accessed November 2020).

53 Liselore N.M. Tissen, "Culture, Corona, Crisis : Best Practices and the Future of Dutch Museums," *Journal for Conservation and Museum Studies*, 2021.

takes place within the walls of their institutions, but on the other hand increasingly beyond the boundaries of their buildings dispersed over numerous types of new and old media. This approach leaves room for 3D prints to exist and to potentially contribute to an enhanced connection to both the artwork as well as the museum. Yet, what do we make of all of this? What will the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 museum look like and how can a 3D print contribute to this paradigm shift?

3D PRINTING AS AN EXTENSION OF THE WORK OF ART AND THE MUSEUM EXPERIENCE

The convergence imposed by new digital media which is highlighted by the consequences of COVID-19 may help reinvent the boundaries of the museum experience. Furthermore, deriving from Simon's theory, it is quintessential to move from traditional to a more participatory design as authenticity is not permanent, singular and fixed, but rather ephemeral, plural and dispersed. What this entails is that the way that information flows between institutions and users is changing. In the pre-COVID more traditional exhibitions and programs, the interpretations of the past were mediated with authority based on the primacy of the museum. Here, the institution provided content for visitors to consume, enforcing a one-way conversation. In contrast, post-COVID museum design should be more participatory. This, Simon says, could be done by focusing more on making the content high quality and accessible. That way, every visitor, regardless of their background, interest, religion, values or beliefs receives or can create a good and reliable experience.[54]

Yet, how can 3D printing contribute to this phenomenon? In *3D Reproductions of Cultural Heritage Artefacts: Evaluation of significance and experience* (2021) – a study that analyses the significance of 3D reproduction technologies for creating enhanced experiences with artworks – it became evident that for museum visitors, 3D reproduction technologies were considered essential for

54 Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, i–v, 1–6.

maintaining and enhancing the relationship between the artwork and the beholder. This is especially relevant at times when a physical connection between artwork, museum and visitor is barely possible.[55] Here, the participants said that it is clear that a 3D print of *The Goldfinch* can never replace the original artwork and is therefore always complementary to Fabritius' painting, yet it it is instrumental in creating more intangible emotional, profound and long-lasting bonds with the artwork located at the Mauritshuis. The reason for this is that it not only provides new perspectives on the artwork but it also facilitates direct and creative engagement with the beloved artwork. For example, a 3D print of Fabritius' painting can contribute as a second medium beside the original artwork that is unreachable at that point in time. It allows me to create my own tailor-made experience with the artwork. From the comfort of one's home, the 3D print combined with other (digitized) media such as virtual gallery apps (e.g. *Ikonospace* and *Occupy White Walls*) could make it possible to create virtual exhibitions with *The Goldfinch* and, having the freedom to manipulate the painting in ways one sees fit, links can be forged between artworks that are meaningful to one personally (Figure 5).[56] Through personal encounters with the artwork in the virtual realm, the active engagement with the museum and the artwork via various platforms and diverse media and a

55 Liselore N.M. Tissen, Umair S. Malik, and Arnold P.O.S. Vermeeren, "3D Reproductions of Cultural Heritage Artefacts: Evaluation of Significance and Experience," *Studies in Digital Heritage* 4, no. 1 (2021).

56 Ikonospace, accessed 1 March 2021, https://www.ikonospace.com/ *Occupy White Walls*, accessed 1 March 2021 https://store.steampowered.com/app/876160/Occupy_White_Walls/

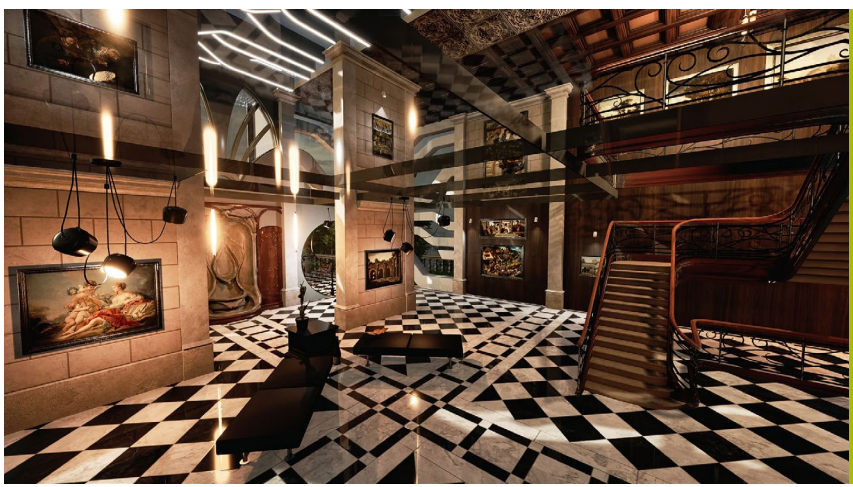


Fig. 5. Occupy White Walls, here I can create my own exhibition with The Goldfinch

