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Ecocriticism and Pandemics

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Guest Editors:

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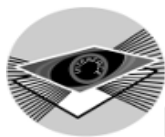
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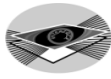
EDITORIAL:

Ecocriticism and Pandemics

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As the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted the 21st century by totally changing people's lives, it has also become one of the factors that is bringing forward new ways of thinking about the environment. Ecocriticism has therefore become a new trend in cross-disciplinary research, necessitated by the state of emergency due to the pandemic. In *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glotfelty notes that "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment", in other words, it is a combination of literature and the natural environment as an implicit criticism between human/non-human. This was one of the topics that were dealt with by participants in our recent conference, INTERFACEing 2021, a fact that motivated the journal's editorial board to set "Ecocriticism and Pandemics" as the Special Topic for the current issue. We have received a considerable amount of submissions, both from people who participated in the conference and from others who were attracted by our Call for Papers. After anonymous peer review we selected for publication four of the submitted papers, two of which had been presented in INTERFACEing. We are very happy not only with the considerable quality of these papers, but also with their spread (geographic, temporal, disciplinary, linguistic) which illustrate the identity of INTERFACE as an international, multilingual, multi/inter-disciplinary journal.

Our selection starts with Augé's study, which explores the controversial reference of Covid-19 as a remedy to environmental problems ("Natural is healing. We are the virus.") and seeks to explore to what extent environmentalists rely on it to deliver their perspectives and messages, to support their lines of argumentation. Against the background of an

ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and worsening environmental degradation, the article analyzes the linkages between these two major issues which provides a relevant field of study from a linguistic perspective.

Environmental degradation is also an issue of importance in Stepanov's analysis of Marie Redonnet's *Splendid Hôtel*, the story of a crumbling inn and its nameless, obsessive innkeeper. Stepanov, based on the theory of "becoming" of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, focuses on Redonnet's deployment of "ecology" and "economy", relates them to their Greek root, *oikos*, and very perceptively analyzes how Redonnet creates paradoxical relationships between economy and ecology and space and body, most notably the narrator's. We can find in the conclusion what it means to become our environment, what (fear of) contagion does to body and mind, what a non-genealogical, "ecological" filiation might look like, and what insight Splendid Hôtel can offer on our current era's condition.

Guerio's paper "Malattie scambiate: Peste e Colera in Percy e Mary Shelley", resonates with responses to Covid -19, the post-colonial attitude in the distribution of vaccines and the way WHO has described for us all the uneven map of health. It tackles a subject that is both pertinent and original through a novel reading of the two works concerned, *The Revolt of Islam* and *The Last Man*. The two opening sections of the article provide an impressively detailed account of the history and epidemiology of cholera with extensive citation of statistics and studies.

Mitsios brings our collection to a close with his compelling study "Ancient Pandemics in Mythical Athens: the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids". He discusses the myths concerning the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids, and he very persuasively shows not only how these myths functioned within ancient Athenian society in times of plagues and famines, but also the interplay between myths and contexts and the ideology of the times and the place.

The appearance of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought renewed interest to plagues of the past and the way people in the past reacted and

talked about them. This special issue can be regarded as scholars' inquiries about ecology in the post-epidemic era. By examining myths, poems, and literature environmentally, the authors make a distinctive contribution to in-depth speculation on human/nonhuman. Likewise, the main attempt is to deepen and broaden research and to connect "ecocriticism" worldwide. Since environmental disasters and pandemics are largely man-made, not to mention the ruination brought on by autocrats' wars against humanity, the ultimate goal of ecocriticism may well be to decentralize humans, to attend to what is suppressed and silenced in the Anthropocene epoch.
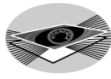
"COVID-19 is the Earth's vaccine":

Controversial metaphors in environmental discourse

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Abstract

This paper proposes a discussion of the controversial conceptualisation "Nature is healing. We are the virus". These depictions have been observed in Twitter threads during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic. The implications entail that solving the climate crisis would require humanity to be eliminated (like a VIRUS). I investigate the ways environmentalists have metaphorically depicted the causes and consequences of the health crisis. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change can be interrelated if one considers the role of humans' uncontrolled consumption in the spread of these two phenomena. Environmentalists have emphasised the consequences of pollution on health, they praised the drop of emissions documented during the lockdown, and they advertised a post-COVID-19 world where humans reduce pollution to avert a new health crisis. The paper thus asks to what extent (if at all) environmentalists relied on disputable depictions such as HUMANITY AS A VIRUS (FOR THE PLANET). The research relies on pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis to study environmental texts published by major Non-Governmental Organisations. This analysis will lead me to question the relevance of the metaphorical conceptualisation HUMANITY AS A VIRUS (FOR THE PLANET) in environmental discourse. The results show that environmentalists effectively rely on metaphors to blame humanity for the present crises, but they adapt these metaphorical conceptualisations to show support to the communities suffering from the virus and to promote mitigation. *Keywords:* Nature is healing; Metaphor; Twitter; Greenpeace; Extinction Rebellion; Lockdown

"COVID-19 is the Earth's vaccine":

Controversial metaphors in environmental discourse

This paper draws on the controversy associating the COVID-19 pandemic and environmental issues. This controversy emerged from a metaphorical conceptualisation promoted by a number of environmental activists on Twitter. These activists created a thread using the hashtag (#) "Nature is healing. We are the virus" to praise the decrease of gas emissions induced by the lockdown.

The "Nature is healing" thread relies on a well-documented conceptualisation in environmental discourse which personifies Nature in order to depict pollution as a DISEASE, thus making it more concrete to "lay" people. For instance, one may consider the relevance of James Lovelock's Gaia theory (2007) in environmental sciences which explains how the ecosystem evolves as a living organism that can react to excessive pollution through environmental disruptions. From a spiritual viewpoint, the personification of Nature can also be perceived in the identification of "Mother Nature" (Augé, 2019a) who is represented as a figure of authority who needs to be respected by humanity. In the context of the pandemic, this personification has taken on an additional argumentative function in environmental discourse: while attention towards environmental issues decreased following global health concerns, environmentalists drew a link between people's experiences of COVID-19 and Nature's HEALTH CONDITIONS (Augé, 2021a; Sorce and Dumitrica, 2021). This led some activists to extend this metaphorical conceptualisation on Twitter through descriptions of humanity as a VIRUS for the planet. Scholars contested such descriptions at several levels (see Bosworth, 2021): first, these posts were illustrated with eulogistic pictures of natural elements "thriving" in a less polluted environment, e.g. pictures of Venice's clear blue sky, elephants having a bath in rivers, wild birds flying above cities. However, these pictures and associated captions were then contradicted by existing reports showing

the continuous degradation of the environment. Second, the characterisation of Nature as a HEALING BODY implies that climate change does not require long-term actions to be mitigated. These depictions were observed at an early stage of the pandemic, when emissions just started to decrease. The resulting enthusiasm from online activists thus led to misleading conceptions about the environmental threat. Third, the identification of humanity as a VIRUS is particularly concerning at a time when the population experiences major health concerns and high rates of hospitalisations. Such a conceptualisation implies that in order to solve the climate crisis, humanity needs to be eliminated like a VIRUS (Augé, forthcoming). Therefore, such a conceptual trend has been perceived as an instance of "bad environmentalism" or "environmental fascism" (Bosworth, 2021), relying on fake data and promoting human extinction.

The present research aims at testing the relevance of such a controversial metaphorical conceptualisation in environmental discourse. I here ask to what extent (if at all) environmentalists relied on disputable depictions such as HUMANITY IS A VIRUS (FOR THE PLANET)? Through a pragmatic, cognitive, and discourse analysis of the metaphors observed in environmental discourse, I demonstrate that environmentalists may, indeed, rely on metaphors to blame human behaviour. The analysis presented below shows that these metaphors convey particular arguments aiming at convincing recipients to stop polluting activities. I also demonstrate that metaphors can be used by environmentalists to depict the lockdown (and the decrease of gas emissions) as an opportunity to "build back better". While these metaphorical depictions – blaming humanity and praising lockdown – may resonate with existing controversial descriptions on Twitter, I show that environmentalists carefully avoided to endorse the images displayed by the statement "Nature is healing. We are the virus" through counter-narratives.

1 The role of metaphors in environmental discourse

Metaphors play an essential role in environmental discourse. Through the mapping of a complex target domain associated with the topic of cli-

mate change with a concrete, familiar source domain associated with an "alien" concept, metaphors can help "lay" people to understand highly complex, scientific findings (Lakoff, 1993). For example, the warmth produced by gases in the atmosphere is metaphorically identified as a "greenhouse effect" (Augé, 2022; Romaine, 1996). The popularisation of scientific observations is required to convince individuals to perform emission reduction and to be more cautious about domestic waste (Augé, 2021b). In the present research, I focus on two target domains associated with environmental issues: on the one hand, I analyse how humans' responsibilities have been metaphorically depicted by environmentalists. On the other hand, I focus on how the lockdown – and the drop of gas emissions – have been metaphorically praised. In addition, I discuss the reliance on metaphors using HEALTH as a source domain, with possible depictions such as HUMANITY AS A VIRUS, COVID-19 AS THE EARTH'S VACCINE, and NATURE AS A HEALING BODY.

Metaphor scholars who analysed metaphorical expressions in media discourse and in political discourse demonstrated that metaphors can also serve an ideological function. For instance, Musolff (2016) focuses on the metaphorical mapping NATION AS BODY as it has been used in European debates. His study establishes how different BODY-features have been attributed to the NATION to advertise different arguments regarding the place of Britain within Europe (e.g., with mentions of a "blood clot", "a rotten heart", "a limb"). These metaphorical expressions were effective in advancing political opinions, and these played a significant role in the debates, i.e. politicians could then adapt the metaphor NATION AS BODY to their own viewpoint (see also Musolff, 2004; 2020).

The ideological function of metaphors is also at play in environmental discourse. Indeed, while the identification of the phenomenon is grounded in a series of scientific models and experiments, the mitigation it involves may generate various debates opposing climate activists to sceptical communities (Augé, 2022). For example, some corpus-based studies reveal an association between RELIGION metaphors and scepticism regarding climate science. Nerlich (2010; see also Shaw

and Nerlich, 2015) studies metaphors used in media depictions of climate change. Her results show that RELIGION metaphors depict scientists as spreaders of fake news and science as "untrue". In political speeches, Lakoff (2010) suggests that the politicians who favour the enactment of climate policies do not show good mastery of argumentation through metaphors. However, U.S. Republicans use effective metaphors to communicate about such policies. Lakoff (2010, p.73) claims that this lack of metaphorical depictions to promote mitigation may be the reason behind the fact that not enough climate policies have been voted. In addition, politicians may promote certain metaphorical conceptualisations in order to advertise the environmentally friendly aspects involved (or not) in their decisions. These may also be used to reassure recipients and downplay the risks associated with climate change (Lakoff, 2004). For example, Lakoff (2004, p. 22) refers to the legislation named the "Clear Skies Act" whose outcome would increase pollution rates while the metaphor ("clear") suggests an absence of polluting gases (US green rhetoric is discussed in Bonnefille, 2008).

In environmental discourse, Doyle (2007) shows that metaphors form a significant part of the communication performed by Non-Governmental Organisations like Greenpeace. She establishes how this organisation has relied on metaphors – in verbals and in visuals – to warn recipients about the emergency to tackle climate change (e.g., climate change as a TIME BOMB). Notably, several studies establish the prevalent function of HEALTH metaphors in environmental discourse (i.e., the ECOSYSTEM HEALTH; Augé, 2021a; Ross et al., 1997). These metaphors illustrate the relationship between humans and the environment with HEALTH-related expressions, and they emphasise humans' dependence on nature. Metaphorical references to the SYMPTOMS, or TREATMENT of the environment can advertise suitable solutions to ecological problems (1997, p.123), e.g. "An ecological system is *healthy* and free *from distress syndrome* if it is stable and sustainable" (1997, p.119)

Such metaphors have gained additional functions in environmental discourse produced during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Char-

teris-Black, 2021, p.110). Sorce and Dumitrica (2021) convincingly demonstrate how the environmental organisation Fridays For Future used metaphors in their communications in order to reframe the COVID-19 debates around environmental issues. Augé (2021a) focuses on the source domain HEALTH to analyse how NATURE'S HEALTH CONDITIONS may have developed during the pandemic: the communications released by the organisation Extinction Rebellion show that global health concerns led the Rebels to metaphorically insist on the link between humans' health and NATURE'S HEALTH (e.g., "Neither COVID nor climate pay attention to borders. The world is a small place, and we are all interconnected. This is the basis of *planetary health. Prevention is better than cure*"; Augé, 2021a, p. 11). Here, I ask to what extent these HEALTH-related metaphors have been used by environmentalists. Considering the controversy associated with the Twitter thread "Nature is healing", I analyse the metaphors used by environmentalists in descriptions of humans' responsibilities and descriptions of the environmental impacts of lockdown. This analysis will establish if HEALTH metaphors have indeed produced such controversial environmental statements or if other metaphors – not related to the source domain HEALTH – have been favoured. The following section provides information about the methodology at play in the data selection and the identification and analysis of metaphorical expressions.

2 Methodology

I here offer a corpus-based approach (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001) to the metaphors used in environmental discourse to 1) depict humans' responsibility for climate change and for the COVID-19 pandemic, and 2) depict the lockdown as an opportunity to "build back better"[1]. In other words, I focus on a limited set of metaphorical expressions used in a corpus composed of environmental texts in order to test the main hypothesis of the present research, i.e. environmentalists may have relied on controversial metaphorical conceptualisations such as "Nature is healing" to praise the effects of the lockdown. I do not aim at presenting

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1   https://www.buildbackbetter.org.uk/

an exhaustive account of the different metaphors that can be observed in environmental discourse produced during the pandemic. Instead, I highlight how metaphors have been used to discuss these two particular sub-topics.

The corpus composed for the present research includes texts retrieved from the official websites and archives of two major international Non-Governmental Organisations focusing on environmental issues: Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion. Other organisations have been of interest, like Fridays for Future, World Wild Fund, and Friends of the Earth, but these only offer limited metaphorical descriptions of the two main sub-topics: humans' responsibilities and decrease of emissions during the lockdown (i.e., two metaphorical statements have been observed in the Fridays for Future's website, two metaphorical statements have been observed in the World Wild Fund's website, and three metaphorical statements have been observed in the Friends of the Earth's website, sometimes relying on similar metaphorical conceptualisations across different publications). Hence, in order to offer an overview of the metaphors used by environmentalists to address the two topics, I focus on the variety of metaphorical statements observed in the communications produced by Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion. This focus will help me to demonstrate how possible controversial statements may interact with different (perhaps, less controversial?) metaphorical conceptualisations in the publications under study. For the purpose of the study, I delimited a particular timeframe: the corpus includes texts produced during the pandemic, i.e. from January 2020 to October 2021 (when the research started). In addition, a subsequent selection of texts has been performed with a focus on the scope through which the pandemic was described. I thus exclusively focused on publications which described humans' responsibility for the phenomena (climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic), the drop of gas emissions during lockdown, the association between COVID-19 and climate change, and the environmental opportunities appearing at the end of the lockdown (e.g., COVID-19 as a "wake-up call"). Even if the timeframe includes publications produced until October 2021, it is not surprising to observe that most of the metaphorical descriptions related to the (positive) impact of

the lockdown appear in earlier publications (produced in 2020). For this reason, most of the extracts discussed below originate in publications produced during the early stage of the pandemic. These have been selected in order to offer a comprehensive – but non-exhaustive – picture of the different arguments that have been promoted metaphorically in environmental discourse.

I performed a manual analysis of these different texts in order to identify the metaphorical expressions (unrestricted to HEALTH metaphors) relied on to address these topics. In order to determine the metaphorical meaning of an expression (as opposed to its literal meaning), I used the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIPVU; Steen et al., 2010). This procedure proposes three main steps to test the metaphoricity of an expression in discourse:

- read texts and identify an "alien" word,
- search for a more "basic" meaning of this word,
- if this "basic" meaning differs from the contextual meaning (the meaning of the word in the text), identify the metaphorical mapping (Steen et al., 2010).

These different methodological steps resulted in the identification of a plurality of metaphorical expressions unrestricted to the source domain HEALTH. The details of the corpus are provided in Table 1 below:

Organisations	Greenpeace	Extinction Rebellion
Sources	Greenpeace.org	Rebellion.earth
Number of texts about humans' responsibilities and effects of the lockdown	130	121
Metaphorical occurrences (responsibilities and lockdown)	13	36

Table 1: Details of the corpus

While the scope of the present research is not to compare these different organisations, Table 1 shows that – within the same time-frame – Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion significantly focused on the topics under study. However, it has been observed that other organisations like Fridays For Future only offer a limited number of texts and metaphorical occurrences addressing these issues. This might be due to the particularity of the latter organisation which focuses on school strikes and demonstrations (the movement emerged as a result of the impact of Greta Thunberg's school strike). The results discussed below illustrate how the metaphorical expressions observed in these different environmental texts from Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion have blamed humanity and promoted the opportunities resulting from the lockdown. I first discuss the HEALTH metaphors which have been used to depict these two topics, I then present the different metaphorical statements which address the positive impacts of the lockdown and human responsibilities: the CRIME and the CONTAINER metaphors. I study how the images of "Nature is healing" have been endorsed or disputed by the different environmental organisations.

3 "Nature is healing": HEALTH metaphors and counter-discourse

Environmentalists have described the COVID-19 pandemic, and in particular, the lockdown, as an opportunity to "build back better". These descriptions present the temporary end of (industrial) activities as an illustration showing that a different society can be built, i.e. a society in which humanity does not rely on industries to live. Therefore, the lockdown was used as an example of such a society, and environmentalists highlighted that this experience of lockdown could make the population realise that a more sustainable world is not only a utopia. They insisted on this aspect because they feared the end of the lockdown would mean a "return to normal". The descriptions of the lockdown in environmental discourse thus presents an optimistic view on post-lockdown society. This is exemplified in the extract presented below:

(1)This is the time to reimagine our streets. The increase in air

quality is tangible to all. We can't go back to the pollution we had before where *cars are king*. It's time to share space equitably; *putting people and the planet's health first*. Enabling our children to walk and cycle will make *our cities and towns thrive with life*."

(Extinction Rebellion, 15/05/2020)[2]

In extract (1), from Extinction Rebellion, the pandemic is perceived through a PATH metaphor ("go back"). This description emphasises that pollution ("cars") represents a lack of PHYSICAL PROGRESSION. This extract re-interprets the environmental characteristics of the past to reveal the unpleasant aspects of such a society. For instance, the past is perceived as a KINGDOM. This conceptualisation comprises negative features because it metaphorically establishes how the population has attributed authoritarian powers to non-human entities, i.e. cars. This description of the past echoes the description of the lockdown period when "the air quality" has increased. In turn, this positive effect of the lockdown is emphasised in the end of the extract where the environmentalists focus on the health impact of pollution from cars ("health of the planet"; "thrive with life"). Hence, the metaphorical depiction aims at presenting a eulogistic image of the consequences of the lockdown in order to show to recipients the extent of the damages done by the unrestrained "authority" of cars in the past. Such a comparison thus argues that air quality can be improved in the long term, if cities and towns stop being "dominated" by cars. The personifications of cars ("king"), planet ("health"), and cities and towns ("thrive with life") establish a storyline which qualifies the past as a storied world dominated by an EVIL-MINDED AUTHORITY. This is opposed to the metaphorical depiction of the post-pandemic world, where living entities (planet and humanity) do not suffer from major health issues related to car pollution.

It should be noted that environmentalists have acknowledged the controversy associated with the metaphorical statement "Nature is healing. We are the virus" advertised on Twitter by individual activists (Bosworth, 2021). While these online activists may well be associated with

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2   The sources of the extracts presented here can be found in the Appendix.

one of the environmental organisations under study, the information provided in the Twitter thread does not explicitly associate such statements with any established organisations.

The environmentalists from Greenpeace posted publications questioning this conceptualisation, with emphasis on the partial endorsement related to humans' responsibilities and to the positive effects of the lockdown. However, these official statements deny the controversial implications. Environmentalists thus adapted the statement to fit their arguments while avoiding the extended identification of HUMANITY AS A VIRUS or COVID-19 AS THE EARTH'S VACCINE. Such exploitations can be perceived in the extract presented below:

> (2) Back at the beginning of the pandemic, *we saw posts everywhere saying that "nature was healing"* as animals strolled freely around cities, pollution levels dropped drastically, allowing people *to see what wasn't in their horizon before*. But this was framed wrong: we should not focus on *the healing, but on what had made nature sick* in the first place.
>
> (Greenpeace, 07/08/2020)

In extract (2), from Greenpeace, the environmentalists explicitly refer to the Twitter thread. We can see that this thread has been used to produce a different argument, allowing the metaphor users to avoid the controversial implications. While Greenpeace praised the environmental effect of the lockdown (through the use of the CONTAINER metaphor; see section 5), they here deny their endorsement to such eulogistic views of the pandemic. By not focusing on the HEALING, Greenpeace acknowledges the irreversible impact of polluting industries. Indeed, the environmentalists state that the thread started "at the beginning of the pandemic". However, extract (2) was selected from a text published in August 2020, when the (first) lockdown was over. At this time, the environmentalists already knew about and experienced the effects of the re-opening of industries. Therefore, this public denial is effective to on the one hand, dissociate the organisation from the controversies and, on the other hand, establish the responsibilities of industries for the

negative effects of pollution. The depiction of a SICK NATURE thus highlights that environmental optimism cannot prevail since the cause of SICKNESS has not disappeared. Yet, the questioning of the conceptualisation "Nature is healing" does not so much refer to the associated controversies: environmentalists even partially endorse this image to use the online activists' relief in order to promote a long-term relief which would involve the definitive drop of emissions. In addition, this partial endorsement (associated with an explicit denial "this was framed wrong") can be perceived in the use of the past perfect to describe nature' s SICKNESS, i.e. "what had made nature sick". The use of the past tense to describe NATURE'S SICKNESS implies that, according to Greenpeace, Nature had indeed HEALED. However, Greenpeace still questions the reality of the HEALING because they associate the SICKNESS with industrial pollution: this insists on the fact that the HEALING is only punctual and does not prevail any more at the time the publication was released.

