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## **"Breathe in your stuffy cell": (Re)emergence of poetry in times of COVID-19**

This essay aims to give an overview of the poetic response to the coronavirus pandemic. Written as the sanitary crisis is still ongoing, it investigates the modes of circulation and publication of poetry between April and August 2020 in order to assess the relationship between poetry and crisis. Using the poetry of the First World War as a heuristic tool, it establishes hypotheses for the functions poetry accomplished during the coronavirus pandemic: therapeutic, cathartic, control of space and time, historical anchoring. It also argues that COVID-19 has nuanced the autonomy of the literary field. It uses the Great War as a model to read pandemic poetry as establishing connections between the dead and the living, but also to interpret this poetry ironically. Conversely, the essay interrogates how the digital character of the writing, reading and sharing of poetry during the coronavirus pandemic can provide insights into a more general relation between poetry and crisis. Finally, close reading of a small corpus of poems by amateur and professional poets alike presents the richness and diversity of pandemic poetry.

### **1. Introduction**

This essay aims to give an overview of the poetic reaction to the coronavirus pandemic and to contextualise it within a broader study of poetry in times of crisis, focusing on the First World War. As we wait for the event to pass us by, research questions arise: how have people engaged with poetry during the COVID-19 crisis? How can the theoretical framework surrounding the poetry of the Great War inform poetry reading in times of coronavirus? What impact have digital platforms and social media had in the circulation of poetry in this particular time? Can these platforms and the immediacy of the circulation of poems provide insights for researchers studying the relationship between poetry, crises and history? Using this poetry as a source for a historiography of the present imposes an overarching question: what does this poetry – both that which is written and that which circulated – tell us about the experience of COVID-19?

According to Brazilian poet Mario Quintana, "When someone writes a poem they open a window./ Breathe, in your stuffy cell,/ the fresh air entering it./ That's why poems have rhythm / - so that you can take a deep breath./ [...]"<sup>1</sup> (2008: 141) Quin-

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<sup>1</sup> "Quem faz um poema abre uma janela./ Respira, tu que estás numa cela abafada,/ esse ar que entra por ela./ Por isso é que os poemas têm ritmo/ - para que possas profundamente respirar./ [...]" Non-literary translation by the author.

tana's poem, appropriately titled "Emergência" (which translates into both emergency and emergence), allegorises the emergence of poetry during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. This metadiscursive poem about windows opening and finally being able to breathe when one's thoughts are on paper in the form of poetry becomes relevant as poetry is read, written and above all shared at a time when most of the world practises isolation in the face of a disease that attacks the respiratory tract. Coronavirus seems to be the catalyst for a revival of poetry as a medium for the expression of feelings of anxiety and bereavement, but also a way to maintain the social fabric. This indicates a cyclical pattern in the poetic response to crises that points towards continuity between the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the First World War providing a model for the relationship between poetry and tragedy. Poetry has become – as it had before – fundamental for the construction and maintenance of what Benedict Anderson (1983) identifies as imagined communities: imagined because we will never know every single other person touched by the coronavirus pandemic, yet the image of our communion lives in our minds.<sup>2</sup> This imagination goes beyond the national scope originally theorised by Anderson, though, as the virus knows no borders and the pandemic hit us in the age of social media: COVID-19 is lived as a global and totalising event. Like most totalising events before it, it has led to immediate and varied poetic answers.

### **1.1 Pandemic poetry: diverse modes of engagement with poetry during the COVID-19 crisis**

If the First World War imposes itself as a model for the reflection about poetry in times of crises, comparisons must take into account the diversity OF its poetry, beyond the constructed canon of the war poets. Contemporary discussions about poetry in times of COVID-19 should not, therefore, stem from literary criticism and aim to establish a canon. On the contrary, the first step is to assume that poetry has been itself 'pandemicised', occurring in wide areas and affecting large numbers of people. Like fear and grief, poetry seems to be exponentially growing to the point

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<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that the claim that "we are all in this together", which emerged in the early days of the pandemic in the Western hemisphere, should be accepted acritically. While the global character of the pandemic, social media and poetry itself reinforce the imagination of the community, COVID-19 has accentuated disparities, challenging the notion that this is a unifying experience.

of near-generalisation but has been experienced in different ways during the pandemic.

