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Introduction

Sharen Bart, Daniel Elias, & Georgia Whittaker
Submission Co-Editors

This edition welcomes two new submission editors to *Limina*, Sharen Bart and Georgia Whittaker. Our thanks go to our outgoing submission editor, Amelia Birch. Her contribution to *Limina*, from an initial collective of two to an editorial collective of ten, is invaluable. We also welcome two new book review editors, Amy Alexander and Rachel Denham-White, a frequent contributor. We hope that this structure of shared responsibility will up-skill and train future scholars in running and growing an academic journal.

Limina Collective is glad to present this October's general edition, containing two journal articles, three creative pieces, one short story and two sets of poetry collections, and seven book reviews. Lillian Robb's article, *For Crisis, and in Crisis? An Origin Story of International Law* critically examines the pervasive narrative of crisis within the field of international law. The piece argues that international law's foundational myths often portray it as a heroic entity forged in response to global catastrophes, such as the Peace of Westphalia or the World Wars, leading to an over-mythologisation of its role. This heroic narrative, however, creates unrealistic expectations, contributing to a perception of international law's failure when it appears impotent in the face of contemporary crises such as those in Ukraine and Gaza. Robb contends that this perceived failure is not solely due to inherent systemic flaws but also stems from oversimplified narratives. The article juxtaposes this heroic origin story with an alternative perspective that views international law as historically complicit in settler colonial expansion and imperialism. By presenting these contrasting narratives, Robb challenges the tendency to imbue international law with either purely benevolent or malevolent characteristics. Instead, the author advocates for a more realistic understanding of international law as an instrument, rather than a character, urging a critical re-evaluation of its capabilities and limitations in addressing unfolding global crises.

Brigitte De Poi's article *1631 The Year the Music Died: Exploring the Impact of the Plague on Venice's Music Printing Industry* examines the consequences of a devastating plague in 1630 in Northern Italy that promptly put a halt to the Venetian music printing industry. De Poi argues that the outbreak devastated the city of Venice, which at the time was the centre of the European musical industry. Working within the field of musicology, the article contends that there is a lack of serious examination into the years leading up to and following the plague and its correlation with the decline of the Venetian music printing industry. Maintaining a clear focus on this period as well as the intricate relationships sustaining musicians and music printers, the article investigates numerous printing databases to offer new insights into the various

networks imbricated with sustaining the Venetian music printing process. In doing so De Poi effectively addresses a history that has been overlooked, offering an extensive industry-wide analysis that locates the plague as the primary cause of the Venetian music print decline.

Views To A Room by Juan Sebastián Martínez Mora consists of three poems 'exit wounds', 'limit state' and 'points of entry'. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's conceptualisations about the structure of a house and its connections to his films form the basis for this collection's exploration into love, companionship, time and loss. Across the collection, language mirrors the loss and disintegration relationships can cause to an individual and wreaks havoc on the page. From harsh, bitter and concise diction in the first poem to a noisy cacophony of ideas and ages clashing about in the second, to lastly, words failing to hold up against one's memory which carries itself as a constant interloper in the persona's shattered psyche and dwellings, Mora's language reeks in ways that offer a baroque persona 'abode' in crisis.

Rochelle Pickles' short story *Little Girls* follows two girls on the precipice of becoming young women, 'teenagers' to be exact. The narrative shows the characters gleefully waving goodbye to their pre-tweenhood as they dress up for Halloween in a Perth suburb. Bordering on the edge of this liminal time and space, Pickles paints a terrifying succession of scenes where budding femininity and sexuality become threatened by the very real, violent and visceral male gaze. Pickle's writing dazzles and ensnares, entrancing readers in myriads with a calculated playfulness that reverses this gaze and creates fractures in time, arresting and suspending the characters bodies and corporeality. The difference between these two conceits can be ever so slight and may not matter depending on the writer who chooses to take them up for examination. In this narrative, Pickles dissects, revisits and oscillates between their differences, ruminating on the onslaught that puberty can bring with prose that pulsates towards its climax, creating a past that bleeds irreversibly into and cannot be broken from the present.

In the last creative contribution to this edition, Frances Sullivan-Rhodes' "*Some Sort of Delightful Horror*" provides the internal musings of a persona's confrontation with productivity, domesticity and parenthood. Competing thoughts and tensions stand at the forefront of the first poem, casting the speaker's public world as under siege by their private. In 'The second poem', light abounds and brings awareness to the persona of the beauty of life and the precarity of innocence, youth and time. There is a stillness that flowers in this poem that gives rise to a contemplation that pervades to the final verse. Here, one's place of dwelling and how it is built becomes a metaphor for the persona's internal state of mind and their being. The collection offers a consideration into the competing joys of work and raising children with constant reminders of these feelings across each text, a technique that has pressed itself upon each of their accompanying paintings.

Our book reviews section for this year offers a diverse range of historical, cultural, and poetic works, with some review texts put forth by the Journal and some pitched by our talented contributors. Ava van Aurich and Phillip Zapkin have provided reviews of poetry collections by Indigenous authors – Nyikina Warrwa, and Māori and Coastal Salish, respectively – which, coincidentally, both address the staggering beauty of the natural world and the mutability of its waterways, from coastline to river. Rachel Denham-White puts out her assessment of a work of feminist theory in the unique and emerging field of Medievalism’s, whereas Anna Rita Marie gives her thoughts on a contemporary monograph of teaching history in the medieval classroom through Project-Based-Learning. Jennifer Caligari reviews an underrepresented side of Australian history: the contributions made by Chinese and Asian furniture makers to the Australian economy, and Oliver Krumholtz provides their excellent overview of the historical impact of the controversial Third Reich-aligned paper ‘Der Sturmer.’ Jewel Oreskovich closes out this section with a beautifully poignant assessment of Greek myths as interpreted through a post-pandemic viewpoint, navigating a combination of the old and new, which encapsulates both this collection of reviews and our latest issue of the journal.

Our gratitude extends to the numerous contributors, peer reviewers, advisory board members, and, most importantly, our fellow editors in the *Limina Collective*.

For Crisis, and in Crisis?: An Origin Story of International Law

Lillian Robb

Geneva Graduate Institute

International Law can be said to be a tool forged in the flames of crisis, based on a heroic tale in which the international legal order rises from the ashes of the greatest horrors seen by humankind and paves the way towards a better world: that is its origin story. This story is contrasted against another, in which international law is a facilitator of settler colonial expansion and imperialism, inseparable from its colonial past. The stark contrast illustrated by this second narrative cautions against over-mythologisation and questions the role of international law in the face of crisis. This piece proposes both the removal of international law from its pedestal and simultaneously questions the expectations that that pedestal created, asking what role international law realistically plays in the face of unfolding crises.

Epigraph

This piece was written in early 2024, shortly after the International Court of Justice (ICJ) considered South Africa's request for provisional measures concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip but before it delivered its Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. It was written at a time when the Gaza death toll was significantly lower. However, the trends remain consistent. The hostilities have continued, the resulting questioning of international law has continued, and the handwringing over the future of international law has only increased.

In mid-September 2025, the annual conference of the European Society of International Law (ESIL) was held in Berlin with the theme 'Reconstructing International Law'. The conference opened with the statement: 'We are grappling with a crisis'.¹ It was preceded by an exposition painting a potential future in which 'international law dies', reflecting political patterns of the 1930s into the 2030s.² The speaker described how, in our effort to reshape international law to prevent what had happened then, certain elements were overlooked, leaving an international law that internalised certain legitimacy flaws, by 'locking out alternative visions' and 'carrying colonial imperialising vision', which now 'threaten to pull down the architecture

¹ Gleider Hernández, ESIL President, 'Opening Address' (20th Annual Conference of the European Society of International Law 11-13 September 2025 at Freie Universität Berlin)

² Prof. Dr. Heike Krieger, 'Opening Address' (20th Annual Conference of the European Society of International Law 11-13 September 2025 at Freie Universität Berlin)

today'.³ Both opening speakers presented a call to 'begin the process of reconstruction',⁴ arguing that international law is worth the effort to 'keep it alive'.⁵ This theme carried through the multiple days of the conference, with speakers either embracing the crisis narrative or explicitly disputing it. I cite this as an illustration that, despite the time that has passed since its initial authorship, the moment for this paper has not passed, and the narrative theme that places 'crisis' both at the heart of international law and looming over it as a potential spectre of destruction, is as pervasive as ever.

In the first plenary panel of the ESIL conference, mention was made of the unprecedented interest in international law held by the public at large, paired with a comment that 'international lawyers must be honest about the limits of international instruments'.⁶ The current piece was written as a think piece rather than an academic article, and it has this wider audience of international law in mind. The responsibility of the international lawyer to think critically and communicate honestly about their views on nature, failures, and limits of this discipline, particularly in a time of increased public interest, was at the forefront of the author's mind in writing it. It is written for the *Limina* audience, being both a general audience and academic audiences in fields other than law, such as history and cultural studies, and, as such, much of the theory of law literature has been left to one side.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gleider Hernández (n 1).

⁵ Prof. Dr. Heike Krieger (n 2).

⁶ Professor Astrid Kjeldgaard-Pedersen, 'Opening Panel' (20th Annual Conference of the European Society of International Law 11-13 September 2025 at Freie Universität Berlin)

Introduction

International Law can be said to be a tool forged in the flames of crisis, based on a heroic tale in which the international legal order rises from the ashes of the greatest horrors seen by humankind and paves the way towards a better world. There exists an anthology of stories depicting slightly different versions of this narrative throughout international legal discourse. In some ways, crisis is part of our origin story.⁷ As international lawyers, ‘crisis’ has been characterised as our identity⁸ or lifeblood,⁹ something we are obsessed with;¹⁰ that we perennially experience;¹¹ that dominates our imagination;¹² and forms a precursor to the need for our profession.¹³ Judge Hillary Charlesworth once called us a ‘discipline of crisis’.¹⁴ However, the story of the forging of international law is a story, and like all stories, it is incomplete – because a story cannot maintain its appeal or its narrative power if it continually fragments, in the hands of multiple narrators, into diverging and contradictory branches laced with nearly incomprehensible complexity. The ‘crisis’ narrative at its heart plays into a mythology of international law, which paints an institution as a heroic character.

Today, a different tale is told: one in which international law is completely impotent in the face of ever-multiplying crises, particularly as horrors unfold unabated in both Ukraine and Gaza. This tale builds on the first, it assumes that the tool of international law was intended to, and capable of, teaching us the lessons of history and preventing future crises; protecting humanity from the scourge that went

⁷ ‘Origin story’ here is defined simply as a story that accounts for the character of a group of people (or here, a thing or system) and explains why they are either protagonists or agonists. In this way it is viewed as a subcategory of the etiological myths, being those that give explanations for why something is the way that it is (or the ‘Just So Stories’ described by Rudyard Kipling). It is also used in a manner comparable to a ‘founding myth’ which may be adopted in a heroic model to create a national original myth by groups (cities, civilisations, kingdoms, even religions or specific traditions, or the ethnogenesis of a group).

⁸ Hilary Charlesworth, ‘International Law: A Discipline of Crisis’ (2002) 65 *The Modern Law Review* 377.

⁹ Philippe Sands, ‘Crisis and Its Curators’: in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022).

¹⁰ See, for example, Charlesworth (n 8) 384; James Crawford, ‘Reflections on Crises and International Law’ in James Crawford, *How International Law Works in Times of Crisis* (Oxford University Press 2019); Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont, ‘Introduction’ in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); Sands (n 9); Jean D’Aspremont, ‘International Law as a Crisis Discourse: The Peril of Wordlessness’ in Jean D’Aspremont and Makane Moïse Mbengue, *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); Jan Klabbers, ‘The Love of Crisis’ in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); Philippa Webb, ‘From Crisis to Epoch: How to Understand This Era of International Law?’ (2024) 25 *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 1.

¹¹ Klabbers (n 10) 10.

¹² Charlesworth (n 8) 382.

¹³ Crawford (n 10) 10; Sands (n 9); D’Aspremont (n 10) 74.

¹⁴ Charlesworth (n 8).

before.¹⁵ This story tells us, then, that international law has failed, or is failing. International law is falling short of its promise, failing to fill the enormous, hero-laced shoes set out for it. But this story, too, is incomplete—lacking the nuance and complexity of the real world—while following the narrative structure set out by a heroising mythology.

This piece examines international law's obsession with crisis as the central mobilisation theme of its 'origin story'. It interrogates the above tale, from international law's rise in the flames of crisis to the 'fall' that some believe they are witnessing today. In so doing, this piece touches on two different types of crises: external crises for which international law is sought as a potential solution, and crises of the international legal order itself.¹⁶ These two types of crises are understood as interdependent: the failure to act in the face of an external crisis is seen as triggering a crisis of the system itself and the questioning of whether international law is fit for purpose. However, it argues that the current moment of crisis experienced by the field is not necessarily, or solely, the result of some inherent characteristic of the system. It is also a result of our use of simplified stories and unnuanced narratives. The piece examines the power of the narratives we use by placing two narratives side by side: one in which international law is painted as an almost hero-like character, liable to fall from grace when those expectations are not reached; and another in which international law is almost villainous from the outset, serving at the right hand of imperialism, colonialism, and oppression. While there is truth to both, the final section discusses how we can perceive of international law less as a 'character', imbuing it with good or evil and playing into the narrative extremes, and more as an instrument.

Moment of Crisis for International Law?

The notion of 'crisis' seems everywhere in the field and beyond. The *Limina* issue which prompted this piece was themed 'crisis'. The Australian and New Zealand Society of International Law has themed their conference 'International Law: Crisis, Conflict and Cooperation'.¹⁷ At the Hague Academy of International law has themed the Centre for Studies and Research on 'International Institutions in the Face of International Crises'.¹⁸ A book was published containing pieces by 20 of the 'big fish'

¹⁵ To use the language of the UN Charter: *Charter of the United Nations 1945* (1 UNTS XVI) Preamble.

¹⁶ On 'Exogenous' and 'Endogenous' crises, see: M. Reisman, A. R. Willard (eds.), *International Incidents: The Law That Counts in World Politics* (Princeton University Press 1988); G. Guillaume, *Les grandes crises internationales et le droit* (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1994). For applied distinctions between 'exogenous' and 'endogenous' crisis see Jean-Marc Sauvé, 'Jean-Marc Sauvé, 'Reflections: How International Law Functions in Times of Crisis' in George Ulrich and Ineta Ziemele (eds), *How International Law Works in Times of Crisis* (1st edn, Oxford University Press 2019).

¹⁷ '31st ANZSIL Annual Conference' <<https://anzsil.org.au/page-18089>> accessed 17 March 2024.

¹⁸ '2024 Centre' (*The Hague Academy of International Law*) <<https://www.hagueacademy.nl/2024-centre/>> accessed 18 March 2024.

of international law titled ‘Crisis Narratives in International Law’.¹⁹ There are webinars, conferences, talks, blogs, news pieces, publications, and even podcasts all invoking the term or the sentiment.²⁰ Their focuses range from Climate Change and environmental devastation to wars in Ukraine and Gaza, to health and the COVID pandemic, being of the kind of crises that are external or exogenous and facing the globe at large.²¹ Alongside consideration of those external crises, the flurry of

¹⁹ Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022).

²⁰ See, for example, *International Law After Gaza: Crisis of Rules or System Breakdown?* (Directed by Institute for Peace & Diplomacy, 2024) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fuotirr72U>> accessed 24 August 2025; ‘Full Programme | Boğaziçi University International Law Conference’ <<https://bilc.bogazici.edu.tr/full-programme>> accessed 24 August 2025; ‘International Law after Gaza’ <<https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/international-law-after-gaza>> accessed 24 August 2025; ‘2022 Symposium – Lessons Learned: Perspectives on Law and Policy From the War in Ukraine’ <<https://lawreview.syr.edu/2022-symposium-lessons-learned-perspectives-on-law-and-policy-from-the-war-in-ukraine/>> accessed 22 March 2024; Fuad Zarbiyev, ‘Damaged Beyond Repair? International Law after Gaza’ (*EJIL: Talk!*, 26 March 2024) <<https://www.ejiltalk.org/damaged-beyond-repair-international-law-after-gaza/>> accessed 11 April 2024; Fuad Zarbiyev, ‘Did the International Community Die in Gaza? | IHEID’ <<https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/news/international-community-gaza>> accessed 11 April 2024; Nico Krisch, ‘After Hegemony: The Law on the Use of Force and the Ukraine Crisis’ (*EJIL: Talk!*, 2 March 2022) <<https://www.ejiltalk.org/after-hegemony-the-law-on-the-use-of-force-and-the-ukraine-crisis/>> accessed 24 August 2025; Marko Milanovic, ‘Dystopian International Law’ (2025) <<https://www.ssrn.com/abstract=5446315>> accessed 1 October 2025; Philippa Webb, ‘Six Viewpoints on the Future of the International Legal Order and the Role of International Courts’ (*EJIL: Talk!*, 20 August 2025) <<https://www.ejiltalk.org/six-viewpoints-on-the-future-of-the-international-legal-order-and-the-role-of-international-courts/>> accessed 1 October 2025; ‘Will the War in Gaza Become a Breaking Point for the Rules-Based International Order? | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank’ (25 January 2024) <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/01/will-war-gaza-become-breaking-point-rules-based-international-order>> accessed 22 March 2024; ‘The Future of International Law in Light of the Russian-Ukraine Conflict – The Leaflet’ (13 December 2022) <<https://theleaflet.in/the-future-of-international-law-in-light-of-the-russian-ukraine-conflict/>> accessed 22 March 2024; ‘The Fall and Fall of International Law: A Chronicle from Covid to Palestine – The Leaflet’ (1 December 2023) <<https://theleaflet.in/the-fall-and-fall-of-international-law-a-chronicle-from-covid-to-palestine/>> accessed 12 March 2024; ‘What Palestine Teaches Teachers of Politics and Law – The Leaflet’ (29 October 2023) <<https://theleaflet.in/what-palestine-teaches-teachers-of-politics-and-law/>> accessed 12 March 2024; Wesam Ahmad, ‘The Mask Is off: Gaza Has Exposed the Hypocrisy of International Law’ (*Al Jazeera*) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/17/the-mask-is-off-gaza-has-exposed-the-hypocrisy-of-international-law>> accessed 23 March 2024; ‘What International Law Can – and Can’t Achieve – in Gaza’ (*TIME*, 26 January 2024) <<https://time.com/6588977/international-law-israel-gaza-ukraine-russia/>> accessed 16 March 2024; Yves Daudet, ‘“Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste”: Can International Law Seize the Advantage?’ (2021) 115 *Proceedings of the ASIL Annual Meeting* 129; Ntina Tzouvala, ‘International Law as a Discipline in Crisis’ (2025) 79 *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71; Rouven Diekjobst and Daniela Rau, ‘#50: Eine Disziplin (in) Der Krise?’ [2025] *Völkerrechtsblog* <<https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/50-eine-disziplin-in-der-krise/>> accessed 6 August 2025.

²¹ See, for example, Catherine Kessedjian, ‘International Law and Crisis Narratives after the COVID-19 Pandemic’ in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in*

discussions also invokes internal crises affecting specific regimes of international law, the institutions of International Law, or multilateralism itself.²² Ntina Tzouvala has turned the criticism on ourselves, explaining how the manner in which we as a discipline discuss the situation in Gaza renders us not only a discipline of crisis, but also a discipline in crisis.²³ Given this context, it certainly feels like a time of reckoning for the field. That moment of reckoning reaches the level of the personal. Even those experienced mentors that we look up to, or go to for perspective, are authoring personal pieces about the current moment in which the word crisis is often used.²⁴ Even this article is written from the UN offices in Geneva, where the escalators stand still and staff work from home due to an oft-invoked, 'liquidity crisis' in which even cuts to the electricity bill have been deemed necessary given the financial situation facing the organisation - an occupational hazard for an organisation that relies on the political will of States for funds.²⁵ It seems, from a relative newcomer, that things really might be 'that bad'.

International Law (Brill 2022); Frédéric Mégret, 'COVID and the Crisis Mode in International Legal Scholarship' in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D'Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); Anne Peters, 'COVID-19 as a Catalyst for the (Re-) Constitutionalisation of International Law': in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D'Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); Yuval Shany, 'The COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis and International Law': in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D'Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); 'The War in Ukraine and the Future of International Law | IHEID' <<https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/war-ukraine-and-future-international-law>> accessed 22 March 2024; 'The Future of International Law in Light of the Russian-Ukraine Conflict – The Leaflet' (n 23); Tomer Broude, 'Warming to Crisis: The Climate Change Law of Unintended Opportunity' in Mielle K Bulterman and Willem JM van Genugten (eds), *Crisis and International Law: Decoy or Catalyst?* (TMC Asser Press 2014); Webb (n 10); D'Aspremont (n 10).