3D print hanging on one's living room, it is possible to have a special bond with Fabritius' 'original' painting without needing to be physically in the presence of the artwork at the Mauritshuis in The Hague. These experiences, together with the physical artwork, constitute its significance. In this way, it is possible to have an experience with *The Goldfinch* in a way that entirely transcends the material of the original artwork. The 3D print can nonetheless largely present the artwork's physical assets. In this sense, it could be argued that the authentic values of the artwork that we attribute to it and the memories that were created through the engagement with these various media and platforms can temporarily manifest themselves in the physicality of the 3D print. I argue that, once one can visit the Mauritshuis again and see the original painting, this remote yet personalized experience can greatly attribute to a deeper and more personal connection to the original artwork now than before the pandemic hit, as it was possible to engage with the artwork in a very different and more active manner.

This example shows that using Simon's idea and 3D prints as a method to comply with the necessities imposed by society, museums can provide a multiplicity of ways to access the objects, supporting cultural engagement in unlimited ways with complementary experiences. That way, new and meaningful narratives can be developed which can take place in a world where there is limited to no engagement possible with the actual object or the museum as a physical space. As Simon says: "When people can actively participate with cultural institutions, those places become central to cultural and community life."[57] Thus, in the light of Jenkins' and Simon's idea of a more participatory and democratic experience, the ideal (post–)COVID museum is no longer a single physical space with one story to portray, but it should be seen as a multi-medium with a multiplicity of identities that are expressed through the careful choice of (digital/virtual) tools. The careful curation of this digital and technological toolbox which every museum can use should support a more engaging experience with a more diverse and complex group of visitors in a way that complies with

57 Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, ii.

the museum's message, ideals, and the experiences it wants to create. In this way, an ostensibly indistinguishable 3D printed reproduction of any artwork no longer has to be a threat to the original work of art, but instead can greatly contribute to thrilling new experiences that could not take place with the fragile material of the original artwork nor within the physical boundaries of the museum space. Instead, it can contribute to the visualization and physicalisation of different meanings and values attributed to the artwork, adding to the overall significance of both the painting and the role of the museum in society. This way, art's significance can reach far beyond its physical borders and the museum experience will no longer be limited to a 2-hour timeslot.

Het *nieuwe normaal* (the new normal) has forced museums to relinquish the prevalent idea of the museum as a physical space and the individualistic idea of the one and only artwork providing the 'auratic' experience. However, it is important to realize that an artwork's intangible meanings, cultural significance and the emotions and expressions it evokes cannot exist without a physical predecessor. Furthermore, I do not claim that an artwork's physical manifestation and that of the museum as a fixed place one can visit do not have any value and will cease to exist. As the National Museum Research also shows, there is still an increasing longing (25% of Dutch people) to finally visit the museum again once the lockdown ends, as it appears that a stronger bond with collections is still largely related to actual museum visits.[58] It is evident that aspects of their obvious and trivial material qualities as embodiments of history trigger the people's direct emotions. This is of pivotal importance and should not be disregarded. Thus, an artwork's significance and therefore also a 3D printed reproduction will always be connected to the original artwork's material. Yet, I think it is important to mention that 3D prints of all new media and technologies could be most useful and promising because, in contrast to other reproduction methods, it is still a material object: it is directly perceivable, and it can be touched, seen and held. I believe that this not only stimulates intangible and abstract appreciations of the artwork, but also triggers the emotions that arise during the direct

58 De Museumvereniging, "Er Is Een Breed En Groeiend Draagvlak Voor Musea."

experience between the object's trivial material and perceivable qualities and the beholder. This way, I argue, a 3D print to some extent can comply with both the traditional longing for an artwork's material 'aura' as well as its intangible convergent perceptions.