Even in publications which do not explicitly refer to the controversial Twitter thread, some extracts show that environmentalists have relied on HEALTH metaphors to emphasise the link between human activities, climate change, and COVID-19. This is exemplified in the extract presented below:

> (3) We are at an *intersection* of global crises. Climate, COVID-19, racial injustice – all are *symptoms of a toxic system that is driving us to extinction*. We cannot carry on like this.
> (Extinction Rebellion, 01/09/2020)

In extract (3), from Extinction Rebellion, the environmentalists do not explicitly refer to the Twitter thread and its associated controversies. However, we can see that they similarly discuss the pandemic through the HEALTH metaphor ("symptoms"; see also Augé, 2021a). Here, the HEALTH metaphor does not mention any HEALING: instead, Extinction Rebellion focuses on the interrelation between different crises ("intersection"). The fact that the climate crisis and racial crisis have not been solved prevents the metaphor users from promoting a positive view

of the COVID-19 pandemic and its environmental effects. For instance, they exploit the HEALTH metaphor to emphasise that the pandemic is only a SYMPTOM. This limits the scope of the metaphorical depiction and argues that other precarious CRISES-SYMPTOMS prevail. Within this conceptualisation, Nature is still SICK since its SICKNESS is not restricted to the pandemic. According to Extinction Rebellion, Nature can only HEAL when its VIRUS – i.e., the "toxic system" – is being treated. While in extract (2), Greenpeace partially endorsed the conceptualisation "Nature is healing" to convince recipients that industrial pollution is a SICKNESS, Extinction Rebellion explicitly denies this conceptualisation to place the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, and the climate crisis on the same scale and to identify the prevailing VIRUS which has not yet been treated: the toxic system.

In the next section, I discuss the use of particular metaphors related to the personification of the industrialised world as a CRIMINAL HARMING HUMANITY. Here, the pandemic and the climate crisis are not identified as HEALTH CONDITIONS, but as CRIMINAL ACTIONS performed in order to impact the planet.

4 "Normal is killing us": (SELF-INFLICTED) CRIME metaphors to identify the responsible sectors

During the pandemic, environmentalists produced texts emphasising humanity's responsibilities in the surge of the crises. They perceived the pandemic as an explicit, global manifestation of environmental disruptions. Metaphorical expressions have been used to criticise the various polluting activities which have led to such a global health crisis. These metaphors promote particular arguments aiming at emphasising the damaging features of these "past" activities, i.e. the activities that were performed before lockdown.

For instance, several occurrences from the corpus refer to humans' "normal" behaviour, which highlight the unprecedented and surprising aspects of the consequences of the pandemic. This "normal" behaviour

is defined by environmentalists as a lack of attention towards gas emissions, leading humanity to increase pollution regardless of the impacts on health and on the environment. These metaphorical depictions of "normality" can be observed in the extracts presented below:

> (4) "We can't go back to normal when *'normal' is a toxic mix* of climate emergency, systemised oppression and inequality, and a dangerous political shift to the right, leading to a scary and unpredictable climax".
>
> (Greenpeace. 16/09/2020)

> (5) "We are at *a turning point* in human history. It's becoming clearer every day that the Government isn't capable of *getting us out of the coronavirus mess*, or preventing climate breakdown and animal suffering. They are more concerned with *getting us back to "normal"* as rapidly as possible. But *it's normal that is killing us.* So as the UK lockdown begins to ease, we stand at the *crossroads*: Bail out people and the planet OR bail out *the industries that are killing us*. We have a choice.
>
> (Extinction Rebellion. 11/07/2020)

In extract (4), from Greenpeace, we see that the pandemic is perceived as a PROGRESSION ALONG A PATH ("go back to"). This PROGRESSION, in view of the impact of the pandemic, has allowed humanity to experience the consequences of their past mistakes (i.e., uncontrolled pollution, inequality, political choices). This experience has helped humans to "move past" the obstacle of "normality". In other words, in this extract, "normality" is implicitly conceptualised as a PATH THAT IS LIMITED BY AN OBSTACLE. Because the pandemic has forced the population to adopt an "abnormal" behaviour, this has produced a NEW PATH which is characterised by the absence of "climate emergency, systemised oppression and inequality, and dangerous political shift to the right". Yet, this NEW PATH is not the focus of the extract: instead, the environmentalists expressed their anxiety regarding the end of the pandemic which would, ultimately, allow people to "return to normality". Hence, another metaphorical conceptualisation appears in order

to convince recipients that "normal is not normal". Here, "normality" is perceived negatively but the extract implies that the population (or politicians and people working in the industries) has a positive image of this concept. Therefore, the environmentalists highlight the various aspects which contradict this positive image, through the metaphor NORMALITY AS A TOXIC MIX. This metaphor does not only deny the positive features of normality, it also questions the identification of the concept "normality". Indeed, "normality" is a highly complex concept which may be too subjective to define, but through the lens of environmentalism, "normality" is perceived in relation to dangerous social trends (like uncontrolled pollution) which endangers humans' health. Thus, the environmentalists rely on the conceptual association linking human life to the concept of "normality" and emphasise that human life trends eventually prevent the continuation of human life (as it has been demonstrated by the impacts of the pandemic, i.e. "toxic"). In turn, this endangerment of human life alters the concept "normality", and this alteration is at the heart of Greenpeace's arguments. The environmentalists conceptualise recipients' perception of "normality" as a TOXIC MIX in order to promote a "new normal" which would allow human life to continue and evolve according to different environmental trends. This implicitly produces an absurd image of humans' past behaviour: humanity is depicted as producing a TOXIC MIX to eventually KILL its individuals. Therefore, in this extract, Greenpeace uses the pandemic as an explicit illustration of the "abnormality" of past behaviour.

In extract (5), from Extinction Rebellion, the pandemic is similarly perceived as a PROGRESSION ALONG A PATH ("turning point"; "crossroads"). The conceptualisation slightly differs in this extract since the environmentalists do not describe a NEW PATH but a DIFFERENT DIRECTION made available following the impacts of the pandemic. In the beginning of the extract, the metaphor users explicitly blame the UK government for forcing the population to "remain" in the PATH-CONTAINER ("getting us out") that presents precarious characteristics associated with COVID-19. The interrelation of PATH and CONTAINER metaphors in the extract has a significant role in the argumentation performed by Extinction Rebellion. Indeed, the CONTAINER meta-

phor "getting us out" is followed by another PATH metaphor "getting us back": this interrelation implicitly establishes that the pandemic has allowed the population to "exit" the CONTAINER, but the government is preventing people from "escaping" to a different PATH. Thus, in this extract, "normality" is perceived as a FORCED CONTAINMENT – this conceptualisation aims at highlighting governmental responsibilities for the crises. In addition, the metaphor is extended in the end of the extract where "normality" becomes personified: it transforms into a KILLER, which echoes the lethal consequences of the climate and health crises. Such a conceptualisation is highly effective in the context of the pandemic, when people experience loss and precarious health conditions. The source domain KILLER is exploited further with an emphasis on the identification of "normality" as the "industrial world" ("industries are killing us"). This represents an indirect depiction of the government as a KILLER: because the government wants to protect industries, it puts the health of the population at risk. Metaphorically, this is represented by the images of the population TRAPPED IN A DEADLY CONTAINER (CONTAINING A KILLER) BY THE GOVERNMENT. The responsibility is put on politicians instead of humanity, but the stance of the extract aims at warning recipients that it is people's responsibilities not to listen to the government ("We have a choice"). Extinction Rebellion emphasises the extent of such a choice through metaphorical exploitations presenting the deadly characteristics of "normality".

In the next section, I focus on the metaphors used by environmentalists to describe the environmental optimism resulting from the lockdown. While this section focused on the metaphorical descriptions of humans' responsibilities, I now pay attention to the use of the CONTAINER metaphor to depict the opportunity to "build back better".

5 "The system is broken": the CONTAINER metaphor to describe new opportunities

Several metaphorical occurrences convey effective arguments which

depict a bad past that led to the pandemic. In the following extracts, we see that the "normality" of pollution is denied to focus on the unpleasant characteristics of the past which are highlighted by environmentalists in order to convince recipients about the benefits of a new society. This is exemplified in the extracts presented below:

(6)"The Coronavirus pandemic has created *a rare crack in the system* – let's use it to create a better world. During the 2008 economic crisis, governments saved the banks. Politicians adopted relief packages that de facto favored the most polluting industries. This time it must   be the planet that is 'too big to fail'. (...) When the corona crisis starts to subside, we can choose *to glue the cracks in our system together. We can also choose to look into them and catch a glimpse of a future* in which our economies are designed for the *wellbeing of both humans and the planet.*"

(Greenpeace. 16/04/2020).

(7) Join our first *No Going Back* action this Thursday. Close down the biggest polluters, hang up posters over the doors of the most polluting businesses to make clear that they cannot reopen for business as usual, if *we want to rebuild a better world*. We can all feel it, *the wind is turning, change is on its way. Let's rise up on the winds of change. Let's reclaim our future.*

(Extinction Rebellion, 14/04/2020)

In extract (6), Greenpeace's main argument is related to the unsuitable decisions taken by politicians. They rely on the metaphor POLITICAL SYSTEM AS A BROKEN CONTAINER to reveal politicians' responsibilities in the Coronavirus crisis. They refer to existing political decisions which have already endangered humanity, i.e. the 2008 economic crisis and the industrial bailouts. Indeed, we see the effective use of metonymies in this extract: instead of referring to the people working in banks and in industries, Greenpeace relies on the metonymy PLACE OF ACTIVITY FOR THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THIS ACTIVITY (see discussion of metonymies in environmental discourse in Augé,

2019b). This has an argumentative function which emphasises the negative aspects of governmental decisions: politicians have supported non-human entities instead of supporting the population. In addition, these bad decisions are associated with the COVID-19 pandemic which is presented as a consequence of such decisions. Metaphorically, this is represented as a CONTAINER that has been FRAGILISED by previous decisions which led it to BREAK following the pandemic. Yet, this image of a BROKEN CONTAINER is perceived positively by the environmentalists: unlike other CONTAINER metaphors (e.g., "greenhouse effect"; Augé, 2022), the environmentalists limit the characterisation of the CONTENT to politicians (and not humanity). Thus, the CRACK allows environmentalists to "see" the CONTENT. In this case, the impact of the pandemic is presented through a positive viewpoint: people "outside the CONTAINER" can now monitor politicians more easily. In the end of the extract, the representation of the political system as a simple object that humans can easily manipulate is exploited. The environmentalists attribute a role to the recipients by metaphorically referring to a simple action one can take to fix the problem: GLUE THE CRACKS. This highlights recipients' responsibilities to "strengthen" the system so that future pandemics and environmental issues can be averted. Therefore, the pandemic is perceived as a punctual event which BROKE THE FRAGILISED CONTAINER, and the idealised, post-pandemic politics is represented as a CONTAINER THAT HAS BEEN MENDED (i.e., the DANGEROUS CONTENT has been removed from the CONTAINER). In this extract, we can see that the post-pandemic world imagined by environmentalists is depicted through HEALTH metaphors ("well-being of the planet"). Environmentalists explicitly blame politicians for the present pandemic, and they metaphorically emphasise the causal relationship between the environmental crisis and the health crisis.

In extract (7), from Extinction Rebellion, environmentalists call readers for a passive, distanced protest. This extract was published during the peak of the epidemic, in April 2020. The beginning of the extract refers to the need to stop polluting activities – as previously discussed in section 4. Here, the pandemic is conceptualised as an event that DE-

STROYED the world, with a characterisation of the WORLD AS A (BUILT) CONTAINER. The environmentalists use this concrete image of a DESTROYED HUMAN CONTAINER to present environmental actions as necessary ("rebuild") and as simple steps that humans can take (i.e., building a container). The association with polluting industries implicitly establishes that these have a responsibility in the DESTRUCTION, but we can notice that the blame is not emphasised in the metaphorical exploitation. Indeed, in this extract, the environmentalists focus on the positive impacts of the DESTRUCTION, which forces humanity to REBUILD THEIR CONTAINER – implying that this RECONSTRUCTION will be safer for its CONTENT. This description of a BETTER RECONSTRUCTION as a forced, necessary measure is emphasised in the remainder of the extract: the environmentalists involve the recipients through the use of the pronoun "we" and insist on the fact that the need for a BETTER RECONSTRUCTION is self-evident, i.e. they refer to the recipients as a subject of an epistemic verb "feel" which shows that the change is so obvious that environmentalists can assert that everybody can "feel" it. The idiomatic reference to the WIND exemplifies this assertion: the responsibilities of polluting industries and the negative characteristics of the pre-COVID-19 world transform into a physiologically perceptible entity, the wind. This metaphorical exploitation is extended through a JOURNEY metaphor ("on its way"), personifying "change" and identifying it as an environmental SAVIOUR COMING TOWARDS HUMANITY. In the end of the extract, the perception of the DESTRUCTED world insists on the need for humanity to be saved: the perception of the pre-COVID-19 world is indirectly conceptualised as an IMPRISONMENT for environmentalists, who identify the prevalence of polluting industries as a DENIAL OF THEIR FUTURE. In other words, pollution prevents a future – which is not only impacting environmental activists but also the recipients.

Environmentalists significantly exploited the CONTAINER metaphor in order to describe COVID-19 as a possible EXIT from a polluted world to a more sustainable society. Yet, they also considered the impacts of polluting industries on society. In such cases, the CONTAINER metaphor is exploited to emphasise the risks to ENTER – or to let

pollution ENTER – a new, damaged world. This is exemplified in the extracts presented below:

(8) We've all watched the last six months in disbelief, hoping that the Covid-19 crisis would at least provide *a doorway to a new and better world*. But instead, what we all feared has *unravelled before our eyes*: a return to an even worse version of 'business as usual'.

(Greenpeace, 16/09/2020)

(9) We will be delivering an Open Letter to the UK Government, signed by scientists, NGOS, animal rights organisations and environmentalists, to demand that the UK Government urgently address the cause of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Government must heed this stark warning ~*the next global pandemic is on our doorsteps*, and on people's plates.

(Extinction Rebellion, 08/09/2020)

In extract (8), Greenpeace activists conceptualise the past (and present) polluted reality as an IMPRISONMENT. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic is identified as a DOORWAY, highlighting the environmentalists' perception of the past world as being deprived of such an EXIT. The image of an IMPRISONMENT is effective in reflecting the powerlessness of activists: this extract insists on the fact that past environmental actions – even if they were aimed at raising awareness – could not result in a "better world" because industrial pollution prevailed (there was no EXIT). Yet, the lack of industrial activities during the lockdown could have helped them to produce actions that would lead to sustainability. However, the "business as usual" strategy in place at the end of the lockdown "closed the door" to this possibility: pollution was not reduced, and this contradicts the reality of a greener society. In addition, this lack of reduction is here materialised, i.e. "unravelled before our eyes": this strengthens the environmentalists' arguments which, this time, depict uncontrolled pollution as a MISCHIEVOUS PERSON "moving towards" humanity and IMPRISONING them in a damaged, dangerous world.

In extract (9), from Extinction Rebellion, the environmentalists refer to the pollution induced by humans' food consumption ("people's plates"). Similarly, they describe the world as a CONTAINER. In this case, the CONTAINMENT is not perceived as an IMPRISONMENT. Here, the DOORWAY represents a danger which can let INTRUDERS in. Indeed, the continuous uncontrolled consumption is represented as an absurd behaviour from humanity who OPENS THE DOOR to the next global pandemic. The present COVID-19 pandemic was thus perceived as a "stark warning", inviting the population to CLOSE THE DOOR to such INTRUDERS. The argument can be related to the arguments discussed in extract (8): Extinction Rebellion and Greenpeace activists significantly criticise the "business as usual" post-pandemic strategy, and they rely on metaphors to on the one hand, illustrate the possibility of a more sustainable world, and on the other hand, depict the danger of past and present consumptions through more concrete features. This also emphasises the ease by which humanity can be impacted, since uncontrolled consumption facilitates the spread of viruses (or "let viruses enter").

Alternatively, environmentalists produced metaphorical descriptions of the lockdown in order to praise the environmental impact of the interruption of industrial activities. This is exemplified in the extract presented below:

> (10) With factories stopped, cars parked, and airplanes grounded, *the skies opened up for us and the waters cleared*. The drop in emissions has thus brought the issue of air pollution to the attention of many in a more tangible way.
>
> (Extinction Rebellion, 30/07/2020).

In extract (10), Extinction Rebellion relies on the CONTAINER metaphor. Yet, in this example, we see that the argument differs from the one presented in extract (9). Indeed, this extract refers to the increased air quality during the lockdown as an OPENING. This implies a conceptualisation of the past world as an IMPRISONMENT. In addition, this OPENING is associated with visible features ("brought to the atten-

tion"), which echoes the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING (Lakoff and Johnson, 2002). Hence, the environmentalists rely on the dichotomy between a past polluted world where air was of low quality and where people were UNINFORMED and IMPRISONED, and a world under lockdown, where air is of higher quality and where people can SEE nature through the OPENING of the CONTAINER. Even if Extinction Rebellion does not explicitly argue in favour of reduction in this extract, we can still see an effective argument promoting the benefit of air quality.

In the next section, I will discuss the argumentative roles of the metaphors used by environmentalists to address the topics at play in the controversial statement "Nature is healing. We are the virus". I will also provide more details about the role of metaphors to attribute different responsibilities in environmental discourse.

6 Summary, Discussion, and Concluding Remarks

The present research has demonstrated that environmental organisations – Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion – partly endorsed the arguments implied by the thread "Nature is healing. We are the virus" (Bosworth, 2021). Indeed, they produced several official statements blaming humanity for the different crises (the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic), and praising the opportunities offered by the lockdown. However, we saw that HEALTH metaphors were used with caution. On the one hand, Greenpeace has indeed endorsed the image of "Nature is healing" but the environmentalists have been careful not to exploit the metaphorical conceptualisation. They even explicitly criticised the content of the thread, despite the fact that their statements still argue that NATURE HAD HEALED. On the other hand, Extinction Rebellion explicitly contradicts the arguments promoted by the thread. They draw a causal link between COVID-19, climate change, and racial injustice to emphasise that these are not VIRUSES but only SYMPTOMS of the SYSTEM-VIRUS. Such an interrelation between COVID-19 and climate change has indeed been previously noticed in

a study focusing on Extinction Rebellion's use of HEALTH metaphors during the COVID-19 pandemic (Augé, 2021a).

The paper also demonstrated that the environmental organisations metaphorically discussed the two (interrelated) target domains under study: humans' responsibilities and opportunities permitted by the lockdown. However, the present study finds that these organisations favoured different source domains to address these topics. It has been demonstrated that Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion significantly relied on CONTAINER and JOURNEY-PATH-MOVEMENT metaphors. They thus used ubiquitous metaphorical expressions (see Grady, 1997) which do not bear any controversial implications in the context of the pandemic (as opposed to HEALTH-related expressions). For instance, they pictured the end of polluting activities as a PROGRESSION ALONG A PATH or a DIFFERENT DIRECTION that is being BLOCKED by political decisions and industrial authority over society. Alternatively, they described the political system as a BROKEN CONTAINER while the lockdown offered humanity an EXIT so that the MISCHIEVOUS CONTENT can be REMOVED, and the CONTAINER can be FIXED. In different cases, the complex concept of (pre-COVID-19) "normality" has been depicted as a SELF-INFLICTED CRIMINAL ACTION. Environmentalists relied on this absurd image to mock humanity's past behaviour. In other extracts, the CRIME is COMMITTED by a particular sector: industries. This image insists on the necessity to prevent the "business as usual" scenario, which involves the complete re-opening of industries and the lack of control over industrial pollution.

Overall, these metaphorical depictions emphasise that humans' "normal" behaviour has been disrupted. These highlight the (un)surprising aspects of the pandemic and expose the "abnormality" of the pre-pandemic world. These arguments aim at convincing recipients to take responsibilities in the BUILDING of a better society.

In view of the existing criticism of the conceptualisation "Nature is healing. We are the virus" (Bosworth, 2021), the present research aimed at testing environmentalists' reliance on such a controversial metaphor-

ical statement. The HEALTH metaphor can indeed effectively convey environmental arguments, particularly in a social context impacted by a global pandemic (see Augé, 2021a; Charteris-Black, 2021; Sorce and Dumitrica, 2021). However, the characterisation of Nature as a HEALING BODY implies that climate change does not require long-term actions to be mitigated. This argument has notably been emphasised in the extracts discussed in this paper. Instead, environmentalists favour metaphorical descriptions which, on the one hand acknowledge the unprecedented consequences of the pandemic (e.g., a BROKEN CONTAINER) and on the other hand, take into account the supremacy of the industrialised world and of the political system (e.g., a DOORWAY BLOCKED by political decisions). The focus was thus on the damaging impacts of the decisions taken by political leaders, preventing sustainability.