²² The crisis of multilateralism refers to the tendency of States to move away from international cooperation as a solution to their global concerns, or an unwillingness of States to create or sign on to new legal instruments. See: Jutta Brunnée, 'Multilateralism in Crisis' (2018) 112 *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting (American Society of International Law)* 335; Maria Varaki, 'Revisiting the "Crisis" of International Law' in Lukasz Gruszczynski and others, *The Crisis of Multilateral Legal Order* (1st edn, Routledge 2022); BS Chimni, 'Crisis and International Law': in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D'Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022); Lukasz Gruszczynski and others, *The Crisis of Multilateral Legal Order: Causes, Dynamics and Implications* (1st edn, Routledge 2022). Cf Guilbaud, Petiteville, and Ramel who emphasise that 'crises of multilateralism' are ever present in the development of international law, and not new or unique: Auriane Guilbaud, Franck Petiteville and Frédéric Ramel, 'Introduction: Crisis as the Matrix of Multilateralism', *Crisis of Multilateralism? Challenges and Resilience* (Palgrave Macmillan 2023).

²³ Tzouvala (n 25).

²⁴ Most Recently at the time of writing, Marcelo Kohen, 'International Legality in the 21st Century' (Parc Mon Repos, 19 February 2024)

<<https://www.graduateinstitute.ch/communications/events/international-legality-21st-century>>.

²⁵ His Excellency António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, 'Accelerating Liquidity Crisis' (25 January 2024) <<chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.un.org/pgawp-content/uploads/sites/108/2024/01/SG-Letter-on-Liquidity-Crisis.pdf>> accessed 14 March 2024; 'UN's Cash Crisis May Force Hiring Freeze, Limit Official Travel & Curtail Expenses System-Wide' (16

While the notion of ‘crisis’ is at the forefront of many minds, it’s a term not always consistently defined. Charting its shifting meaning from the Greek Κρίσις to its adoption in German, English and French, Koselleck warns that it is a term that experienced “an enormous quantitative expansion in the variety of meanings attached [...], but few corresponding gains in either clarity or precision”²⁶. An element of the definition of ‘crisis’ that has remained consistent is the notion of a ‘turning point’, ‘change in the course of things’ or ‘critical juncture’. The Greek Κρίσις invokes a decision that would ‘tip the scales’,²⁷ while ‘crisis’ in Latin referred to the observation of a condition or diagnosis, and the moment of change in the course of an illness.²⁸ In Chinese it can be read as both ‘opportunity’ and ‘crucial point’.²⁹ That term, while initially often used in a medical sense, experienced a “metaphorical expansion into social and political language”³⁰ to describe “that point in time at which a decision is due but has not yet been rendered”.³¹ In this form, ‘crisis’ was adopted into English, German and French and applied to the body politic.³² The term today is usually externally orientated, referring to a social or political diagnosis of a problem or criterion for action (particularly political or military action) in the form of a threat that originates from outside but spells potential demise for the body politic.³³ It can also, however, be internal, referring to a structural revision.³⁴ That is to say, crisis is a term that can be used in many different ways, indicating both threats from the outside and those that originate within, but largely invoking a time of uncertainty and potential destruction or reform. In the field of international law, the term ‘crisis’ is also invoked in many ways, sometimes as a call to reform, and others as a description of the inevitable state of things. Given its current invocation, the next section explores one way in which ‘crisis’ has appeared or been invoked in narratives around the formation of international law.

February 2024) <<https://www.globalissues.org/news/2024/02/16/36006>> accessed 12 March 2024; ‘Without Faster Collection Rate of Unpaid Assessments, United Nations Liquidity Crisis Risks Worsening in 2024, Management Chief Warns Fifth Committee | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases’ <<https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaab4428.doc.htm>> accessed 15 March 2024.

²⁶ Reinhart Koselleck and Michaela Richter, ‘Crisis’ (2006) 67 *Journal of the History of Ideas* 357, 397 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/198076>> accessed 4 September 2024.

²⁷ Ibid, 358.

²⁸ Ibid, 361.

²⁹ Matthew Seeger and Timothy Sellnow, *Narratives of Crisis: Telling Stories of Ruin and Renewal* (Stanford Business Books, an imprint of Stanford University Press 2016) 10.

³⁰ Koselleck and Richter (n 32) 361.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid 369.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 362.

The Origin Story: Crisis as a Mobilising Force

The ‘origin story’ of international law tells us that, at the start of it all, the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648 to put an end to the Thirty Years’ War. Considered one of the longest and most destructive wars in European history, this moment can unequivocally be considered a ‘crisis’. The Westphalian treaties created the building blocks for an international legal system: the ‘sovereign nation-state’, the subject of international law, without which the legal order we know today could not exist. That narrative is one repeated so often that it forms part of the central narrative of the field. The fact that ‘crisis’ often exerts a generative force on international law is often discussed,³⁵ including as a catalyst, facilitating the development of international law.³⁶ ‘Crisis’ thus becomes the threads from which the fabric of international law is woven,³⁷ or the engine of its development.³⁸

This simple narrative could be viewed as an ‘origin story’ for international law, here referring to a story that accounts for the character of an individual or group (or here, a thing or system) and explains why they/it is either protagonist or agonist in the narrative to come. Like an origin story, this tale, which centres on crisis and repeats over and over in the history of international law, connects the numerous legacies of past crises to today’s international rules or institutions, explaining their existence, purpose or nature. For example, the ‘laws of war’ were (allegedly, and somewhat hagiographically) forged in 1859 at the battle of Solferino, when a bystander named Henry Dunant assisted the wounded and was so struck by the horror that he swore to limit the cost of conflict, establishing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).³⁹ Today, this organisation is the ‘guardian of international humanitarian

³⁵ Iain Scobbie, ‘Crisis? What Damned Crisis?’ in Makane Moïse Mbengue and Jean D’Aspremont (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill 2022) 22. These generative moments of crisis are sometimes referred to as ‘Grotian moments’ Michael P Scharf, *Customary International Law in Times of Fundamental Change: Recognizing Grotian Moments* (CUP 2013) 5.

³⁶ Benjamin Authers and Hilary Charlesworth, ‘The Crisis and the Quotidian in International Human Rights Law’ in Mielle K Bulterman and Willem JM van Genugten (eds), *Netherlands Yearbook of International Law 2013: Crisis and International Law: Decoy or Catalyst?* (TMC Asser Press 2014) 20, 25, 28; Chimni (n 28) 42.

³⁷ Varaki (n 28) 62.

³⁸ Charlesworth (n 8) 391.

³⁹ Or so the story goes. Henry Dunant’s experience and call for the founding of such an organisation is described in: Henry Dunant, *Un Souvenir de Solferino* (Jules Fick 1862). This story, and the ‘heroic’ mythology around the founding of the Red Cross, has become commonplace, though it is a contested one: John Hutchinson, ‘Rethinking the Origins of the Red Cross’ (1989) 63 *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 557. See, for example, pointing to the pre-existence of these ideas before Dunant: David P Forsythe, *The Contemporary International Committee of the Red Cross: Challenges, Changes, Controversies* (First edition, Cambridge University Press 2024) 43; François Bugnion, ‘From Solferino to the Birth of Contemporary International Humanitarian Law’ 14–15 <<https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/solferino-bugnion-icrc.pdf>>; Hutchinson 562–563. See also Costas Constantinou who points out the uncritical repetition of the romantic story of the Red Cross’s origins, and draws attention to the colonial nuances of Dunant’s

law',⁴⁰ and its creation and the ongoing work of Dunant and others led to the Geneva Conventions that continue to operate. The flames of the First World War were doused at the Paris Peace Conference in 1920, where the Treaty of Versailles closed a bloody chapter. Here, the desire to see global peace crystallised into the League of Nations⁴¹ – the first worldwide intergovernmental organisation and precursor to the United Nations (UN).⁴² It also prompted the creation of the Permanent Court of International Justice, which is the predecessor to today's International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Hague Peace Conferences, which hoped to “prevent the calamities which threaten the entire world”,⁴³ led to, among other outcomes, the Permanent Court of Arbitration. The ‘crisis of peace’ that was the Second World War marked the failure of the legal

humanitarianism: Costas Constantinou, ‘Humanitarian Diplomacy as Moral History’ (2023) 11 *Peacebuilding* 1, 6–10. See particularly the detailed biography by Chaponnière: Corinne Chaponnière, *Henry Dunant: La Croix d'un Homme* (Perrin 2010). This biography has been positively reviewed for avoiding the ‘hagiographical’ portrait sometimes made of Dunant and thus for presenting “portrait of a man, not of the monument that some hagiographers saw fit to build, in spite of the documents and sometimes in spite of Dunant's own testimony”: François Bugnion, ‘Henry Dunant: La Croix d'un Homme. by Corinne Chaponnière Éditions Perrin, Paris, 2010.’ (2012) 94 *International Review of the Red Cross* 1563 and for stripping the story of its usual hagiographical trappings and acknowledging his colonial ventures: Marian Moser Jones, ‘Review of Chaponnière, Corinne, *Henry Dunant: The Man of the Red Cross*’.

⁴⁰ Julie Billaud, ‘Masters of Disorder: Rituals of Communication and Monitoring at the International Committee of the Red Cross’ (2020) 28 *Social Anthropology* 96, 97.

⁴¹ The Covenant, which was integrated into the Treaty of Versailles and all other peace settlements signed in Paris after World War I, opens with “THE HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES, In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war, by the prescription of open, just and honourable relations between nations, by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another, Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations”: *Covenant of the League of Nations 1919* (108 LNTS 188), Preamble.

⁴² “The United Nations was created in 1945, following the devastation of the Second World War, with one central mission: the maintenance of international peace and security”: United Nations, ‘Maintain International Peace and Security’ (*United Nations*) <<https://www.un.org/en/our-work/maintain-international-peace-and-security>> accessed 15 August 2025. “As World War II was about to end in 1945, nations were in ruins, and the world wanted peace. Representatives of 50 countries gathered at the United Nations Conference on International Organisation in San Francisco, California, from 25 April to 26 June 1945. For the next two months, they proceeded to draft and then sign the UN Charter, which created a new international organisation, the United Nations, which, it was hoped, would prevent another world war like the one they had just lived through”: United Nations, ‘History of the United Nations’ (*United Nations*) <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un>> accessed 15 August 2025.

⁴³ Opening statement of the first Hague Peace Conference “His Majesty proposed to all the Governments whose representatives are here assembled that meeting of a Conference which should endeavour to discover a way to halt these never-ending armaments and to prevent the calamities which threaten the entire world”: *The Proceedings of the Hague Peace Conferences: Translations of the Official Texts*, vol Prepared in the Division of International Law of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace under the supervision of James Brown Scott 1920 (2nd Edition, Martinus Nijhoff 1907) 14.

structures just created and prompted the reformation of those organisations into their current forms, what we often call the ‘Post-World War II International Order’. The ‘crisis of humanity’ that occurred when we collectively attempted to reckon with the horrors of the holocaust led to the establishment of International Criminal Law – through which the international community said ‘never again’ to acts that were classified into the newly formulated international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes against peace.⁴⁴ Continuing atrocities throughout the Far East, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia, and Sierra Leone moved our treatment of those so-called ‘atrocious crimes’ from *ad hoc*, specially created tribunals to the permanent forum of the International Criminal Court (‘ICC’) that exists today.⁴⁵ In other words, the stories tell us that the international instruments and institutions that exist today were produced as a response to crises.

While these stories all describe historical occurrences, often in a dramatised fashion, the legacy and continued presence of that narrative is seen in the instruments themselves, in the rhetoric of international organisations that administer them, and in the perspectives and imaginings of many practitioners.⁴⁶ In many of those instances, ‘international law’, in the form of the institutions or instruments so created, gain a ‘hero’ like protagonism. The United Nations Charter opens with “We the Peoples of the United Nations Determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind”.⁴⁷ The 1929 Geneva Convention opens with “animated by the desire to lessen, so far as lies in their power, the evils inseparable from war”.⁴⁸ The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that a failure to uphold human rights led to “barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind”.⁴⁹ The preamble of the Rome Statute, the foundational document of the ICC, follows up with accountability where these may fail, it states that “[m]indful that during this century millions of children, women and men have been victims of unimaginable atrocities that deeply shock the

⁴⁴ See, for example, on the history of genocide: Raphael Lemkin, ‘Genocide’ (1946) 15 *American Scholar* 227; Itai Sneh, ‘History of Genocide’ in Mangai Natarajan (ed), *International Crime and Justice* (1st edn, Cambridge University Press 2010)

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/CBO9780511762116A055/type/book_part> accessed 7 October 2025. On the crime of Genocide. And the Nuremberg Charter on the early definitions of crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, and war crimes United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, France and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, *Charter of the International Military Tribunal - Annex to the Agreement for the prosecution and punishment of the major war criminals of the European Axis (“London Agreement”)*, 8 August 1945.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Katzenstein, ‘In the Shadow of Crisis: The Creation of International Courts in the Twentieth Century’ 55 *Harvard International Law Journal*.

⁴⁶ On the tendency of some to join the field motivated by a crisis, see Crawford (n 10); Sands (n 9).

⁴⁷ *Charter of the United Nations Preamble*.

⁴⁸ *Geneva Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field 1949* (75 UNTS 31), Preamble.

⁴⁹ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*, adopted by UNGA Resolution 217 A (III), 10 December 1948, Preamble.

conscience of humanity” and “[d]etermined to put an end to impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes”.⁵⁰ Organisations like the ICRC have similarly crisis-orientated missions and rhetoric, “to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance”⁵¹ and to “prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles”⁵² or, for the UN Refugee Agency, “saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution”.⁵³

The lofty aims and the stories around the development of the institutions and instruments of international law can come across as hero-*esque* in the sense that they arose out of crisis or hardship, represent the good and the noble, and are to be celebrated as a force making the world a better place. Consider the narrative summary:

Once upon a time, a strong, attractive hero lost one or both of his parents. He then overcame a series of obstacles and faced off against a monster that had terrorised his community. The hero vanquished the monster and was celebrated.⁵⁴

This is how Singh characterises the ubiquitous ‘sympathetic plot’ associated with the tale of the ‘hero’, which he describes as one that will ‘twiddle psychological mechanisms’ to feel sympathetic joy towards the main character.⁵⁵ Common themes in these plots⁵⁶ include that the protagonist is appealing (strong, clever, humble, skilful, attractive, generous, or considerate) and the opponents are recalcitrant and formidable,⁵⁷ and they also tend to follow similar patterns known as the ‘hero’s journey’ narratives.⁵⁸ The ‘hero’ tends to have similar origin stories, characteristics, and journeys, as well as a tendency to be celebrated and the ability to ‘bestow boons on his fellow man’ upon his return from the hero’s quest.⁵⁹ If we were to replace ‘monster’ with “the scourge of war”, for example, and ‘his community’ with ‘the

⁵⁰ *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 2002* (2187 UNTS 3), Preamble.

⁵¹ ‘The ICRC’s Mandate and Mission | International Committee of the Red Cross’ <<https://www.icrc.org/en/mandate-and-mission>> accessed 17 March 2024.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ ‘About UNHCR’ (*UNHCR US*) <<https://www.unhcr.org/us/about-unhcr>> accessed 17 March 2024.

⁵⁴ Manvir Singh, ‘The Sympathetic Plot, Its Psychological Origins, and Implications for the Evolution of Fiction’ (2021) 13 *Emotion Review* 183.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵⁶ Though being secondary features, *ibid.* 184.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See, for example, Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Third edition, New World Library 2008); Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero: A Psychological Exploration of Myth* (EJ Lieberman and GC Richter trs, Expanded Edition, Johns Hopkins University Press 2004); Nancy Gordon Seif, ‘Otto Rank: On the Nature of the Hero’ (1984) 41 *American Imago* 373.

⁵⁹ Campbell (n 64).

international community', we could cast the international institutions and instruments in this mould, invoking the assumption that they are imbued with 'good' and 'noble' characteristics, and can deliver the international community from the hardships that they vanquished.

Failure to Prevent Crisis as Evidence of the Fall of International Law

This piece argues that the narratives we tell influence how we, both as practitioners and lay people, conceive of the role of international law, however subtly and however unconsciously. In this example, the institutions and instruments so created, and painted with the above narrative, become something designed 'for crisis'. International law becomes a field of law that is designed to come to our aid when crisis strikes. This is reflected in the way international law is sometimes described. It has been said that international law "is the tool which is summoned whenever a phenomenon deemed to be outside normality is experienced"⁶⁰ and "can be seen as a discursive tool that is on standby, charging in the garage, until it is fired up by international lawyers (and their associates) to tackle any new crisis appearing on their horizon."⁶¹ However, such an expectation shapes, in turn, the perception of what a 'failure' of international law looks like. This section introduces a second, corollary, narrative about the 'fall', 'death', 'failure', or 'crisis' of international law that appears to be a current preoccupation both within the field and beyond.

While the 'origin story' and the hero narratives built a certain type of protagonist, other classic narratives describe such a protagonist's fall from grace, sometimes even into villainy, becoming the very thing the 'hero' sought to combat. The fall of the hero, either into villainy or simply back into humanity by revealing the hero's universal flaws, can also be reflected in responses to a flawed international legal system, which seems an inevitable consequence of the pedestalling that places any person, or thing, into the realm of the idealised.

If international instruments and institutions are painted as arising from crisis, vanquishing the horrors of those crises, and bestowing a future free of those vanquished hardships, the continued occurrence and existence of crises, especially ones that international law is powerless to resolve, can appear as failures. Even if we consider ourselves immune to this fantastical narrative, the idea that international law is something shaped by crisis and intended for use when a crisis emerges or, better yet, use in preventing a crisis from emerging, is infectious. International law's failure in the face of crisis, then, casts doubts on its usefulness at all – it brings down the illusion. Given the pervasiveness of this 'origin story' and elements of the hero narrative, one can be forgiven for entering an existential questioning about the health of the institution in such instances. Indeed, since the Russian aggression in Ukraine,

⁶⁰ Jean D'Aspremont, 'International Law as a Crisis Discourse': in Jean D'Aspremont and Makane Moïse Mbengue (eds), *Crisis Narratives in International Law* (Brill, 2022) 72.

⁶¹ Ibid.

and now in relation to Gaza, the ‘death’⁶² or ‘fall’⁶³ of international law has been often invoked.⁶⁴ To explore the ‘fall of the hero’ narrative, we will see how it could play out in relation to Gaza.

The Fall of the Hero Narrative Realised

In the hero’s fall narrative as it plays out in relation to Gaza, international law is presented as having tried many times and failed to gain traction, culminating in the current devastating crisis in Gaza and an associated internal crisis of faith in international law and international institutions. While this depiction of events is far from the only narrative, it is an important one that often arises in the context of the above ‘origin story’ of international law and the resulting disappointment in its inability to perform when crisis strikes. It can be seen playing out in both academic, professional and public spaces alike.

After decades of narrative competition, any description regarding Israel and Palestine is challenging. Almost any account can be criticised as lacking context, and that would be true in almost any case, as describing this context in sufficient detail would require multiple volumes. However, the fact that what we see today is a humanitarian crisis is undisputed. To paint it very briefly, and in a manner that serves this dominant narrative, the facts could be described as follows.

Israel declared independence on 15 May 1948, a date that now officially marks for Palestinians ‘the Nakba’ (النكبة) meaning ‘The Catastrophe’. Since that time, Israel has been condemned in 45 resolutions of the UN Human Rights Council, comprising nearly half (around 45%) of all resolutions by the UN organ since its creation in 2006. The UN Security Council has adopted 131 resolutions concerning the conflict, and the US has vetoed 45 Resolutions of the Council that were critical of Israel. Several of these resolutions adopted called for ceasefires.⁶⁵ There have been 185 UN General Assembly

⁶² See, from an Israeli, Clifford D May, ‘Is International Law Dead?’ (*JNS.org*, 15 June 2022) <<https://www.jns.org/is-international-law-dead/>> accessed 22 March 2024; *Is International Law Dead?* (2024) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fYk6VHadKI>> accessed 11 August 2024. And, from a Palestinian, ‘International Law Is Dead – TWAILR’ <<https://twailr.com/international-law-is-dead/>> accessed 22 March 2024.

⁶³ ‘The Fall and Fall of International Law: A Chronicle from Covid to Palestine – The Leaflet’ (n 23).

⁶⁴ See, for example, ‘What International Law Can—and Can’t Achieve—in Gaza’ (n 24); ‘What Palestine Teaches Teachers of Politics and Law – The Leaflet’ (n 23); ‘Will the War in Gaza Become a Breaking Point for the Rules-Based International Order? | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank’ (n 23). As well as various panel discussion such as ‘Events and Announcements: 28 March 2022’ (*Opinio Juris*, 28 March 2022) <<https://opiniojuris.org/2022/03/28/events-and-announcements-28-march-2022/>> accessed 22 March 2024; ‘The War in Ukraine and the Future of International Law | IHEID’ (n 27); ‘2022 Symposium – Lessons Learned: Perspectives on Law and Policy From the War in Ukraine’ (n 22); ‘International Law and the War on Ukraine - A Panel Discussion’ (*Institute for International Law and Justice*) <<https://www.iilj.org/events/international-law-and-the-war-on-ukraine-a-panel-discussion/>> accessed 22 March 2024.