### **1.1.1 Spreading poetry as an antidote**

In the earliest days of the crisis, the resurgence of poetry was accompanied by that of a 1990's internet phenomenon: the email chain. Emails aiming to create an "*échange communautaire*" ('communitarian exchange') for poetry lovers or a "collective, constructive and hopefully uplifting challenge"<sup>3</sup> circulated from April 2020. The insistence on the communitarian aspect in both emails demonstrates the power of poetry for connection, particularly relevant in a time when most of the world is encouraged to practice isolation. Why did reading and especially sharing poetry become such an important practice during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The poetry of previous crises seems to provide compelling hypotheses. Poetry is a way to cope with unprecedented situations because the trope is a means to say what rational language cannot (Ertel 1993: 12). Poetry promotes catharsis by pushing the boundaries of the unsayable and therefore of the truth, giving the impression of a reality that humanity can still apprehend and communicate. This experience of control, increasingly important in times when humanity feels powerless against an invisible agent we do not fully understand and when individuals are unable to control their movements, is enhanced by the formal work of poems. Bending language and finding rimes provides solace when everything else seems to be rigid and immutable. Poems, by their brevity and metrics, provide a tangible sense of time and rhythm that acquires even greater importance when facing the disconnection from socialising institutions that mark the passage of time (school, work, church, etc.). The pandemic and lockdown have disturbed the mathematical apprehension of the passing of time. Poetic rhythm and briefness can provide a proxy for this understanding, as illustrated by the time-bound character of challenges such as "one poem a day". Gillian Clarke's poem "What Day is It?" shows that, while social conventions that help humanity make sense of time have been suspended, making the days

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<sup>3</sup> These quotes are from email poetry exchange invitations received by the author during the pandemic. The first one, in English, was received on 06/04/2020, and the second one, in French, the following week. They were both sent by academics whose research is about poetry. I would like to thank Laurence Campa, who drew my attention to the fact that these email chains were pertinent to my thesis on French poetry of the First World War because they indicated human reliance on poetry during times of crisis. I would also like to thank Marjorie Enya for her comments on earlier drafts.

hard to count, nature's timeline is still progressing, and seasons change while nothing else seems to:

May-gold has gone to seed, yellows fallen,  
petals of primrose, laburnum, Welsh poppy.  
June is rose, magenta, purple, [...]  
then a change in the weather. Heat rises.  
Flowers open rose to the sun.  
Birds fall quiet a moment – then [...]

On the other hand, appreciating the artisanship involved in the poetic labour (Thélot 2013) can also help transcend the boredom of ordinary situations where space and time are both at a standstill. An example is a poem by Jessica Salfia, composed only of the first lines of emails she received during lockdown (Cain 2020): "In these uncertain times/as we navigate the new normal,/ Are you willing to share your ideas and solutions? As you know, many people are struggling. [...]."

Conversely, historical models of poetry allow for the creation of communities and a sense of anchoring. Writing or reading a poem of fourteen verses about a crisis means inscribing oneself in a tradition of sonnets that dates back to the thirteenth century, for example. Poetry, especially fixed-form poetry, anchors current crises in history, allowing for a cyclical vision and reminding us that, if our ancestors overcame tragedy through poetry, so might we. It is telling that one of the first pandemic poems to go viral, Kitty O'Meara's "And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested", was often shared with an accompanying story about how it had been written during the 1869 cholera epidemic and reprinted during the 1919 flu pandemic (Weir 2020). The poem was written and published on Facebook on March 16, 2020, but in times of crises rumours can be particularly revealing of cultural reactions to history. This rumour reveals that sharing poetry is not only cathartic and provides a sense of control, but also that poetry can somehow remind humanity of previous struggles and provide a sense of connection with the past as well as hope for the future.