A major conceptual difference exists between the metaphorical statements "Nature is healing" and "Build Back Better": the latter comprises the DESTRUCTION caused by non-environmentally friendly decisions and the concrete actions that every human-being can take to improve society (i.e., FIXING A BROKEN OBJECT). However, in the "Nature is healing" statement, the VIRUS or SICKNESS does not necessarily involve a new opportunity, and it does not necessarily involve a serious HEALTH CONDITION (i.e., the source domain VIRUS can be interpreted as a DEADLY VIRUS, but also as a simple FLUE). In addition, this controversial statement does not argue in favour of global mitigation: the metaphorical frame of MEDICINE implies that only a DOCTOR can CURE Nature. This conceptualisation thus excludes the possibilities for every human-being to perform individual actions to solve the climate crisis. Metaphorical references to the SYMPTOMS, or TREATMENT of the environment can still advertise suitable solutions (Augé, 2021a; Ross et al., 1997) as these emphasise humans' dependence on Nature: recipients can perceive environmental damages interpreted as BODY DAMAGES. Yet, these metaphors are mostly aimed at raising awareness through a concrete representation of the impact of pollution (Augé, 2021b). The controversies discussed by Bosworth (2021) are related to the role played by humanity within the mapping

NATURE AS A DISEASED BODY. For such a mapping to produce effective arguments, humanity needs to be included within the concept of NATURE – echoing James Lovelock's depiction of Gaia as a living organism (2007). Yet, humans should be excluded from the concept DISEASE, which may recall existing xenophobic statements produced during past periods (Musolff, 2010). In the context of the pandemic, the identification of humanity as a VIRUS is particularly concerning at a time when the population experiences major health concerns. Similar controversial metaphorical statements about the role of humanity during the COVID-19 pandemic have indeed yielded significant debates among linguists. They observed how the questionable exploitations of the WAR metaphor could result in the identification of sick people as ENEMIES (Augé, forthcoming; Charteris-Black, 2021).

This paper thus demonstrated that the use of metaphors to blame humanity should be carefully processed: the extracts discussed in this paper emphasised how Greenpeace and Extinction Rebellion promoted humans' power to mitigate the crises through the use of metaphors. Metaphorical arguments blaming particular groups – like politicians – relied on source domains which represented actions that evil-minded individuals may perform (e.g., breaking an object or blocking a path) but, despite bearing negative features, cannot harm the population. Even if reducing pollution is a necessary mitigation that can be produced at the level of the individuals, the emphasis – through metaphors – on the damages done by humans' activities (i.e., "We are the virus") contradicts environmentalists' main argument, which is to present sustainability as an achievable, concrete goal to live in a better world.

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Appendix.

URLs of the extracts presented in the paper (Data available at: Greenpeace. org and Rebellion.earth)

 1 - https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2020/05/15/16-17-may-extinction-rebellion-to-create-pop-up-bike-lanes-and-say-no-going-back-to-busy-polluted-streets-as-lockdown-eases/

 2- https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/44577/alice-bra-ga-food-commodities-deforestation/

 3- https://extinctionrebellion.uk/event/we-want-to-live-summer-rebel-lion-east-of-england/

 4 - https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/45047/demand-cli-mate-justice-europe/

 5 - https://extinctionrebellion.uk/event/blood-on-your-hands-global-action/

 6 - https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/30020/corona-virus-pandemic-covid-crack-system-economics-future-fairness-reco-very-climate/

 7 - https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2020/04/29/uk-newsletter-14-no-going-back/

 8 - https://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/45047/demand-cli-mate-justice-europe/

 9 - https://extinctionrebellion.uk/event/letter-for-our-future/

10 - https://rebellion.global/blog/2020/07/30/lockdown-emissions/

On Contagious Disease, Economy, and Ecology in Marie Redonnet's *Splendid Hôtel*

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Abstract

Marie Redonnet's 1986 *Splendid Hôtel* tells the story of a crumbling inn and its nameless, obsessive innkeeper. The latter's efforts at maintaining the hotel are futile, however: all of her attempts are undone as she struggles to handle reckless guests, manage intrusive vermin and destructive weather, and, overall, keep the building habitable and hospitable. The following article analyzes this understudied novel by focusing on the notions of economy and ecology with respect to both space —namely the decrepit eponymous hotel— and body, most notably the narrator's. Both "economy" and "ecology" are concepts derived from the Greek *oikos*, or "house," and both are paradoxically distinct and blurred in the book. I argue that disease relates economy and ecology in Redonnet's text, indeed makes them interdependent, and through these derivations of *oikos*, I examine *Splendid Hôtel*'s reflections on contagion, its aftereffects, and our powerlessness when faced with it. My reading, in which the threshold between the inside and outside of the guest house becomes a metaphor for the interdependency between the inside and outside of the body, opens onto more general considerations of the liminal spatiality of economy and ecology. The lenses used here are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of *becoming* as well as Cheryll Glotfelty's work on literature and environment studies and the wider theoretical frame of ecocriticism. Ultimately, the lines of thought structuring this article include what it means to become our environment, what (fear of) contagion does to body and mind, what a non-genealogical, "ecological" filiation might look like, and what insight *Splendid Hôtel* can offer on our current era's condition. Redonnet's novel and its close reading are exceptionally timely in our contemporary moment of, at minimum, dual pandemics. As I posit in this article, this literary text can function as theory to help us understand and act upon the crises that surround us.

Keywords: ecocriticism, contagion, economy, ecology, environmental humanities

http://interface.org.tw/ and http://interface.ntu.edu.tw/

On Contagious Disease, Economy, and Ecology in Marie Redonnet's *Splendid Hôtel*

My interest in notions of inside and outside crystallized during the pandemic —but which one? I travelled to Australia in December 2019 for the Australian Society for French Studies Conference. On my second day in Sydney, struggling to breathe in the smoke as I looked on at a blazing red sky, I bought an N95 mask in a pharmacy. I wore it outside —protection against the air filled with fire as systems of life and infrastructure burned. That same day I was thankful to step into a safe, closed space, governed by its own rules of circulated air and cushioned seats: the train to Parramatta, where the University of New England, one of the conference's hosts, is located. I remember taking a deep breath inside the compartment along with the other riders. Solidarity. A sense of coming together, huddling inside, close to one another, hiding from the ecological disaster of the outside world. At the end of my trip ten days later, I distinctly remember reaching, rather uncomfortably, across my luggage to throw the mask out, completely oblivious to what would soon become our global reality. Thousands of miles away and three months later, I sewed my first cloth mask from a pair of old socks, longing for the one that I had thrown out, worth its weight in gold by then. This new mask, layered with another, would become what I wore inside, where the air might as well have been filled with fire at a molecular level. Months later once more, as I lay at the edge of a bed unable to move or do more than shallow inhale and exhale in deep pain, Covid-19 having wreaked havoc on every aspect of my bodily system, I longed for the N95 mask once more. Hadn't that mask been a warning? I remember more and more, now, that one of its ear loops got tangled in my hand as I insisted on throwing it out, as I cast it to its fate in a landfill after a short stint at the bottom of a plastic-lined trash bin. Didn't that mean something? Wasn't all of this death avoidable? And the fires? Those deaths too? Hadn't there been warnings beforehand?

Illness, contagion, and quarantine are the constitutive elements of contemporary writer Marie Redonnet's 1986 *Splendid Hôtel*, her first published novel and the first of a trilogy, with *Forever Valley* and *Rose Mélie Rose* completing the group of intimately linked texts. Ironically not very splendid, the eponymous inn has few redeeming qualities. Built on the edge of a wetland on unstable, shaky ground, the hotel plays host to a variety of guests: rats and mosquitos, infections and disease, aging and groaning sisters, and troublesome, inattentive clients, dragging mud with every step, clogging toilets with every new morning. With such a party, each of whose members is a nuisance in his or her own right, the hotel is clearly decrepit, namely because there are more "guests" contributing to its decay than there are people working toward its upkeep. In fact, the algorithm involving clients and personnel pits many against one, the novel's narrator, the "I" of the text. Having inherited the Splendid from her late grandmother, the nameless narrator, the youngest of three sisters —the other two are Ada and Adel— is obsessed with the maintenance of the building. The battle is continuous and cyclic, however: with every accomplishment comes a greater setback, a greater horde of vermin or absentminded guests creeping in.

The hotel, situated in a marshy region restricting its area, necessarily raises questions concerning its economy: not necessarily that of goods or services, but of the possible number and combination of events that can occur within the finite space whose finite resources are delineated by the confines of the Splendid. One can define this economy as an exchange of events or even of characters in —most importantly— a closed system: the hotel. Its constant infestations also raise concerns vis-à-vis ecology, that is, its environmental surroundings and their interaction with the increasingly decrepit building. All in all, *Splendid Hôtel* addresses the delimitation of space, the operative function of the notions of inside and outside, and the harmony, or more specifically the lack thereof, of nature and human-made construction. And although Redonnet's novel —indeed like the entirety of her oeuvre from her first publication, a collection of poetry titled *Le mort & Cie* (1985), to her most recent novel, *Trio pour un monde égaré* (2018)— offers much theoretical richness, not a great deal of scholarly commentary has been written on *Splendid Hôtel*.

1 Literature Review

Nonetheless, some researchers have studied the novel, particularly following Jordan Stump's translation of the trilogy in 1994. Stump's own 1995 article considers a continuity among the novels of the trilogy, as well as tensions within the texts themselves. "Opposition is expressed in *Splendid Hôtel* by coexisting images of expansion and obstruction" (Stump, 1995, p. 107), he states, and indeed this article will also examine the novel's themes of growth and restriction and the oscillation between, or *coexistence* of, the two —namely with respect to the confines of the hotel and what lies beyond them. Further study of Redonnet's work has been published, namely by exploring how it relates to texts of other contemporary French writers such as Annie Ernaux and Marie Darrieussecq (Chossat, 2002; Duffy, 2009). Taking a different tack, Jeanine Alesch (2004, p. 59) addresses *Forever Valley*, and "read[s] the novel against Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993)", Jean Duffy (2009, p. 904) analyzes the "relationship between fantasy and liminality" in Redonnet's trilogy, whereas Elizabeth A. Mazza-Anthony (1996, p. 492) argues for a blurring of genre and medium, what she calls a "writ[ing] 'across boundaries'" in both *Splendid Hotêl* and Redonnet's play *Seaside* (1992). What these particular studies show, which will become clear in this article as well, is how in-betweenness is at the heart of *Splendid Hôtel*. I, too, will focus on this text's recurrent motifs concerning blurred thresholds, but I will emphasize the physical ones, be they of the hotel with the exterior world or of the body with what is beyond the threshold of the skin, rather than discursive ones regarding sex, gender, or the trilogy's female characters. I more specifically argue that the novel and the hotel itself bring into focus the indistinct separations within its economy and ecology through vectors of disease and non-filial lineage.

2 Definitions

I would thus like to consider the role of disease and genealogy in *Splendid Hôtel* in order to question the representation of economy and, ulti-

mately, ecology in the text, that is, the interactions and exchanges of the interior, closed system —the hotel— with the outside world —the open space and swamp around it. Though it may seem obvious that there should exist a relation between economy and ecology, the hotel goes so far as to problematize the limits of these spaces, these systems, even leading to a misrecognition of the two.[1] By means of the increasingly undefined hotel-swamp contrast, I will address how illness challenges the relation of the body to what is both inside and outside its physical epidermal barrier, in addition to how blame is attributed or distributed in disease, and how these considerations can help us understand and act upon our present-day ecological crisis. I will analyze the interdependence of economy and ecology, concepts that are both derived from the Greek *oikos*, "house," and the liminal spaces that are created between inside and outside that take place in the text by means of contagion, on the one hand, and filiation, on the other. I will begin treating the notion of economy by concentrating on disease, contagion, and blame. While building on the idea of liminality, I will then introduce the concept of ecology, and juxtapose it to that of economy, to encapsulate the novel's central concern of indistinct thresholds in general and, specifically, the overlap or even confusion between economy and ecology —epitomized by the narrator herself.

I use the word "ecology," here, to mean the systems of natural life existing beyond the threshold of the hotel. But the distinction between the outside, "natural" world, what we might also term the "environment," and the hotel's human-made inside, or the "built environment," is not so clear —and becomes less clear as the novel progresses. This growing indistinction is the nature of ecology itself, as Cheryll Glotfelty (2012, p. 614) explains:

> the science of ecology examines the interrelationships in sys-

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1   Although this extends beyond the limits of this article, in a similar context, though obviously on a different scale, one could take a look at Timothy Morton and his *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), which describes kinds of phenomena and pollution that cross ecological limits —and geographical and political frontiers too. The term "hyperobject" was first used by Morton in his *The Ecological Thought* (2010). Bruno Latour has spoken of "hybrids," what he also names "quasi-objects," that is, states of being that call into question the Nature/Culture divide. See his *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes, Essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (2006) for more.

tems. . . . The very term environment implies a separation from the subject. This term suggests a binary divide between humans and nature. I don't think that is the best way to conceptualize the universe. I think the model of ecology where everything interacts always is the model that makes sense. I like having the "eco" to imply a systems approach, and I still prefer the term ecocriticism today.

This quote is taken from an interview with Glotfelty as she describes the birth of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), an anthology that she edited along with Harold Fromm that cemented "ecocriticism" as a field of study. As Glotfelty (2012, p. 608) further clarifies:

When I was at Cornell in the 1980s, it was an exciting center of developing contemporary literary theory, and I became interested in combining literary studies with environmental engagement. I started looking for scholars who were doing what I wanted to do: bringing literary-critical approaches or text-centered analysis to the study of landscape or place in a work.

Certainly, much has changed since William Rueckert's first use of the term "ecocriticism" in 1978 (Glotfelty, 2012, p. 608), the growing interest in and urgency of environmental studies over the last four decades, the marriage of environmental concerns with literature, and *The Ecocriticism Reader*'s establishment of the discipline of ecocriticism. The field is wide, its methodologies varied, and its motives diverse, with the "eco" and "criticism" of "ecocriticism" focusing on different facets of our world: ecology, economy, ecocide, literary critique, and the criticism of environmental policy among other domains. Ecological discussions have gone from burgeoning to critical, increasingly dynamic and polemic. If emergent ecocriticism already alerted us to an environmental emergency in the 80s and 90s, today, in the age of —at the very least— dual pandemics, it is dire.

I focus, in what follows, not only on the architecture that exists between

economy and ecology, but also on how a literary text sheds a vital light on the interdependency between humans and their environment. *Splendid Hôtel* calls on humans to better cohabitate with their surroundings —and uncovers what happens if they choose not to. In its representation of dysfunction and decay, the book lays bare the need for sustainable interventions and alternative paradigms of existence, hoped-for reconfigurations in our current era as we battle interposed virulent pandemics —ecological, viral, and racial to name but a few. Redonnet's novel, though notably published a decade before *The Ecocriticism Reader*, already converses with this much larger frame and highlights its place as a prime interlocutor in ecocritical modes of thinking. *Splendid Hôtel* resists a simple reading; instead, though a detailed examination of its movements and major ideas, we can observe a poetic call to action. As we will see, calling into question the threshold between inside and outside, and thus conjugating notions of economy and ecology, permits us to think heterogenous spaces, to bring attention to the limits of the body and the relationship of those limits to the outside world —especially within the context of disease. It also encourages us to reconsider the interdependency of humans and non-human organisms, of the human-made and the organic.

3 Systems of Interdependence

3.1 Life Forms and Forms of *Récit*

Michel Serres, reflecting on the nature of writing, storytelling, and archiving memory —and which forms of life get to do it— asks:

> [A]u bilan, qui écrit? Réponse: les vivants sans exception, sur les choses et entre eux, les choses du monde les unes sur les autres, les planètes sombres, les étoiles scintillantes et les galaxies lumineuses . . . .Si l'histoire commence avec l'écriture, alors toutes les sciences entrent, avec le monde, dans une histoire nouvelle et sans oubli.
>
> (Serres, 2016, p. 18)

Composing history and stories —the two coupled in the French "histoire" and, more specifically, in the play of the uppercase (history) versus lowercase (story) "H/h"— must take into account all life forms, making room for them and voicing their concerns if they are not readily legible. As I appeal for here, reading and analyzing should initiate the same course of action. Close readings of literary texts reveal eerie parallels between fiction and real life. It is through literary analysis that literature becomes both a theoretical model and a call to praxis. Texts concerned with climate collapse and readings that articulate the anxieties of the human and non-human allow us to not only understand, through distance and abstraction, but also to act upon our contemporary crises.

Splendid Hôtel, to all appearances a monologue originating from the narrator, known only as "I" in the text, is in fact a novel composed of various layers. Initially, the narration functions as a justification of the day-to-day tasks performed in the inn, that is, a record of quotidian chores and why they must be done. Second, the novel also chronicles the legacy of the hotel, where inheritance equates to taking care of family members. "C'est mère qui l'a entretenue, maintenant c'est moi. J'ai hérité du Splendid Hôtel" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 10), states the narrator, the "la" of her statement actually referring to Ada and her poor health, and the juxtaposition of the two sentences thus expressing the need to "maintain" both her sister and the hotel. Third, the text is a documentation of disease, or, precisely, of the fluctuation of sickness. Cycling through the inhabitants of the Splendid, disease is represented in various ways in *Splendid Hôtel*, with Ada being the veritable voice, embodiment even, of illness in the text. She has bruises and poor blood circulation, swollen eyes, an asthmatic cough, and rheumatism, to name just a few of her indispositions. And yet, at a few singular moments in the text, Ada is the near picture of health. Ada's health, and then Adel's, seem to fluctuate in function of that of the hotel: "Le Splendid Hôtel n'a pas dit son dernier mot. Mes sœurs rajeunissent. Elles redeviennent coquettes" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 51), notices the narrator.

3.2 Circularities

This fleeting revival in the health of both the hotel and the sisters points to a cycle of events. Time moves linearly forward, yet the events occurring in the hotel fluctuate from bad to good to bad again, as though they were following a secondary, cyclical temporality, best illustrated in the conclusion of the text. The frigid night described at the end of the novel cycles back to its very beginning: "Et le Splendide-Hôtel fut bâti dans le chaos de glaces et de nuit du pôle," reads the epigraph, quoting Rimbaud's "Après le Déluge".[2] The story at this moment joins, both structurally and thematically, its beginning: the construction of the Splendid. Indeed, this recounted circularity in the events, in the tasks, in the various and wavering illnesses of the sisters in *Splendid Hôtel* underscores the fact that the text is based on an economy of exchange —namely of sickness— within the confines of the hotel. As Jeannette Gaudet (1999, p. 142) states, evoking Ada and Adel: "The sisterly relationship, like the narrative structure of the whole novel, feeds on continual change which, paradoxically, is always the same", an observation that equally recalls the logic of Franz Kafka's *The Burrow* (1931), summarized in the last (extant) phrase of the short story: "But all remained unchanged" (Kafka, 1995, p. 359).[3] This, not so paradoxically, is precisely an economy of exchange: change occurring without end within the confines of a system, with the overall result of the system and its contents remaining unchanged. In other words, the inhabitants of the hotel —be they guests or Ada and Adel— are constantly exchanging diseases, repeatedly changing state from healthy to unwell within the finitude of the hotel, and due to the continuity of this circularity, all always appear the same and appear to remain unchanged: Ada and Adel are sick (whatever

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2   In this final scene, the hotel is covered in ice, and the lone narrator looks out onto the marsh (Redonnet, 1986, pp. 102–113).

3   Indeed, the themes of these two texts are acutely linked. The fear of intrusion, of destruction, is just as present in the mind of the mole-like creature of *The Burrow* as it is in the thoughts of the keeper of *Splendid Hôtel*. The narrators of both *Splendid Hôtel* and *The Burrow* are constantly under attack, needing to surmount various problems and overcome obstacles throughout their respective texts. The entrance to the burrow, like that of the Splendid, too marks a seemingly starkly defined threshold demarcating the distinction between the inside, the burrow, and the outside, the upper world. Moreover, in *The Burrow*, like in the Splendid, change within the closed system is possible, and in fact always occurring within the space of the Castle Keep labyrinth. In Kafka's text, new tunnels are built and small fry are constantly flooding in (Kafka, 1995, p. 327); in *Splendid Hôtel*, one group of insects or guests is continuously being replaced by another.

illness they may have), the Splendid is battling an infestation (whatever intruder it may be), the Splendid is in dire need of repair (no matter what particular part of the building may need repairing).

Although Ada's health does fluctuate in this circular economy, it is poor more often than not, thus begging the question: from where do the illnesses of the seemingly closed economy emerge? Disease can generally either be transmitted from one being to another, or it can originate from within the one who is unwell, this being an autoimmune condition where the cells of the body recognize their own as a foreign pathogen. And, in fact, representations of both internal and external maladies are found within *Splendid Hôtel*. The former, for instance, is exemplified when the narrator states: "Ça vient peut-être de l'intérieur, comme le reste" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 15), hypothesizing that Ada's swollen eye is not caused by a mosquito bite, but rather by an ailment from the inside. Other internal illnesses seem to be generated by the interior of the hotel itself: "Pour elle [Adel] c'est la chambre qui est responsable de sa maladie" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 64), as though the very rooms of the building were attacking its inhabitants.