⁶⁵ See, for example, UNSC Res. 1860 of 8 January 2009, UN Doc. S/RES/1860; UNSC Res. 338 of 22 October 1973, UN Doc. S/RES/338.

Resolutions concerning the situation in Palestine, from 1947 when the partition of the land into Arab and Jewish states was recommended,⁶⁶ to 2023 with Resolution ES-10/21 regarding the protection of civilians in the so-called 'Israel-Hamas war' through a humanitarian truce.⁶⁷ A pivotal example is General Assembly Resolution 194 calling for refugees to be allowed to return to Palestine.⁶⁸ '194' has come to symbolise the right of Palestinian Refugees to return and can be seen on artwork and protest signs both within and beyond the borders of Palestine to this day. There is an open case before the International Criminal Court concerning events occurring since 2014, including multiple military operations in Gaza and the issue of illegal settlements in the West Bank, as well as extending "to the escalation of hostilities and violence since the attacks that took place on 7 October 2023".⁶⁹ There have also been multiple cases before the ICJ. In 2004, the International Court of Justice weighed in on a border wall that Israel had constructed along, and in many places slightly inside, the 1967 'green line' dividing Israel from the West Bank. The advisory opinion declared this construction by Israel as illegal and in an act "tantamount to de facto annexation" of Palestinian territory.⁷⁰

In 2024, the ICJ further ordered provisional measures based on a finding that a breach of the Genocide Convention in Gaza was plausible.⁷¹ A further case has been brought against Germany for aiding in the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, arguing that Germany:

...has contributed to the commission of genocide in violation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" and has "failed to comply with other peremptory norms of general international law in particular by rendering aid or assistance in maintaining the illegal situation of the continued military occupation of Palestine including its ongoing, unlawful attack in Gaza [...] [and] by rendering aid or assistance and not preventing the illegal regime of apartheid and the negation of the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people."⁷²

⁶⁶ UNGA Res. 181(II) of 29 November 1947, UN Doc. A/RES/181(II).

⁶⁷ UNGA Res. ES-10/21 of 27 October 2023, UN Doc. A/ES-10/21.

⁶⁸ GA Res. 194 of 11 December 1948, UN Doc A/RES/194(III).

⁶⁹ 'State of Palestine | International Criminal Court' <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/palestine>> accessed 19 March 2024.

⁷⁰ *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion* [2004] ICJ Rep 136.

⁷¹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Provisional Measures, Order of 26 January 2024*, [2024] ICJ Rep 1

⁷² *Alleged Breaches of Certain International Obligations in respect of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Nicaragua v. Germany)*. See also, *Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion*, requested only after the date of writing.

In these facts, the institution of international law, that is the different organs of the UN, including the General Assembly, the ICJ and the (not quite but somewhat associated) ICC, have repeatedly attempted to prevent and lessen the humanitarian harm. They have advocated for the good, the realisation of human rights and the continuation of peace, but have ultimately faced a challenge which they are powerless to resolve. The narrative goes that, despite all the best efforts, a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has unfolded unabated. 'International law' tried but was unable to prevent the situation, illustrating that the system, the system that is meant to act in situations like this, is failing, has no enforceability, and is in crisis. This series of events understandably leads Palestinians and non-Palestinians alike to the conclusion that international law, the law *for* crisis, serves very little purpose. That sentiment is expressed in academic spaces, with many writing about their despondence regarding international law, and in public spaces. Others make cases for international law's continued relevance, expressing sentiments about why 'international law is as important as ever' despite its seeming lack of relevance, and explaining the usefulness of the system despite its seeming failure. This narrative failure, it is argued, is a natural corollary to one that paints international law as the hero arising from crisis. Similar to the fall of a hero, through their corruption and the realisation of their humanity, the narrative 'fall' of international law comes into play as soon as it is revealed to be fallible or powerless in the face of a crisis. However, the next section explores alternative narratives that paint international law in an entirely different light. If this version of international law were to be narrativised as it was in the origin story, it would come out looking akin to a villainess rather than a heroic character.

An Alternative 'Origin'

Far from the image of international law as a humanitarian hero swooping in to address crisis, there exists an alternative narrative that contests the 'origin story' of international law. This narrative is taken, largely, from the discipline known as 'TWAIL': Third World Approaches to International Law. In this field, the world-making power of international law is viewed through a very different lens, and the origin story is questioned to reveal an international law that serves at the right-hand of imperialism and colonial expansion throughout its history. In this version, crises can be viewed not as a failure of the international law project, but as evidence of its continued service and success.

In discussing the TWAIL approach as applied to Palestine, Mohsan al Attar reflects on the notion of origin stories, stating that:

Origin stories are always more fiction than fact, more myth than reality. At times, origin stories serve to redeem a dubious past, while at others they enable us to justify an unwelcoming present; sometimes, they do both. Mythology possesses symbolic and material power, shaping how we see the world and, crucially, how we teach others to see it. Throughout, we fix

our gaze on the future, relying on mythology to guide our course along preferred paths.⁷³

Regarding the origin story of international law, he argues that “TWAIL’s intervention exposed this hagiographical narrative as a self-serving myth, crafting a fresh origin story to account for those brutalised by the regime”.⁷⁴ It is his argument that, in the case of Palestine, such examination of the origin stories of the field illustrates “how international law, rather than acting as an impartial arbiter, has bolstered Israeli settler-colonialism”⁷⁵ and explains why, “throughout the course of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, international law has seemed futile, if not irrelevant.”⁷⁶

The author’s first exposure to TWAIL was through Antony Anghie and his book “Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law” in which he unpacks the origins of international law through the writings of its earliest architects and their service to imperial colonial expansion.⁷⁷ In an early chapter of the book, Anghie explores the Mandate system of the League of Nations, a mechanism through which post-colonial territories were placed under the responsibility of another State, the ‘mandatory power’, charged with their transition towards full independence through a system of ‘international tutelage’.⁷⁸ This system is of great relevance to Palestine, which was under a British Mandate from 1922 until 1948. Because this piece is far too short to allow an in-depth engagement of the extent and complexity of the role of International Law in the question of Palestine from a TWAIL perspective, it rather introduces only a TWAIL perspective on the mandate system which, it is argued by many, had a huge impact in the founding of the State of Israel, and the shaping of the international legal treatment of Palestine today.

The mandate system was, on its face, decolonial as it attempted to “promote self-government and [...] to integrate previously colonized and dependent peoples into the international system as sovereign, independent nation-states”⁷⁹ which “generated a debate among international lawyers on the role of their discipline in legitimising colonial conquest”.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the mandate system represents the moment in which we may see the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism⁸¹ as the “transference of sovereignty to non-European peoples [...] was simultaneous with, and indeed inseparable from, the creation of new systems of subordination and

⁷³ ‘Reimagining Palestine in TWAIL Scholarship’ (*Opinio Juris*, 10 October 2023)

<<https://opiniojuris.org/2023/10/10/reimagining-palestine-in-twail-scholarship-a-conversation-with-noura-erakat/>> accessed 23 March 2024.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (Stanford University Press 2019) 15.

⁷⁷ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (1st ed, Cambridge University Press 2005).

⁷⁸ Ibid, 115.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 116.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 137.

⁸¹ Ibid, 194.

control administered by international institutions".⁸² Under the mandate system, the populations concerned had very little control over the shape that their future independent State would take, which was created in the image desired by the mandatory powers and often operated in economic service of them. The mandate territories were, for example, financially responsible for the creation of infrastructure designed to extract resources for the benefit of the mandatory powers, such that they were paying for their own exploitation and conquest⁸³ and created structures that continued to benefit former mandatory powers even after independence.⁸⁴ In the context of Palestine, it is argued that "France and Great Britain were intent on gaining control over the oil resources in their Middle Eastern mandates and went so far as to redraw the boundaries of the mandate territories of Palestine, Mesopotamia and Syria in order to enable a more efficient exploitation of their oil reserves",⁸⁵ a set of priorities argued to be a factor in the present day events in Gaza,⁸⁶ and an aim facilitated through the mandate power.

The 'natives' of the mandate territories were spoken for by the mandatory powers, as the peoples of the mandate territories had no avenue through which to communicate with the Permanent Mandate Commission.⁸⁷ That lack of an avenue was sometimes justified "on account of the backwardness of the peoples concerned".⁸⁸ Such images of backwardness were rooted in the colonial origins of international law through which the rights of Indigenous nations were made contingent on their societies' resemblance to European society.⁸⁹ These systems tended to give violent conquest the veneer of objective legality.⁹⁰ As such, the only way to express native discontent was through rebellion, the significance of which was to be interpreted by the Commission or the League.⁹¹ Noura Erakat's book titled "Justice of Some: Law and the Question of Palestine" traces the legal mechanisms active in Palestine, from 1917 to the present day, in terms of their use in disenfranchising the Palestinian people and serving a colonial agenda.⁹² Her arguments serve to illustrate a version of the TWAIL approach's view on international law as it is linked to the mandate system and to Palestine. She characterises the situation as one in which "Palestinian protest against Britain's colonial decision became a struggle against established international law and

⁸² Ibid, 179.

⁸³ Ibid, 172.

⁸⁴ Anghie provides the example of Nauru.

⁸⁵ Anghie (n 83), 144.

⁸⁶ Ahmad (n 24).

⁸⁷ Anghie (n 83) 175.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 176.

⁸⁹ Erakat (n 82) 23; Anghie (n 83) ch 1.

⁹⁰ Erakat (n 82) 23; Anghie (n 83) ch 1.

⁹¹ Anghie (n 83) 176.

⁹² Erakat (n 82).

the international community seeking to uphold it",⁹³ rather than against an expansion of colonial interests.

TWAIL provides not only an alternative narrative relating to Palestine, but also to the notion of crisis itself, and the concept of international legal inaction. Chimni, a leading TWAIL scholar, argues that "[i]n so far as TWAIL is concerned the crisis of modern international law is originary, deep and enduring and can be traced to its roots in colonialism."⁹⁴ Regarding the inaction or impotence of international law in the face of crisis, Chimni offers the following:

There is something about modern international law that it facilitates and tolerates inhumane outcomes. [...] It would appear that the haunting realities of the contemporary world which tolerates endless violence on people is still not a sufficiently grave crisis for the mainstream practitioners of the discipline to call for the overhaul of international law and institutions.⁹⁵

In this version, the inaction of international law in the face of certain external crises does not constitute an internal crisis. It is rather viewed as part and parcel of the character of international law.

The presentation of this alternative narrative on international law and Palestine, whether the reader agrees with it or not, serves to illustrate a vast departure from the 'origin story' of international law. It is a narrative gap so huge that it can seem challenging to understand these two stories as describing the same institution, and one that renders the challenge of holding these two narratives simultaneously a mind-boggling one. However, these narratives are far from the only two that exist. There exists a plurality of narratives on almost every aspect of this situation, with various levels of crossover and commonality. Another somewhat villainising narrative, for example, is one in which the same antisemitism pervasive throughout Europe, leading to the horrors of the holocaust among other devastating events, also exists within international institutions and agendas that demonise and attack Israel. That attack is evidenced by the vast number of UN actions concerning the State,⁹⁶ the same documents used in the earlier narrative to illustrate international law's well-

⁹³ Ibid, 42.

⁹⁴ Chimni (n 28) 40.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 49.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Hillel Neuer, 'Antisemitism and Discrimination Against Israel at the United Nations: Written Testimony by Hillel C. Neuer Executive Director of United Nations Watch' (The House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations 2023); May (n 68); 'USUN: Engaging the United Nations in the Fight Against Antisemitism' (*United States Department of State*) <<https://www.state.gov/usun-engaging-the-united-nations-in-the-fight-against-antisemitism/>> accessed 22 March 2024; 'Anti-Semitism in the United Nations' <<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/anti-semitism-in-the-united-nations>> accessed 22 March 2024.

meaning and powerless nature. As such, international institutions are considered to be, on the whole, antagonistic both to Jews and the State of Israel, casting them out of the humanitarianism narrative altogether. This, still, is but one of the available narrative arrays.

Beyond the Narrative

In conclusion, this piece explores three ways in which we can go beyond the 'origin story' narrative, both by addressing the narrative element itself and by questioning the pedestalling that it has produced.

International Law as a Tool: an Instrumentalist View

The 'origin story' of international law, and the hero-esque narrative that it produces, falls into the trap of rendering 'international law' as a character, imbued with agency, intention, and traits like 'goodness'. It is something that some counternarratives also do when responding to or countering the origin story. But it is otherwise a very strange habit. If one were to characterise domestic law in the same terms, it would probably appear as such. It would likely sound very odd if someone were to talk about the traffic code and the magistrate's court that implements it as having arisen in a time of reckless driving to free the world of the scourge of road accidents, and then to declare it 'dead' if certain road users flouted the rules. It would also appear odd to cast these instruments as inherently 'good'. This section considers the way that the use of these narratives shapes our perception of a body of law, by instead talking about the same body of law instrumentally – that is, as a tool that is used by various different agents for various different purposes, thus bringing it more in line with how we would talk about other bodies of law. In this view, while international law may be a tool forged in the flames of crisis, it is still simply a tool: flawed as any man-made construction and subservient to the will and intention of those who wield it.

Any tool, including that of international law, is neither inherently good nor inherently malign in an instrumental view. While the origin story presented above contains an implied virtue to the hero-like instrument, that version of the myth is not universally shared. However, and perhaps as a result of the narratives we use, there is a tendency for international lawyers to view themselves as heroes on the side of the good and the just, and "[t]he use of crises as the crucible of international law encourages international lawyers to cast ourselves grandly in a heroic mould".⁹⁷ As observed by Jan Klabbers:

Multilateralism, cooperation, and international law are neither inherently good nor bad. [...] The mistake is understandable though: generations of international lawyers have told themselves and their students (and

⁹⁷ Charlesworth (n 8) 387. Citing Anne Orford, 'Muscular Humanitarianism: Reading the Narratives of the New Interventionism' (1999) 10 *European Journal of International Law* 679, 699.

whoever wanted to listen) that international law is inherently a force for good [...] And if you are often enough told that international law is inherently benign, then sooner or later this becomes its own truth.⁹⁸

That tendency, however, can be dangerous and is particularly prominent in crisis narratives. Klabbers further observes that a diagnosis of crisis “typically depends on one’s underlying set of values and is often based on underlying and unspoken epistemic assumptions, such as the mistaken idea that international law is by definition a force for good”.⁹⁹ Indeed, we see this concern played out in the example presented in this piece. Suppose one assumes that international law is inherently a force for good. In that case, the narrative in which it has failed repeatedly to have any impact in preventing a crisis appears as a crisis in and of itself, an inability of ‘the good’ to prevail. However, suppose you were to view the same instrument as a neutral tool that can be used for a range of purposes. In that case, this series of events appears as flawed in either the tool’s effectiveness, or even in the motivating values of those using it, but would likely result in a call for the reassessment or re-evaluation of the instrument or its use, rather than as a declaration of its ‘fall’, ‘failure’ or ‘death’.

The narrative in which the ‘character’ of ‘international law’ is imbued with some kind of ‘good’ also invites the binary narrative that international law is inherently malign: a direct contestation of the first assumption. And yet, that opposite contestation often shocks the same people who would freely use the former. Suppose anything can be taken from the existence of such starkly different narratives about the nature of international law. In that case, it should surely be that the operation of this system is too various and complex for one to always understand whether it ‘acts’ for good or ill in any given instance, let alone to assign any inherent quality to the system. An instrumental, and non-mythologised, view of international law would render the ‘tool’ capable of creating an array of outcomes, both good and bad. Put differently, one could take the image painted by Noura Erakat of:

...law as a sail, politics are the forceful winds that mobilize change and the law can be used in the service of those efforts; raise the sail when useful, drop it when harmful, and stitch together a new one when possible.¹⁰⁰

In this articulation, international law is, as all law is, viewed as operated by actors with an array of objectives and aims who can use and adapt it to serve various positions.

Another way to conceptualise the same notion is to view the operation of international law in society as a story, where its shape reveals more about the society in which it is told than about the story itself. In this view, international law is again neither inherently good nor malign. Rather, it is a story that, at one point, took on the hope that international society held for it, and at another point took on the full weight of international society’s effort to come to terms with wrongs done.

⁹⁸ Klabbers (n 10) 12.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Erakat (n 82) 48.

Demythologising: Lowering the Expectations

The mythologising of international law through the ‘origin story’ also creates an expectation of what international law can accomplish; it puts it on a pedestal as the law capable of resolving crises. Thus, in the narrative of the origin story presented above, a lack of enforceability seems to spell a failure of the system, despite this system being characterised by its lack of coercive power. This piece thus questions the metric with which we measure ‘failure’. It is argued that the perceived impotence of international law in the face of a crisis should not be the sole arbiter of a failed project.

The question, of enforcement, or ‘coercion’, vs ‘cooperation’ is a longstanding debate in the theory concerning the foundation of international law. Some argue that a legal system is only law if it is backed by coercive power capable of enforcing those laws.¹⁰¹ This is the kind of thinking implied by the narrative of the ‘death’ or ‘fall’ of international law. The idea is expressed that insufficient coercive strength in the international system, as evidenced by its failures to prevent or halt crises through declarations of unlawfulness, spells a failure. Others disagree with that premise, arguing instead that law is not necessarily obeyed due to coercive power, meaning that such coercive power is not a necessary pre-condition for law to be law or for a legal system to exist.¹⁰² Under this line of thinking, international law is characterised as operating through cooperation rather than coercion,¹⁰³ a factor that distinguishes it from domestic systems.¹⁰⁴ For some, it is considered a ‘success’ of the system that we have a language to describe international wrongdoing, and a conception that some things are not permissible even for states. Still others take a dual approach, seeing international law as a system of “both cooperation *and* conflict simultaneously”.¹⁰⁵ A proponent of such an approach is the Finnish Legal Theorist Martti Koskenniemi who, in responding to the question “what is international law for?”, battles between the idealist notions that it serves peace, harmony and human rights, and the realist notion that international law is about power.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the marker of enforceability in isolation does not fully capture the field, falling into the trap of expecting it to operate as a domestic system does, and plays into a somewhat unrealistic myth about what international law was, is, or can be.

Demythologising international law may involve moving away from the high expectations of what it can do and allowing it to be judged on a different metric, such

¹⁰¹ John Austin, *Austin: The Province of Jurisprudence Determined* (Wilfrid E Rumble ed, Cambridge University Press 1995); Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law* (translation from the second edition (revised and enlarged) German Edition by Max Knight, University of California Press 1967) 6.

¹⁰² Mehrdad Payandeh, ‘The Concept of International Law in the Jurisprudence of H.L.A. Hart’ (2010) 21 *European Journal of International Law* 967, 967–995.

¹⁰³ Martti Koskenniemi, ‘What Is International Law For?’ in Malcolm Evans (ed), *International Law* (Oxford University Press 2010) 363–372, 32.

¹⁰⁴ Payandeh (n 108), 967–995; Kelsen (n 107), 70–81, 6.

¹⁰⁵ Koskenniemi (n 109), 363–372, 34.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 363–372.

as the many ways it regulates, interacts with, shapes, and impacts international discourse. Jan Klabbers weighs in on this, pointing out that “legal rules have rarely, if ever, stopped atrocities, as the citizens of Rwanda know all too well”¹⁰⁷ and tells us “that might be a useful thing to realize”.¹⁰⁸ He argues that, rather than accountability, the purpose of international law is the “weaving the fabric of international society”, just as the rules of the road are not intended to punish those who disobey but rather to prevent chaos.¹⁰⁹

A shifting set of expectations also allows space for the ebb and flow of power held by international law at a given time. As seen in this piece, the creation of unattainable expectations has a narrative downside with real-world implications. However, when working with a system that is stronger at some moments than at others, realistic expectations are also a moving target. For example, take an international organisation that engenders one of these ‘hero’ narratives in its Statute, but is suffering a crisis in State support and no longer has the funding required to fulfil that narrative. The same applies to rules and principles themselves, which also exist in an interdependent ecosystem in which their power ebbs and flows in relation to external factors.

Moving Away from ‘Crisis’

One final observation on the origin story narrative is taken from Hillary Charlesworth, a renowned Australian lawyer and Judge of the International Court of Justice who wrote a well-known piece in 2002 titled ‘International Law: A Discipline of Crisis’, cited frequently throughout this contribution.¹¹⁰ This piece rarely goes without mention in any international legal discourse on crisis. In it she argued that while “[i]nternational lawyers revel in a good crisis”, this focus on crisis simplifies and shallows the analysis offered and “shackles international law to a static and unproductive rhetoric”.¹¹¹ Her criticisms of the crisis narrative include that the crisis orientation promotes a narrow agenda in which “we focus on a snapshot in time of long-simmering disputes”.¹¹² This focus leads to an analysis that can be as simple as “good or bad, right or wrong, justifiable or unjustifiable”¹¹³ and steers us away from a “clear of analysis of longer-term trends and structural problems”.¹¹⁴ Charlesworth is not alone in her concerns. Jean D’Aspremont, editor of the book ‘Crisis Narratives in International Law’, shares the concern that “international law’s revelling in crises may

¹⁰⁷ Klabbers (n 10) 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 14.

¹¹⁰ Charlesworth (n 8).