### **1.1.2 Poetry, oral traditions and the cure against disinformation**

Rumours, however, have been one of the biggest dangers of this pandemic. Historian and First World War veteran Marc Bloch (1921) claimed that in the trenches anything could be true. The Great War presents itself as a layering of physical violence but also violence against the very notion of truth. The pandemic, which has

violated the fabric of Western sociability, also has the particularity of hitting us when 'fake news' and 'post-truth' describe the way humans interact with information. Infodemiology studies mapped out the impact of digital misinformation during COVID-19 (EU Disinfo Lab 2020), but scholars may never be able to ascertain the cost of lives lost due to the tragic combination of disease and lack of information literacy. Bloch associates the prevalence of rumours and '*fausses nouvelles*', which translates into fake news, with a resurgence of oral traditions. Once again, a parallel can be traced between the war and the pandemic, and, just as poetry was partly reactive to propagandist views of warfare in the First World War (Winter 2014: 204), it has been used to counter misinformation during the pandemic, particularly in countries where oral traditions have often invested poetry with an epistemological role.

In his account of an encounter between a *griot* (a bard who is the depositary of oral traditions and embodies the convergence between history and poetry) and a *Xhosa* king, Harold Scheub claims that:

It is a subjective accounting, but the poet, using all his magic to convince his listeners otherwise, contains these as yet unchannelled bursts of energy and gives history a new gloss. Not surprisingly, the oral poet is frequently a competent historian. (Scheub 1987: 478)

The sanitary crisis has particularly affected slam and rap, arguably the modern and urban equivalents of oral poetry. The most prominent members of the industry found mechanisms to help other artists and rap has become a vector for solidarity during the Coronavirus crisis (UNIS Geneva 2020). In countries where encounters with poet-historians such as the one described by Scheub are important cultural elements and where oral poetry, more than an art form, is a means of understanding the connection between past and present, oral poems are combating misinformation and therefore the spread of the virus. A group of female slam poets from Senegal published videos slamming to promote solidarity during the pandemic. One of their main objectives is to use the popular character of slam to ensure the correct information reaches the Senegalese population (ReliefWeb 2020). Mauaya Jua's poem insists on the importance of wearing a mask: "*Pour que nos rires perdurent malgré la dureté de ses temps, portons le masque qui empêchera nos larmes de couler*

*amèrement.*"<sup>4</sup> The choice of poetry to raise awareness and as a means of educating the general population relates to their country's preference for oral and folkloric forms of communication. Once again, the brevity of the genre is a determining factor. Unesco's call for jingles, for example, empowered poets to dispel hoaxes in Nigeria, a country where 65% of adults encountered misinformation on social media (UNESCO 2020). While poems, in general, have been increasingly written, read, and shared during the pandemic, oral poetry has been an important educational and informational tool, particularly in countries where poets have historically been the depositaries of communal knowledge.

### **1.1.3 Fresh and famous voices**

Oral poetry is not the only outlet for new voices. On March 21 2020, *These Are the Hands*, an anthology of poems by professional poets and by the United Kingdom's National Health Service workers, from doctors to cleaning staff, was published. Including both professional and amateur poets in anthologies is common in times of crises, as illustrated by the First World War *Anthologie des Écrivains Morts à la Guerre*, and sheds light on how totalising events have the power of turning anyone into a poet and, furthermore, into a published poet. Like other crises, the coronavirus pandemic has contributed to blurring the frontiers of the literary field, breaching the gap between professional and amateur writers. This circumstantial expansion of the literary field has also benefited independent poetry publishers, particularly online, and both Indolent Books and Terra Preta have an open call for COVID-19 anthologies.

This idea of a circumstance capable of rendering the literary field less autonomous is not a new one and does not relate uniquely to crises. According to Pedrag Matvejevitch (1971), what characterises poetry of circumstance is that the circumstance not only dictates form, metre and function, but also 'commissions' or even 'commands' poetry. The feeling of being commanded seems to be shared by both professional authors, whose pandemic poems were commissioned, and by amateur ones who felt compelled to write. C., a member of the author's family, aged 9 and living in Brazil, wrote poems during the pandemic. One of them, inspired by Pablo Neruda's famous quote "*Si nada nos salva de la muerte, al menos que el amor nos*

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<sup>4</sup> "Laughter can be heard again despite the harshness of our time, if we wear a mask, one that prevents our tears from flowing bitterly". Translation by ReliefWeb.

*salve de la vida*"<sup>5</sup>, explores the possibility of salvation but also the fast-paced changes of the world, questioning if it will still be the same when she wakes up. When asked about what led her to write poetry instead of prose to process her feelings during the pandemic, C. claimed that what makes poetry special is that one does not have to know how to write a poem, only to feel it.