3.3 Autoimmunity and External Pathogens: Diseases of the Inside and Outside

External diseases are illustrated elsewhere in the text, as in an episode where a guest, the hotel's general contractor, is bitten by a rat —an element external to the inn— resulting in infections contracted by both Ada and Adel.[4] Gaudet identifies this double transmission of illness as well: "Ada's weakened constitution is unable to fight off contagion that comes from outside herself. All her previous afflictions came from within" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 142), she writes, underscoring how sickness is most destructive when it comes from outside the hotel's economy. Though Ada is frequently ill from within —both the hotel and self— her overall health does manage to stabilize in these "internal"

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4   Coincidentally rats bring us to the very beginning of Deleuze and Guattari's "Devenir-intense, devenir-animal, devenir-imperceptible. . ." chapter of *Mille plateaux*, which starts with a description of a *devenir-rat* in Daniel Mann's 1972 film *Willard*.

cases. And yet she is unable to recover from the rat incident, that is, following external contamination, contagion coming from outside the confines of the hotel. The internal economy of the system, defined by a circulation of internal disease appears, then, to be infiltrated by its surrounding ecology in the case of external illness, exemplifying the kind of in-betweenness embodied by Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming*: "Un devenir est toujours au milieu, on ne peut le prendre qu'au milieu. Un devenir n'est ni un ni deux, ni rapport des deux, mais entre-deux, frontière ou ligne de fuite, de chute, perpendiculaire aux deux" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 360). We begin to see how the hotel finds itself on the threshold of economy and ecology; it encapsulates the middle, the in-between, whereby contagion leads to this crossing over and muddling of the border between inside and outside.

As Deleuze and Guattari underline, "la contagion, l'épidémie met en jeu des termes tout à fait hétérogènes: par exemple un homme, un animal et une bactérie, un virus, une molécule, un micro-organisme" (1980, p. 295). Disease is a heterogeneous operation, a relation with the other, whether this other be an entirely *other* being —a contagious individual, for instance, passing along an infection— or oneself, such as in an autoimmune reaction by which the body recognizes itself as other. Disease also exposes the extent to which the self is insecure in relation to the outside world. A microbe need not ruin the integrity of a body to enter it. It can infiltrate imperceptibly, invisibly penetrating the permeable skin, transferring itself from the outside to the inside, disorganizing the interior of the body, provoking it to take action against the foreign pathogen. In other words, if we have seen how the hotel defines a space in which economic transactions —the exchange of disease— take place, we can now understand that the aim of contagion, of an external pathogen, is not only to break into the body from outside it, but also to call into question the very threshold that is presumed to separate that body as intact entity.

In *Splendid Hôtel*, disease, then, points to the porousness of the body to the outside world, even to the seeming "outside" or "other" living within us in the case of an autoimmune disorder, and, more specifical-

ly, to the Splendid as less of a closed system than previously thought. The role of blame with respect to contagion in the Splendid also sheds light on the liminality of inside and outside. A concept which often-times functions in relation to infectious disease, blame —the desire (whether scientific or divine) to attribute fault to someone or something in order to explain the origin of unfortunate sickness— in Redonnet's novel can also be understood as a metaphor for disease. Though there is clearly a qualitative difference between the circulation of blame and the circulation of contagion, blame, like disease, in the Splendid follows a logic of transmission in terms of its transference of accountability, of responsibility.[5] In the rat incident, the external cause of the ailment is the animal —the rat— according to the contractor. The rat's sup-posed culpability, however, is displaced by Adel onto the construction overseer himself when Ada falls ill, a shift that is further supported by the narrator after the death of her sisters. "Les rats avaient toujours été inoffensifs. D'ailleurs, ce n'est pas la faute des rats, c'est la faute des hommes du chantier avec toutes les ordures qu'ils ont laissées pourrir dans le campement" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 112), she affirms, blaming not the rats, but the men and their mess. Here, human animals are to blame for their discordant existence with their non-human animal and other-wise organic and inorganic surroundings. It is as though the *hommes du chantier* act as foreign pathogens, infecting both the hotel *and* the humans linked to it even more so than the germs. The narrator thus removes the blame from the animals, and attributes it, rather, to the contractor and his team. Blame consequently circulates from party to party, highlighting the bounds and restrictions of the hotel and precisely the problematization of their limits, engendering a lack of focus, even an indistinction between the economy of the hotel and its surrounding ecological environment: it is thus unclear where these boundaries begin and end. Where the hotel's limits produce bodies that are susceptible to pathogens *and* diseased bodies "infect" the hotel, blame, once again like disease, too crosses the frontier from the interior site of sickness to the outside and vice versa —from the external lieu of contamination to the inside— circulating among the inhabitants of the hotel and the

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5   It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the ethical or political considerations of responsibility, responsibility with specific regard to the animal, or the notion of consciousness or recognition with regard to responsibility. For more on this see, for instance, Jacques Derrida's *L'animal que donc je suis* (2006).

ecological beings (rats and construction workers) entering and exiting the economic system and space.

Even more obviously encapsulating the fact that blame cannot be contained within the Splendid's economy are the repeated moments in the novel highlighting the deceased grandmother's fault —be it of having built the hotel too close to the swamp, or of having chosen the wrong wood or paint for the interior of the building— which underline a kind of original sin and, by extension, original blame.[6] "C'est la faute à grand-mère" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 3) rings out on nearly every page of the text: blame, here, is displaced onto the grandmother —a someone, or something, fundamental yet *external* to the economy of the Splendid. Thus, if it would seem that in a finite, confined space there is a restricted number of events that can take place, that only so many can get sick, and that by extension there are only so many to whom blame can be ascribed or onto whom blame can be displaced, here the foundational blame for the Splendid's many problems in fact stems from beyond its closed economy. Blame thus exceeds the economy of the system, hinting at a remainder.

3.4 Uncanny Mathematics: Oddities and Remainders

An incursion of inside across a frontier to outside can thus be better understood through this notion of remainder —be it an addition or an absence, a lack— with respect to economy. The remainders, of blame as of contagion, that fail to add up in the novel point to the not-so-clear border between the finite inside of the Splendid and the greater outside. Indeed, one cannot affirm that everything in *Splendid Hôtel* adds up, or that everything lines up within the confines of the hotel. Oftentimes there is an odd one out, seen in the attribution of blame, for instance. Other times, there are subtle misalignments, dissonant repetitions in the text, with regard, for example, to identity: "Ada fait toujours le même rêve. Elle rêve qu'elle n'est pas Ada, mais Adel" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 23).

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6   "Personne n'avait jamais construit un hôtel en bordure du marais" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 9), states the narrator, highlighting the hotel's proximity to the marsh.

Certainly, the similarity of the two names —Adel is sometimes referred to as Ada and vice versa— also hints at the likeness of the two sisters, and indeed, they seem almost to exchange identities. This consequently highlights not only a fracturing of individual identity, but also a congruence, even porosity of name and person, as though Adel were just a multiple of Ada, or Ada simply a version of Adel. And yet, "Ada et Adel, nées et mortes au Splendid Hôtel" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 114), read the plaques on the sisters' gravestones when they die, underlining the simultaneous singularity of each sister by identifying each in her own right. This points to yet another remainder in *Splendid Hôtel*: the sisters nearly overlap to form one single being in the text, but also always leave a slight remnant breaching the overlap —like the example above where they *are* correctly identified separately as Ada and Adel— that permits Ada/Adel to be identified independently from Adel/Ada.

Moreover, the sisters are distinct from the narrator. Although they begin and end their lives, their life cycle, in the Splendid, Ada and Adel both spend their youth traveling beyond the boundaries of the hotel, gaining experiences, evolving as individuals. Before permanently moving into the Splendid, their bodies are in continual contact with the outside world, thus incurring changes, once again suggesting that the body is not a closed economy. The leaky restrictiveness of the body's economy and its beyond, as well as the narrator's difference vis-à-vis her sisters, are also seen in the former's language. Indeed Redonnet, expanding on the narration of her trilogy in a 1994 interview with Stump published with the translation of *Forever Valley*, explains that

> [e]ach book adheres to a rigorous structure, at the same time mathematical, architectural, and musical, which transforms itself from book to book: the elements multiply, the combinatorial system grows richer, space and thus mobility become more important, the story grows more complex.
>
> (Redonnet, 1995, p. 111)

There is consequently a conscious effort on Redonnet's behalf to introduce greater scope and complexity within the progression of her trilo-

gy. *Splendid Hôtel* is the first entry of the triad, and, reflecting Redonnet's strategic narratological development of the trilogy, more confined, bare-bones, in its language, setting, and description of character. Stump (1995, p. 106), for instance, also notices this style by underlining the "polyvalent nature of Redonnet's infinitely simple writing", while Katharine Gingrass-Conley (1993, p. 51) remarks on her "short, descriptive sentences in the present tense". The linguistic simplicity in both the narrator's syntax and semantics, the nearly infantile quality of her speech and vocabulary, stems from the fact that her language is restricted spatially —the narrator having never left the hotel.[7] Her language has always been used in an isolated context and has thus never been exposed to the outside. And yet, she inevitably picks up snippets of phrases enunciated by the guests, adding, as a result, a certain mobility to her mode of communication, a certain element from without, beyond language's exteriorization of and projection from the human. The narrator's language is consequently not only a product of the Splendid but equally parallels the functioning of the hotel. The Splendid —defined by a combinatorial, mathematical system based on exchange and substitution due to its confines— is secluded and delimited, made finite by the swamp. And yet, motion within the space, and *through* the space —embodied by the very notion of a hotel— is not restricted: comings and goings occur daily, disease and contagion multiply ceaselessly in the hotel, and transference between spaces, thus highlighting their porosity, is foundational to the text.

4 Liminal Spaces

4.1 Environmental Porosity: The Osmotic Flow of Economy and Ecology

Every question addressed in this article thus far has sought to underline a liminality pointing to a perviousness by means of which the economic, pathogenic exchanges within the hotel, among its guests, and be-

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7   "Je me sens différente de mes sœurs, sans doute parce que je n'ai jamais quitté le Splendid" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 41), she affirms.

tween its interior and its surrounds, comes to be understood in terms of ecology. Like the body, physically delimited by its skin from the outside world, but never out of contact with it, the hotel, although physically delimited by the swamp and seemingly entirely closed off from it and the external world, is in a continual, contingent touching with its environment. The threshold that is skin and wood, for the body and hotel, respectively, is not a clearly defined frontier. Rather, it manifests as an osmosis, a diffusion; elements of the outside world —be it through the animal life of the swamp, the weather, or the pathogens constantly invading the hotel— obscure the threshold between the building proper and the marshy lands surrounding it. Similarly, although attempts at communication and transportation between the Splendid and that which is external to it fail, as exemplified by the abandoned project to build a bridge that would make the hotel more easily accessible, there is an exchange with the outside through the comings and goings of the guests and the vermin. The hotel is thus in a constant state of oscillation between the inside and the outside, between economy and ecology, exemplifying what someone with a mathematical inclination might call *clopen*, that is, an object simultaneously closed and open.[8]

Why are these questions of transmission, transfer, and threshold, then, important? It is difficult, if not impossible, to bring into focus blurred frontiers, a project in and of itself unnecessary, as it is precisely the unclearly defined, or clearly undefined, quality of the threshold that makes it of interest. Thresholds and their confusion, their overlap, effectively enable the examining of limits, or the lack thereof. What is serious illness other than an oscillating state, a hazy threshold between life and death? And, if we are to think the interior and exterior, where do the limits of the inside end, and where do the beginnings of an outside emerge? How does a building, a human-made construction, live in harmony with its environment? In other words, where and when does one space or self become different or other?

The aim of the foregoing analysis has been to demonstrate how any con-

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8 A *clopen* set is a set that is open *and* closed, that is, both the set and its complement are open (a set is closed if its complement is open). Thus I am not necessarily using "clopen" in a rigorous mathematical sense, but rather as a fitting term that captures the open-closed, inside-outside state of the Splendid.

sideration of the economy that functions in *Splendid Hôtel*, and in Splendid Hôtel, must deal with the fact that such an economy is conjugated in association with an ecology. Both economy and ecology derive from the Greek *oikos* "house," where one, economy, etymologically carries the sense of the management of the household, of the inside, *oikonomia* (economy), and the other, ecology, studies the circulation of substances, of organisms, and their relation to their environment. The hotel is thus at the threshold of *oikos*, of economy and ecology, at the threshold of the finite events produced in the finitude of the space of the hotel and the mobility through the space —that is, how the hotel interacts with its ecological exterior, with the "guests" from the outside world, from microbe to animal to human. For all its seeming isolation, the Splendid cannot escape seeping out of its own boundaries. And perhaps this is most accurately and acutely captured by the narrator's description of the cemetery adjacent to the marsh: "La tombe de grand-mère s'est complètement affaissée, comme je le craignais. Quant aux autres tombes, dans l'état où elles sont, il est impossible de les distinguer les unes des autres. Le cimetière était plein d'eau. Il fait comme partie du marais depuis que le marais gagne" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 48). The hotel, like the graveyard, *fait comme partie du marais depuis que le marais gagne*. The boundaries of both these spaces are permeable, pervious, leading to a transmission of substances from the marsh to the hotel and vice versa, a lack of focus therefore between the limits separating the economy of the Splendid from the ecology of the wetland surrounding it.

As we have seen above, economy and ecology —and their overlap as the result of the invasion of one into the other— necessarily raise questions of frontiers, asking us by extension to consider the implications that such a growing indistinction has for filiation, identity, subjectivity, and disease. How do considerations of economy merging into ecology then affect genealogy and its conceptualization? As mentioned above, there is a parallel in *Splendid Hôtel* between the narrator's inheritance of the Splendid and the nursing of Ada (and Adel), thus already a parallel between inheritance and disease. The original transferal of the hotel, from grandmother to granddaughter, is based on filiation, a perverted filiation perhaps, as it skips the underrepresented mother, but a bloodline none-

theless. More importantly, we may ask where the establishment will go from there: once there is a halt in lineage, will the hotel be inherited by the swamp and the life, the animals and plants, living there? When, as Deleuze & Guattari (1980, p. 295) state, "[n]ous opposons l'épidémie à la filiation, la contagion à l'hérédité", they are calling for genealogy to be redefined, and it seems to be exactly this reconfiguration that *Splendid Hôtel* underlines with its incursion of ecology into economy. This consideration is, in fact, once again intimately linked to Deleuze & Guattari's notion of *becoming*, identified as being of an order other than descent: "Le devenir est toujours d'un autre ordre que celui de la filiation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 291). Similarly, in Redonnet's text, by way of the infected hotel itself, there is, in addition to a genealogy defined by filiation (for example from grandmother to granddaughter), a more generalized transmission that functions by means of contamination and heterogeneity, of inside meeting outside, of the threshold of the hotel lacking focus with respect to the beyond-threshold. The hotel can thus be seen as being "passed down" to the marsh, perhaps entirely swallowed up by the swamp, or even becoming the wetland after the death of the narrator.

4.2 Identity: The Poetics and Praxis of Becoming

Considerations of threshold are just as essential for subjectivity, for the definition of "I" and the forging of self. In fact, as state Deleuze & Guattari (1980, p. 305), "le moi n'est qu'un seuil, une porte, un devenir entre deux multiplicités". The notion of threshold thus puts into perspective the self's relation —be it physical, mental, ethical— to the other. It underlines considerations of where the "I" ends and where the other begins, hence dramatizing the very question of how the "I" defines itself. The "I" cannot solely be determined by what is inside the skin, and yet the "I" cannot be physically exterior to itself, in a constant flux, then, between its interior economy and external, surrounding ecology like the Splendid itself. Once again underlining the hotel-body parallel —and thus the permeability of the systems, of the economies, of both body and hotel— the Splendid seems to be a near extension, that is, a

prosthesis, of the narrator's body since she was not present at *its* birth, its construction at the time of her grandmother, nor will she be present, we can speculate, at the time of its demise, its becoming entirely one with the swamp.

Consequently, it is not solely the hotel that is en route to becoming one with the marsh: the narrator too exhibits such a *becoming*. Indeed, if the ecology of which the hotel is a part penetrates its internal economy —ecology, in the words of Deleuze & Guattari, becoming economy— and this very economy reciprocally seeps into, becomes, ecology, then its resulting heterogeneity of states is best encapsulated by the narrator herself. As mentioned above and to come full circle with my discussion of disease-contagion-blame, the "I" of the text feels different from her sisters, an inkling she attributes to having never left the place in which she was born. When, at the beginning of the text, guests become ill on account of a microbe in the water, the narrator's difference is manifested as immunity. "Je suis acclimatée au marais. Le microbe n'a pas réussi à me rendre malade" (Redonnet, 1986, p. 22), she affirms, referencing a kind of adaptive immune system in which the body remembers a foreign pathogen and no longer sees it as a threat. Having become immune by means of an overexposure to the outside elements and microbes —though paradoxically having never left the inside— the narrator is thus unable to become ill. And immunity entirely relates to blame. There is an association, in fact, to be made between immunity and guiltlessness. The one who is immune is, by definition, exempt from illness. Unable to become ill, the immune body is also unable to actively, knowingly, pass on the illness, unable to be a link, a stage, in the cycle of transmission: one who is immune is exempt from blame.

Although the narrator of *Splendid Hôtel* is oftentimes underappreciated, she is never blamed, and, specifically, never blamed for making anyone ill. Fault and accusation are, indeed, always projected onto someone exterior to the narrator. It is precisely, then, this *becoming-immune* that permits a seamlessness between the narrator and the world immediately outside her body, and, ultimately, what enables her to escape the death that takes her sisters. The narrator thus embodies threshold itself; she

is the epitome of the in-between, of the liminality between inside and outside. Though she has never left the hotel, she is the one most in tune with what is beyond it. Though she remains firmly within the literal confines of the Splendid, she oscillates on the border between the hotel and its environment, living in the delicate symmetry of inside and outside. She is also the sole individual in the novel who takes her responsibilities seriously. She is not to be blamed because she is responsible —conscientious, that is, not accountable. If the Splendid shows us, even teaches, us anything, it is that there is no escape from one's surrounding environment and that —if we are to emulate the narrator— in order to survive, we must recognize the inevitable necessity of concord between the *oikos* of the inside and that of the outside. In other words, there is no choice as to whether or not we must cohabitate with our ecological surroundings. The choice lies in how we do it.

5 Conclusion: Crises, Choice, and Change

"In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?" Glotfelty (1996, p. xix) asks in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Such concerns clearly seep into and structure Redonnet's novel. *Splendid Hôtel* uncovers deep and insightful truths concerning how we interact with our environment, the perils that this puts us in if we continue on our current track, and how a *becoming* (more like our environment) might help in the wake of virulent pandemics. This text does not quite serve as a retroactive mirror, that is, an example from the past that can illuminate our future, or even a wise warning from a bygone time as to how to behave in the present, but rather constitutes an urgent request for cohabitation, even a *becoming-environment*. In this article, I have underscored the knowledge that circulates in this literary narrative, thus positing that *Splendid Hôtel* can and should play a role in our conception and perception of ecological catastrophe. Here, fiction has emphasized a concern for our "natural" environment and has put to the fore the troubled relationship, playing out in real time, between human animals and non-human animals, among humans, plants, bodies of water, objects, and the

built environment. The cohabitation of these entities in times of crisis especially is put into focus in Redonnet's novel, which is extraordinarily relevant to our current moment —and all moments to come if change is not enacted.

I firmly believe that the Covid-19 pandemic is helping us understand what it means to live with our unfolding ecological pandemic. Each is the inverse of the other: one, virulent from the outside, the other, virulent from the inside. However, the two have changed our connection to both the inside and outside world and our relationship to matter and beings —from a particulate, molecular level to all-encompassing proportions, captured by the very word "pandemic," that is, "all of the people," from the Greek *pan*, "all," and *dēmos*, "people." Both pandemics have challenged the limits of space, threshold, and safety. Inside, the air might be contaminated with a virus. Outside, the air is filled with fire, the water caked with spilled oil, and the ground suffused with plastic. Peril surrounds us. Yet as a remedy, or at least response, to an accumulation, oversaturation of harrowing news built on models of speed and easy consumption, literature can help. *Splendid Hôtel* echoes the epoch of Covid-19 still carving itself into our timeline two years on. The narrator is truly quarantined in her hotel, acutely aware of her surroundings, her limited supplies, and the potential dangers that human animals and non-human animals alike can bring into the guest house. Her existence is defined by cyclic, accelerating hardships in an inn that seems to be standing, unbalanced, on a precipice. Glotfelty summarizes this simultaneously ongoing and further looming disaster, a sentiment that is keenly felt by many in the field of ecocriticism, as follows:

> Ultimately, not to be a pessimist, but giant disaster can sometimes be the ashes out of which new forms arise. It has happened many times on smaller scales. Maybe that is where we are heading.
>
> (Glotfelty, 2012, p. 614)

Splendid Hôtel allows up to think about our current, still developing crisis —with distance. Indeed, Redonnet's book, set in an undefined

place and time, serves as a translator of our current era, of the human footprint that has imprinted destruction onto our environment.