¹¹¹ Ibid, 377.

¹¹² Ibid, 386.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 389.

prove to be, within a few decades, the very cause of international law's self-debilitation, self-exhaustion, and self-depletion".¹¹⁵

While the origin story of international law stresses the moments of crisis, a more tempered understanding of international law may be able to link these crises together and view international law from a long-term vantage point. An attempt to "refocus international law on issues of structural justice that underpin everyday life"¹¹⁶ requiring a "methodology to consider the perspectives of non-elite groups"¹¹⁷ to end with "a much more contradictory, complex and confusing account"¹¹⁸ of a given doctrine. It is the author's position that we can only address, remedy, and continually reform a version of international law that remains relevant if we embrace such a complex and confusing account. From this vantage point, the 'complex and confusing account' allows the space for doubt and questioning of the underlying values being promoted, the structures, and the failings of the institution, revealing the sites of reform that allow the tool of international law to be shaped and to adapt. However, such a confusing account is at odds with the somewhat simplistic 'origin story' portrayed above.

Conclusion

The current moment is characterised by a preoccupation with the idea of crisis, and potentially constitutes a moment of reckoning for international law. However, this is not the first time that has happened in this field. In 1970, just 25 years after the signing of the Charter of the UN, Franck posed the question "Who Killed Article 2(4)?",¹¹⁹ referring to the UN Charter's most significant provision and cornerstone of International Law, the prohibition on the use of force. Henkin responded, with a nod to Mark Twain, that "The Reports of the Death of Article 2(4) Are Greatly Exaggerated".¹²⁰ More than 50 years on, the matter remains unresolved.¹²¹ Like now,

¹¹⁵ D'Aspremont (n 66), 70.

¹¹⁶ Charlesworth (n 8), 391.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Franck, 'Who Killed Article 2(4)? Or: Changing Norms Governing the Use of Force by States' (1970) 64 *The American Journal of International Law* 809.

¹²⁰ Louis Henkin, 'The Reports of the Death of Article 2(4) Are Greatly Exaggerated' (1971) 65 *The American Journal of International Law* 544.

¹²¹ See, for example, John Becker, 'The Continuing Relevance of Article 2(4): A Consideration of the Status of the UN Charter's Limitations of the Use of Force' (2004) 32 *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 583; David Wippman, 'The Nine Lives of Article 2(4)' (2007) 16 *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 387; Thilo Marauhn, 'How Many Deaths Can Article 2(4) UN Charter Die?' in Lothar Brock and Hendrik Simon (eds), *The Justification of War and International Order* (1st ed, Oxford University Press Oxford 2021); Jan-Phillip Graf, 'The Death of the Prohibition on the Use of Force: An Attempt at Reimagination' [2022] *Völkerrechtsblog* <<https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/an-attempt-at-reimagination/>> accessed 22 March 2024; Graham Melling, 'Has Russia Killed Article 2(4)? Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Prohibition of the Use of Force in the Conduct of International Affairs' (2024) 25 *San Diego International Law Journal*.

past moments have prompted internal questioning regarding the role of international law in the face of external crises, and the future will likely continue to deliver. As long as it does, the failure of the law to live up to unrealistic expectations will likely also re-occur for as long as those expectations exist.

This piece counsels against simplified stories, especially those that paint international law as a character imbued with particular traits. It counsels against both the unbridled hope and faith that some wish to place in an ultimately man-made tool, and attempts to draw attention to the way in which the central narratives we have of the field influence our expectations of it. It's not time, yet, to hold a funeral for international law. But it is high time we take it off its pedestal, question the mythology, and take a more critical stock of what it is, what it has been, and what it could be in the future. This piece attempts to hold multiple narratives simultaneously as one embraces the challenge of wielding an imperfect tool in the face of yet another crisis. It argues that an ability to do so, with nuance and complexity, might just be the path out of the 'crisis of the international legal order' in which we find ourselves, at least to the extent that that crisis is based on disenfranchisement at the realisation that the law cannot achieve all that many had hoped, or live up to a narrative that has shaped our perception of what this instrument can do.

1631 The Year the Music Died: Exploring the Impact of the Plague on Venice's Music Printing Industry

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The Venetian music printing industry irreversibly declined in prosperity in 1640, with the deteriorating economic conditions of the 1620s long being considered the culprit. An often-overlooked aspect of this period is the 1630 plague that swept through Venice, killing thirty-three per cent of the population. This research uses a newly created database to investigate how the plague instigated a complete stop to all music printing. An examination of the aftereffects shows that while printers initially experienced an impressive economic recovery, the long-term impact of the plague was ultimately fatal to the industry. A comparison of new databases created for the 1630 and 1575 plagues shows that this economic impact was inconsistent between different outbreaks. Furthermore, examining other printing forms in Venice indicates that the halting of the printing presses was unique to the music printers. This paper concludes that the plague of 1630 was likely the cause of the industry's long-term decline.

The recent global pandemic, which resulted from the COVID-19 virus, has caused a surge of renewed interest in historical plague outbreaks. Medical historians, epidemiologists, public health officials, and plague historians alike are using this collective experience to explore historic outbreaks through a fresh lens. As a musicologist, I am no exception. The impact of the recent pandemic on the worldwide musical community has yet to be quantified. Still, those in the industry know through experience that the impact is negative and widely felt. The same can certainly be said for historical outbreaks of disease that often-struck Europe for longer and with even more destructive consequences. One such outbreak in 1630 in northern Italy devastated the city of Venice, which had long been an important centre of the European music industry, with the Basilica di San Marco at its heart. Indeed, as Deborah Howard notes, 'it would be scarcely an exaggeration to claim that the ducal chapel of San Marco was one of the leading musical centres of Renaissance Europe.'² That said, it was not only the music performed in Venice that contributed to its musical reputation. It was also the preeminent city for music publishing in Europe.

Scholars have often studied the music publishing industry in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice for its overall impact on the development of music

¹ ORCID ID: 0009-0000-7211-7142; This research was carried out while the recipient of an Australasian Centre for Italian Studies (ACIS) Save Venice Fellowship and Dino Di Poli Scholarship for Research on North-East Italy.

² Deborah Howard and Laura Moretti, *Sound and Space in Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Music, Acoustics* (New Haven, US: Yale University Press, 2009). 17.

printing as a whole, and its consequent influence on musical activity. Music publications have also been used to define broader musical trends and tastes during these centuries. For instance, Jane A. Bernstein has used the surviving primary sources to investigate the financial arrangements of larger Venetian publishing houses.³ Medical historian and musicologist Remi Chiu studied the connection between plague and music as a healthcare tool and an early form of medicine.⁴ Musicologist Tim Carter used the existing records to examine broader trends in the Venetian printing industry to determine the complex structure, both financial and occupational, of the industry, while more recently, Gideon Brettler and Cory M. Gavito have used databases of surviving prints to understand the broader trends in printing guitar music and *alfabeto* throughout the seventeenth century.⁵ Within this broader context, the plague crisis of 1630 stands out as particularly destructive. In the words of Lex Eisenhardt:

Venice suffered severely from the devastating plague of 1630, and in the year that followed, music publishing was suspended almost completely. Between 1620 and 1630 many collections of songs with *alfabeto* had been printed every year, but there are no such publications at all from 1631 and 1632.⁶

Most of these scholars acknowledge, at some point in their research, that the plague of the 1630s impacted the printing of music in Venice; however, none provide any significant analysis to quantify these impacts in detail.

The plague of 1630 was caused by the bacteria *Yersinia Pestis*, which was brought over the Alps in 1629 by troops involved in the War of Mantuan Succession.⁷ It arrived in Venice in the summer of 1630, killing around one-third of the population in eighteen months. Venice's stringent quarantine measures were invoked, and all non-essential activities within the city were halted.⁸ A recent study has found

³ Jane A. Bernstein, *Print Culture and Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ Remi Chiu, *Plague and Music in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵ Tim Carter, "Music Publishing in Italy, c.1580-c.1625: Some Preliminary Observations," *Research chronicle - Royal Musical Association* 20, no. 20 (1986); Gideon Brettler, "Revisiting the Music-Printing Market in Seventeenth-Century Italy and the Peculiar Case of Pietro Millioni's Guitar Books," *Journal of Musicology* 39, no. 1 (2022); Brettler, "Revisiting the Music-Printing Market in Seventeenth-Century Italy and the Peculiar Case of Pietro Millioni's Guitar Books."; Cory M. Gavito, "THINKING LIKE A GUITARIST IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY," *Early music history* 40 (2021).

⁶ Lex Eisenhardt, "Italian Guitarists at Home and Abroad," in *Italian Guitar Music of the Seventeenth Century*, Battuto and Pizzicato (Boydell & Brewer, 2015). 30.

⁷ Guido Alfani, Marco Bonetti, and Mattia Fochesato, "Pandemics and Socio-Economic Status: Evidence from the Plague of 1630 in Northern Italy," *Population Studies* 78, no. 1 (2024): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2023.2197412>.

⁸ Jane Stevens Crawshaw, "The Renaissance Invention of Quarantine," in *The Fifteenth Century XII: Society in an Age of Plague*, ed. Carole Rawcliffe and Linda Clark (Boydell & Brewer, 2013).

evidence that of the major musical institutions in Venice, only at the Basilica di San Marco did any musical performances continue, and that was to a significantly reduced degree and with fatal consequences.⁹ The cessation of music making within the secular and ecclesiastical institutions that sustained musicians careers meant a complete standstill to musicians' jobs and financial security; however, these sacred and secular music institutions were not the only source of income for the city's musicians, who actively took advantage of the thriving music printing trade within the city.

The music printers and the musicians of Venice lived in a complex and mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship in which the city's musicians provided publishers with new compositions to sell, and the musicians, in return, had access to an additional stream of revenue as well as a valuable networking tool in an era where published music was one of the few ways to distribute one's music throughout Europe. Understanding the circumstances of printing during the plague months can therefore provide some insight into the conditions of the music industry more generally; however, so far, investigations into the seventeenth-century Venetian music publishing industry have not focused in depth on the plague of 1630. To address this gap, I have combined data from several existing databases and catalogues to create a more extensive database of surviving music prints from the seventeenth century, focused primarily on the plague years. To make this study possible, the existing catalogues had to be correlated to create a more complete database, as all those previously existing were incomplete in some way over this period of study. While previous databases, such as Jeffery Kurtzman's, focus on genera or certain instrumentations, the new database aims to highlight the entire body of work, enabling an industry-wide analysis. This more detailed database allows a closer focus on the plague years, including the lead-up and recovery years, to offer a more detailed insight into the impact the plague had on music printing.

The most complete existing database is RISM (*Répertoire International des Sources Musicales*), the International Musicological Society's online catalogue of printed music and manuscripts from archives and libraries worldwide.¹⁰ This was followed by Jeffrey Kurtzman and Anne Schnoebelen who compiled *the Catalogue of Motets, Mass, Office, and Holy Week music printed in Italy, 1516-1770*, an open-access database hosted by the Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music that focuses solely on sacred works and includes some items not catalogued in RISM.¹¹ Additional sources can be found in the *Database of Printed Sacred Music in Europe 1500-1800*, compiled by the Institute of Musicology, University of Fribourg, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, and the

⁹ Brigette De Poi, *L'ira Di Dio: The Influence of the Plague of 1630 on Venice's Musical Institutions and Culture* (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2025).

¹⁰ "Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM)," <https://rism.info/>.

¹¹ "A Catalogue of Motets, Mass, Office, and Holy Week Music Printed in Italy, 1516-1770," *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, 2014, 2022, <https://sscm-jscm.org/instrumenta/instrumenta-volumes/instrumenta-volume-2/>.

Swiss RISM Office.¹² Like the Kurtzman and Schnoebelen database, it focuses entirely on sacred works and is therefore missing the large body of secular music printed between 1620 and 1640. The final database utilised was *The Universal Short Title Catalogue* (USTC), created by the University of St Andrews as a search tool for books printed in several countries, including Italy, from 1450 to 1700.¹³ RISM and the USTC are the only databases that include all forms of music, sacred and secular, as well as vocal and instrumental, while the others have more specific focuses. While RISM is a comprehensive database, it is incomplete as several works are listed in other sources that do not appear in RISM. They have been added to my combined database to create a more extensive collection of works. In fact, very few publications in my database appear to have been included in all four of the previous databases, and none of these databases includes every single publication that appears in mine; thus, this newly correlated database provides a basis for insight and statistics not available in the previous ones.

While the primary focus of my database is on the eighteen months of the 1630 plague, it covers the years from 1615-1660 to determine trends in printing in the periods immediate before and after 1630-31. A second database covering the years around the 1575 plague has also been created, allowing a direct comparison of music printing in Venice during the two plagues. Gavito and others argue that waning economic conditions in the 1620s, the result of war, brought the end to Venice's dominance in the music printing trade, calling it the end of the 'Golden Age' of printing; this view is also argued by Lorenzo Bianconi.¹⁴ Brettler and Carter emphasise the economic decline of the 1620s as a contributing factor to the decline of the industry but also highlight several musicological factors.¹⁵ The weak economic conditions of the Venetian Republic in the early decades of the seventeenth century had a demonstrable impact on the publishing industry; however, my database demonstrates that this had less impact on the industry than previously thought. This analysis aims to isolate the plague as a separate event with significant importance in its own right. To determine if the plague had a decisive influence on the long-term health of the music publishing industry, this article not only examines the yearly output of the music printers but also examines the music printing industry through another plague outbreak without economic hardship in the pre-plague period. In addition, it explores the non-music printing industry in Venice, which, while impacted by the plague to a

¹² "Printed Sacred Music Database - Printed Sacred Music in Europe 1500-1800," 2014, 2022, <http://www.printed-sacred-music.org/pages/home>.

¹³ "The Universal Short Title Catalogue," 2025, <http://www.ustc.ac.uk/>.

¹⁴ Cory Michael Gavito, "The Alfabeto Song in Pring, 1610 - CA.1665: Neapolitan roots, Roman codification and 'il gusto popolare'." (Doctor of Philosophy The Universtiy of Texas at Austin, 2006). 64. & Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁵ Brettler, "Revisiting the Music-Printing Market in Seventeenth-Century Italy and the Peculiar Case of Pietro Millioni's Guitar Books." 4-6. & Carter, "Music Publishing in Italy, c.1580-c.1625: Some Preliminary Observations." 20-21.

certain degree, did not experience the complete stoppage to the presses that the music printers did. Thus, I argue that industries that experienced a plague without an economic downturn, or economic downturn without a severe impact of the plague, were able to survive and rebound. The music printing industry in Venice, however, experienced both, and as a result, by 1660, the industry was significantly reduced from its former heights. Thus, while the industry could probably have survived either the economic downturn of the 1620s or the plague, if it had occurred at another time, it was not possible for the industry to emerge unscathed from both in close succession. As a result, it can be hypothesised that if the 1630 plague had not occurred when it did, the long-term outlook for the Venetian music publishing industry might have been healthier than it was.

Surviving Prints in 1630: Chronology and Impact

To understand how the plague may have impacted the music publishing industry in Venice, I created a database of yearly printing numbers before, during and after the plague of 1630-31. During the period covered by this database, the two main competitors in music printing in Venice were Alessandro Vincenti and Bartolomeo Magni, both of whom account for most of the prints represented. Bartolomeo Magni was originally from Ravenna before becoming an apprentice to Angelo Gardano of the well-known Gardano press.¹⁶ He inherited the press in 1611 and was active until 1644.¹⁷ Alessandro Vincenti Magni's main competitor, has little information available about him. It is known that he was the son of printer Giacomo Vincenti, whose independent press was established in 1586 after a 20-year collaboration with Ricciardo Amadio.¹⁸ It appears Alessandro took over his father's press after his death in 1620. While these two competitors do not account for the entirety of the music prints seen in the database from 1615-1660, they represent a significant contribution in the industry.

The following figure is a representation of the whole database, which covers the years from 1615 to 1660, and makes it clear that there was a significant disruption of music publication in Venice during the plague of 1630.

¹⁶ Stanley Boorman, "Magni," (Oxford University Press, 2001 2001).

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000017450>.

¹⁷ Thomas W. Bridges, "Vincenti [Vincenci, Vincenzi], Giacomo," (Oxford University Press, 2001 2001).

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000029417>.

¹⁸ Bridges, "Vincenti [Vincenci, Vincenzi], Giacomo."

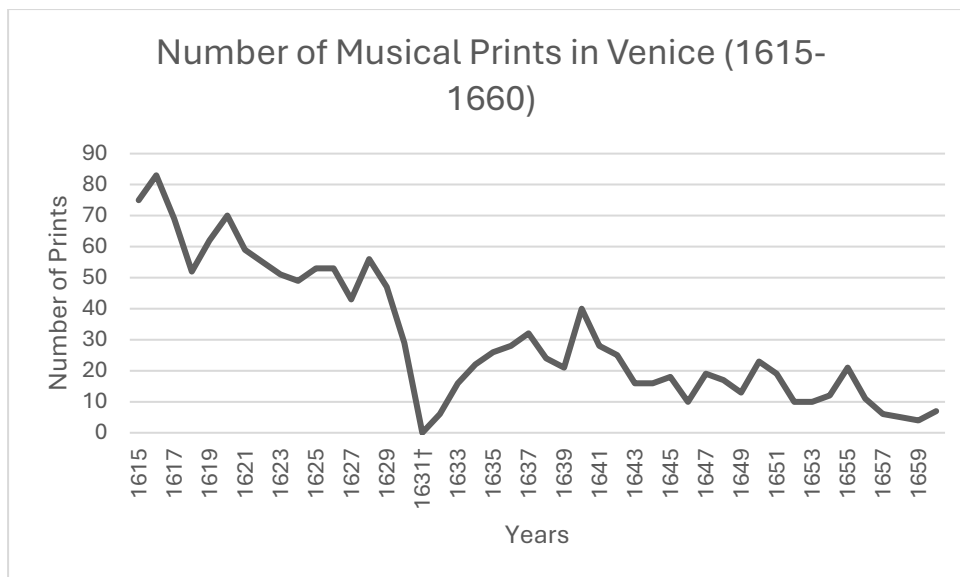


Figure 1 – Number of Music Prints in Venice represented in new database from 1615-1660¹⁹

Figure 1 shows the surviving number of music prints published in Venice from 1615-1660, indicating a significant reduction in the numbers once the plague reached the city in 1630-31. The previously discussed downturn in numbers in the 1620s is evident, though, as will be discussed below, it was not as prominent as previously thought, as the data shows that the numbers did begin to stabilise in the years before the plague. The evidence thus suggests that this decade does not represent an overall precarious trend in the industry's long-term health; instead, it simply represents a temporary reduction in output due to external economic circumstances from which the industry was beginning to recover before the plague. The database shows that in 1629, 47 musical prints were published in Venice, which is still on trend with the previous few years. In 1630, with the plague striking halfway through the year, however, the numbers decreased dramatically to 29. Then, in 1631, at the height of the plague, there are no surviving musical publications in Venice for the entire year represented in any database examined during this study.

To better identify the overall trends, the same data from Figure 1 is represented in Figure 2 with a three-year rolling average of yearly printing numbers. The use of a three-year average allows for the overall trends and patterns of the entire 45-year period to be more easily extrapolated. It reduces the impact of short-term fluctuations in printing numbers and can therefore better highlight long-term trends.

¹⁹ The cross symbol represents the years with plague.

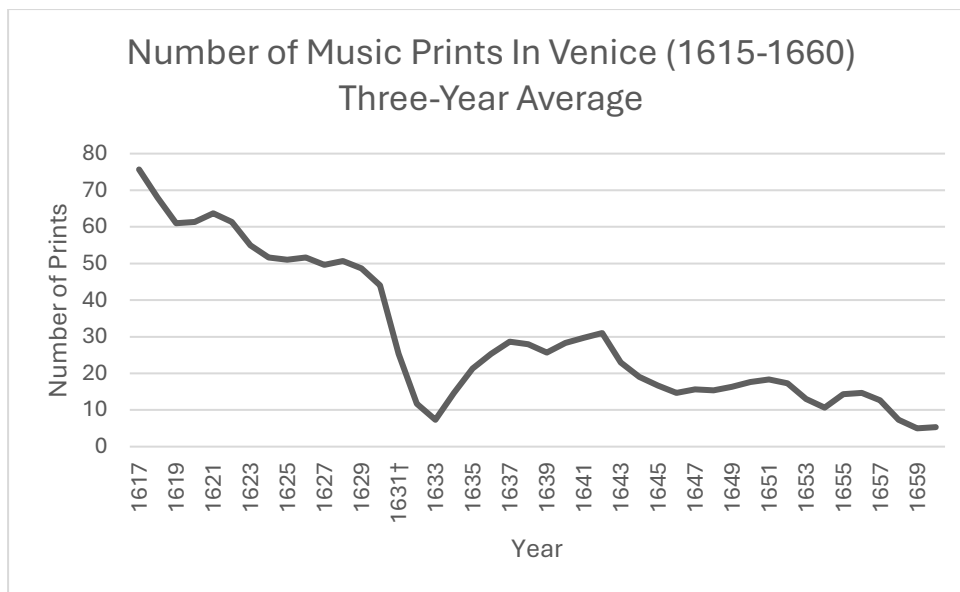


Figure 2 – Three-Year rolling Average of Music Printed in Venice 1615-1660

Figure 2 demonstrates that after the initial attempted recovery after the immediate plague period, when printing seemed to stop, the overall trend in the decades following was downwards.