In the same spirit of commission and command through feelings, the National Poetry Library (UK) compiled initial reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic by prominent poets. Preliminary close readings of the twelve poems commissioned, along with those in the *Write Where we Are Now* project and poems by amateur poets, have indicated that the pandemic has 'commanded' poetry by poets all across the professionalization spectrum. Professional poets whose texts were commissioned, however, tend to focus on specific aspects of the pandemic and its smaller details (how it has changed their relationship to food or parenting, for example), while amateur poets tend to focus on general feelings of bereavement and of chaos brought about by the sanitary crisis. This should be reassessed after the pandemic, once poetry written and circulated during the crisis has been catalogued and comparisons established, but it denotes the place poetry occupies in the reflection of professional and amateur poets, the latter often resorting to poetry in overwhelming situations and therefore preferring poems encompassing bigger pictures. It also illustrates Terry Eagleton's (2007: 38–41) argument about how poetry can juxtapose sensuous and pragmatic uses of language.

## **2. What can the poetry of the First World War tell us about the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The previous section aims to create a typology of how poetry re-emerged in the COVID-19 pandemic, based on its functions. The modes of engagement with poetry described have been identified using the poetry of the First World War as a heuristic tool. The main benefit of using the Great War as a paradigm to start delineating the poetry of the COVID-19 pandemic is the premise that crises can be understood via poetry both by those who live through them and by future historians. As world leaders announced lockdown in the early days of March and April 2020,

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<sup>5</sup> "If nothing can save us from death, may love at least save us from life". Translation by the author.

many of them resorted to national imagery related to the First World War: Emmanuel Macron's statement on 12 March was reminiscent of calls for the *Union Sacrée* and the first weeks of the pandemic saw iterations of 1914–1918 vocabulary such as "frontline". So far, there are no clear examples of this recuperation of First World War tropes leading to pandemic poems that follow the main characteristics of canonical war poetry. Nonetheless, the latter has influenced the way this poetry is written and read.

## 2.1 Why poetry?

The First World War has shown that poetry has the potential to be a hybrid genre and therefore to encompass liminal historical moments. Jay Winter insists that the poetry of the Great War was a "set of mediations on the dead and their passing" (Winter 2014: 204). In his 1916 poem *Les Morts Immortels*, Pierre Aguétant claims to have heard the voice of his brother, who had died in combat in 1914, asking him to sing the prowess of the fallen: "Chante toujours... – Et j'ai chanté"<sup>6</sup>. This idea of the poet as providing connection in times of crises has oriented 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of poetry and could partially explain the resurgence of poetry during a pandemic where not only socialisation is prohibited but the act of burying loved ones and therefore connecting with both the living and the dead is impossible, as it had been in 1914–1918. Poet laureate Simon Armitage's poem, "Lockdown", provides an example of a plethora of connections established in a single text. Referencing the 17<sup>th</sup>-century plague outbreak in Eyam, Armitage builds a bond between the current crisis and previous ones. A Shakespearean reference links Armitage's creation and national literary history:

star-crossed lovers on either side  
of the quarantine line

whose wordless courtship spanned the river  
till she came no longer.

The same verses provide the much-needed attachment between living and dead and the harsh confrontation with the fact that the woman in the couple had probably fallen ill. The vision of the poet as a weaver, connecting realities torn apart by history, by the evolution of generations in literary history, by death or, in the case of

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<sup>6</sup> "Sing, always... – And I sang". Translation by the author.

the COVID-19 pandemic, by social distancing, is one of the prisms the First World War has imposed on the reading of poetry in times of corona.

## **2.2 Truth and Irony**

First World War poetry created the image of the poet as the 20<sup>th</sup> century's "truth-teller *par excellence*" (Winter 2014: 221), but also reshaped the very notion of what is true. While the war poetry canon can and should be questioned, the ironic mode of expression it introduced informs the reading of pandemic poetry. If the Great War inaugurated modern and ironic forms of understanding, it also inaugurated the polysemic reading of poems such as Grace Nichols's "Harbour", one of the pieces included in the collection *Write Where We Are Now*:

When it's all over and hopefully it will be over,  
I'll probably look back and miss  
this strange web of our togetherness-

The impromptu arias at windows  
and balconies, the orchestras of pots  
and pans and hands beating a metronome.