In the final analysis, problematized thresholds permit us to think heterogeneity, to redefine genealogies, question the limits of the body, especially within the context of disease, and reconsider the interdependency of systems and spaces, of humans and non-human organisms. The narrator, a being immune to the swamp *and* to the hotel, goes so far as to blur the human-animal divide, exemplifying, we return to Deleuze and Guattari, a *becoming-animal*, an in-between figure, a fluctuating middle line at the epitome of heterogeneity, of limitlessness to the outside world, of interdependency between the two *oikoi*. After all, there is no "outside world," but simply world, composed of the human and non-human, of plant, human animal, and non-human animal life. This human-animal coexistence brings to mind another *becoming* and another set of infiltrating organisms —ants this time as opposed to rats— via Henri Michaux. To conclude, I would like to consider the opening lines of his "Encore des changements." "À force de souffrir," recounts the poetic voice,

> je perdis les limites de mon corps et me démesurai irrésistiblement. Je fus toutes choses: des fourmis surtout, interminablement à la file, laborieuses et toutefois hésitantes. C'était un mouvement fou. Il me fallait toute mon attention. Je m'aperçus bientôt que non seulement j'étais les fourmis, mais aussi j'étais leur chemin.
>
> (Michaux, 1998, p. 479)

There is not only a literal *becoming-animal* described in the poem, but an intimate relation to the outside that is accentuated. *I soon noticed I was not only the ants, but also their path*. Perhaps, then, we should think of the "I" of *Splendid Hôtel* as a path linking the hotel to the swamp, bridging interior and exterior, a path at the intersection of —and entreating for solidarity among— economy, ecology, and the other.

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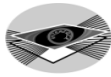
Malattie scambiate: Peste e Colera in Percy e Mary Shelley

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Abstract

L'obbiettivo di questo articolo è discutere la rappresentazione delle malattie epidemiche presenti in The Revolt of Islam (1818) di Percy Bysshe Shelley e The Last Man (1826) di Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, opere prodotte durante la prima pandemia di colera (1817-1824) che colpì duramente l'Asia, ma non arrivò in Europa. Argomenterò che questi testi utilizzano il termine generico "peste" per raffigurare indirettamente il colera e, in questo modo, riflettere sull'ansia dell'invasione e del contagio.

Parole chiave: colera nella letteratura, peste nella letteratura, malattie finzionali, critica tematica
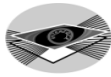
Swapped Diseases: Plague and Cholera in Percy and Mary Shelley

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to discuss the depiction of epidemic diseases in *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) by Percy Bysshe Shelley and *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, works produced during the first cholera pandemic (1817-1824) which affected Asia deeply but did not reach Europe. I will argue that these texts use the generic term "plague" to indirectly represent cholera and, in this way, reflect on the anxiety of invasion and contagion.

Keywords: cholera in literature, plague in literature, fictional diseases, thematic criticism

Malattie scambiate: Peste e Colera in Percy e Mary Shelley

Il *Vibrio cholerae* è un batterio non invasivo che sussiste preferibilmente in acque salmastre e fitoplancton, ma, quando ingerito da esseri umani, può alloggiare temporaneamente nell'intestino tenue, dove produce una tossina che impermeabilizza il tratto intestinale e limita la capacità del corpo di assorbire liquidi. Impossibilitato ad idratarsi, l'organismo prova paradossalmente a liberarsi dell'infezione espellendo una grande quantità di liquidi attraverso frequenti deiezioni corporee. Seguono, allora, dissenteria e vomito che possono ripetersi decine di volte al giorno.

La grave disidratazione addensa il sangue, causa insufficienza cardiaca e renale, e conferisce alle vittime del colera il loro aspetto caratteristico: occhi infossati, rughe sulle mani e sui piedi, pelle bluastra, fredda e poco elastica. Inoltre, insiemi ai liquidi sono eliminate anche sostanze importanti per il normale funzionamento delle cellule, come il sodio e il potassio, la cui mancanza crea uno squilibrio elettrolitico che causa, in aggiunta agli altri sintomi, dolori acuti, crampi muscolari, letargia, difficoltà a parlare ed, eventualmente, coma.

L'azione della malattia è rapida: il colera colpisce subitamente, senza preavviso, e, nonostante uccida in una media di due o tre giorni, in alcuni casi può anche farlo in poche ore. Il suo relativo tasso di mortalità è allo stesso modo molto elevato, fra il 50% e il 60% dei casi non trattati. Tuttavia, il tasso di morbilità, ossia la percentuale della popolazione che contrae la malattia, nonostante possa variare enormemente, è normalmente basso, storicamente inferiore al 5% in Europa. Sono rari i casi in cui una percentuale superiore al 10% della popolazione è stata contaminata. Il colera è, allora, una malattia di bassa morbilità e alta mortalità, al contrario, per esempio, dell'influenza, che colpisce una grande per-

centuale della popolazione (alta morbilità), ma causa poche morti (bassa mortalità).

Un trattamento efficace contro il colera è apparso soltanto dopo i progressi nella terapia di reidratazione compiuti da Sir Leonard Rogers, già nel ventesimo secolo, che insieme agli antibiotici diminuì il tasso di mortalità a meno di 1% (Echemberg, 2011, p. 43). Durante il diciannovesimo secolo, le terapie utilizzate per i medici si basavano principalmente su tre elementi: medicine a base di mercurio, che inconsapevolmente intossicavano i pazienti; purgativi volti ad espellere l'elemento infettivo, ma che in realtà aumentavano ancora di più la già grave disidratazione; l'estrazione di sangue attraverso salassi e sanguisughe, che indeboliva ulteriormente le vittime. In questo modo, i medici spesso contribuivano all'aumento della mortalità, motivo per cui Howard-Jones (1972, pp. 373) designò la terapia contro il colera come "a form of benevolent homicide". Questo fatto generò diverse teorie cospiratorie fra la popolazione che si credeva perseguitata, vittima di un complotto di "untori" organizzato dalle autorità per sterminare i poveri.

Poiché non esistevano terapie adeguate, la modalità più comune per combattere il colera durante il diciannovesimo fu, prioritariamente, quella di prevenire la sua diffusione, utilizzando spesso pratiche create o perfezionate per gestire la peste, come quarantene, cordoni d'isolamento e ospedalizzazioni forzate. Intorno al 1850, movimenti igienisti incominciarono campagne pubbliche per migliorare la gestione dei rifiuti nelle grande città europee. Questi attivisti lavorarono per indurre i politici all'azione e per sensibilizzare la popolazione sull'importanza della pulizia, circostanza che comportò diversi miglioramenti alla salute pubblica. Una svolta significativa provenne dall'adozione di una legislazione più attenta alla salute della popolazione, allo stato delle abitazioni, alla salubrità degli spazi di lavoro (Chevalier, 1958). Altre furono l'impiego di metodologie statistiche per descrivere la salute pubblica e lo sviluppo di un apparato burocratico per controllare quello che Foucault (2004 [1979]) chiamerà di "*biopouvoir*". A ciò si aggiunga la creazione sistematica di sistemi fognari, impianti di trattamento d'acqua e giardini pubblici, che migliorarono il benessere generale della popolazione. Lo

sviluppo del colera si lega dunque ai processi di riurbanizzazione delle grandi città europee avvenute nel diciannovesimo secolo, come quelle di Londra, Parigi o Napoli.

Tuttavia, ancorché l'igienismo abbia avuto un grande impatto nella lotta contro le malattie epidemiche del diciannovesimo, bisogna considerare che i presupposti medici su cui si basavano tante delle riforme, anche se efficaci nella pratica, risultavano scorretti scientificamente.

Durante la maggior parte del secolo non si sapeva cosa esattamente causasse il colera. L'esistenza delle cellule e delle batterie era già conosciuta, ma la teoria dei germi come base della medicina moderna si è diffusa gradualmente soltanto dopo i lavori di Virchow, Pasteur, Hansen, Koch e altri, tra 1870 e 1890. Esistevano per questo motivo una pluralità di teorie su cosa causasse il colera, e quasi tutte collegavano, da una parte, i cosiddetti miasmi, elementi infettivi generati dalla decomposizione di materia organica (immondizia, cadaveri, gli effluvi di fogne e pantani, ecc.) presenti principalmente nell'aria, e da un'altra, elementi circostanziali come cattiva nutrizione, bassa qualità delle abitazioni, mancanza di riposo e pratica sportiva, insufficienza di aria fresca e luce solare, e tanti altri.

Il vibrione fu scoperto, in realtà, prima della rivoluzione della teoria dei germi, nel 1854, dall'anatomista italiano Filippo Pacini, che, però, pubblicò le sue osservazioni in un giornale di bassa circolazione, circostanza che comportò una scarsa risonanza nella comunità scientifica. Nello stesso anno, il medico inglese John Snow, in uno dei primi studi epidemiologici della storia della medicina, dimostrò l'esistenza di un legame fra il colera e l'acqua, dopo aver comparato la distribuzione geografica delle vittime e la distribuzione di acqua a Londra. Ciononostante, Snow non riuscì a spiegare quale fosse il meccanismo d'infezione e, di conseguenza, non riuscì a convincere un numero significativo di colleghi. Nel 1883, Robert Koch fu invece in grado di isolare il vibrione in pazienti colpiti dal colera in Egitto, confermando in questo modo il legame fra il batterio e la malattia proposto da Pacini. L'anno dopo, Koch rintracciò il vibrione in un lago contaminato in India, corroboran-

do così il legame fra il colera e l'acqua suggerito da Snow e scoprendo la trasmissione del batterio per via oro-fecale.

1 La Prima Pandemia di colera, 1817-1824

Il colera fu storicamente considerato endemico al delta del Gange, in India, dove la descrizione di una malattia con sintomi simili sarebbe stata documentata in sanscrito già nel quinto secolo (Barua, 1992, pp. 1-3). Questa suposta origine indiana del colera, però, è stata messa in discussione da studi recenti (Hamlin, 2009), che sottolineano i pregiudizi di molte fonti primarie e sostengono che un'ampia distribuzione geografica della malattia sarebbe meglio allineata con il comportamento e l'ecologia del batterio. Ciononostante, ci sono notizie di epidemie più recenti ristrette all'India, una particolarmente devastante fra il 1765 e 1776 (Schader, 1985, p. 5), normalmente collegate a festività religiose, in cui si radunavano grandi moltitudini di pellegrini che, in seguito, portavano la malattia a casa con sé.

All'inizio dell'Ottocento una serie di avvenimenti conferì al colera una maggior mobilità. Per primo, l'intensificarsi del colonialismo inglese attraverso la progressiva espansione della East India Company: dopo la Battaglia di Plassey, nel 1757, l'azienda trasformò l'Imperatore Mughal in un governatore fantoccio e, per i successivi sessant'anni, continuò ad allargare direttamente e indirettamente la sua area d'influenza. In questo modo, nel 1818 la East India Company controllava già la totalità del subcontinente indiano. Apparvero così al vibrione nuove possibilità di propagazione attraverso le costanti operazioni militari, lo spostamento di truppe e popolazioni, il miglioramento dei sistemi di trasporto, l'intensificarsi del commercio con l'Europa.

In aggiunta, nel 1815, si verificò la maggior eruzione vulcanica degli ultimi due millenni, quando il vulcano Tambora esplose in Indonesia ed espulse una quantità massiccia di elementi nella atmosfera e nell'oceano (Wood, 2014). L'eruzione cambiò la costituzione chimica dei mari circostanti e, di conseguenza, distrusse gli ecosistemi marini di cui fa

parte il *vibrio cholerae*, spingendo il vibrione a cercare altri habitat. Inoltre, microbiologi discutono anche la possibilità che gli elementi chimici rilasciati dell'eruzione abbiano provocato nel batterio cambiamenti genetici che avrebbero aumentato la sua infettività. Wood afferma, basandosi su i lavori delle microbiologhe Mercedes Pascual e Rita Colwell:

"In 1817, the acquatic environment of the Bay of Bengal had deteriorated radically owing to the disrupted monsoon, a consequence of Tambora's dimming presence in the stratosphere. By a process that remains mysterious in its details, the altered estuarine ecology then stimulated an unprecedented event of genetic mutation in the ancient career of the cholera bacterium."

(Wood, 2014 , p. 89)

Le abbondanti emissioni di cenere causarono anche anomalie climatiche che raffreddarono il pianeta dai 0,5 agli 0,8 gradi centigradi, generando negli anni seguenti inverni freddissimi. Il 1816, per esempio, fu chiamato "l'anno senza estate". Le temperature eccezionalmente basse causarono perdite nell'agricoltura e scarsità di cibo in tutto il mondo, fattori che indebolirono la popolazione (Wood, 2014, p. 9).

Normalmente, l'acidità dello stomaco è una barriera efficace contro il vibrione e, in molti casi, riesce a impedire la contaminazione. In un individuo malnutrito, tuttavia, il pH dello stomaco è spesso più basico e questo lo rende più suscettibile alla malattia. Quindi, il colera trovò negli anni seguenti alla esplosione del Tambora popolazioni indebolite e predisposte a sviluppare l'infezione.

Una serie di fattori contribuirono insieme, dunque, a facilitare la propagazione del vibrione per il globo nel 1817, quando ebbe inizio la prima pandemia di colera.

La pandemia incominciò probabilmente nelle vicinanze di Kolkata, da dove si diffuse per il subcontinente, arrivando l'anno dopo a Mumbai, nella costa occidentale. Nel 1820 raggiunse la Thailandia e le Filippine,

l'anno seguente arrivò all'Indonesia e alla Cina, e, nel 1822, al Giappone, e all'Impero Turco-Ottomano, in regioni che oggi corrispondono all'Iran, Siria, Georgia, Armenia e Azerbaijan. Nel 1823, colpì le Isole Mauritius, lo Zanzibar, e arrivò alla città portuaria di Astrakan, in Russia. L'anno dopo, però, la trasmissione ebbe fine, probabilmente a causa dell'inverno particolarmente rigido (Hays, 2005, p. 193).

La prima pandemia non arrivò all'Europa, ma i governi del continente accompagnarono i suoi movimenti con attenzione attraverso agenti diplomatici. Il colera causò anche un primo impatto culturale attraverso le relazioni di viaggiatori europei e, specialmente, attraverso i trattati prodotti dai medici inglesi in India. Alcuni di questi testi erano enormemente speculativi e amplificarono le cifre di mortalità in maniera sorprendente. Hays afferma a questo riguardo: "Moreau de Jonnès (1831) put the death toll at about 18 million, and other writers increased their estimates to as many as 50 million" (2005, p. 198).

Secondo i calcoli del Maddison Project Database (2018), la popolazione del globo intorno all'anno 1820 era di circa 1.042 milioni, dei quali 224 (21%) vivevano in Europa – numero, questo, che include anche le repubbliche dell'ex URSS nell'Asia Centrale. La Francia aveva poco più di trentuno milioni di abitanti, il Regno Unito ventuno, l'Italia venti. Se il colera avesse davvero ucciso cinquanta milioni di persone soltanto in Asia, infatti per gli europei sarebbe stata una catastrofe: mantenuta la letalità, il morbo avrebbe sterminato un quarto della popolazione, un numero degno della peste nera. Hays commenta ulteriormente le esagerazioni, ritenendole come l'origine della isteria della popolazione:

> "No evidence supports such beliefs, but their currency at the time when the second cholera pandemic was reaching Europe and North America helps explain the near-hysteria that it generated as it approached".
>
> (Hays , 2005, p. 198)

Lo storico R. J. Morris presenta una conclusione simile quando discute la rappresentazione della seconda pandemia nei giornali inglesi che, nel

1831, con l'obbiettivo di conquistare l'interesse del pubblico, incoraggiarono l'allarmismo descrivendo la malattia con toni drammatici:

> "The nature of the newspaper and periodical Press as a media is, and was, to select striking details to gain and retain the interests of readers. This, as always, increased the apparent tension, violence and pace of an incident. The very language of the articles was calculated to increase alarm – scourge, plague, pestilence, Asiatic violence, devastation, rampage, desperate, formidable, capricious, mysterious, intractable and so on. It was a diet which promised social and economic confusion to a waiting country."
>
> (Morris, 1976, pp. 27-28)

Al di là delle testimonianze dei giornali e trattati medici, è curioso rilevare come le stesse persone che vissero l'epidemia spesso amplificassero il tasso di mortalità, probabilmente in modo sincero, ma poco affidabile.

Charlotte Blake Thornley, per esempio, aveva quattordici anni quando il colera arrivò a Sligo, in Irlanda, nel 1832. Lei e la famiglia scapparono della città e tutti sopravvissero. Circa quarant'anni dopo, Charlotte descrisse l'epidemia in una lettera destinata al figlio, lo scrittore Bram Stoker, che la usò successivamente come fonte per uno dei racconti di *Under the Sunset* (1881).

Nella lettera, Charlotte delinea il colera come una "peste terribile" ed enfatizza la sua novità:

> "In the days of my early youth the world was shaken with the dread of a new and terrible plague which was desolating all lands as it passed through them, and so regular was its march that men could tell where next it would appear and almost the day when it might be expected. It was the cholera, which for the first time appeared in Western Europe."
>
> (Stoker, 2003, p. 412)

Charlotte prosegue con la descrizione dei primi casi di colera, la fuga della popolazione, quella della sua famiglia, e racconta episodi in cui individui furono sepolti ancora vivi o che scapparono dalla sepoltura per poco. Alcuni critici letterari hanno visto in queste storie gli antecedenti degli *undeads* di *Dracula* (1897).[1]

Charlotte conclude il suo racconto con una stima drammatica del numero di morti, cinque ottavi della popolazione: "At the end of that time we were able to live in peace till the plague had abated and we could return to Sligo. There we found the streets grass-grown and five-eighths of the population dead."(Stoker, 2003, p. 418).

La popolazione di Sligo all'arrivo del colera era di circa quindici mila persone, secondo Samuel Cohn Jr. (2018, p. 167). Se, come afferma Charlotte, cinque ottavi fossero deceduti, il numero di morti sarebbe stato di circa 9.375, ossia, il 62,5% della popolazione. Eppure, il numero di morti registrato ufficialmente in tutta l'Irlanda è di 20.070 abitanti su una popolazione totale di 7.784.539 (Creighton, 2014, p. 816), vale a dire, una tassa di mortalità dello 0,26%. Se la stima di Charlotte fosse corretta, ciò significherebbe che la metà di tutti i decessi dell'Irlanda ebbero luogo a Sligo.

Ufficialmente, il numero di casi della città fu di 1.230, che causarono 641 decessi (Cohn Jr., 2018, p. 167). Questo numero ispira poca fiducia ed è probabilmente basso, dato che molti casi non erano registrati e le autorità stesse a volte mascheravano i numeri. In ogni caso, se lo accettiamo, il tasso di morbilità sarebbe di circa 8,2% e il tasso di mortalità di 4,3%, dati che, in confronto con i 0,26% dell'Irlanda, confermano che Sligo fu particolarmente colpita dall'epidemia. Possiamo anche comparare questi numeri a quelli di Bilston, la città più colpita d'Inghilterra in cui, su una popolazione di 14.500, ci furono 2.250 casi (15,5%, il doppio di Sligo) e 693 morti (4,7%) (Cohn Jr., 2018, p. 167). La comparazione rivela, allora, che una mortalità di 4,3% è verosimile e, anche se la aumentassimo cercando di correggerla, saremmo comunque

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1 Carol Senf (2002, p. 50) afferma: "Certainly it is difficult to document the exact nature of Charlotte's influence on Bram. It is clear, however, that Charlotte Stoker was one of the first people to recognize the Gothic power of *Dracula*."

abbastanza lontani degli 62,5% di cui parla la lettera.

2 The Revolt of Islam

Fin qui ho discusso i sintomi del colera e il suo iniziale impatto storico. Ho provato a mostrare come si espanse per il globo durante la prima pandemia, e come alcune delle sue caratteristiche epidemiche generarono rimembranze dei tempi della peste. Ho anche argomentato che l'Europa rispose con allarmismo ed esagerazioni alla nuova malattia "orientale", e ho utilizzato come esempio di questo fenomeno un trattato medico, alcuni testi giornalistici e la lettera di Charlotte Stoker, testi diversi ma tutti ben rappresentativi della diffusa inquietudine. La natura varia di questi discorsi, uno medico scientifico, uno informativo e pubblico, e l'ultimo narrativo e privato, rivela come l'ansia e, posteriormente, il trauma causati dal colera fossero profondi.

Ora argomenterò che la letteratura si inserisce ugualmente in questo dialogo, se pur in modo più metaforico e meno esplicito. Per farlo, utilizzerò due opere inglesi che discutono il tema indirettamente, *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) di Percy Shelley e *The Last Man* (1826) di Mary Shelley, entrambe scritte durante la prima pandemia e pubblicate prima che il colera arrivasse in Europa, nel 1832.

The Revolt of Islam è un lungo poema narrativo, composto in stanze spenseriane (otto endecasillabi, seguiti di un alessandrino, rimati in *ababbcbcc*), divise in dodici canti. Il poema fu scritto e pubblicato nel 1817, però sotto un titolo diverso: *Laon and Cythna*; or, *The Revolution of the Golden City*: *A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*. Questo titolo lungo e triplice mostra una funzione programmatica e offre al lettore indizi sulla natura allegorica del testo. Innanzitutto, i nomi dei protagonisti sono inabituali e suonano grecizzati, forse carichi di significato. Inoltre, il riferimento a una città immaginata, la 'Città d'Oro', invoca un registro mitico e fa pensare a Eldorado o al Regno di Prete Gianni. Poi, l'uso della parola 'visione' nel sottotitolo costringe il lettore a chiedersi se troverà una rappresentazione di avvenimenti già passati, e, dunque,

un 'episodio', una 'immagine', oppure se vedrà vicende venture, una 'predizione', una 'profezia'. Infine, il riferimento cronologico preciso al diciannovesimo secolo punta a una interpretazione del presente.