The other trend, more visible as a result of the data being represented as a three-year average, is the pre-plague economic downturn in the 1620s, discussed in several previous papers. For instance, Carter notes that:

...although it is clear that the Venetian houses were facing increased competition over the 1600s, their actual output does not seem to have decreased significantly until the economic slump of the early 1620s. Certainly, there is little evidence to suggest a serious decline in their activities until this time: on the contrary, 1585-1620 appears to be the peak period of Venetian music publishing.²⁰

This 'slump' that Carter refers to is clearly visible in both Figure 1 and Figure 2; however, when considered in the light of the more comprehensive data collated in my new combined database, this downturn is not as prominent as previously thought. The database that Carter uses shows 63 music prints in Venice in 1620, compared to my database, which shows 70. Additionally, Carter shows 41 in 1625 compared to my 53. Consequently, the result of my new database shows that the decline in numbers in the 1620s, while still evident, was not as damaging to the industry as perhaps previously presumed. Furthermore, the period immediately following the economic downturn and the decrease in the number of prints shows that the industry was stabilising to an extent, albeit with fewer prints per year than previously. From 1623 to 1629, the three-year average showed less fluctuation in the yearly number of prints

²⁰ Carter, "Music Publishing in Italy, c.1580-c.1625: Some Preliminary Observations." 20.

than in any other period of the 45 years represented in the database, a sign that the impact of the earlier economic hardships was beginning to wane, and the industry was reviving. This stabilisation was, however, entirely undone by the appearance of the plague in the following years and while the data shows an attempt by the industry to recover in the decade following, ultimately, recovery proved to be impossible. Thus, if Carter believes that the industry was strong before this 'slump' and my data shows that the economic decline, while impactful, does not appear to have inflicted as much long-term damage as previously thought, this further implicates the plague as being more damaging than previously suspected.

The initial impact of the 1630 plague is difficult to determine because, at first glance, the quantity of publications for 1630 as a whole year may suggest that there was still a reasonable amount of printing occurring in the city during the plague time. However, focusing on the year independently of the other data makes it clear that this is not the case. Of the 29 surviving prints, 14 can be dated exactly thanks to the printer's foreword.

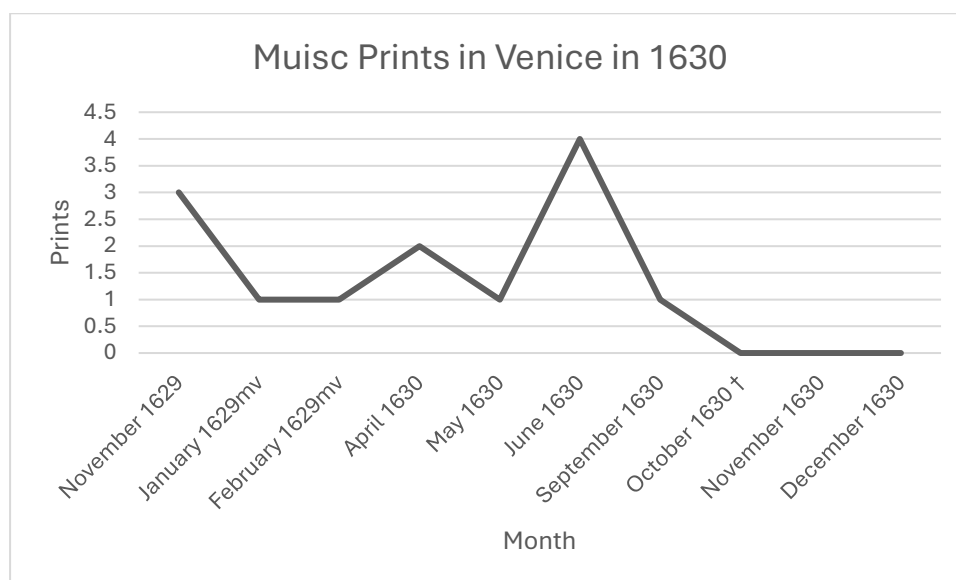


Figure 3 – Timeline of Musical Prints from 1630 with known dates

Three of these prints were dated 1629 in the printer's foreword but 1630 on the title page. This suggested they were completed in late 1629 and printed in early 1630, as the printer's foreword was written before printing. The other possibility is that the forwards were signed in the Venetian calendar, *More Veneto*, while the front page was not as the music was likely to be distributed outside of Venice and, thus, followed the calendar conventions of followed by the rest of the Italian city-states.²¹ Ten of the

²¹ The *More Veneto*, the Venetian calendar, starts on the 1st of March instead of the 1st of January. Thus, a date such as the 1st of February 1630 in the Gregorian calendar, would be written as the 1st of February 1629(MV) in the Venetian.

remaining eleven prints were printed before July, with the last published in September. The exact timing of the plague's arrival in Venice was a source of contention, even in 1630, as doctors disagreed on whether the disease present in the city was the plague or not.²² Recent research shows, however, that the index case entered the lagoon in early June and that by July, plague had spread into the city.²³ The debate was over by October, however, as the plague had completely taken hold by then and the death rate began to soar. Therefore, even if the plague hit Venice in the summer of 1630, its impact was not felt until over half of the year was complete, meaning that all these pieces were printed before the plague became out of control within the city. While the last 15 prints remain undated at this time, it appears from the current data that the decline in printing was not gradual, as the line graph may suggest, but was sudden and in line with the period when the plague struck. This, in conjunction with the knowledge that there is no evidence of any prints in 1631 when the plague was at its worst, indicates that music printing stopped entirely during the 1630-31 plague.

Looking back at Figure 1, we can see that 1632 saw a reintroduction of music printing with just six prints. The industry then started to slowly gain momentum again, with 16 prints in 1633, with the numbers then gradually increasing until finally we see 40 prints in 1640, the last peak number of prints seen in the database in the post-plague period and less than what was seen in the years leading up to 1630. This is not a slight recovery by any means and is impressive given the post-plague economic and social disruption the city was experiencing. This short-term recovery post-plague is a point that Brettler agrees with when he states:

the resurgence toward the 1640 post-plague peak in output was still driven by the Venetians..., demonstrating the industry's resilience and undermining the plague as a root cause for its collapse.²⁴

While this initial recovery in the immediate aftermath of the plague is remarkable and, as Brettler states, a testament to the industry's strength before the plague, it was not to last, as music printers in Venice were ultimately unable to maintain these numbers. In the long term, the plague had the final say, as immediately after 1640, the numbers declined rapidly. In 1641, for example, only 28 music prints were published in Venice, and only 18 by 1648. By the 1650s, the industry struggled to maintain even ten prints a year, with the 21 seen in 1655 as a statistical outlier, with the next best year being a

²² See the writings of Protomedico Cecilio Fuoli for more information about the debate that raged among doctors in the early stages of the 1630 plague, *Provveditori e Sopraprovveditori alla Sanità*, b.742, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Venice.

²³ Brigette De Poi, *L'ira Di Dio: The Influence of the Plague of 1630 on Venice's Musical Institutions and Culture* (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2025). Chapter 5.

²⁴ Brettler, "Revisiting the Music-Printing Market in Seventeenth-Century Italy and the Peculiar Case of Pietro Millioni's Guitar Books." 11.

measly 12 in 1654. Eventually, by the end of this database in 1660, the industry only produced seven prints, which is slightly more than the four of 1659. Thus, while there was an immediate surge in post-plague music printing in Venice, the industry never again attained pre-plague numbers in the period studied and produced insignificant numbers by the start of the 1660s.

Both Carters assessment and the data presented in Figures 1 and 2 show that the Venetian music publishing industry was healthy in the years leading up to the plague of 1630. While there had been some reduction in numbers as a result to external economic factors in the early 1620s this decline has been shown to not have been as detrimental as previously estimated and the industry was showing signs of stability and strength. This all changed in 1630-31 when the plague stopped music publishing and inflicted lasting damage to the industry. Figures 1 and 2 show that while there had been an initial attempt to save the industry in 1632-1640, the plague ultimately had a lasting influence on the decline of music publishing in Venice, and by 1660, the industry was publishing a fraction of its former numbers. When economic pressures hit in the 1620s, the industry was affected, but it took only a handful of years before it could halt the decline and regain stability by the mid-1620s, as can be seen when represented in a three-year average in Figure 2. The same cannot be said after the 1630 plague when industry strength allowed some level of post-plague recovery, but ultimately, it was not enough to save printers. It is difficult to determine whether the industry would have been able to withstand the plague if the economic downturn of the 1620s had not occurred, though the evidence presented below suggests it could have been possible. It is clear that the industry was in a strong position to survive the 1620s hardships if the plague had not occurred. Thus, the timing of the plague in conjunction with the recent 1620s economic conditions having just occurred was a combination that was too much for the industry to stand.

The Economics of Plagues

The recovery of an industry in a post disaster period is a more complex procedure than simply deciding to start the presses again. While, as discussed above, there was an impressive attempt at a recovery in the years around 1640, a decade after the plague, the immediate post-plague recovery in the Venetian music printing industry was not instantaneous. The situation in Venice in late 1631 is one that modern musicians, printers, and scholars can relate to personally by examining the current economic recovery following the recent COVID-19 outbreak. One only has to turn on the news to see a different story of the recent pandemic's impact on labour and supply chains. Many cities worldwide find the post-pandemic and post-quarantine economic conditions challenging. Quarantines cause some cities to suffer a diaspora of people leaving the city and create a labour shortage while unemployment is at a record low, meaning the replacement of staff is increasingly difficult for surviving businesses. In conjunction with rising supply costs and inflation, this has created an economic

environment that makes it challenging for businesses to thrive. This is nearly identical to the situation seen in Venice in 1632. Venice experienced a prolonged and strict quarantine that put pressure on the economy with the added difficulty of a thirty-five per cent mortality rate. Curiously, the 1630 plague had a different economic profile to earlier plagues that struck the city and may account for why the music printing industry was impacted differently.

Economic historians such as Guido Alfani have studied the 1630s plague because it deviated from the financial norms of Renaissance post-plague recovery.

Even the worst epidemic, the “San Carlo” plague of 1575-1577 that struck many important cities in the north, had been mainly an urban event involving a limited area. The damage it caused was quickly mended thanks to the availability of large surplus populations in the countryside. There would be no such surplus after the two great epidemics of the seventeenth century.²⁵

Alfani discusses in detail how previous plagues in Northern Italy had little long-term impact on the economy of the cities as there was a surplus population in the rural areas to replace the lost urban workers, or vice versa. The first significant plague outbreak of the Second Plague Pandemic, The Black Death of 1348, is known for its favourable socio-economic impact on Europe and its importance in changing social structures.²⁶ The labour shortage created by the catastrophic loss of life inflicted on Italy by the Black Death meant that previously disenfranchised social classes had the power to dictate working terms and wages previously unattainable. As the plague continued to ravage the peninsula through the centuries, the same principle held that there would be a surplus population to replace the dead population. Therefore, the economic damage from plague outbreaks was limited. As stated by Alfani above, the plague of 1630 proved a different beast. It devastated the urban and rural communities alike, meaning the usual surplus population also suffered heavy casualties and was not available to alleviate the post-plague transition. The result was that, unlike previous outbreaks, the rural population was not able to come into the cities to replace the deceased urban populace creating a widely felt labour shortage throughout all layers of social classes. The consequence of this was a hit to the Venetian economy that was harsher and more prolonged than previously felt in early outbreaks.

When considering all of the above in the context of the music publishing industry, it is essential to remember that the industry’s recovery would take time and effort. Not only were there supply and labour constraints in the city, but the personal impact of the plague on individual printing houses is unknown; several printers have

²⁵ Guido Alfani, "Plague in seventeenth-century Europe and the decline of Italy: an epidemiological hypothesis," *European Review of Economic History* 17, no. 4 (2013). 414.

²⁶ Guido Alfani, "Pandemics and Asymmetric Shocks: Evidence from the History of Plague in Europe and the Mediterranean," *Journal for the history of environment and society* 5 (2020). 198.

been found in Venetian death records, indicating some disruption to the industry resulting from death. Further, the impact on the employees within the printing houses doing the bulk of the manual work is unknown, but assuming it was similar to the city mortality rate of thirty-five per cent, the effect on the ability to maintain a constant level of publications would have been vast. While the main music publishers, by all accounts, survived, it is likely that among these numbers of casualties were several of their staff. Training employees within a printing shop is a several years long process; therefore, replacing them would take time, effort, and money. In conjunction with this, some of their more regular clients and composers were impacted.²⁷ For example, Alessandro Grandi, a well-known composer who was a prolific composer for publishers, died of the plague, as did Leonardo Simonetti, who also appears regularly in my database.²⁸ The effects of the plague, however, were two-pronged and felt at different times. The immediate aftermath of the plague would have been a difficult period for music publishers in Venice, who faced several challenges in restarting their presses. This is reflected in the lower printing numbers of 1632 and 1633. Once the printers had restarted, however, by 1640, it is clear through the decline in numbers through the 1650s that the economic conditions of Venice post-plague no longer allowed for the large amount of publishing that had occurred in the decades before the plague.

Non-Music Publishing

In 1630, music was not the only form of printing taking place in Venice. The publishing industry was bustling with various printing styles in the government and private sectors, including pamphlets and books of various genres. Books were the primary focus, with around 40 presses in the city by the time of the 1630 plague.²⁹ An examination of the printing database available on the 'Universal Short Title Catalogue' website shows some curious similarities between the two industries; however, it also presents two significant distinctions: non-music publishing, while reduced, never ceased during the plague, and as a result, the long-term impact from 1650-60 does not show a decline in industry but instead a recovery. This indicates that what befell the industry during the plague (i.e., whether it stopped or not) may have had an influence on the industry's long-term health. Figure 4 shows the non-musical prints in Venice on a rolling three-year average scale from the same year range as the musical database, as found on USTC.

²⁷ Jane A. Bernstein, *Music Printing in Renaissance Venice: The Scotto Press (1539-1572)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). 55-7.

²⁸ Rodolfo Baroncini e Marco Di Pasquale, *Monteverdi A San Marco. Venezia 1613-1643* (Lucca: LIM, 2020). 92 & 100.

²⁹ Sandy Thorburn, "What News On The Rialto? Fundraising and Publicity For Operas in Seventeenth-Century Venice," *Canadian university music review* 23, no. 1/2 (2003). 186.

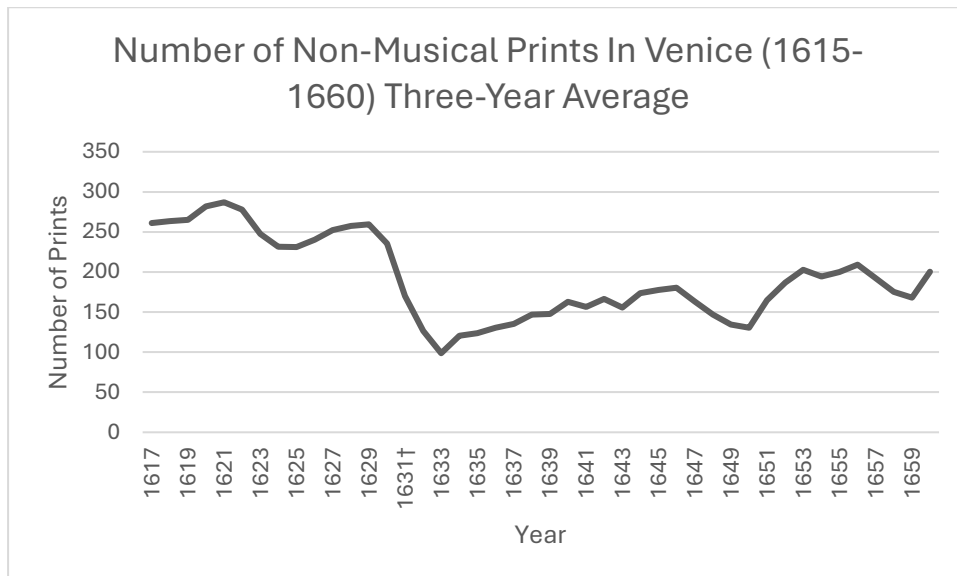
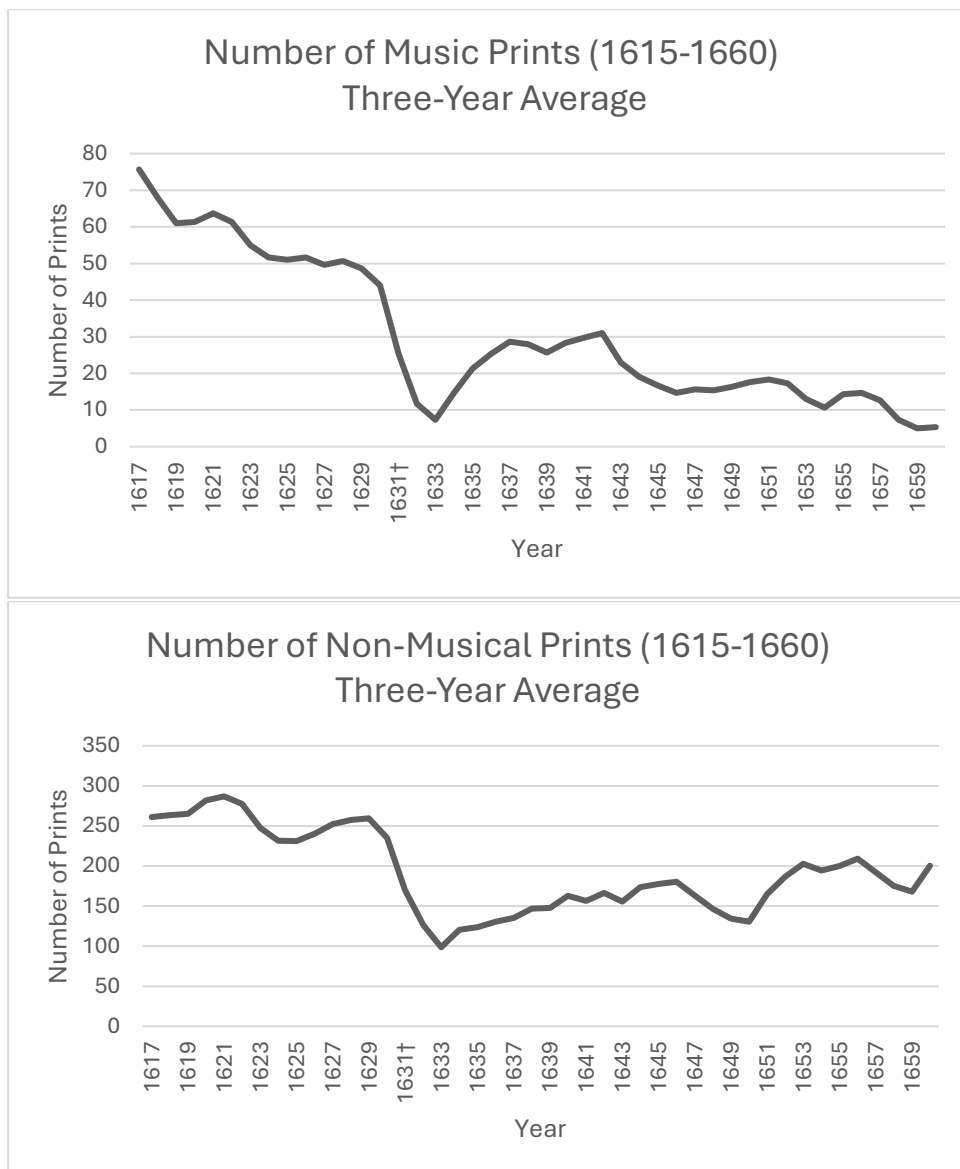


Figure 4 – Three-year average of the number of non-musical prints in Venice (1615-1660)

It shows that in the pre-plague period, the 1620s' slump' resulting from the period's economic conditions also occurred in the non-music publishing industry. That said, while the musician printing industry was plateauing during the late 1620s, the non-music publishing industry showed clear signs of recovery towards its former yearly numbers of prints. This was before the plague struck in 1630-31, and the graph shows a significant impact, though, seemingly crucially, the industry did not completely shut down like the music printers did. In the first decade after the plague, non-music publishing showed a similar trajectory to that of music publishers. The numbers steadily increased to a peak in 1640, albeit still significantly fewer prints than in the pre-plague period, before declining again in the early 1650s. During the decade of the 1650s, the two industries reacted differently to one another. While the music publishers saw a significant reduction in their yearly print numbers, ultimately ending in an almost extinct industry by 1660, the non-music printing industry did the opposite. From 1651 to the end of the study period in 1660, the non-music printers of Venice once again began to steadily increase their yearly output. Besides a slight dip in numbers in 1658 and 1659, which is quickly corrected, the non-music publishers show signs of rebuilding their industry.