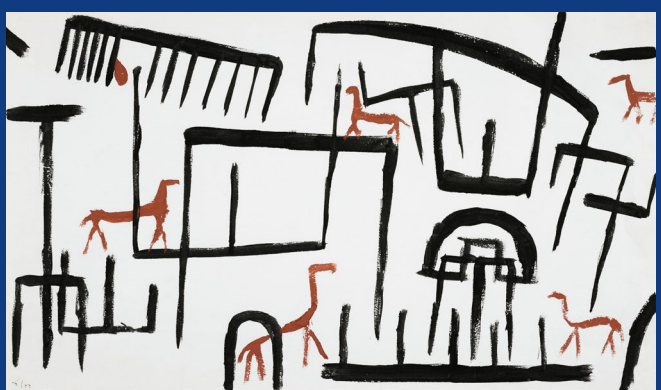
In the COVID and post-COVID museum, where new and old media do not collide, but rather enhance one another in creating new relationships with users, and between visitors and the museum's interactive situations. Here, in the perspective of Jenkins' convergence and Simon's stance, the museum could (and should) serve as a "platform", connecting a variety of users that can attribute to the creation of the museum's content (e.g. specialists, consumers, visitors, collaborators). It has become clear that 3D prints can become an important asset for shaping these connections and collaborations between individual visitors and cultural institutions. However, I want to emphasize that it must be kept in mind that it is hard if not impossible for the museum to guarantee the consistency of visitor experiences as the multiplicity of media used to express one's message makes it hard to oversee the quality of the experiences. Instead, the institution should aim at providing opportunities for diverse visitor co-produced experiences. The latter triggers one remaining question: What authority will museums have in a future society characterized by convergent and participatory media? This is an aspect that should also be kept in mind if museums choose to use 3D prints in their museum practice and presentation. Will they be the ones disclosing the 3D prints, or will they offer the 3D data on an open-access basis so people can freely use and print their artworks at home? I believe this is a highly important issue that requires further investigation. However, for now, we can only speculate on the consequences that the virus will have on museums and their way of presenting artworks to their audience and communicating with them, and the role of 3D printing within this debate.

CONCLUSION

The introduction of 3D printing within the art world rekindles the discussion of what is 'real' and 'authentic' and what is not, a discussion that has been inherent to the Western perception of cultural heritage. Furthermore, this notion is also disturbed by the consequences of the coronavirus. The necessary use of 3D reconstructions for the continuation of the museum experience discloses new information about original artworks and radically changes the engagement with museums. What this article has shown is that art's significance and the museum experience reach far beyond their final material aspects: the perceived authenticity of both the original and the 3D print is a social construction that is not static, but changes according to what society considers to be 'authentic'. Dutton's theory has shown that shifts in the appreciation of the functional, material, emotional or conceptual qualities of an artwork change the meaning of not only the artwork and a 3D printed reproduction but also that of the museum. Furthermore, the convergence of media and society revealed that the boundaries of museums are currently being reinvented and relocated if not entirely removed. Whereas traditionally the interpretations of the past were proposed by the museum alone, nowadays the interpretation of art has been elevated to a multi-media domain that is more critical and engaging. The rapid development of technology and (social) media has significantly changed the way we communicate and interact with museums and their collections. The material and social convergence of society have forced us to rethink our perception of art, the engagement with cultural heritage and the museum as fixed, singular and material-based objects and institutions. Here, the combination of Hoy, Prensky and Jenkins' theories opened up a way of considering the museum as not solely one medium or format, but instead as one of many. As the virus is forcing us to reassess our relationship with museums, let us move away from the idea that the museum is a physical space that welcomes hordes of visitors during pre-determined hours and fixed timeslots. Instead, let us consider the museum as a multi-medium with a multiplicity of

identities. What will matter is the careful choice of (reproduction) technologies and methods that each museum can use in support of greater engagement with a more diverse and complex group of visitors in a way that complies with the message, ideals and experiences that the museum wants to create. Instead of focusing on only one 'auratic' aspect of the artwork – its unique material – multiple 'auras' can co-exist within and outside the museum. From this perspective, where the significance and the experience of art transcend its material, a 3D printed one-on-one reproduction of Fabritius' *The Goldfinch* no longer forms a threat to the original artwork. A 3D print no longer means the end of the original artwork's "aura", but becomes the start of unlimited engagement with the artwork and the museum. This can overcome any boundaries imposed by a lethal virus whilst keeping pace with the ever-changing societies of today and tomorrow.

Liselore Tissen is based at Leiden University and Delft University of Technology, where she is currently preparing a doctoral dissertation on the significance of 3D printing for the art field and the moral and ethical discussions prompted by the introduction of this technology to the art world. She specializes in conservation studies and 3D printing paintings, with a particular interest in the sociological importance of this technology. Furthermore, on the basis of this framework, her research attributes to the development and applicability of 3D printing for material science, technical art historical research and practical conservation and presentation purposes.



Animals in an Enclosure (1938) by Paul Klee.
Original from The Minneapolis Institute of Art.
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