La prefazione dell'opera conferma i primi sospetti del lettore. Shelley (1818) dice di aver condotto uno 'esperimento' cercando di scoprire se "[the] thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives […] the tempest which have shaken the age in which we live" (p. V). L'obbiettivo esplicito del testo, dice l'autore, è di infuocare nei lettori l'entusiasmo per la libertà e la giustizia. In effetti, la critica legge spesso il poema come un manifesto idealista e una metafora della disillusione risultante dell'insuccesso della rivoluzione francese.

Il poema narra la storia d'amore incestuoso di Laon e Cythna e della rivoluzione che conducono per liberare la città di Argolis del tiranno Othman. Dopo anni di privazioni, gli innamorati quasi raggiungono la vittoria, ma infine falliscono, venendo catturati e bruciati vivi davanti al trono del despota.

Il poema è chiaramente scritto per sostenere la guerra d'indipendenza greca, ideale caro all'autore e al suo circolo, e si struttura su dicotomie tipicamente romantiche e orientaliste: la libertà contro la tirannia, la civilizzazione contro la barbarie, la ragione contro l'oscurantismo e così via.

I nomi dei personaggi rispecchiano questo contrasto. "Laon" è l'accusativo di *λαός*, *laós*, greco antico per 'popolo', 'moltitudine' e anche 'soldati'. È anche rilevante il fatto che questa sia la base di *λαϊκός*, *laïkós*, che può significare tanto 'popolare', quanto 'laico', 'non ecclesiastico'. "Othman", a sua volta, è la traslitterazione arcaica del nome del fondatore dell'Impero Turco-Ottomano, chiamato in turco di *Osman*, ma in arabo di عُثمان , *Uthman*. "Cythna" sembra essere un nome coniato da Percy e la sua radice è meno trasparente, forse derivata dell'isola di Citera (*Κύθηρα*, *Kýthira*), il luogo di nascita della dea Afrodite.

La Città d'Oro, il posto in cui si passa l'azione e, chiaramente, un dop-

pio di Costantinopoli, ha un nome ugualmente simbolico. "Argolis" è la traslitterazione di Argolide (Ἀργολίς *Argolís*), la regione del Peloponneso che è una delle culle della civiltà greca. È anche il posto dove si trova la città di Argo, Ἄργος, uno dei più antichi insediamenti umani abitati ininterrottamente. Il patrionimico applicato ai cittadini di Argo è Ἀργεῖος, e questo è giustamente il termine che nell'Iliade è impiegato al plurale per designare i greci in generale, gli Achei (Ἀργεῖοι, *Argeioi*). In questo modo, il nome scelto per la Città d'Oro è carico di tutta una rete di significati che rimandano alla lingua, alla storia e alla cultura greca e che, di conseguenza, enfatizzano l'usurpazione e la mancanza di legittimità del tirano Othman.[2]

Nel 1818 Percy cambiò il titolo dell'opera a *The Revolt of Islam*, scelta curiosa visto che il testo non discute l'Islam di per sé, ma condanna le religioni in modo generale e critica particolarmente il cristianesimo. L'Islam è dunque impiegato unicamente come elemento orientalista, una sineddoche che indica indirettamente l'Impero Turco-Ottomano.

Nell'intreccio del poema "pestilenze" e "pesti" appaiono due volte. La prima è nel *Canto VI*, quando l'esercito condotto da Laon e Cythna è vinto in battaglia e, dopo tenace resistenza, gli amanti scappano insieme. Nel cammino si imbattono in una città desolata, dove Laon si reca da solo per cercare cibo e, arrivato nella piazza principale, trova tutti gli abitanti massacrati, la fontana circondata dai cadaveri di donne, vecchi e bambini, e non riesce a berne l'acqua, perché bagnata in sangue.

L'unica persona sopravvissuta alla strage è una donna di aspetto appassito (*withered*) che non sembra più umana, ma un mostro (*fiend*), e che impazzì dopo l'uccisione dei due figli ancora pargoli. Prima che Laon percepisca la sua presenza, lei gli salta addosso improvvisamente, lo bacia in bocca e, ridendo scatenatamente, grida: "Now Mortal, thou hast deeply quaffed / The Plague's blue kisses – soon millions shall pledge the draught!" (Shelley, 1818, p. 152, Canto Sixth, stanza XL-

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2   Shelley usa persino il paratesto per creare questa enfasi. L'opera si apre con una citazione non tradotta di Archimede: *ΔΟΣ ΠΟΥ ΣΤΩ ΚΑΙ ΚΟΣΜΟΝ ΚΙΝΗΣΩ*. Una versione leggermente modificata di "datemi una leva e solleverò il mondo" che qui è carica di valenza politica.

VIII). La donna si identifica come la personificazione della Pestilenza – lo dirà ancora due volte, "My Name is Pestilence [...]" (Shelley, 1818, p. 152) –, il suo bacio è blu, e, presto, milioni ne proveranno un sorso. Il suo discorso continua: dice di spostarsi di continuo per uccidere e soffocare, "hither and thither / I flit about, that I may slay and smother"; descrive il suo petto come secco, "this bosom dry"; e definisce il suo contatto contagioso, "All lips which I have kissed must surely wither"; tale da rendere le sue vittime deboli e desidratate (*wither*) (Shelley, 1818, p. 152).

Credo che si possa affermare che la malattia immaginata e personificata in questo passo, ancorché chiamata "peste", è il colera. Diversi elementi possono giustificare questa interpretazione. Per primo, l'insistenza sugli aggettivi *withered* e *dry*, entrambi impiegati come sinonimi di "secco" (aspetto "assecchito" della donna, il suo petto "secco", le vittime "desidratate") fa pensare alla profonda disidratazione dei pazienti colerosi e alla loro pelle caratteristicamente rugosa. Poi, i movimenti del personaggio riecheggiano l'azione della malattia: lei si sposta di continuo con l'unico obbiettivo di uccidere e il suo attacco è repentino e subdolo, senza preavvisi, come quello del colera. Dopo, il bacio è aggettivato di blu, il colore tipico del morbo che, in inglese, è chiamato spesso il *blue cholera*. Inoltre, la predilezione fatta nel 1817 riguardi al fatto che milioni di individui saranno colpiti nel futuro prossimo è, non solo, corretta, ma anche fatta in un luogo immaginato allo stesso tempo come "l'Oriente", l'origine geografica generica della malattia, e come l'Impero Ottomano, che difatti avrebbe sofferto la malattia in diverse delle sue regioni entro pochi anni. Finalmente, se accettiamo l'analisi di *The Triumph of Life* fatta da Alan Bewell (1999, pp. 205-241), questo non sarebbe l'unico testo in cui Percy Shelley impiega la retorica della peste per riferirsi al colera.

Laon richiede l'aiuto della signora per trovare cibo e, appena trova del pane, abbandona la città per tornare a Cythna. Al contrario di quanto dichiarato, il "bacio blu" non comporta conseguenze nefaste, cosa che conferma i sospetti del lettore: il personaggio non è una personificazione sopranaturale della peste, ma semplicemente una donna impazzita,

e i cittadini furono uccisi dai soldati dell'esercito nemico e non da una malattia.

Ad ogni modo, la predilezione della donna si confermerà più tardi nell'azione, nel *Canto X*, quando Othman ordina il massacro della popolazione, i cui corpi sono lasciati sui campi a putrefarsi. Dopo sette giorni, il "sole ardente", il "calore stagnante" e "l'aria assetata"[3] trasformano le esalazioni dei cadaveri in miasmi, "[...] and a rotting vapour past / From the unburied dead, invisible and fast" (Shelley, 1818, p. 218, Canto Tenth, stanza XIII), che generano una "peste", una "malattia strana" fra le bestie che periscono dopo "hideous spasm, or pains severe and slow" (Shelley, 1818, p. 219, Canto Tenth, stanza XIV). L'epidemia uccide ugualmente pesci, uccelli, mammiferi, e persino insetti, che muoiono di "un'agonia impotente". La morte degli animali, a sua volta, causa una carestia che indebolisce ulteriormente la popolazione sopravvissuta al massacro e prepara il terreno per l'arrivo della "Peste blu": "Then fell blue Plague upon the race of man" (Shelley, 1818, p. 222, Canto Tenth, stanza XX).

Come ho affermato precedentemente, la prima pandemia fu preparata da perdite nell'agricoltura nel 1816, di modo che la "Peste blu" condivide con il colera non solo il colore, ma anche il contesto di arrivo. In aggiunta, lei è generata da miasmi e vapori nocivi di origine organica, un'applicazione precisa delle teorie scientifiche dell'epoca sull'origine del colera e altre malattie epidemiche, come la febbre gialla o la malaria. Infine, i sintomi manifestati per gli animali, anche se non rispecchiano perfettamente quelli del colera, potrebbero anche descriverlo.

La "Peste blu" decima la popolazione della città: migliaia (*thousands, myriads, a multitude*) periscono per strada "ululando e muggendo" sotto "feroce tortura" (Shelley, 1818, p. 222); le vittime hanno sete e, provando inutilmente a saziarla, muoiono dentro e intorno ai pozzi, generando ancora più miasmi; la malattia "tortura" e causa "dolori selvaggi", "vene scoppianti", "cicatrici innominabili" e "pustole livide";[4] i malati vedono

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3 Tutte le traduzioni di *The Revolt of Islam* all'italiano sono mie.

4 "[...] Thither still the myriads came, / Seeking to quench the agony of the flame, / Which raged like poison thro' their bursting veins ; / Naked they were from torture, without shame, / Spotted with

la propria "immagine magra", "l'io spettrale" diventato una "visione terrificante"[5]; alcuni provano, prima di morire, a propagare il contagio; altri sono sepolti vivi nella piramide di cadaveri intorno alla fontana.

Un'altra volta troviamo curiose similarità fra la "Peste blu" e il colera: entrambe preferiscono ambienti urbani, sono ripulsive, sono generate per miasmi, causano dolori acuti, le loro vittime si avvizziscono. Le pustole fanno pensare ai bubboni della peste nera o le vescicole del vaiolo, ma il loro colore livido ricorda la pallidezza e le estremità bluastre dei colerosi, cosa che dimostra il carattere ibrido della rappresentazione del morbo. Per di più, il seppellimento di malati ancora vivi, su cui insisterà Charlotte Stoker anni dopo a proposito del colera, è praticato anche nel testo in esame.

L'episodio è importante per la narrativa per due motivi. Il primo è attribuire la colpa alla diffusione del morbo: furono gli ordini sanguinosi di Othman che scatenarono la serie di eventi che condussero all'epidemia. Così, è possibile creare nell'intreccio un legame fra malattia e barbarismo, cosa che si ripeterà continuamente nei discorsi sul colera. A questo riguardo, Echenberg (2011, p. 19) afferma:

> "Part of this response [of emotion and fear] was the growing assumption that "Asiatic" cholera was a reflection of Asia's barbarity, despite the inability of European medical opinion to comprehend the cause and mode of transmission of the disease".

Il secondo motivo, è giustificare l'immolazione che chiude l'opera: un sacrificio umano è promesso agli dei come una forma per placare l'epidemia e risulterà nell'uccisione di Laon e Cythna, confermando le predilezioni della signora impazzita del *Canto VI*. In questo modo, "i baci blu della Peste" (Shelley, 1818, p. 152) sono stati, alla fine, veramente mortali.

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nameless scars and lurid blains, / Childhood, and youth, and age, writhing in savage pains." (Shelley, 1818, p. 222, Canto Tenth, stanza XXI)

5   "It was not thirst but madness! many saw / Their own lean image every where, it went / A ghastlier self beside then, till the awe / Of that dread sight to self-destruction sent / Those shrieking victims; [...]" (Shelley, 1818, p. 223, Canto Tenth, stanza XXII)

Fino a questo punto ho provato a dimostrare come le pestilenze presenti in *The Revolt of Islam* svolgono un ruolo importante nello sviluppo dell'intreccio e presentano alcune caratteristiche emblematiche del colera. Ora passerò ad analizzare un testo in cui l'ansia del contagio è ancora più centrale.

3 The Last Man

The Last Man fu pubblicato da Mary Shelly nel 1826 e si tratta di un romanzo di fantascienza apocalittica in cui una nuova malattia stermina la popolazione mondiale.

Il testo si apre con una prefazione che gioca la carta del manoscritto ritrovato. Un narratore non identificato – ma che l'autrice prova a confondere con se stessa – trova, durante una visita all'inaccessibile caverna della Sibilla Cumana a Napoli, manoscritti in latino, greco e altre lingue che contengono predizioni future. L'ingresso alla caverna è descritto attraverso i *topoi* della letteratura di esplorazione e il testo prova ad attivare rimandi epici virgiliani. La scoperta avviene nel 1818 e ora, passati otto anni, il prefatore porta le profezie all'attenzione del pubblico, editate, unificate e tradotte.

Le profezie narrano un'unica storia, stranamente in prima persona: l'io narrante è Lionel Verney che racconta la storia della sua vita, dalla nascita, alcuni anni prima del 2073, fino al presente della narrazione, nel 2100, quando è l'ultimo essere umano di cui si abbia notizie e percorre il globo cercando altri sopravvissuti.

Così come in *The Revolt of Islam*, la nuova malattia è chiamata genericamente "peste" – anche se le vittime non presentano i sintomi della peste nera – ed è altamente letale: il narratore è l'unica persona che vi è sopravvissuto e, conseguentemente, ne è diventato immune.

La malattia uccide tutti quelli che la contraggono e lo fa improvvisamente: pochi minuti separano l'apparizione dei sintomi dalla morte. È

questo il caso di un contadino che, soffermandosi per sentire un discorso fatto in pubblico, in pochi minuti, incomincia a tremare, sbatte le ginocchia e i denti, sente irrigidirsi le membra, "cambia a tanti colori, giallo, blu, e verde", mostra convulsioni e muore mentre grida di dolore[6]. La morte istantanea, la gestualità incontrollata e i cambiamenti di colori, sono, a mio avviso, quasi una caricatura del colera portata allo stremo.

Per di più, anche in *The Last Man* il flagello nasce "nell'Oriente", immaginato un'altra volta non come l'India, ma come l'Impero Turco-Ottomano. Nel momento in cui la peste si presenta per la prima volta, infatti, i personaggi principali lottano nella guerra d'indipendenza greca – che si trova, alla fine del ventunesimo secolo, praticamente nello stesso punto dov'era nel momento della scrittura, all'inizio del diciannovesimo – e sono alle mura di Costantinopoli – come il testo preferisce chiamare Istanbul, adottando la stessa strategia di enfatizzare l'illegittimità dell'occupazione attraverso la scelta di nome greci.

La nuova malattia non è nata nel Ganges, ma nel Nilo, nell'Egitto che, fino al 1867, era ancora sotto il controllo dell'Impero Turco-Ottomano:

> "That word, as yet it was not more to her, was PLAGUE. This enemy to the human race had begun early in June to raise its serpent-head on the shores of the Nile; parts of Asia, not usually subject to this evil, were infected. It was in Constantinople; but as each year that city experienced a like visitation, small attention was paid to those accounts which declared more people to have died there already, than usually made up the accustomed prey of the whole of the hotter months."
>
> (Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 19)

In aggiunta, il governo Ottomano, spesso descritto come "barbarico",

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6   "One man in particular stood in front, his eyes fixt on the prophet, his mouth open, his limbs rigid, while his face changed to various colours, yellow, blue, and green, through intense fear. [...] [The prophet] looked on the peasant, who began to tremble, while he still gazed; his knees knocked together; his teeth chattered. He at last fell down in convulsions. "That man has the plague," said the maniac calmly. A shriek burst from the lips of the poor wretch; and then sudden motionlessness came over him; it was manifest to all that he was dead." (Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 218)

"tirannico" e "incivile", è considerato parzialmente colpevole per non aver percepito in tempo la letalità anomala della nuova malattia.

Più avanti, il narratore riproduce alcuni rumori che affermano che un sole nero sarebbe apparso in Oriente. A questo punto, la trascuratezza delle autorità ottomane diventerà piccola in confronto alla negligenza di tutto un continente che, a causa del fenomeno astronomico, calpesta i morti per strada senza rendersene conto:

> "though the dead multiplied, and the streets of Ispahan, of Pekin, and of Delhi were strewed with pestilence-struck corpses, men passed on, gazing on the ominous sky, regardless of the death beneath their feet."
>
> <div align="right">(Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 131)</div>

Il testo afferma anche che è normale che la mortalità della peste cresca durante i mesi più caldi, cosa rilevante perché lo stesso può essere detto dal colera, che normalmente colpiva più severamente d'estate. Per questo motivo, più avanti nel romanzo, quando la peste arriverà all'Inghilterra, i personaggi ancora vivi fuggiranno dal continente, in direzione della Svizzera, dove immaginano che la malattia sarà meno severa a causa del clima freddo.

Un altro punto di contatto fra la nuova peste e il colera è l'inesistenza di trattamento efficace. L'unica forma per combatterla è attraverso la prevenzione, anche se i personaggi non sono d'accordo sulle misure adeguate da adottare.

Il primo passo per i personaggi è capire cosa causa la malattia: la peste è contagiosa? è causata per agenti infettivi trasmessi di persona a persona?, è come la peste nera?; oppure, è causata da elementi putrefatti presenti nell'atmosfera?, sono i miasmi dall'aria e dalle acque a provocarla?, è come la malaria?.

Queste sono le questioni con cui si confrontarono reiteratamente scienziati e governi lungo tutto il diciannovesimo secolo. Se il colera fosse

causato da miasmi presenti nell'ambiente, non avrebbe senso creare quarantene o cordoni d'isolamento, sarebbe invece necessario creare sistemi sanitari e ristrutturare l'urbanizzazione delle città. Se il colera fosse, però, causato da un agente infettivo, il flusso di persone e merci dovrebbe essere rigorosamente controllato, mentre miglioramenti delle abitazioni o del sistema fognario sarebbero considerate irrilevanti (Baldwin, 1999).

Questa polarità, e l'ambivalenza che necessariamente ne risulta, è evidente in molti trattati medici del diciannovesimo secolo. Il Dr. Holland, per esempio, inviato a investigare lo scoppio dell'epidemia di colera a Sunderland, scrive nel 1831 di non avere dubbi che il colera è allo stesso tempo contagioso e non contagioso (una posizione chiamata *contingent contagionism*):

> "I have no doubt that the disease is both contagious and non-contagious. To explain myself fully respecting the latter opinion would compel me to write more than you would like to read, and therefore we will pass it over. In support of the former, it is easy to produce evidence which is everything but demonstrative; and of this kind of proof the subject does not admit. It is not at all uncommon in our daily visits to find that two or three of a family have been swept away in rapid succession, the disease apparently passing from one to the other; such evidence, however, is quite insufficient to satisfy the non-contagionist. He demands something like ocular demonstration, which is rather difficult to adduce."
>
> (Stokes, 1921, p. 131)

Il narratore di *The Last Man* è allo stesso modo riluttante su quale posizione debba adottare. Da una parte, afferma con sicurezza che è già comprovato che la peste non sia contagiosa nello stesso modo della scarlattina o del vaiolo, ma da l'altra, usa attraverso il testo la parola 'contagio' come sinonimo di 'peste' e riconosce che la questione è ancora aperta alla discussione:

"That the plague was not what is commonly called contagious, like the scarlet fever, or extinct small-pox, was proved. It was called an epidemic. But the grand question was still unsettled of how this epidemic was generated and increased. If infection depended upon the air, the air was subject to infection. [...] But how are we to judge of airs, and pronounce—in such a city plague will die unproductive; in such another, nature has provided for it a plentiful harvest? In the same way, […] bodies are sometimes in a state to reject the infection of malady, and at others, thirsty to imbibe it."

(Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 146-147)

Durante la discussione su quali siano i migliori mezzi per evitare che la peste arrivi in una città come, per esempio, Londra, uno dei personaggi protesta dicendo che è assurdo pensare che una tale malattia possa raggiungere una città "ben governata" (Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 122). In effetti, il narratore è d'accordo, visto che, oltre a essere protetta per lo sviluppo della sua civiltà, l'Inghilterra è naturalmente isolata da una barriera di paesi europei:

"These were questions of prudence; there was no immediate necessity for an earnest caution. England was still secure. France, Germany, Italy and Spain, were interposed, walls yet without a breach, between us and the plague. [...] We could not fear—we did not. Yet a feeling of awe, a breathless sentiment of wonder, a painful sense of the degradation of humanity, was introduced into every heart."

(Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 147)

Questo tipo d'incredulità rispetto all'arrivo del colera in Europa è tipico dell'inizio del secolo. Eugenia Tognotti dimostra, per esempio, come una commissione di salute, formata nel Regno di Sardegna per giudicare le precauzioni da prendere nel 1831, dopo l'arrivo del colera in Polonia e Germania, concluse che "non v'ha per ora alcuna ragione di temere che sia il morbo per avvicinarsi siffattamente da compromettere la salute pubblica nei Reali Nostri Dominii" (Tognotti , 2000, p. 28).

La studiosa elenca molti altri esempi di scetticismo dei medici sulla possibilità che il colera arrivasse in Italia, circostanza che notò pure il Leopardi in una lettera alla sorella: "L'altra sera parlai colla commissione medica mandata da Roma a complimentare il Cholèra a Parigi, la quale ci promette la venuta del morbo in Italia: predizione di cui ridono i medici di qui, perché non ci credono" (Foschi, 1983, p. 161).