Below are Figures 2 and 4, comparing the two industries in Venice and their pre- and post-plague printing numbers.



Figures 2 & 4

While it is difficult without further information to speculate on the reasons for this difference in the long-term impact on the industries, it does have to be wondered if the reaction during the plague could be one. It is clear from the above examples that while the plague severely impacted the music printing industry to the point of closure, the same could not be said for other forms of printing within the city. The non-music publishing industry reacted differently to the plague by not shutting down, albeit reducing significantly, and in its ability to recover in the long-term. The reason behind this perceived difference in industry standards is unclear, but what is clear is that, despite some similarities, there was some disparity in reaction between Venice's music and non-music publishers.

Plague Vs Plague: A Comparison

While the 1630 plague may have been the final outbreak to devastate Venice, it was certainly not the first, with 23 visitations of the plague between 1348 and 1630.³⁰ As a result, there is a previous outbreak available for comparative data to investigate how the music printing industry reacted to them: the 1575 plague mentioned by Guido Alfani. Similar to 1630, the 1575 plague lurked around Northern Italy for some time before entering Venice in the summer. This outbreak lingered in the city for two years, causing waves of illness and death, with 1577 being the deadliest year.³¹ This plague killed as much as one-third of the population, again comparable to 1630, though over a more extended period with more peaks and troughs of disease; however, as noted above, the city's overall economic recovery from this plague was more rapid.³² This outbreak also occurred when music printing in Venice was at its zenith, with its two foremost houses, Gardano and Scotto, being European leaders of music printing.³³ The mid to late sixteenth century is an era in music printing in Venice that has been abundantly written about and commented on, notably by Jane Bernstein and Tim Carter, who have both written extensively on this period of music history, making it ideal for a case study.³⁴

A complete stoppage in music publishing in this era could have proven catastrophic to the printers economically; however, while various writers have, albeit briefly, mentioned the 1630 plague in their writings, there is little to no references in the research regarding the plague of 1575–1577. This suggests that while the plague occurred, it may have had little impact on the music printing industry in Venice, and thus, no explanation or commentary was required in the scholarship. Figure 5 represents the yearly music printing numbers in Venice in the years around the 1575 plague.

³⁰ Catherine Jenkins, "Curing Venice's plagues: pharmacology and witchcraft," *Postmedieval* 8, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-017-0046-2>.

³¹ Jr Samuel K. Cohn, *Cultures of Plague: Medical thinking at the end of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). 1.

³² Alfani, "Plague in seventeenth-century Europe and the decline of Italy: an epidemiological hypothesis." 414.

³³ For more information, see, Bernstein, *Print Culture and Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice*.

³⁴ Jane A. Bernstein, "Financial Arrangements and the Role of Printer and Composer in Sixteenth-Century Italian Music Printing," *Acta Musicologica* 63, no. 1 (1991). & Bernstein, *Print Culture and Music in Sixteenth-Century Venice*. & Tim Carter, "Music-Printing in Late Sixteenth- and Early Seventeenth-Century Florence: Giorgio Marescotti, Cristofano Marescotti and Zanobi Pignoni," *Early Music History* 9 (1990).

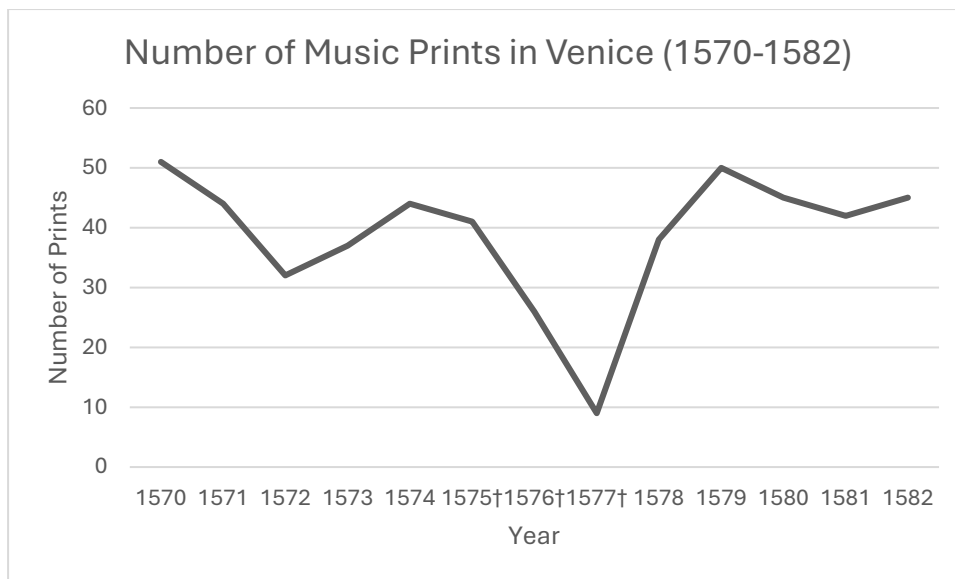


Figure 5 – Number of Music Prints in Venice from 1570-1582

This chart tells an interesting story: the presses continued working throughout the worst of the plague, a complete divergence from the music printers of the 1630 outbreak. Like Figure 1, it is immediately apparent that there was a significant reduction in publishing numbers during the worst of the outbreak; however, a closer analysis of the data shows that at no point during the two-year-long outbreak did music publishing appear to stop completely. In 1575, the impact was scarcely recognisable, with a reduction of only three prints to 41 from the previous year's 44. In 1576, the numbers decreased as expected, similarly to 1630, though unlike 1630, the plague had existed within the city already for six months to a year before production decreased. By 1577, the numbers had reduced to nine, showing a similar downward trajectory as seen in 1630 but still with significantly more prints than in the later outbreak. The economic recovery of the music publishing business following the 1575 plague is also evident in Figure 5. It was swift and robust, with the music publishers returning to pre-plague numbers within a year. This is in comparison to 1630, which took ten years to regain some momentum, after which it once again began to decline rapidly. Interestingly, the difference between the two plagues does not extend to the type of music being produced. A cursory examination of the genre of musical prints that appear in the databases before and after both plagues reveals little to no long-term changes in the genre of music being published.

To fully understand the difference in recovery between the two plagues, Figure 6 shows the publications for the two plagues side by side.

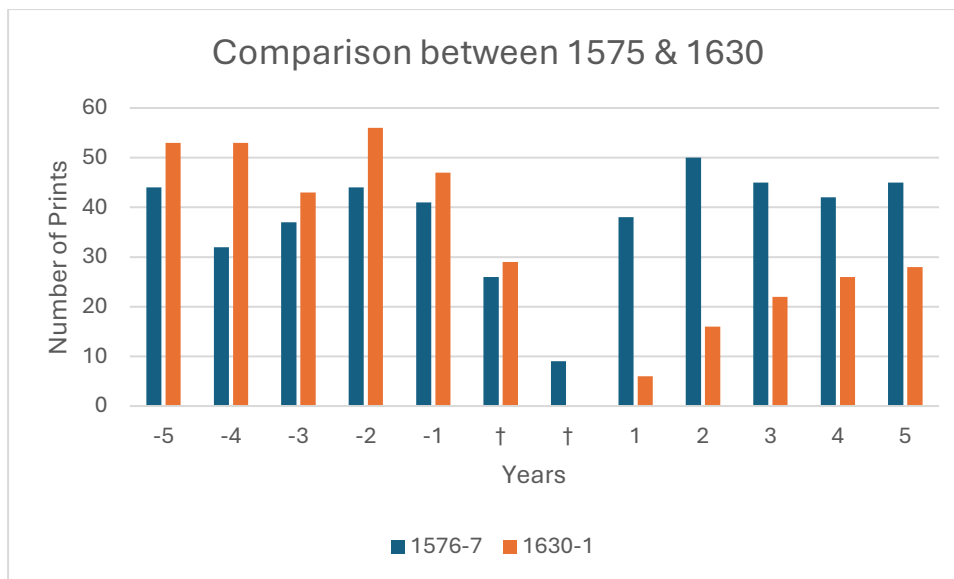


Figure 6 – Comparison of Music Prints in Venice during the 1575 and 1630 plagues³⁵

In 1575, the industry did slow down, with a significant decrease in the music printed during the plague years. That said, at no point does the data show that the industry stopped completely, with music being published throughout the entirety of the time the plague was active within Venice. The recovery was then almost instantaneous, with no long-term impact of the plague present in either the chart or the scholarship. In 1630, printing stopped completely and swiftly. Once the industry started up again, it took nearly a decade to recover even partially, after which it once again began to decline and by 1660, printing was but a fraction of what it had been in previous years. This data aligns with Alfani's observation regarding the economic recovery of the two plagues being significantly different. The reason for this difference is not immediately clear, given the comparable mortality rate between the two outbreaks; however, the one defining difference between the two is the economic conditions leading into the plague. While the 1630 data does show that the industry was in the process of stabilising after the economic issues of the 1620s, it had not yet reached its former heights when the plague of 1630 struck. The difference in long-term results between the two outbreaks of 1575 and 1630, as well as the difference between music and non-music publishing in Venice, suggests that the combination of the 1620s economic issues in conjunction with the complete stoppage of printing in 1631 was a death knell and the music printing industry was unable to recover in the long term.

³⁵ The numbers on the X axis represent the years before and after the plague years of 1576-7 and 1630-1. For example, 1 represents the years 1578 and 1632, whilst -1 represents the years 1575 and 1629.

Conclusion

By correlating this new database, I have re-examined the decline of the music printing industry in seventeenth-century Venice and connected it to the plague of 1630. The database being larger than those correlated before allowed for a reconsideration of the previously explored recession of the industry in the 1620s and found it to be less damaging than previously assumed. This, in conjunction with a further analysis of the non-music printing industry and the industry's different reactions to the 1575 plague, promotes the hypothesis that it was the 1630 plague occurring so soon after the economic 'slump' of the 1620s that was the ultimate downfall of the industry. While this paper has focused on the plague's impact on music publishing in Venice, the database created for it can also answer other possible investigations about the seventeenth-century Venetian music printing industry. It presents future opportunities to study changes in genre throughout the century, trends in musical styles, the popularity of certain composers, and the impact of business practices on individual printing houses. Beyond the individual database, the investigation into the plague's impact on music printing and, consequently, the musical community of Venice brings forth questions regarding human interaction with the plague. Disease and death are universal human experiences that transcend time and place. Investigating historical manifestations of the plague and its impact on cultural institutions can also provide insight into the long-term consequences of these events. These crises can permanently modify cultural institutions within a city, as seen in 1630 Venice, where the demise of the music printing industry not only affected those directly employed by it but would have had broad ramifications for the entire musical community of Venice and beyond. By investigating the impact of the plague on the music printing industry in Venice, this article underscores the reality that the cultural impact of a crisis can long outlast the events that caused it.

Views To A Room

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Rainer Werner Fassbinder, when discussing his movies, once was asked about their meaning. He believed that all human achievements share a common theme, for him, he wanted to build a house where each movie would be a different component of its structure: one movie would be the stairs, one the window, one the frame. These three poems share a common theme as well, they are all about longing, and they all amount to a structural component: one is the beams, the floorboards, the lintels; the other is the doors and windows, and so on. And, although their structural quality might be put into question, nonetheless they form a room, a room which you are more than welcome to come into.

exit wounds

i realised
how dimly silent
your voice has become
how mute
how neatly-clipped the corners
of your mouth seem
and how contempt has
ironed the creases
of things you would whisper
while in bed
all words are concrete
and the only noises i hear
are the dragging pebbles
caught under the soles of my shoes
when walking home
now there's just the idea
hollow and vacant
of a lingering pain
a darting convulsion every
time i ask myself
if wherever you are
are you sleeping or are you awake

limit state

33 is a good number
in a decade full of bin-like
numbers
a single spot of clarity
surrounded by flies
viscously roaming all putridness
of young adulthood angst
33 is a good number
and that's the number Jesus
chose to die
the year he said fuck-it-all
screw this or at least
meant it – that i'm sure of
33 is a good number
because you've crossed the
threshold of enlightenment
a middle finger poised
which understands the true
meaning of not giving
a fuck
so as i near to 33
which is such a good number
i try to numb the kid in me
that cries as loud
as some silences when the hole
of the sun is high or
all that has been accomplished
piles up at your palm
with a necessity to be crushed
to be flat

points of entry

dinner is served and that's
such a fancy way to
put it since it's just
frozen food and
i eat it cold since the
microwave is broken and rats
prowl around the sink and
have marked the stove with
their rott'ness
it's in these moments i
think of your eyelashes framing
the luminescent cracks where some
doorknobs still remain untouched
with anxious desire and
time's folded and marrow
goes cold from
wonderment
but then i pinch the
slabs of chicken dry
like bricks and gobble
down the pieces of broccoli
which languidly sink as
i let the water run to clean
hastily and leave among the cutlery
inside the cupboard again the things
i feel when the you is fished out
from all the thinning
of life

Little Girls

Rochelle Pickles
Murdoch University

We'd find out in a day or so that it wasn't the door-knocking that killed the two girls, it was being the children of parents that went to a barbeque earlier that day. It was their vague familiarity with the man at the beach who called to them over the sound of the waves, having learned their names at the barbeque.

'They were your age,' my mum would keep repeating.

June applied the blush, commanding Cathy to suck in her cheeks. I'd never seen anyone put on makeup like this before. Maybe this is how June made up her modelling friends, sitting beautiful and still as mannequins. They probably didn't even flinch as the eyeliner was drawn along the inside of their eyelid. They probably blinked through the third membrane, like birds.

* * *

Cathy was going as a witch and I'd be a goblin.

I stood behind her older sister, June, as she crouched down to apply Cathy's makeup.

'Stay still,' June told her again, squinting to trace the outline of the lips.

I caught eyes with Cathy; it was impossible not to grin. Her face cracked open and June shouted at her this time, 'Keep still!'

We'd only ever seen trick-or-treating in the movies. Now we were going to try it for ourselves. It was all arranged, until yesterday when Cathy's mum tried to call it off. Cathy fought with her all night about it—finally her mum gave in but said she would be accompanying us, standing at the end of the driveways while we knocked. We were eleven now—so embarrassing. But two girls on the other side of the country had gone missing over the weekend, likely snatched while door-knocking for odd jobs—they found them dead in the sand dunes yesterday. Cathy complained about the terrible timing.

'Go like this,' June instructed, pulling a kissy-face. Cathy cracked up.

'You look like a fish,' she told her older sister, looking past her because the joke was for me and not for June, who was fourteen and did modelling and never spoke to us if she could avoid it. I'd been to Cathy's house about a hundred times, and this was the first I'd been allowed in June's bedroom. There was a strong scent of vanilla perfume, *Girlfriend* magazines scattered across the floor with teenage girls on the covers posing in various positions—hat rims flipped and adorned with fake flowers. I wanted to pick one up, look at the pictures of JTT and Scott Wolf and learn how to

look and act like Cathy's sister so boys would like me. Scanning the covers, I noticed a pair of white knickers discarded just under the bed, crumpled and tinged beige in the middle.

June gave Cathy a steely look and Cathy obeyed, pulling the fish face. When June was done applying the lipstick, Cathy smacked her lips open and closed at me with a *puh-puh-puh*.

We'd find out in a day or so that it wasn't the door-knocking that killed the two girls, it was being the children of parents that went to a barbeque earlier that day. It was their vague familiarity with the man at the beach who called to them over the sound of the waves, having learned their names at the barbeque.

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June applied the blush, commanding Cathy to suck in her cheeks. I'd never seen anyone put on makeup like this before. Maybe this is how June made up her modelling friends, sitting beautiful and still as mannequins. They probably didn't even flinch as the eyeliner was drawn along the inside of their eyelid. They probably blinked through the third membrane, like birds.

'You look just like Linda Evangelista,' I told Cathy, mimicking her cratered cheeks. Cathy lost it and June let out a frustrated growl, driving the blush brush hard into Cathy's cheek, scrubbing at her like a stain. Cathy went quiet.

June was scouted by one of Perth's biggest model agencies as she was walking to the Fremantle Library in her school uniform, eating a box of chips from Chicken Treat. I liked to imagine her, strutting the Cappuccino Strip like a catwalk with a mouthful of hot potato and salt, uniform skirt rolled up at the waist to make it shorter the way Cathy taught me. Cathy said her mum took June to get her eyebrows waxed once a month, her eyelashes were tinted black for that 'natural look'. Since June began modelling, she'd started having her legs and pubic hair waxed too. I didn't have any pubic hair, but I knew Cathy did—she'd showed me at a sleepover last month. It was thin and straight like the hair on a newborn baby.

Cathy had been *Nairing* her legs since the start of the year—her mum tried to take her to get them waxed like her sister, but Cathy started to cry as soon as the beautician smeared the first line of hot wax down her shin. The only way to remove the wax was to strip it off with a calico cloth and when Cathy came to school the next day, we all took turns touching the smooth patch of skin.

Sometimes I'd catch Cathy trying to do the model strut down the street, hoping she'd be discovered too, I guessed. June told her she wasn't tall or thin enough to be a model and Cathy stopped eating sausage rolls from the tuck-shop on Fridays.

'Do you want me to do yours?' June asked without looking at me. Cathy got up, her makeover complete.

'No, thank you.'

We went back to Cathy's room to change into our costumes. I ran some green eyeshadow across my eyelids with the applicator sponge my mum gave me, then smeared the green lipstick I'd picked up at Supré. I tried to stretch out my lips the way

June told Cathy to, then rubbed them together before an accentuated *puh-puh-puh*. Cathy laughed.

My costume was a ratty old black dress my mum let me cut up. Cathy was wearing something similar. When we surveyed ourselves in the mirror, Cathy decided we were both witches.

‘Witches, not bitches,’ I said, waggling my eyebrows at Cathy in the mirror. It was meant to be a joke, to make her feel better about what Simon in Year 7 said at lunch that day, but she looked away.

Cathy had liked Simon since Year 5. He was tall and parted his sandy blond hair near the middle like Billy from *Neighbours*. He hadn’t paid much attention to her until Cathy got boobs during the last school holidays—she returned to school pulling her shirt collar down at the side to flick a bra strap at the other girls, a ‘you know how it is’ look on her face as if she didn’t know we were all still in crops. There was a staircase up to the classrooms that the Year 6’s and 7’s shared, and Simon started to push Cathy on the stairs whenever he went past. Light, on the shoulder at first, then harder between the shoulder blades, making her tumble a few steps before looking up at him in feigned horror, mouth wide as he ran ahead of her with a grin. Cathy loved it. She coordinated the time of her descent down the stairs with the Year 7’s release from class, so as not to miss her staircase encounter for the day. I was only a little jealous—my crush was in our grade but the only time I got to talk to him was when the teacher took pity on me and placed him in my activity group for the afternoon.

I’m not sure what made Cathy stray from the usual routine earlier that day. She and Simon had an unspoken agreement—he pushes, she tumbles, he looks back, they both laugh. Maybe he didn’t push her hard enough today—only setting her mildly off balance. Maybe she just had a clean shot. But Simon was not expecting Cathy to shove him back the way she did, a huge smile on her face. He was also not on even footing yet, after he’d turned from having pushed her, and so he lost his balance and almost face-planted on the brick paving. His hands broke his fall, but not before a few embarrassing attempts to regain stability on the way down, his facial expressions priceless. The nature of the fall was undeniably funny, and everyone who saw it couldn’t help but pee themselves a little laughing, even though we knew we shouldn’t. I crossed my legs and covered my mouth, standing behind Cathy as Simon got to his feet, dusting off his skinned palms, beads of red emerging. He looked back up at her face, now stricken.

‘Bitch,’ he said, and limped away.

Cathy finished putting glitter gel in her hair and offered me some. My hair was out, instead of tied back like hers, but I ran a little through my fringe anyway.

We searched Cathy’s room for something to put the lollies in and Cathy produced a toy basket and an empty fairy floss container from the Royal Show. It still smelled like pink sugar.

Cathy’s mum was watching TV in the lounge room while she waited for us. It was light outside, but the evening programs had started. We stood for a while singing

The Nanny's opening tune—I usually sang it with my little sister and found myself missing her. I hated her a little most of the time, but I hoped I'd never hate her as much as June hated Cathy. I wasn't sure that Cathy noticed—she only bragged about her big sister. It didn't seem to matter to her that June was mean, as long as she was beautiful.

Cathy's mum looked up at us from the couch. After surveying Cathy's outfit and face, she told her she looked nice and reminded her to pull her shoulders back. Sometimes I saw her jab her fingers into the middle of Cathy's spine—her shoulders would whip back like a puppet, strings jerked tight.

Cathy's mum was beautiful like June, tall with straight teeth and wavy brown hair highlighted with gold. Family photos displayed June and her mum with perfect smiles and poses, a sharp distinction between them and Cathy, who closely resembled her dad.

Cathy's mum pulled herself up from the couch and sighed. 'Okay.'

The street was quiet as we ran down the sloped lawn of Cathy's house, half-skipping down the street with excitement and nostalgia for a holiday from the TV. The sun was beginning to set, the air grainy with approaching darkness. Silver Princess gumtrees hung bleached branches outside a row of squat brick houses, their paved driveways engraved with initials and dogs' pawprints.