While nothing in the text indicates that Nichols is being ironic, the expression of the First World War through irony permeates the reading of this poem, and it is reminiscent, for example, of Blaise Cendrars's ironic representation of victory in his 1916 war poem "*La Guerre au Luxembourg*". Contrary to Cendrars's poem, though, where increasingly far-fetched images render the concept of victory itself impossible, Nichols's poem ends in a humane and subtle tone, claiming that the virtual world can console but that she would trade it for a hug. Not all pandemic poetry is written to be ironic, but if 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers can lend polysemy to poems written and read during the coronavirus crisis, it is partially because war poetry inaugurated ironic modes of expression which nuance hopes that humanity can overcome crises.

## **3. How can COVID-19 shed light on the relationship between poetry and crises?**

Just as First World War poetry provides a paradigm for the initial understanding of the engagement with poetry during COVID-19, the current situation can provide some enlightenment for those looking at the general relationship between poetry and crises.

### **3.1 A perfect storm: poetry and crisis in the digital age**

The fact that COVID-19 is one of the first global crises of the digital era sheds light on the circulation and reception of poetry. The immediacy of social media means that poems are not only accompanied by elements of contextualisation (both true and fake, as in the O'Meara example above) but also by justifications by poets or reactions by readers. Scholars have the possibility of conducting research, in the modes of netnography, on the very platforms via which poems circulate, using the techniques of interpretative anthropology to extract data from public conversations surrounding poetry exchanges on social media. Data analytics enable the mapping of poetry networks and answer questions such as whether countries with strong poetic traditions saw a peak in poetry exchanges, publications or sales during the pandemic.

Poets no longer have to resort exclusively to metadiscourse to explain their vision for the relationship between poetry and crisis. The presentation of the diverse forms of engagement with poetry in the previous section already addressed the main reasons why this poetry was circulated, read or written during the pandemic. Contrary to the Great War, however, in the context of COVID-19, these reasons are rendered explicit less by the poems themselves and more by everything surrounding them: newspaper articles, blog posts, and image captions on social media. While First World War historians and literary critics have hinted at the fact that poetry is a mode of experiencing a crisis, and therefore more than just text, sources were only available to corroborate this statement for canonical, well-documented poets. The question remains of whether these poets' reasons for responding to a crisis through poetry are generalizable to the other 2000 wartime poets in Britain (Reilly 1978) and France (Villard 1949). The COVID-19 crisis, digital engagement with poetry in all its immediacy and the blurred frontiers of the literary field allow scholars to compare the poetic intentions of both professional and amateur poets. Salfia, whose email poem is reproduced above, claimed that she felt emotions that were too strong and was compelled to write a poem. She insists, however, that she is not a poet because she would be unable to connect to such deep feelings all the time. While the First World War has helped create the myth of the poet that could have been and the bereavement of all the poems that were not written, the COVID-19 crisis shows, on the contrary, that poetry can be strictly contingent, and that crises can

turn people, not necessarily into poets – as the poetry of the Great War led us to believe and as I have argued above – but rather into people who occasionally wrote a poem. The direct contact with poems via social media during COVID-19 has shown that poetry is a realm one can weave in and out of with relative ease, and more research is needed to investigate whether this is particular to the era of mass and immediate digital communication or if the same can be said of previous crises.

### **3.2 What pandemic does poetry communicate?**

It is probably too soon to have an overview of trends that emerge from the close reading of pandemic poetry. Anthologies are starting to be published in mid-2020, and new poems by amateur and professional poets alike appear almost daily. While this article has insisted on the fact that poetry is a way of understanding, experiencing and bestowing sense upon the COVID-19 crisis, it cannot shy away from the question of what aspects of the pandemic are being communicated. Besides the 'functional typology' established in the first section, close reading of poems included in *In the Beginning Of Covid-19* (National Poetry Library) and *Write Where We Are Now* (Manchester Writing School – Manchester National University) indicates certain recurring themes that could help orient further studies of the pandemic poetry.