Lo stesso è vero in altri paesi Europei. Morris dimostra come i giornali inglesi nel 1831, pur ammettendo che il morbo potrebbe arrivare in Inghilterra, affermano che la sua azione sarebbe più leggera:

> "Another group, amongst them many medical men, assured the public that when cholera came it would not be as bad in Britain as elsewhere. The varied climate, prosperity, 'our insular position', 'the modern habits of our people', 'superior clothing, comfort and diet', and 'the easier condition of the lower orders', were all suggested as factors which would protect Britain from the full force of the epidemic."
>
> (Morris, 1976, p. 28)

Questo commento può essere accostato ad un altro passo della narrativa, in cui Verney, sicuro di sé, spiega ai concittadini in termini geografici, climatici e razziali perché la peste non può arrivare in Inghilterra. Dopo l'esordio, "Countrymen, fear not!", il narratore apre il discorso con un commento quasi sarcastico: non è da sorprendersi che "nelle terre ancora incolte (*uncultivated wilds*) dell'America" ci sia la peste, tutto sommato, la malattia è una "figlia del sole, una lattante dei tropici" e, logicamente, "perirebbe in queste temperature [inglesi]" (vol. II, p. 151-152). Poi, si sa che la malattia "beve il sangue scuro degli abitanti del sud, ma non si alimenta mai del pallido celta" e, se per caso, "alcun asiatico colpito venisse tra noi, la peste morirebbe con lui, non comunicativa e innocua". Comunque, malgrado il disprezzo con cui ritratta gli altri, Verney è imperialisticamente fraterno, "anche se non possiamo mai sperimentare [la malattia]", "piangiamo i nostri fratelli", "lamentiamo e assistiamo ai bambini del giardino della terra" (Shelley, 1826,

vol. II, p. 151-152).[7] E conclude enumerando posti colpiti dalla peste, curiosamente, gli stessi che colpì il colera durante la prima pandemia: l'Impero Ottomano (*Persia, Arabia*), l'India (*Cashmere*), la Russia (*Circassia, Georgia*).

Questo passo dimostra come il discorso del narratore di *The Last Man* è in consonanza con i discorsi medico scientifici fatti all'epoca e con i presupposti ideologici che saranno adottati per i giornali pochi anni dopo. La certezza dell'isolamento, la fiducia sul clima, la protezione della razza superiore, lo sguardo paternalista agli inciviliti sono elementi che, dopo l'arrivo del colera nel 1832, troveremo di continuo fino alla fine del secolo, non solo in letteratura, ma anche nella retorica medica, politica, economica, ecc.

Però, nonostante tutte le previsioni, la peste arriva con forza piena in Europa e, finalmente, in Inghilterra. La popolazione è annientata e i protagonisti fuggono verso regioni più fredde dove, presumibilmente, saranno più sicuri. Partono allora per la Francia, raggiungono la Svizzera e poi l'Italia. Durante il viaggio, i personaggi muoiono uno a uno, finché Verney non diventa l'ultimo uomo di cui si ha notizie. La narrativa si chiude, allora, a Roma, da dove il narratore partirà presto alla ricerca di altri sopravvissuti. Lui percorrerà in nave il Mediterraneo e la costa d'Africa per raggiungere, finalmente, "le odorifere isole del lontano oceano Indiano", percorrendo così l'itinerario della peste all'inverso.

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7   "O, yes, it would—Countrymen, fear not! In the still uncultivated wilds of America, what wonder that among its other giant destroyers, Plague should be numbered! It is of old a native of the East, sister of the tornado, the earthquake, and the simoon. Child of the sun, and nursling of the tropics, it would expire in these climes. It drinks the dark blood of the inhabitant of the south, but it never feasts on the pale-faced Celt. If perchance some stricken Asiatic come among us, plague dies with him, uncommunicated and innoxious. Let us weep for our brethren, though we can never experience their reverse. Let us lament over and assist the children of the garden of the earth. Late we envied their abodes, their spicy groves, fertile plains, and abundant loveliness. But in this mortal life extremes are always matched; the thorn grows with the rose, the poison tree and the cinnamon mingle their boughs. Persia, with its cloth of gold, marble halls, and infinite wealth, is now a tomb. The tent of the Arab is fallen in the sands, and his horse spurns the ground unbridled and unsaddled. The voice of lamentation fills the valley of Cashmere; its dells and woods, its cool fountains, and gardens of roses, are polluted by the dead; in Circassia and Georgia the spirit of beauty weeps over the ruin of its favourite temple—the form of woman." (Shelley, 1826, vol. II, p. 151-152)

4 Conclusione

Ho presentato in questo articolo alcuni dei motivi che fecero del colera la grande malattia epidemica del diciannovesimo secolo e causarono un profondo trauma culturale: la novità del morbo, l'ignoranza intorno alle sue cause, l'impotenza nel combatterle, l'inesistenza di trattamenti, la celerità dell'attacco, i sintomi repulsivi e umilianti, l'elevata letalità.

Poi, ho discusso come questi discorsi siano modellati in *The Revolt of Islam* e *The Last Man*, testi che precedono l'arrivo del colera in Europa, ma che, a mio avviso, lo discutono indirettamente. I testi sono, tra l'altro, molto simili: si presentano come una visione o una allegoria del futuro, ambientano il loro intreccio in tempi caotici, sostengono la Guerra d'Indipendenza Greca, demonizzano l'Impero Turco-Ottomano, postulano una polarità fra civiltà e barbarismo, non dubitano della superiorità "dell'Occidente". Pure il nome dei protagonisti è simile, *Laon* e *Leonel* Verney.

Ho dimostrato come "la peste" è un elemento centrale in queste narrative e argomento che siano importanti, non solo perché sono possibilmente le due prime apparizione del colera nella letteratura europea che sono riuscito a identificare, ma specialmente perché presentano molti dei *topoi* che la scrittura colerica adotterà più tarde: la personificazione, reale o immaginata, del colera; il catastrofismo delle previsioni di mortalità; la fuga dall'infezione; il rapporto intimo fra guerra ed epidemia; la suposta origine "orientale", "asiatica" e "tropicale" del morbo; lo sforzo attivo, reale o presunto, di un individuo nell'infettare gli altri; l'incapacità dei governi di controllare il contagio, alcune volte pure causandolo involontariamente; la tempestività con cui il colera colpisce; l'aspetto bluastro, rinsecchito e cadaverico delle vittime.

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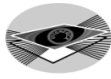
Ancient Pandemics in Mythical Athens: the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids

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Abstract

According to the literary tradition, when the city of Athens was threatened by plague and famine, the daughters of the Athenian king Leos and Hyakinthos sacrificed themselves for the salvation of the city. There is no denying that the brave and patriotic act of the daughters of Leos —also known as the Leokorai— and the daughters of Hyakinthos —also known as the Hyakinthids— made the Athenian heroines the ideal role models for every Athenian citizen. Demosthenes (60.29) attests that the self-sacrifice of the daughters of Leos, served as the mythological paradigm for the men of the tribe of Leontis fallen at war. The selection of these heroines to represent their tribe shows the power and extent of this mythological motif as a patriotic theme. Diodorus (17.15.2) tells us that the Athenian general and politician Phocion used the brave act of the self-sacrifice of the daughters of Hyakinthos urge rival politicians to do their patriotic duty and hand themselves over to Alexander in order to save the city.

In this paper the phenomenon, context and impact of the voluntary sacrifice of the mythical Athenian heroines during times of pandemics, plagues and famine will be examined, taking into consideration the literary, epigraphic and topographic evidence, in close relation to the historical and ideological context of the classical period. The ultimate aim of the study is to relate the brave sacrificial act of the mythical virgins during the mythical pandemics to the current historical pandemic and the plague of Athens during 430 B.C. and furthermore emphasize the importance of the brave act of women for issues of Gender and Identity, further extending the research scope to the Anthropological Studies.

Keywords: Heroines of Attica, Ancient Greek Mythology, Gender, Identity

Ancient Pandemics in Mythical Athens: the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids

On March 11th 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic.[1] In his announcement, WHO's Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stated that the WHO is "deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity and by the alarming levels of inaction," and he called on countries to take action to contain the virus. Since then, a lot has changed in our lives. The pandemic continues and we are dealing with a new and unprecedented reality, unknown before to the vast majority of the population. The use of masks, social distancing and the avoidance of close contact have become integral part of our lives and this way of living is considered the new normality. Governments have taken drastic measures in order to contain the virus, most importantly lockdowns, according to the pandemic wave and the recorded cases of infections. Vaccination has become mandatory in some countries —and for some specific age groups. Unvaccinated have been fired from their jobs and people who are opposed to the obligation of vaccination protested and rioted. The pandemic has caused incomparable and unprecedented chaos and although almost two years have passed, it still remains active. As of today (30rd of December) we have a total of 286.422.421 confirmed cases, 253.049.841 people have recovered and 5.444.315 people have died. Experts have clearly stated that the vaccination of the people will reduce the spreading of the disease —and transform it from pandemic to endemic. Science, vaccination and drugs are the answer of contemporary society to plagues and diseases. But what was the answer to plagues and diseases in the mythology of classical antiquity? In my paper I will examine how plagues and diseases were dealt in the mythology of ancient Athens. More specifically, I will

examine the two known cases: the Leokorai (daughters of the mythical king of Athens Leos) and the Hyakinthids[2] (daughters of the mythical Spartan king Hyakinthos).

Comparing ancient and modern cases of several types of crisis of the city, we note that they are no major differences between them. War, plague, famine, natural disasters diachronically remain the most common causes of crisis. Given that, in terms of "polis-crisis" almost nothing has drastically changed between the mythical past and the historic (and current) present. The difference lies in how such crises are dealt with. Here I will examine the relevant literary, epigraphic and topographic evidence related to the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids and explore the historical implications and gender aspects and parameters.

I will first begin my examination with the Leokorai, daughters of king of Athens, Leos, who are connected with a mythical plague and diseases.

1 The Leokorai

Literary sources on the Leokorai derive from several authors, ranging from the classical to the Roman period. The earliest testimony on the daughters of Leos comes from Demosthenes (60.29), who states that: "the Leontidai had heard the stories related of the daughters of Leos, how they offered themselves to the citizens as a sacrifice for their country's sake". Pausanias (1.5.2), referring to the Leokorai, mentions: "Leos, who is said to have given up his daughters at the command of the oracle, for the safety of the commonwealth".

Neither Demosthenes nor Pausanias mention the reason why the daughters of Leos were sacrificed. It is simply stated that they were sacrificed for the commonwealth and the salvation of the community (meaning the city) of ancient Athens.

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2   The Hyakinthids are also attested in literary sources as daughters of the Athenian king Erechtheus. On this paper I will examine the Hyakinthids, daughters of the Spartan king Hyakinthos. For the differentiation between two versions, see pages below.

Aristides (*Panathenaicus*, 13. 119) is the earliest to attest to the reason for their sacrifice and additionally he provides information for their cult. He writes: "With similar intention Leos too is said to have given up his daughters in the plague. But it will be clear that the city surpassed even these in conferring benefits; to Codrus the city granted supreme power for his children and glorified the family both at Athens and abroad; as for the maidens the city established shrines for them and in honoring them considered them worthy of a divine instead of a mortal share". This story appears also in a scholiast to Thucydides (1.20), who writes: "There was once a famine in Attica and to free the land from its troubles children had to be sacrificed. A certain Leos offered his daughters and rid the city of the famine. A shrine was established for them in Attica, the so-called Leokoreion".

The only difference between these two testimonies is the description (and definition) of the disease: plague, according to Aristides and famine, according to the scholiast of Thucydides.

Aelian (*Varia Historia*, 12.28), also speaks of the shrine of the daughters of Leos and he is the first who gives their names, stating that the daughters of Leos were named Praxithea, Theope and Euboule. The names of the Leokorai (Prasithea, instead of Praxithea, Theope and Euboule), as well as the existence of their shrine are also given by other sources —such as a scholiast to Libanios (*Declamations* 27.605a) who also states that their sacrifice took place during times of plague.

In terms of their cult and shrine, the exact location of the Leokoreion is controversial and has caused great debate —and uncertainty— between scholars.Some scholars identify the Leokoreion with the so-called crossroads shrine in the Agora of Athens (Figure 1) (Thompson and Wycherley 1972, pp.121-123; Shear 1973a, pp.126-134; 1973b, pp.360-369; Thompson 1978, pp. 96-102; 1981, pp. 343-355). The identification is mostly based on the finds from the sanctuary. These objects include loomweights, perfume bottles, jewelry, astragaloi, feeding bottles and white ground lekythoi, all associated with female deities or in correspondence with female devotees. Others, identify the crossroads Agora

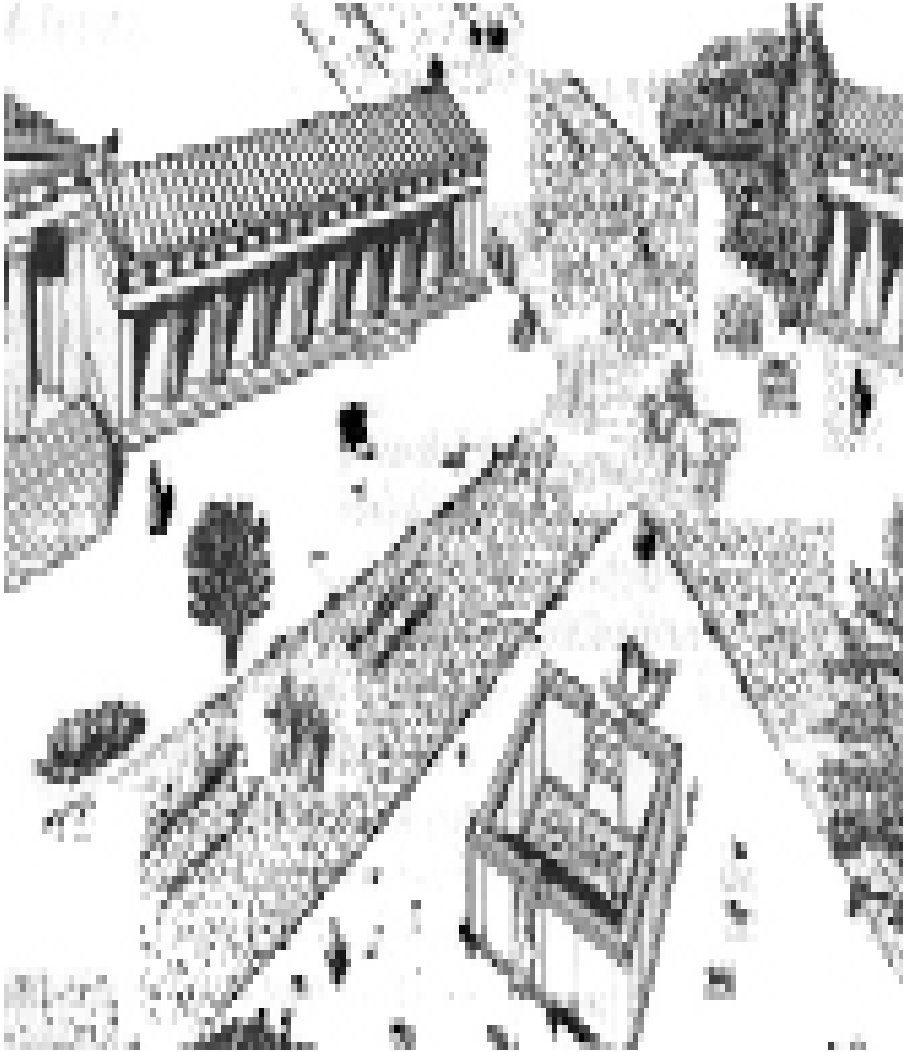shrine as a sanctuary of *Nymphai kourotrophoi* (Camp 1986, pp. 78-79).

Figure 1: The Leokoreion at the Agora of Athens

Although we are not certain about the exact location of the Leokoreion, we know that this shrine was active and existed already from the Archaic period, being connected with important historical facts. Thucydides (1.20; 6.57) and Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* 18.3) attest that it was at the sanctuary of the daughters of Leos that the tyrant-slayers, Harmodios and Aristogeiton, murdered the tyrant Hipparchos. Given that, the location of the Leokoreion was considered of major importance, since it was related with the establishment of the democracy and was situated at the Agora, the public center of the city of Athens.

Having examined the literary and topographic evidence on the daughters of Leos —also known as the Leokorai— who were sacrificed during times of plague (or famine) for the salvation of the city, let us now turn on the examination of the Hyakinthids.

2 The Hyakinthids

The Hyakinthids —like the Leokorai— were sacrificed during times of plague for the salvation of the city. Their case is more complex than the Leokorai. The literary sources on the Hyakinthids are, in fact, conflicting. The Hyakinthids are related and attributed to two different parents according to the literary sources and they are connected with different patterns and motifs.

Several literary sources, especially Euripides' fragmentary preserved tragedy "*Erechtheus*", as well as the Atthidographer Philochorus (*FGrH 328 F 12*) and the orator Lycurgus (*Against Leocrates*, 98), identify the Hyakinthids with the daughters of the Athenian king Erechtheus. According to the tradition and this version of the myth, the oracle of Delphi stated that the city of Athens would be saved during the war with Eleusis only if the daughters of Erechtheus were sacrificed for the salvation of the city. Another Atthidographer, Phanodemus (*FGrH 325 F 4*), relates the Hyakinthids —also attested as daughters of Erechtheus— to the war between Athens and Boeotia, instead of Eleusis. Given that on these versions of the myth the sacrifice of the Hyakinthids took place

—and is related— during times of war, instead of plague (or famine), this version, context and relation of Hyakinthids with king Erechtheus will not be examined further.

The version that is of prime interest here is the relation of the Hyakinthids with mythological plagues (and famines) —I return later to the question of war.

Apollodorus (3.15.8) attests the following for the Hyakinthids, daughters of Hyakinthos: "When the war lingered on and he could not take Athens, he prayed to Zeus that he might be avenged on the Athenians. And the city being visited with a famine and a pestilence, the Athenians at first, in obedience to an ancient oracle, slaughtered the daughters of Hyakinthos, to wit, Antheis, Aegleis, Lytaea, and Orthaea, on the grave of Geraestus, the Cyclops; now Hyakinthos, the father of the damsels, had come from Lacedaemon and dwelt in Athens". We note that in Apollodorus' testimony, unlike those versions attested in Euripides and the Atthidographers, Hyakinthos —instead of Erechtheus— is named as the father of the Hyakinthids and their self-sacrifice takes place during times of plague (or famine), instead of war.

A similar account regarding the Hyakinthids is attested is Hyginus. Hyginus (*Fabula* 238) attests that a Spartan king, killed Antheis, his daughter, according to an oracle on behalf of the Athenians. Although he relates the Hyakinthids with Hyakinthos, a Spartan living in Athens, he does not mention the specific reason for their sacrifice and additionally he attests the sacrifice of only one of the daughters. As we can see, his testimony differs only slightly from that of Apollodorus, but in general he follows the same scheme and context of the Hyakinthids.

The most laconic testimony on the Hyakinthids derives from Harpocration. Harpocration —quoting the statement of Lykourgos in the speech *Against Lykophron*— attests that the Hyakinthids were daughters of Hyakinthos, the Lacedaemonian (Harpocration s.v. Hyakinthids).

Having examined the literary sources on the Hyakinthids, we note that

there are conflicting testimonies on the paternity (Hyakinthos or Erechtheus) and the context of their sacrifice (plague, famine or war). It seems that already in ancient times there were conflicting versions about the Hyakinthids and authors were familiar with both versions.

Phanodemus (*FGrH 325 F4*) claims that the daughters of Erechtheus were called "Hyakinthid maidens" because they were sacrificed on the hill called Hyakinthos. This testimony has been interpreted by scholars as a proof of disjunction —already existing during antiquity— between the Hyakinthids as daughters of the Athenian king Erechtheus and the Hyakinthids as daughters of the Spartan king Hyakinthos (Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, p. 106).

In terms of their name, the fact that they are named patronymically has been explained as a connection with the Spartan (and not the Athenian metic) hero Hyakinthos, who is attested as a pre-Dorian god at Amyklai (Kron 1999, p.79). Likewise, the name of one of his daughters, (Ortheia), reminds the epithet of Artemis (Ortheia), who was venerated at Sparta, further suggesting the connection with Sparta (Kron 1999, p.79). In a hypothetical reconstruction of the original myth, it has been suggested that the Hyakinthids had a pre-existing cult in Attica and died in order to save Athens; to this mythical core were added the two variant and alternative versions on the Hyakinthids: a) being daughters of the Athenian king Erechtheus and b) the Spartan king Hyakinthos (Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, p.107).

The daughters of Hyakinthos received cult and had a shrine in Athens, known as the Hyakintheion, as attested through an inscription (IG I² 1035.52) and some ancient sources. Just like the case of the shrine of the daughters of Leos (the Leokoreion), the exact location of the shrine of the daughters of Hyakinthos (the Hyakintheion) remains uncertain and has caused great debate between scholars.

Photius, s.v.Parthenoi —talking on the tragic fate of the Hyakinthids— states that: *«ἐσφαγιάσθησαν δὲ ἐν τῶι Ὑακίνθωι καλουμένωι πάγωι ὑπὲρ τῶν Σφενδονίων».* Stephanos Byzantine states that: «τῶν Ὑακίνθου

θυγατέρων ἡ Λουσία ἦν, ἀφ'ἧς ὁ δῆμος τῆς Οἰνηίδος φυλῆς», connecting the Hyakintheion with the deme of Lousia. The existence of Hyakintheion in the deme of Lousia has received mixed feedback by scholars. Jacoby accepts the existence of Hyakinthion at the deme of Lousia (Jacoby schol. in Phanodemus *FGrH 325 F4*, p. 178). Others —such as Kearns (1989, p. 102)— do not accept the relation, while others —such as Frame (2009, p.449)— remain neutral, stating that the Hyakintheion may have existed on the west part of the city of Athens.