It was 1995, a year before the serial killings would begin in the fancy suburb where Cathy would later go to high school, and nine years after the lady escaped out the window of the couple that had lived down the road from Cathy's house. The couple that offered girls lifts on Leach Highway; girls that assumed they were okay to get in the car because women are safe, and women keep women safe. If I had looked out June's bedroom window, I'd have seen its pale green exterior at the opposite end of the street—the house where they kept and killed the girls. But we didn't know that story yet; despite some eavesdropped murmurs that quieted on our approach, no-one told us about it, and we'd only been little girls at the time—terrible twos with puffy sleeves and bottoms ballooned by diapers.

Years later, when I did find out, I would think about June. June—strutting down Leach Highway on her way home from the bus stop, eating from a box of chips. Then I'd think about a woman stopping her, giving her an agency card and saying, 'Call me'.

We didn't walk in the direction of the pale green house, instead we turned right to make our way to the very end of Cathy's street—this was as far as her mum said we could go—we would start there and work our way back.

The only time either of us walked around our suburb was with our parents, but Cathy was also allowed to walk down to the bus stop on the weekends to go shopping in Fremantle with June. Cathy told me that sometimes cars beep at you when you walk down Leach Highway without your parents. I asked her why and she told me it's what men do when they think you're hot. Once, when June was in one of her generous moods, she told Cathy the cars were beeping for her. But she knew they were for June.

Me and Cathy pushed each other's arms back and forth debating who would knock at the first house until her mum called, 'Come on,' from the end of the driveway.

An elderly woman opened her front door, the flyscreen locked. We could only see her outline; the house smelled of wet carpet and cigarette smoke.

'No, thank you,' she immediately said, and closed the door.

The next house made us shout our names through the thick wood door, until a chain was unlatched and an older man pulled it open, his wife hovering nervously behind him. She peered out past us to Cathy's mum in the driveway.

'Trick or treat,' we said in unison.

'That's an American holiday,' the man said, and shut the door.

Our basket and fairy-floss container remained empty. Fortunately, the next house in line was Cathy's grandma's house, who did not have any lollies in the cupboard but threw a couple of packets of chocolate biscuits and Iced VoVo's into our outstretched vessels. I waited until we got to the end of the driveway to toss the VoVo's into Cathy's basket. Yuck.

More neighbours answered their doors and found what they could in their cupboards, unprepared for the demand of the last of their sweets on a Tuesday evening.

Two doors down from Cathy's home and nearing the end of the journey, we climbed the cracking concrete steps of a blonde brick house with a stretch of dead lawn out front. By this time, I knocked at the door without hesitation. A young man answered, he had a sandy blond mullet and large creases that whipped across his face when he smiled.

'Trick or treat,' we said.

'Ok, a trick then,' he replied simply. We were unprepared for anyone's right to opt for the alternative and stared blankly back at him. He smiled with raised eyebrows and turned, walking back inside and leaving us standing in the doorway. I looked around for Cathy's mum at the end of the drive, but she was gone. When I turned back, Cathy had already wandered into the house.

I followed her, stepping slowly over yellow patterned carpet, hexagons and circles joining and distant. The TV was on; *The Nanny* was almost finished and canned laughter spilled periodically into the room. A brown glass ashtray sat on a dirty coffee table next to a can of beer, a thin white line from a half-smoked cigarette trailing straight upward before curling and sinking into the stale air. I followed Cathy down the hallway, stopping short about halfway down.

A dull thumping sound had started, softly at first, getting louder—it was coming from one of the rooms off the hallway, their doors all shut. Moving slowly forward, I started a little with the shock of each blunt thud. It was right up against the door, like something was trying to get out.

'Don't open that,' the man called out from some other place. 'That's Pixie, she doesn't like strangers.'

Cathy was at the end of the hallway now and turned to the left and out of view. Quickening my step past Pixie's door, I reached the end of the hall where there was a kitchen on one side and a makeshift dining room on the other. The man was crouched down in the kitchen, opening and closing a series of drawers and rattling around the contents of each: screwdrivers, scissors, batteries, birthday candles, matches, a hammer, extension cables, transparent tape, masking tape, duct tape.

Cathy leaned casually against the kitchen bench beside him.

'What are you looking for?' she asked.

'My lighter,' he said, smiling up at her. Did they know each other?

'Maybe it's in the lounge room,' I offered, assuming he would have used a lighter for the cigarette I'd seen on the way in.

'No...' he mused, standing up and scratching his stubble before venturing across the room to some other drawers by the dining table.

I looked back down the hall toward the open doorway. Thud. Thud. Thud.

'Is Pixie always in there?' I asked. It seemed odd to own a dog that didn't bark.

'What? No, of course not. Just when strangers drop by. Like I said, she doesn't like them.'

I looked at Cathy. Strangers, then.

Cathy didn't notice me and began wandering around the room. She stopped by the stereo and picked up a cassette.

'ACDC,' she read aloud, promptly putting it back. 'Boring!'

'Hey!' he protested, smiling at her again like he knew her.

Cathy rolled her eyes and laughed.

'Aha!' he suddenly exclaimed, holding up one of those Zippo lighters, like the kind I'd seen my uncle use to light his cigarettes. Cathy and I exchanged looks: mine uncertain, hers excited.

'Ok,' he said. 'Come here.' He knelt down on the kitchen lino and beckoned us closer. Cathy and I walked to him and stood close. He looked up at us with a grin. 'Closer.'

We edged in, looking down at him as he crouched low, bad body odour and the smell of cigarettes stinging my nostrils. Up close, his hair was curly but dirty, his fingernails ripped and edged with grit.

He whipped the silver lighter open—the flame went thin and high. Was this the trick? We didn't move. Then the man appeared to pinch the flame out, pulling his pressed-together thumb and index fingers swiftly out to the side. He looked up, flicking a blue-eyed gaze between each of us in turn before releasing his fingers, seemingly sending the flame back to the wick. I gasped.

The man laughed loudly and stood. 'Well, that's it!' he announced.

Cathy slumped. 'You really don't have any treats?'

For a moment the man returned her pleading look, mocking, then reached out a hand and tousled the top of her head with his fist.

'You'll live!' he said.

Cathy grabbed her scalp protectively, worried he'd wrecked her ponytail.

'What's this?' the man inspected the top of his hand curiously.

Me and Cathy both laughed—it was the glitter gel. It had stuck to his fingers and between the small hairs of his knuckles.

Then the man was laughing too, saying 'Hey!', and suddenly lunged at Cathy with the glittered hand. He got her in the ribcage, tickling her like she was a baby. Cathy laughed, but she looked pained as she pushed him away. The expression on her face changed, playful smile lost. I stopped breathing.

Then Cathy turned towards the end of the hallway, and I heard it too; her name being called over the sound of the TV ads. *Maybe she's born with it, maybe it's Maybelline.* Pixie was hurling herself against the door now; it bulged with every hit. We ran back down the hallway toward Cathy's mum's voice, squinting at the natural brightness of the setting sun after the dull light inside. She stood at the end of the driveway.

'Hi Tom,' she called, waving vaguely at the man, who now stood behind us, grinning.

'I guessed this one was yours,' he called back. 'Tasked with trick or treating tonight, are ya?'

'Unfortunately.'

We joined Cathy's mum, heading back down the street. Light slipped below the trees, turning the sky grey and furring the edges orange like a low flame.

Cathy walked close to her mum.

'You want to do one more?' I asked.

She looked at her half-empty basket, then back up at the man's front door.

'Nah,' she said. 'Let's go.'

We walked the rest of the way to Cathy's house. When I turned back, the man was still there, watching us from the landing. Reaching down to pet a large black dog by his side, he smiled at me and waved. I smiled back.

'Bye, Pixie!' I called across the sound of crickets starting up for the night, lifting my arm in a wave. Maybe next time she'd be allowed out, now we weren't strangers anymore.

“Some Sort of Delightful Horror”: The Maternal Sublime in Creative Academic Mothering

Frances Sullivan-Rhodes
Curtin University

In recent years, groups such as PiPA (Parents and Carers in the Performing Arts) have brought attention to the challenges faced by parents balancing carer responsibilities with creative careers; similarly, the Flex Appeal movement or Women United Art Movement, and researchers from around the globe, have highlighted the struggles faced by parents with professional or academic careers. My project is located in the nexus of these spaces. I am seeking to investigate the intersectional experiences of mothers in academia who juggle an additional career in the visual arts. Situated in a critical feminist framework, with a particular interest in matricentric feminism, this project involves poetic, narrative and visual-art inquiry framed by an autoethnographic account. Intended outcomes from this research project include generating advice for universities to support and leverage creative academic mothers' expertise. The project also seeks to make a meaningful contribution to the developing field of Arts-Based Research in Australia.

The first poem¹

I am sitting cross-legged on the floor, staring at a ball of dust, going in and out of focus, and contemplating a sort of cosmic balancing of things. I have missed another deadline for application for an art competition.

Like the spinning of a wheel of fortune, the needle is currently hovering between crushing disappointment and acceptance that I have accomplished other things.

One of those things is stirring and starting to make small sounds. I reach out a hand to the plain, coarse cotton of the hammock and pull down.

Bounce, bounce, bounce.

Boing, boing, boing.

The creak of the spring, reassuring, insistent, compelling, lulling, inevitable, ineffable.

Creak, creak, creak.

The mumbling subsides.

The dust comes back into focus. The dust shouldn't be there. Soft-grey, softness. Why is it always grey. There is hardly anything grey in the house. Where do the colours go?

I have not managed to clean the floors today. The time got away with mashing bananas and raspberries with lemon juice, guiding a little hand on a wooden spoon and measuring flour and sugar with flowered cups, watching one little hand shoving succulent crumbs into its face whilst another pair of little hands wave in the air and gesture at the ceiling,

at the fan,

at the dust.

I have sat on the couch listening with half an ear to "Dora Splorer" whilst marking essays on the Burkean Sublime with one hand and cradling a sucking head with the other. I have bathed little squirming bodies, dried them and folded them into clean, dry softness. I have walked and walked and walked with one bundle in the harness, one bundle in the push, whilst planning the artist statement that I didn't write.

I didn't clean the floors today, I didn't arrange someone to come and fix the plumbing, I didn't get the groceries, I didn't change my life today,
but my children are sleeping untroubled
dreams.

Maybe in a great cosmic balance I didn't do too badly today.



Becoming Golden. Charcoal on Fabriano 300gsm 2025

The second poem

- i. In the forgiving darkness of the mostly sleeping house, I dry my hands
and breathe it in, dishes done.
 A night light,
 Burning bright,
A toy tiger,
 toy bear,
clutched tight or pillowing a head of tumbled curls, a dandelion clock.

Today I led a class on painting and tenebrism, still life, the conceptual use
of light.

Joseph Wright of Derby. A Natural Philosopher, hand raised, on the point
of proclamation.

Talking brushstrokes whilst surreptitiously brushing the hair of a little
head pressed to my knee under the computer.

Talking Caravaggio, talking Dutch still life and the magic of real
ultramarine, mica flecks flinging the light like the reflection in bubbles,
cascading from a wand waved outside the window.

Still life

Still Living

Stilled life.

My mind is fugitive, skidding from untenable thoughts.

The beauty and the horror.

Watching the tumbled mica, tumbled gold. The stilled children. A stillness that haunts.

It is perhaps a perfect moment. In the clamour and the bustle of the day I have not the pause to recognise how perfect they are, how much I love them.

Looking at them in sleep, chiaroscuro under the night light, coming and going,

Dark to light,

I find myself suspended between desires; to wake them and tell them how much I love them,

How their beauty breaks and mends me

To let them sleep and let myself make friends with peace.

Or to paint them.

Itchy fingers holding a phantom brush.

Chiaroscuro. Tenebrism.

Out of the dark, into the light.

A photograph is compromise.

Painting is postponed.

To sleep.



Think but this, and all is mended. Charcoal on Fabriano 300gsm. 2025

The third poem

Hic habitas felicitas

I give my body to building a fence

two boards nailed in place,

12 nails clouted home,

Two little bodies separated from the rush of the street,

the bark of engines,

the squeal of dogs

noting exertion of sinew and bone,

there is pleasure in the hammer strike

mind abdicating responsibility to corpus

I will build this home breath by breath

Ticking through the movements that bring us closer to safe, to comfort, to whole

Whole again

A thing of patches

Drawing together

A home of second chances

Mens sana in corpore sano

I give my mind to assessing the construction of arguments
of beauty,
religious,
sublime,
profound,
profane
assaying essays,
the stuff of thought is the stuff that builds the fence, that buys the nails
The house breathes with reciprocal movements
In and out

Inspiration expiration
An exchange enacted of labour
Of love
For the realisation of patchworked hopes
Hic habitas felicitas.



All Danae to the Stars. Charcoal on Fabriano 300gsm. 2025.

Chinna, Nandi and Poelina, Anne. *Tossed Up by the Beak of a Cormorant: Poems of Martuwarra Fitzroy River*, Perth: Fremantle Press, 2024; paperback, pp. 112, RRP \$29.99; ISBN 9781760992804.

In Nandi Chinna and Anne Poelina's *Tossed Up By the Beak of a Cormorant: poems of Martuwarra Fitzroy River*, the authors demonstrate the capacity of creative work to meaningfully and relationally engage with place and people. Framed as a three-way conversation between the Martuwarra, Poelina, and Chinna, the book emphasises the benefit of dialogic processes to engage with and deeply understand environments, and the related crises induced by human actions. Moreover, it is a call to action for environmental preservation and sustainability.

The book opens with an introduction, first by Poelina, a Nyikina Warrwa Elder, Professor, and Guardian of Martuwarra Fitzroy River, directed specifically to Nandi Chinna but ultimately also the reader. She grounds us in Indigenous knowledge, values, and priorities while encouraging Chinna to engage in a dialogic process of deep listening, stating, 'You need to form your own relationship with the River as a living system. You need to start talking to the River, and then there is a waiting time. Wait and it will communicate with you' (8).

Chinna – a research consultant, community arts facilitator, and writer of four poetry collections – brings forth her own cultural context in her introduction titled 'Blind and Dumb in the Martuwarra.' She asserts how white people are blindfolded by Western colonialism – including English constructions of place, language, and culture – thus they struggle to engage with First Nations people. She encourages the reader to 'Forget the language you have learned since you were a child' (9), to step back and listen, despite the discomfort in doing so. Chinna has a background in cross-cultural collaborative projects, previously working with First Nations peoples to produce poetry collections on ecosystems, homelands, rivers and wetlands. Now she aims in this book to inform the public of the real and oncoming threats against Martuwarra, namely of 'pastoralists wanting to extract water, thereby disrupting and damaging the unique ecosystem' (12). This introduction positions the authors in their respective contexts – indigenous and colonialist – thus encouraging an openness to the subject and aims of the book.

The first poem of the collection, *Martuwarra Time*, written by Poelina, is delineated by a difference in format, style, and length to those of Chinna's. Here, Poelina elaborates on her introduction, discussing the notion of First Law, or 'living waters, living free' (15), in which she advocates for holistic natural laws in the management and balance of life. In parts she utilises interconnection and relationality by channelling the River, speaking with its voice, to persuasively make a call to action:

Nandi, I know you hear me, you feel me, I feel you too
 Write these words down and Dream me to you and we wait for the wet to
 come
 Tell the city people about me, tell them to stand and come
 There are secrets here, I am the largest registered Aboriginal cultural heritage
 site
 We have been promised never again, I am fearful of ecocide and genocide we
 will become (17).

Chinna's poems form the majority of the book, and guide the reader through her two-year journey at Martuwarra toward mutual understanding with the environment. Her first poem, *At Danggu*, playfully leads the reader through an evolutionary transformation of the self as she is exposed to the River, 'I'm one cell > then two >> >>' and 'I crane my neck and look up / into my own beginning' (19). The first half of the collection is a sensory explosion with rich descriptions of place – 'weeping paperbark' (23), lightning as 'blinding scars' (30), 'weedy river grass meadows' (27), and the River:

Martuwarra croons in her rumbled bed
 almost like sleep, or a fragment of reverie
 almost like a dream yet to be dreamt. (22)

Through these early poems, Chinna explores the awkward beginnings of a relationship with the River: 'I love you I mutter in blunt English and feel embarrassed/ until I begin to comprehend that I need to be quiet' (33). Like Poelina, she emphasises the necessity of listening, as it allows for deep, meaningful connection to place and growth within oneself. Although this is a universally beneficial message, both writers address a white audience, perceiving an urgent need to developing deep listening skills.

Chinna's journey and the underlying environmentalist messaging is further supported with a follow-up poem by Poelina. She references devastating colonial environment management projects around the world, powerfully demonstrating the likely impact on Martuwarra if governments and pastoralists continue with their plans. In addition, she asks white Australians to stand with the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, striving for 'Cooperation, not conflict. Unity not divide and conquer / Collaboration, not manipulation, cultural synthesis, not cultural invasion' (56).

Subsequently, a mood shift occurs in Chinna's works, beginning with *In the long hours of the night*, in which she ponders, 'how many of us are lying awake / mourning for rivers that no longer flow' (58). There is an energy of vulnerability and an emotional urgency of 'What can we do?' (72). The sombre mood continues as Chinna shifts back and forth between living her everyday, 'Coles with Mum / pushing our trolleys' (64), and her concerns for the River, continuing to emphasise relationality between people and environment:

Yesterday we talked about rivers,
 how the river would miss its people
 if they were gone, how the people
 would grieve and long for the river (75).

The urgency for environmental preservation surges in the final poems as the journey passes into a new year and Martuwarra floods. Chinna utilises running sentences and paragraphs with little punctuation to evoke confusion:

there are no hierarchies
 brown whorls have eaten that
 laved path an untrackable scent
 we don't know where to place
 our feet mud enters our marrow (88).

Whereas Poelina expresses her fears of ecocide due to governments' lack of listening, knowledge of Country being ignored and Aboriginal voices being muted through bold letters and capitalisation, such as 'Fitzroy River Crossing bridge collapsing, emergency services / **COME QUICKLY**' (92), and exclamations like 'Climate change is real, people / [...] Why is it so hard to see with our ears? / Listen with our eyes!' (93). Through such expressed urgency, the reader is filled with a strong sense of empathy and is emboldened with a need for action, to respond to the crisis in swift yet thoughtful ways.

Chinna argues that 'art making is an ethical act' (11), one which ruptures narratives, including personal and white Western colonialist socio-cultural narratives of belonging and alienation. Through this poetic journey, the reader is situated in two distinct perspectives while following Chinna's evolution of self and mutual understanding. *Tossed Up By the Beak of a Cormorant* is an energetic read, with reflective pauses through Poelina's persuasive pieces.

A glossary at the back explains terms and concepts used by both Poelina and Chinna, including Nyikina words, and particularly various Aboriginal names for places, some specific to the Kimberley region of Western Australia, and others more widely used such as 'Dreaming.' Martuwarra has had a fair amount of coverage in academic research works, focusing on areas of environmental and eco-system management, particularly waterways, with Poelina co-writing much of these. However, few creative literary works have been published about the River, making *Tossed Up By the Beak of a Cormorant* a much needed and unique entry in West Australian poetry.

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Nuttall, Kōtuku Titihuia, *Tauhou*; Wellington, New Zealand, Te Herenga Waka University Press, 2022; paperback, pp. 168; RRP \$26.09 NZD; ISBN 9781776920259.

According to the 'Author's Note', Kōtuku Titihuia Nuttall's debut novel *Tauhou* should not be read as an exploration of the author's Māori or Coastal Salish heritages (156). Instead, Nuttall skilfully weaves the experiences of both her backgrounds into an enchanting and imagistic exploration of personal identity formed and negotiated within coastal cultures, colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. The novel draws inspiration from the shared experiences of Indigenous peoples, reflecting the concerns and values that bind the Native peoples of New Zealand and British Columbia, while also dancing through unique elements of each culture and their histories.

Tauhou's narrative structure is fragmented, weaving characters and stories throughout, but not seeking overall narrative coherence. Variety is the order of the day, foregoing linear story-telling traditions in favour of the inventive and the exploratory. At the narrative level, this inventiveness manifests in a free-flowing presence of characters, some of whom show up across chapters, some of whom disappear after a single chapter, and some of whom seem to shift in time and place. The continual changes of narrative focus, location, characters, and style creates a kaleidoscopic effect, producing an expressionist depiction of a world presented to readers in individual shards, some of which stand independently and some of which overlap. Many of the chapters are extremely short, often less than a full page long, while others tell extended stories following characters through a world shaped by the conditions of Māori and Coastal Salish culture. For instance, the first chapter, 'Daughter', is roughly half a page, while 'SNITZEE', the second chapter, is a full page. But then the third chapter, 'Water', takes us into an extended exploration of cousins Hīnau and Salal as they discover their true familial connection and journey back to an ancestral village seemingly populated by the spirits of their predecessors. Most of the chapters are overtly prose, but some, like 'DOWRY' (137-138), read almost as verse, adding another layer of stylistic and narrative shifts to *Tauhou*.