One of these themes is the life before the pandemic, as poetry helps design a normality-shaped void in the 'new normal'. This absence is often sensorial, as poets explore the longing for a hug or for the touch of other people's hands as a proxy for exchanging with other humans, as in Zaffar Kunial's poem "Self Isolating", where the poet laments "this unhinged monastical spring// where I see nothing pass from hand/ to hand, save between these two". In parallel to this absence of pre-pandemic normalcy, poets have worked to build the backdrop of what is now normal. New words such as Zoom and hydroxychloroquine have provided linguistic material for poetic explorations. Teachers-turned-poets during the pandemic seem particularly sensitive to the effects it has had on language, and explore it in their poems, such as John McBratney's "In A Time of Plague", where the university professor uses imagery issued from his expertise in Victorian literature and combines it with new, unfamiliar words. This normalcy is not without irony, and Hungarian poet George Szirtes writes

Storm clouds of summer.  
The world is back to normal  
Or so it believes

So little changes.  
The dying go on dying.  
It's normal. The storms

Forecasts are normal.

Poetry has therefore highlighted the ambivalence between the sentiment that humanity is facing one of its greatest challenges of the past century and the nature of the crisis itself, which can give the impression that nothing is happening.

Another aspect of the pandemic highlighted by the poems in both projects is that this is not an isolated crisis and that other systems of oppression are amplified by and influence the way the pandemic is experienced. The coronavirus crisis has been concentric with political turmoil in the United States of America and Brazil, with uncertainties regarding the European Union after Brexit, and with one of the worst forced migration crises in history. It has also been marked by the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. Poetry has reflected this accumulation of crises. Rip Bulkeley wrote:

Then almost nothing, just another  
ordinary foul murder with society officially on hold  
in time of plague, and the planet ignites,  
unselfish crowds demolish the assumptions  
of ages, and a line is drawn across which  
there can be no retreating.  
[...]  
No more back of the history bus.

Even poetry written before Floyd's death and the outbreak of BLM engages with themes of social, racial and regional inequalities. Sakinah Hofler wrote "What 'Contagion' Got Wrong About a Pandemic in America" on 11 May. The poem emphasises that the virus has been particularly deadly for African American communities: making up 6% of the general population in Wisconsin, for example, people of colour make up 40% of the fatalities in that state. Mike Jenkins embodies regional disparities in his poem "This is My Ome". He breaches written linguistic conventions to highlight how the pandemic has broadened gaps between global cities and the countryside, in terms of response to the virus but also in terms of racial diversity since Jenkins writes as the only person of colour in his region: "This is my ome, buh even b'fore lockdown/ nothin wuz moving, nothin appnin."

#### **4. Preliminary conclusions: questions, rather than answers**

While the previous section has attempted to give an overview of some of the aspects of the pandemic presented in poems from two collections available online, it provides more questions than it answers. Have these themes evolved as the pandemic progressed? The projects examined involved only English speaking poets, so the exercise should be repeated in other languages to investigate regional and national differences in the experiences of the pandemic (horizontal x vertical lockdown, for example) and how they reflect on poetry. It is important to highlight the diversity of the roles this poetry has been playing during the pandemic and how it can provide a model to understand how poems circulate during crises. The extent to which it engages with literary models from previous crises also remains to be evaluated, though this article has attempted to show that the First World War can provide a heuristic tool to understand the poetry of the pandemic as the crisis is still ongoing. Christian Jouhaud, Dinah Ribard and Nicolas Shapira (2009) argue that texts written during a *malheur* ('misfortune') are not only the depositaries of the experience of the 'real' that influenced them but the very space where this real is built. In other words, living the COVID-19 pandemic and writing, reading or sharing poetry about it are not separate or united by a link of causality ("experience therefore poetry"), but rather the pandemic is lived through the poems one reads, writes and shares. While poetry is constantly valued for its 'timelessness', associated with lyrical genres that speak to internal rather than external circumstances, perhaps its value resides precisely in its timeliness, its capacity to be ever-actualised and ever-current. Historians of the future approaching COVID-19 through poems should, like those of us doing the same for crises of the past, look at writing and living as elements of experience that cannot be dissociated, as concentric circles that mutually constitute each other. If the poetry of past crises can teach us anything about the coronavirus pandemic, it is that poetry should be studied as a practice and not just as texts and that the only way it can be related to the circumstance and used to understand it is by apprehending it in its full diversity. The most important question to ask of the pandemic poetry is not what it says about the coronavirus crisis, but rather what it has done for us during it, and what it will be able to do for historians centuries from now.

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