Having examined the literary, epigraphic and topographic evidence on the daughters of Leos and the daughters of Hyakinthos, we will now turn to examine the similar motifs and context of the myth, as well as the historical and gender aspects of their sacrifice for the salvation of the city.

We note that in both cases, the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids are named patronymically and form a part of a group. Of course, the most important fact —by far— remains their sacrificial context for the salvation of the city. These virgins give their own lives for the commonwealth and protection of the city of Athens. Such groups of young girls are normally triadic, just like the Aglaurids (also called Kekropids), heroines who received cult on the Acropolis of Athens.[3] By far the most important aspects of both the Leokorai and Hyakinthids are: a) their young age and virgin status and b) their actions as "*soteirai*"- saviors of the city.

3 Virginity, young age and city salvation

We have already stated that there are no major differences between the nature of *polis crises* during ancient (and mythical) times and the current (historic) present. The major difference lies in the way these crises are dealt with. In modern times during plagues, pandemics and diseases *soteria*-salvation of the city is achieved through the results of science. More specifically, in terms of COVID-19 pandemic,the safety of the city and the commonwealth is gained through the following factors: a) the

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3   For the Aglaurids, see Mitsios 2018, pp. 8-97.

vaccination of the population (especially the ones of older age), b) the use of drugs and c) hygiene protocols (the often and punctilious washing of hands, the use of masks, social distancing etc). In contrast to this, we observe that in mythical antiquity the *soteria*-salvation of the city comes through the sacrifice of one (or in our cases three or four) for the many: a motif known as *pro multis dabitur caput*.

We note that both the Leokorai and Hyakinthids are young, virgin and unmarried women, daughters of a mythical king. It has been noted by scholars that their context of sacrifice for the salvation of the city is reminiscent of the scapegoats of Athenian rituals, known as pharmakoi.[4] In the scapegoat rituals, the sacrifice of a person who comes from marginal groups —such as a criminal, a beggar, a destitute or a disreputable— guarantees the well-being of the city. The expulsion of such dangerous, unclean and "inferior" elements of the society —deriving from the outermost reaches of the polis —was considered a purification act for the city (Kearns, 1990, p. 335). A mythical example of this may be the case of the Attic king Codrus.Several ancient authors —such as Pherekydes (*FGrH 3 F 154*), Hellanikos (*FGrH 323a F 23*), Lycurgus, (*Against Leocrates* 86) and Pausanias (1.19.5)— attest the tradition according to which when the city of Athens was sieged by the Dorians, the Delphic oracle made it clear that the city of Athens would be saved only if a king sacrificed himself; then, king Codrus, got dressed as a beggar wood-cutter and challenged the Dorians (who killed him), thus voluntarily sacrificing himself for the salvation of the city.According to an inscription (*IG I³ 84*) a sanctuary of Codrus, Neleus and Basile existed, possibly in the Ilissos area, south of the Acropolis; it is likely that the tomb of Codrus was located in the santuary. It is worth mentioning that king Codrus got dressed like a poor wood-cutter in order to get killed by the Dorians —stuming himself into an "inferior", belonging to a marginal group, and so reminiscent of the scapegoat and pharmakos rituals.

But unlike pharmakos and scapegoat rituals, the sacrifice of the daughters of Leos and Hyakinthos, seem to belong to a different context.

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4   For pharmakoi-scapegoat rituals, see Bremmer 1983, pp. 299-320; Parker 1983, pp. 257-271.

The Leokorai and the Hyakinthids are virgin, young and unmarried children. Unlike the persons sacrificed at the scapegoat rituals and pharmakoi, they are not criminals, beggars or disreputable and they do not belong to marginal groups, deriving from the outskirts of the society. Instead, they are daughters of kings, belonging to the higher status and elite parts of the society and polis, because of their father and royal status; but still, they are females of young age.

Hippocrates (*Peri Parthenon)* attests that: "a woman's nature is more depressed and sorrowful; and that young women, when they are at the age of marriage and without a husband, suffer terribly at the time of their menstruation…and madness overtakes them".

It has been pointed out by scholars that the transitional point in women's lives —when they are ready to give birth to children and become wives— is of special interest and importance, given that this was considered the main role of women in ancient society (Lefkowitz 1995 p. 32). Sophocles (Antigone 876) presents Antigone as miserable, because she is going to die without being able to give birth to children. Similar evidence —pointing to the importance of virginity and the role of women as mothers— comes from archaeological and epigraphic evidence. On the statue base of the well-known statue of Phrasikleia it is stated that "kore (maiden) I must be called evermore; instead of marriage, by the Gods, this name became my fate" (Figure 2). The inscription indicates the important role of the marital status of the women, as well as their capacity to give birth (and bear) children.

In the case of the sacrificial daughters, the virgins who are being sacrificed have not reached the "telos" (destination) of their lives, which is to get married and give birth to legitimate children, guaranteeing the continued existence of the society (Kron 1999, p. 83). It has been pointed out that children are not born for their parents and kin groups but for the city as a whole and are necessary to the well-being of the city; their birth and nurture (growth) are like the growth of crops, essential for the existence of the city (Kearns 1989, p. 62). The virginity and young age are of major importance for the women and because of

Figure 2: . The statue (and the statue base) of Phrasikleia

these they are considered pure and untouched. It has been pointed out that the virginity is important in a girl as it is not in a boy; unlike the boy —whose virginity is a matter of little concern— the virginity for the girl is a precious possession required by her husband and while she is still a virgin she remains unfulfilled (Kearns 1989, p. 57). After all,

in ancient Greek myth we never hear of a sacrifice of a married woman or a man of past fighting age.

Beside virginity, the young age is also important, valuable and precious for the young females and in fact, it has been paralleled with the sacrificial cultic practices for animals. In the case of animals, the younger and the more unsullied is considered the better and that's the reason why lambs are preferable to ewes and calves to cows, when it comes to sacrifice in order to please the gods (Connelly 2014, p. 394 n. 74). Just like the case of the sacrifice of the animals is the case of the virgin sacrifice. The younger the age, the better and more valuable, especially if we take into consideration the importance of their virgin status.

Having examined the virginity and young age parameters of the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids, let us now turn on the examination of the other two aspects: the historical and the gender ones. More specifically, I will examine the cases where the Leokorai and Hyakinthds were considered as city saviors and ideal patriotic examples for the Athenians of the classical period, as well as their gender aspects.

4 Historical aspects: city saviors

In 430-429 B.C. the city of Athens was devastated by a plague and pandemic, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths, almost one third of the Athenian population. In the following years, most of the population of Athens was infected, including Pericles' himself, who died from the plague. Given the ongoing war with Sparta, the plague and pandemic had horrific and disastrous results in the population of Athens.

Thucydides (2.49-50) —who also suffered from it— records with clinical detail the symptoms of the catastrophic plague of Athens. According to his testimony, "people suddenly felt their heads begin to burn, their eyes redden, their tongues and mouths bleed. Next came coughing, stomach pain, diarrhea, and vomiting of every kind of bile that has been given a name by the medical profession. The skin turned reddish

with pustules and ulcers, while the stricken plunged into the city's water tanks trying to slake an unquenchable thirst —possibly contaminating the water supply. Most died after about a week. The city was blanketed with corpses".

Beside the analytical description of the symptoms, Thucydides (2.51.5) further comments on the response of the Athenian citizens to the plague, their ethos and their expected behavior during this period of plague and phenomenal crisis. During the catastrophic and disastrous plague, Thucydides drew attention to the brave Athenian citizens who stayed in the city of Athens in order to nurse the sick, and pointed out the feeling of shame for those who were thinking of their own good, instead of the communal one. The literary evidence on the situation of the plague and the pandemic in Athens, as well as on the (expected) behavior and ethos of the Athenian citizens, seem to recall the actions of the mythical heroines, who voluntarily sacrificed themselves for the salvation of the city during similar times of plague and famine.

The cultic evidence point in the same direction as the literary sources. It has been noted that many offerings at the shrine that might be the Leokoreion are dating from that period of the Peloponnesian war, during the time of plague of Athens (Larson 1995, p. 103). It seems no coincidence that these offerings were made at this specific shrine, at that specific time and under the specific circumstances.

During historical times of plague and pandemic the Athenians recalled the myth and made offerings to the Leokoreion, the shrine of the daughters of Leos, who voluntarily sacrificed themselves for the salvation of the city during times of mythical plague and famine. Given that, the daughters of Leos were seen as protectresses of the city during times of plague and pandemic and the Athenians were seeking their help, invoking their names and making offerings to their shrine, during their own historical plague and pandemic.

Besides the case of the classical Athens, the daughters of Leos were recalled and invoked in later periods, indicating their diachronic im-

portance as protectresses and city saviours during times of plague and pandemic.

Aelius Aristides (*Panathenaic Oration*, 13. 119) —writing during times of pandemic in the Roman period, a disease known as the "Antonine plague", when the plague had catastrophic results in the Roman Empire— states that: "*…Λεὼς δὲ ὅμοια τούτῳ βουλεύσας, ἐκστῆναι τῶν θυγατέρων καὶ οὗτος ἐν τῷ λοιμῷ: Κόδρος δ'ἐντῷ πρὸς Δωριέας πολέμῳ καὶ Πελοποννησίους αὐτὸς ἐθελοντὴς ὑπὲρ τῆς χώρας ἀποθανεῖν.*" The mention of the heroic act of the self-sacrifice of the daughters of Leos (and king Codrus) and the resulting salvation of the city of Athens during times of mythical plague and pandemic, aims to point to a positive outcome for the city of Rome, at the end of the pandemic and to the salvation of the empire. Just as the ancient city of Athens was saved during times of mythical plague and pandemic, the Roman empire will be saved from the historical plague and pandemic it was currently dealing with. Of course, there were no heroines to be recalled and evoked more suitable, rather than the daughters of Leos, as well as the mythical Codrus, whose self-sacrifice in identical times of plague and pandemic, resulted in the salvation of the city.

Having examined the cases where the daughters of Leos were used, recalled and evoked as city saviours in historical plagues and pandemics, let us now examine their relation to the Funerary Orations and their gender aspects.

5 Gender aspects: patriotic heroines

The Funeral Orations —spoken for the war dead at the area of Kerameikos of Athens— mention the heroic and brave act of self-sacrifice of the Leokorai and Hyakinthids, locating them in the central sphere of the activities of the city.

Demosthenes (60.29) —in his funeral oration for the Athenian war dead at the battle of Chaironeia— states the following about the daughters

of Leos: "The Leontidae had heard the stories related of the daughters of Leos, how they offered themselves to the citizens as a sacrifice for their country's sake. When, therefore,such courage was displayed by those women, they looked upon it as a heinous thing if they, being men, should have proved to possess less of manhood". The daughters of Leos —instead of Leos himself— were used as the heroic and patriotic examples for the men of the Leontis tribe. It was the brave act of the self-sacrifice of the female daughters —instead of their father— that was mentioned and praised at the Funerary Orations. I believe that there is no doubt that the men of Leontis tribe were taking pride in themselves —because of the brave act of self-sacrifice of their mythical ancestors, the Leokorai— when they were present at the audience of the Funerary Orations, at Kerameikos. After all, the mention of the brave act of Leokorai in public —spoken at the Funerary Orations— was set in parallel with the historical present, more specifically the current war dead of the battle of Chaironeia.

But the mentions of the brave and patriotic acts of the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids are not limited and restricted to the classical period. Diodorus (17.15.2) states that Phokion suggested in the 320s that: "the men should remember the daughters of Leos and Hyacinthus and gladly endure death, so that their country would suffer no irremediable disaster, and he inveighed against the faint-heartedness and cowardice of those who would not lay down their lives for their city". Similarly, Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* 3.15.9), attests that most states have deified the brave for the purpose or promoting valor, giving as examples the daughters of Leos and Erechtheus.

Having examined the references on the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids in the Funerary Orations —as well as the testimonies of Diodorus and Cicero— we note that their mention as the ideal examples of bravery and patriotism endures through time. Just like the case of their mention (and praise) as city saviours examined above —ranging from the classical to the Roman period— their sacrificial context, their brave and patriotic act for the salvation of the city, remains diachronic over the centuries.

As we have already stated, the mention of the names of the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids in the Funenary Orations —spoken for the war dead at the area of Kerameikos of Athens— situated them in the most public sphere of the city.

In the mythology of ancient Athens, there are further examples of virgins who voluntary sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the city. The pattern is identical and the only difference with Leokorai and Hyakinthids is that their self-sacrifice takes place during times of war —instead of plague (or famine).

Philochoros(FGrH 328 F105) attests that when the Eleusinian king Eumolpos attacked Athens —during the kingship of Erechtheus— the Delphic oracle commanded that the city of Athens will be saved only if someone sacrificed himself. Then, the heroine Aglauros threw herself by the walls of the Acropolis, heroically sacrificing herself for the salvation of the city. Just like the previous cases of the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids her brave and patriotic act was rewarded with a shrine, where she was receiving cult. The location of the shrine has been securely identified on the east slope of the Acropolis —thanks to the discovery of an inscription found in situ by Dontas— and is associated with a cave (Figure 3) (Dontas 1983). Several literary sources (Demosthenes 19.303; Philochorus FGrH 328 F 105; Plutarch, Alcibiades 15.7-8) attest that the Athenian ephebes took their oath at the sanctuary of Aglauros, invoking her name as a witness for their oath.[5] Given the brave act of her self-sacrifice and heroic status, Aglauros was the chief patroness of the ephebes and formed the ideal heroine, a role model for the Athenian ephebes.[6]

Similarly, the daughters of Erechtheus —also called the Hyakinthids, as we have already noted —sacrificed themselves for the salvation of the city during times of war between Athens and Eleusis (or Boeotia).[7] A scholion to Aratus (*Phaen*. 172) attests that the daughters of Erechtheus became Hyades. The identification of the Hyades with the daughters of

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5   For the ephebic oath, see Merkelbach 1972; Siewert 1977.
6   For Aglauros as the chief patroness of the ephebes, see Mitsios 2018, pp. 20-27.
7   See previous pages.

Figure 3: The shrine of Aglauros on the east slope of the Acropolis

Erechtheus has caused debate between scholars and has received mixed feedback, with some accepting (Kearns 1989, pp. 57-63; Kron 1999, pp. 78-79; Connelly 2014, pp. 147-148) and some rejecting (Gantz 1993, p. 218; Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, pp. 123-134) the identification. The Hyades did not simply receive cult as divinities but were transformed into stars by Athena herself. Catasterism is considered the greatest honor of all, given that the shining star becomes one with the cosmos (Connelly 2014, p. 147).

Just like the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids, the self-sacrifice for the salvation of the city of Aglauros and the daughters of Erechtheus was

of major importance and their brave acts were praised in Funerary Orations, locating them in the very central sphere of city.

In Euripides' work "Erechtheus" (lines 71-3), in terms of the self-sacrifice of the daughters, it is stated that: "their souls have gone to Hades but I myself have brought their spirit (pneuma) to the upper most reaches of heaven". It is very likely that this passage of Euripides —that mentions the daughters of Erechtheus— was paralleled in the epitaph for those who died in the battle of Poteidaia in 432 B.C. (*CEG 10*) where it is stated that: "the aether took the soul of the war dead, while the Earth took their bodies". This parallelism indicates that the fallen men of the battle of Poteidaia gained some kind of immortality, similar to the one of Erechtheids, daughters of king Erechtheus, their mythical prototypes (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2011, p. 79). The problem of the heroization of the 5th century war dead is complex but there can be no doubt that 5th century Athens did confer heroization upon the men killed in battle (Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, p.194).

Lycurgus (*Against Leocrates* 100) attests that the Athenians owe a debt to Euripides for passing this story (meaning the self-sacrifice of the daughter of Erechtheus) down to them, providing an example (paradeigma) and he further claims that the oath of Erechtheus' daughters was invoked alongside the oath of the ephebes and that of the Greeks at Plataia (Connelly 2014, p 124). We have already noted that the Athenian ephebes were taking their ephebic oath at the sanctuary of Aglauros, daughter of Kekrops, on the east slope of the Acropolis and that Aglauros was considered the chief patroness of the ephebes.[8]

The orator Demades (*Hyper tes dodeketoias* 37) —talking on the self-sacrifice of the daughters of Erechtheus— attests that: "they triumphed over their feminine in their souls and that the weakness of their nature was made virile by devotion to the soil that reared them". Similarly, Lycurgus (*Against Leocrates* 101) attests that "if woman can bring themselves to act like this, then men should show toward their country a devotion which cannot be surpassed".

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8   See previous pages.

We note that the orators repeatedly point out the examples of sacrificial heroines for the salvation of the city and often parallel their acts with the current soldiers, indicating that if women were capable of showing such bravery, at least the same is expected from men. In some cases —especially in the last two testimonies— they clearly attest the gender aspects of the self-sacrifice of the virgins for the salvation of the city, emphasizing the impact of their brave act in relation to the males.

Dying a glorious death in combat is one of the main routes to heroization for men. Achilles in his characteristic monologue in the Iliad (9.410-6) chooses a *short* but *glorious* life, instead of a long inglorious one, gaining *kleos* and *hysterophemia* by dying in the battlefield. But for the case of women —given that they are excluded from war— *kleos* and *hysterophemia* can be gained by their voluntary sacrifice for the salvation of the city. In ancient Greek myth, kleos and hysterophemia is gained in the battlefield for men and in the altar of sacrifice for the women. The role of the female sacrificial heroines is a "passive" one —in contrast with the "active" role of the male, who dies in the battlefield. It has been noted that this not a "do and die" act but one of "dying for doing" (Kearns 1990, p. 329). No matter the passive context, the brave and patriotic act of women is as important as that of men. We have already noted that this heroic act resulted in the establishment of their shrine and the receipt of cult and sacrifices for the heroines. Additionally, the brave act was used as historical example —and their names were invoked— during current plagues and pandemics and most, importantly, their acts were spoken at the Funerary Orations at the Kerameikos.

.Euripides (*Iphigenia at Aulis,* 1394) has Iphigeneia observe that "one man's life is worth more than that of thousands of women". Similarly, Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution*, 1269b18; 1275b23; 1275a22-3) treats women and slaves as parallels. Women —of whatever social rank— stand partly outside the male-dominated structures of polis society, and while their presence is biologically essential for the existence of the city, they are excluded from citizenship (Kearns 1990 p. 336). Loraux states that there were no true "feminine Athenaioi" but merely "Attikai gynaikes" (Loraux 1981 pp. 124-125). Women are examples of people

living in the city, who lack the fullness of belonging (Kearns 1990, p. 334). Given that, they are expected to contribute less to the society.

In total contrast to this, stand the female heroines who voluntary sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the city. Their heroic and brave act of self-sacrifice, serves as a paradigm both for the males and the females, making them the ideal heroines and role-models for all the Athenian citizens.

The masculinization of the heroines assimilated their actions to those of warriors and made their myth a more palatable example for men (Larson 1995, p. 104). Even though female and male heroes are guided by the same ideal to give their lives of their own free will in order to save their community, the female heroic behavior was perhaps considered much more amazing, since women's nature was considered to be much weaker than men's (Kron 1999, p.83).

The story of the heroic and brave self-sacrifice of the Leokorai and the Hyakinthids during mythical times of plague and famine —and the resulted salvation of the city— was recalled (and their names were invoked) during the period of historical plagues and pandemics. The Athenian heroines formed the ideal "soteirai"-saviours for the Athenians of the classical period, who were making offerings at the shrine, the Leokoreion, in the Agora of Athens, the civic center of the city. Additionally, their names were spoken at the Funerary Orations at Kerameikos, honoring the Athenian war dead and the brave act of the virgins was used as an example for the male soldiers, who were expected to show similar courage during the battlefield.In some cases —such as Euripides' Erechtheus— their story was performed at the theater of Dionysus, on the south slope of the Acropolis of Athens, and their heroic and brave act was viewed by five or six thousands of Athenians during the annual city Dionysia (Connelly 2014, p. 146). Given that the shrine of some of the sacrificial virgins (Leokorai) existed in the Agora of Athens —the civic center of the city— and the acts of some of the sacrificial virgins were performed at the Acropolis —the religious center of the city —their brave act was rewarded both in civic and religious context.

The mention of the sacrificial virgins in Funerary Orations, spoken at the Kerameikos, located the act of these heroic virgins in every single "topos" where the Athenian identity was shaped: at the Agora, at the Acropolis and at the Kerameikos.

The acts mentioned above situated the virgin females as the ideal examples and paradigms of bravery. The males —given their elevated and superior status, compared to the females— were expected to act with the same —if not with more— courage and bravery during the battle. Given that, and by concluding, it seems that the self-sacrifice of the women for the salvation of the city, besides being a heroic act, also offered models for Athenian gender and identity roles, since —on a symbolic level— women and men were equated. Females were situated in the very public sphere, central to the polis and the commonwealth, ideal examples of brave and patriotic citizens.

Abbreviations

FGrH = Jacoby, F. 1923. *Die Fragmente der griechischenHistoriker.* (FGrHist) Weidmann, Berlin.

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