The free-flowing structure of the chapters, stories, spaces, and temporalities aligns with *Tauhou's* fluid thematic of a story-world shaped by water. Building from her Polynesian and Pacific Canadian heritages, Nuttall's novel continually draws on oceans, rivers, lakes, and other liquid spaces. The first line of the novel introduces this watery world: 'Creator throws them into the ocean, Mother and Daughter, to become islands' (11). This opening chapter focuses on the nature of islands – as spaces for leisure, for science, for unique evolutionary traits, concluding, 'An island is the only thing between you and the bottom of the ocean' (11). For both the Māori and Coastal Salish, islands shape their worlds, representing territories with which they have deep, traditional connections. But islands also represent possibilities for connection – like the connections between Nuttall's two cultures – as characters move between them,

using water as a medium to bridge gaps. The chapter 'MOTU' strongly reflects this intercultural connection, as it focuses on a young woman who leaves her own island to travel to another, where she encounters people with whom she builds a bond of friendship despite not speaking the same language, wearing the same clothing, or mutually understanding cultures (119-136). This bond recreates the earlier bond between the voyager's grandmother and a woman of the other tribe.

Connections between women are another central thematic in *Tauhōu*, in which women continually support and uplift one another, often in defiance of patriarchal norms. Men rarely feature in the novel, and when they do appear they are often accompanied by a vague threat of domestic violence. But the relationships between female characters throughout the novel are positive and reinforcing, whether between family, friends, or lovers. Women consistently provide one another emotional and material support, construct communities, and survive through suffering together. Across the storylines and the fragments, this mutual support remains a consistent theme in the novel, ebbing and flowing like the ocean currents but always present. In the conclusion of *Tauhōu*, Nuttall returns to the opening, with the closing chapter closely mirroring the first. 'Mother' reworks the phrasing of 'Daughter', borrowing the opening line – 'Creator throws them into the ocean, Mother and Daughter, to become islands' (11, 154) – but arriving at a different end point. Instead of islands being between you and the bottom of the ocean, 'Mother' concludes, 'A woman is a turtle, a fish, a canoe. A woman is an island. A woman was the only thing between me and drowning' (154). Far from reflecting a shift in the novel's ethos, this change reflects the interconnectedness of ecological and geographic spaces with communal or cultural spaces, highlighting the interconnectedness of place and people within Indigenous cultures.

Nuttall's premier novel is an excellent exploration of an identity shaped by the experiences of colonized Indigenous ocean-going cultures and of women within settler colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal power dynamics. The novel's unique, fragmentary structure keeps readers engaged because we can never predict precisely what will come next, whether the next chapter will be a developed narrative of identity exploration, a poetic fragment, an exploration of trauma, an apocalyptic dream-vision, or something else entirely. Readers interested in emerging feminist voices; New Zealand, Māori, Canadian, or First Nations narratives; oceanic environmentalism; postcolonial perspectives; or experimental narrative structures will find *Tauhōu* extremely rewarding. Although there are some adult themes, the book would certainly be suitable for anyone from older teens through adults, meaning that this novel has a wide potential readership and great appeal across generations.

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Vishnuvajjala, Usha, *Feminist Medievalisms: Embodiment and Vulnerability in Literature and Film*, Leeds, Arc Humanities Press, 2024; e-book, pp. 134 + viii, RRP £99.00; ISBN 9781802701531.

Usha Vishnuvajjala, Assistant Professor at the State University of New York, has built her academic brand on medievalisms: the study of the 'reception of and engagement with medieval culture' (1). Following her first book, 2022's *Women's Friendship in Medieval Literature*, her 2024 publication *Feminist Medievalisms* provides a unique methodology for interpreting how feminism is represented, and notably, experienced.

Vishnuvajjala makes her introductory stance on medievalism very clear, maintaining how most modern theory focuses on 'institutional history, martial culture, or men's writing' (1), with current medievalisms only addressing women in the context of misogyny, violence, or women as exceptions in otherwise masculinist spaces (1). Therefore, her introduction establishes a repeated theme of the text: how hierarchies affect our reading of both history and gender, and *Feminist Medievalisms* is her attempt at redefining medievalisms outside of masculine-coded concepts of power, authority, and institutions (5). Her alternative is a reading model that promotes vulnerability, connection, and an ethical understanding of one's own time and place (6).

Vishnuvajjala outlines her methodology as a combination of textual analysis, and participatory, or experiential, medievalism. She specifically draws from Daniel T. Kline's definition of "participatory medievalism": the active decision to immerse oneself in a neomedieval environment (3). Interestingly, Vishnuvajjala chooses five case studies that do not involve a fictional neomedieval world at all. Instead, the author reiterates that these texts display embodied or experiential encounters with medieval women in a real or imagined past (4).

Chapter one 'Nested Medievalisms and Affected Bodies in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*' outlines how Austen's depiction of a medieval past haunts her early-modern present through an exaggerated Gothic mode (30). Vishnuvajjala considers how Catherine Morland's proclivity for novels, as opposed to 'real solemn history' (31), opens her to emotional connections with past women – specifically the nuns from the Abbey – whose history and identity has been obscured by strict patriarchal social codes (20).

This ongoing theme of reimagining history continues in chapter two 'Feminism and Medievalism in Woolf's Final Works.' Firstly, Vishnuvajjala considers the emotional and historical context of 1938's *Three Guineas*, with the oncoming threat of war inspiring Virginia Woolf to critique pedagogical English institutions for inspiring 'unreal loyalties' to war, bloodshed, and national pride. (49). The following analysis of *Between the Acts* recontextualizes English history by placing women as central to the past. The text involves a country pageant that personifies the 'birth' of England, and

portrays English lower, middle, and upper-women throughout the ages. Woolf metatextually challenges the audiences' ability to think of the past as a series of narratives, wars, or political developments (66), instead, they experience the lives of everyday people and are encouraged to think of themselves as *part of* history. Vishnuvajjala maintains that Woolf's outlook on witnessing history being retold is an empathetic and feminist method of experiencing the past, through a shared 'feeling of vulnerability' and connection (66).

Chapter three 'Medievalisms as Feminist Sanctuary in the Late Twentieth Century' was a standout of the book, as Vishnuvajjala's focuses on two modern texts – Madonna's 'Like a Prayer' music video and the 1992 Whoopi Goldberg film *Sister Act*. Vishnuvajjala focuses on their shared imagery of churches, nunneries and the 'witness seeking sanctuary' trope from medieval literature, arguing how these visual encounters are a commentary on intersectional issues in the present, such as racial policing, violence against women, and inter-racial romantic relationships (68).

Chapter four 'Chaucer, Vulnerable Bodies, Somatophobia, and Theory' examines modern politics, where Vishnuvajjala finds a link between radical right misogyny and the Medieval conception of 'trouthe' in art and literature; as a gendered oath of loyalty or fidelity (96) instead of objective truth. The author maintains that this perception contributes to the contemporary right-wing view that women are biologically incapable of truth (109), with references to Hillary Clinton's treatment from the Republican press as a brief case study.

Feminist Medievalisms is only tangentially connected to medieval history and scholarship, but ideal reading for students studying feminism. Vishnuvajjala displays a poignant understanding of the ethics of defining feminism in our increasingly binary and conservative world – stating how she had to rethink whether her project was on 'women' or 'feminism' and chose the latter (2). Her model of reading is gender-neutral, and can be 'experienced by anyone' (7) willing to associate, identify, be affected by, and empathize with the women of the Middle Ages (20). I would thoroughly recommend both her introduction and bibliography as useful springboard to more niche ideas, as she has included a variety of texts on both feminist theory, and contemporary feminist readings of medieval texts, ideas, and historical figures.

This short book includes multiple subfields of research – feminist history, medieval history, the history of emotions, literature, and more – and there were many, many instances where I was demanding further detail and analysis. Notably, chapter four concluded with an entirely new and fascinating discussion: the dichotomy between thinking with the 'mind' or 'body' (120), but its placement ten pages before the conclusion felt jarring. Considering Vishnuvajjala's established interest in hierarchies, her discussion of the dichotomies between 'mind and body, reason and passion, psychology and biology' should have taken far more of the book, maybe even a whole chapter (108).

Separately, Vishnuvajjala's lengthy case studies are all engaging and well-reasoned. However, each chapter was incredibly varied, with little noteworthy flow

between the texts. Chapter four was the biggest stylistic outlier, with her discussion of 'trouthe' occasionally reaching in the connections made. I would certainly like to see a version of Vishnuvajjala's work where she applies her reading method to more closely linked texts, perhaps expanding on the briefly addressed connection between medievalisms, Austen, and Anne Radcliffe.

Personally, I found Vishnuvajjala's overall model of 'feminist medievalisms' to be a nebulous concept. The audience's participation in experiencing vulnerability seemingly applies to both the characters in the text, and the readers of the text, which can get confusing. Furthermore, she stated in her initial definition that her model is intended to provoke ethical questions for the contemporary reader's world and environment, but this line of thinking was only really relevant to chapters three and four. Her work could have benefited, structurally and cohesively, from greater connections between each case study, with the author restating her model in each new context. However *Feminist Medievalism's* most noticeable flaw was its conclusions; each chapter ended abruptly, and her final two-page wrap-up was rushed, unsatisfying, and lacked a unifying discussion to close out the four chapters.

Putting aside the lack of a conclusion and the briefness of certain arguments, *Feminist Medievalisms* is a salient discussion of how we approach hierarchies in history and literary historiography. Vishnuvajjala's own mode of 'feminist medievalisms' may be vague and open to interpretation, but when taken individually, each chapter was an excellent analysis of Austen, Woolf, *Sister Act*, and Madonna. The author's choice of texts is a relevant testament to her overall ethos, as it was especially refreshing to see a music video and a popular comedy film treated with equal relevance to Chaucer or *Le Morte d'Arthur* in modern medieval studies.

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Sobehrad, Lane J., and Susan J. Sobehrad, *Medieval History in the Modern Classroom: Using Project-Based Learning to Engage Today's Learners, Teaching the Middle Ages #1*, Leeds, Arc Humanities Press, 2022; e-book, pp. 224, 8 b/w figures, 14 tables. RRP £114.00; ISBN 781641893961.

Medieval History in the Modern Classroom: Using Project-Based Learning to Engage Today's Learners by Lane J. Sobehrad and Susan J. Sobehrad is part of the ongoing *Teaching the Middle Ages* series published by ARC Humanities Press. As stated in the publisher's website, the series seeks 'to reflect the best and most innovative in medieval pedagogies, providing resources for instructors, students, and administrators.' The Sobehrads' monograph aligns well with this goal, offering a contextualised review of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a teaching method for engaging undergraduate students in the medieval history classroom (x).

Divided into six chapters, this volume opens by emphasising the need to reassess educators' expectations of the knowledge and competencies students bring to undergraduate history courses. While this may appear an obvious premise, chapter one argues that instructors are not always (or not consistently) aware of their students' prior knowledge – especially in the field of medieval European history. As a result, course programmes may not lead to effective learning experiences, since the learning outcomes might not be aligned with student competencies. PBL is presented here as a pedagogical approach that not only fosters deep engagement with course content but also promotes the development of research skills expected of a historian.

However, the Sobehrads admit a trade-off: implementing PBL reduces the scope of topics covered throughout a course, which might deter instructors from using the methodology. Chapter two addresses this concern, tracing the origins of the project-based methodology and outlining its advantages, which include 'higher gains in academic knowledge, more positive perceptions of subject matter, more robust development of problem-solving strategies and research skills' as well as 'improved critical thinking' and 'increased student engagement [and] motivation' (31). Such benefits, this reviewer contends, should be enough to encourage educators to attempt to experiment with PBL, 'a pedagogical method in which a student strives to answer a complex historical question related to a specific topic through an ongoing process of collaborative research, dialogue, and product development (...)' (33). The collaborative nature of PBL further promotes social and collaborative skills as students must work together to answer a driving question. Chapter two concludes with a description of the core principles of PBL, while the following chapter turns to project-based course planning.

Chapter three reiterates the importance of aligning learning goals with outcomes and situates PBL within activity theory, which espouses that novel ideas emerge 'by communicating with others to promote positive action' (68). Framing PBL

as a project activity system, the authors suggest implementing in-class strategies – such as discussions of critical topics – designed to mirror the working environment of a medieval historian. This reinforces one of the authors’ central arguments: authentic practices, or learning medieval history by *doing* medieval history, are crucial to the learning process and student progress. Recognising the complexity of PBL implementation, the authors present practical tools providing an overview of how to intentionally conceptualise a course’s project. These pages include practical, ready-to-use templates that systematise some of the key factors the authors discuss, such as the project purpose and scenario, the project dossier, the project reflection, and the driving question.

The following three chapters focus on implementation of PBL, describing and providing useful examples to the previously addressed components of project design. Chapter four breaks down project management strategies into phases: ‘Introducing the Project’ (scope), ‘The Project Blueprint’ (planning), ‘Adaptive Project Management’ (project products), and a final ‘Reflective’ stage meant to be conducted after the project’s completion. Chapter five discusses the rise of digital humanities and the relevance of multimodal literacies in the twenty-first century classroom. In addition, it critiques how Digital Humanities projects within the field of medieval studies have tended to prioritise content delivery over teaching – a fair point, though this reviewer cannot refrain from acknowledging that without such projects, creating a virtual learning environment in a medieval course would be a significantly greater challenge. Chapter six presents examples of medieval studies projects: semester-long surveys (including assessment elements and project options: mechanical, digital, creative and traditional); unit projects designed to last four to six weeks; and shorter one-two week limited-outcome projects. Following the final chapter, a brief prologue reinforces the authors’ case for PBL’s relevance in the modern medieval classroom.

The Sobehrad’s book concludes with four detailed Appendices: (A) the historical standards, used both internationally and in the US, for developing course learning outcomes; (B) sample content and grading rubrics; (C) additional tools for students, notably rubrics for assessing sources; and (D) survey results from Texas universities, which helped inform the studies included in chapter one.

Medieval History in the Modern Classroom is a valuable resource for instructors in the field of medieval studies seeking to refresh their pedagogical approaches, foster student engagement, enhance motivation, and promote critical thinking. However, the text can be repetitious, particularly in its reiteration of PBL’s merits and the emphasis on aligning learning outcomes with competencies. Furthermore, while examples are given throughout, this monograph would have benefited from introducing some of them earlier on – such as unit projects. Indeed, for readers attempting to implement PBL for the first time, some strategies may only become clear in chapter six. In light of the Prologue stating that the book specifically targets medieval history instructors who ‘have not had formal training in pedagogical theory

and instructional strategies' (ix), the authors' expectations of the readers' competencies might warrant reassessing.

Nevertheless, the methodology, examples, and rubrics presented in *Medieval History in the Modern Classroom* will be valuable to instructors across medieval disciplines – history, culture, literature, and related fields. As someone outside medieval history who intends to tailor the Sobehrad's project-based teaching method to a medieval culture course, this reviewer finds the toolkit of activities transferable to other course units, even beyond medieval studies. The book is also thoroughly researched and well-referenced, including numerous useful citations that allow readers to continue learning through a range of additional sources.

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Gibson, Peter C., *Made in Chinatown: Chinese Australian Furniture Factories, 1880–1930*; Sydney, Sydney University Press, 2022, paperback, pp. 198 + ii, RRP: 40.00, ISBN 9781743327852.

Peter Charles Gibson's *Made in Chinatown: Chinese Australian Furniture Factories, 1880–1930* is the first monograph to provide an in-depth examination of the history of Chinese-operated furniture factories in Australia. Focusing on the period of fifty years, Gibson argues that these enterprises were historically distinctive, noting the absence of comparable Chinese furniture industries in other Pacific Rim migration contexts, such as California. Through a richly documented narrative, the book traces how Chinese manufacturers and workers built a successful industry, despite facing persistent racial discrimination and exclusionary policies. In highlighting their entrepreneurial strategies and adaptive responses to a hostile socio-economic environment, Gibson challenges enduring stereotypes of Chinese Australians as passive victims of racism. *Made in Chinatown* addresses a significant gap in the scholarship, which has tended to solely emphasise Chinese involvement in mining, agriculture, or broader community histories. This book builds upon Gibson's earlier work, including articles in the *Australian Economic History Review* (2018) and *TAASA Review* (2019), and his doctoral thesis, while incorporating new archival sources, such as court and bankruptcy records, to offer a more expansive view of Chinese Australian industrial labour and enterprise.

The book is structured into five chapters. Chapter one traces the origins of Chinese involvement in furniture manufacturing from 1800 to 1880, placing their history within wider patterns of migration and adaptation. Chinese migrants from Guangdong's Pearl River Delta, arriving mainly after the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s, established nearly 200 factories employing around 2,000 workers by 1912, concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne. The only other industry with significant Chinese involvement – with approximately 7,000 participants at the time – was market gardening. Chapters two and three shift focus to the lived experiences of owners and workers; chapter two examines factory ownership and financing arrangements, while chapter three foregrounds workers' voices through rare archival materials including court and bankruptcy records. Chapter four investigates marketing strategies and customer demographics, and the final chapter explores Chinese resistance to 'white labour' activism and exclusionary legislation, underlining their unique contribution to Australian labour history.

Gibson situates *Made in Chinatown* within a broader historiography that has often reduced Chinese economic activity to the trope of 'cheap labour.' Early twentieth-century commentators, many of whom supported racially exclusionary policies, portrayed Chinese workers as threats to industrial standards – narratives shaped predominantly by non-Chinese observers. Gibson demonstrates how the

labour movement and state policies identified Chinese factories as economic and racial threats. This prompted targeted legislation, such as the *Factories and Shops Acts* introduced in Victoria (1887) and New South Wales (1896), which imposed restrictions such as reduced operating hours, inequitable wages, and disproportionate safety and sanitation requirements. As Gibson argues, these legal mechanisms served not only as tools of economic exclusion but as instruments of the broader racialised logic underpinning Australia's settler colonialism.

Adopting a postcolonial perspective, Gibson revises narratives that cast Chinese furniture manufacturers as passive victims by centring their voices and highlighting their agency. Drawing on factory records, advertisements, and legal documents, he shows how Chinese Australians navigated and resisted exclusionary frameworks. Rather than retreating into ethnic enclaves, proprietors engaged with the Australian industrial context, adopting practices such as collective bargaining and, in some cases, fair wage principles uncommon in other migrant enterprises.

Chinese manufacturers also strategically marketed their products to working-class European Australians, combining affordability with style and utilising Western advertising conventions, still while celebrating Chinese craftsmanship. This hybridity is vividly illustrated through period advertisements and the Chinese labour stamp found on Wing Lee furniture. Gibson further shows that these enterprises often operated with the tacit or active support of non-Chinese Australians, who resisted the dominant xenophobic ideologies of the period. He is careful, however, to acknowledge the limitations of his sources, urging readers to interpret court testimonies critically, as products of a biased legal system.

The book also builds on historiographical shifts from the 1960s and 1970s that re-evaluated Chinese economic activity in light of the discrimination. While previous studies highlighted racism's role in shaping Chinese exclusion, Gibson extends his approach by examining the internal dynamics of Chinese enterprises and their strategies for success. He draws attention to factors such as specialisation and high-density worker dormitories, which contributed to their competitiveness. He also complicates the assumption of pan-ethnic solidarity, noting that while Chinese workers may have sympathised with their non-Chinese counterparts, they also pursued independent agendas within the labour market.

Made in Chinatown reframes Chinese Australian history by illustrating how migrant enterprise reshaped Australia's industrial landscape. Gibson convincingly demonstrates that Chinese furniture manufacturers were not marginal participants, but resourceful agents who forged a place at the heart of Australian manufacturing. This book is a valuable contribution to migration, labour, and economic history, and is recommended for scholars, students, and educators interested in Chinese diaspora studies and settler colonial economies.

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Wager, Melanie, *Der Stürmer und seine Leser: Ein analoges antisemitisches Netzwerk, Zur Geschichte und Propagandawirkung eines nationalsozialistischen Massenmediums* (Translated: 'Der Stürmer and Its Readers: An Analog Antisemitic Network. On the History and Propaganda Impact of a National Socialist Mass Medium'), Berlin, Metropol, 2024; hardcover, pp. 537, 92 b/w images, RRP €36,00 EU; ISBN 9783863317119.

Melanie Wager's book *Der Stürmer und seine Leser* (*Der Stürmer and Its Readers*) provides us with a deep insight into the mechanism of antisemitic propaganda, media history, and recipient engagement during the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. The weekly newspaper *Der Stürmer*, known for its notorious antisemitic slurs and infamous cartoons, was published in Germany between 1923 and 1945. Although her book is only available in German, her case study and its findings are of clear interest to the international research community in antisemitic and propaganda studies, as it provides insight into the mechanics of the newspaper, their key players, and a retrospective analysis of propaganda effects during this time period.

Melanie Wager's book is a revised version of her doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Erlangen/ Nürnberg in 2022. Whilst previous publications in this field have tackled the biographical details of *Der Stürmer's* creators, her work specifically highlights the existing gap in methodological research during the National Socialist dictatorship, due to the general lack of documented media recipient interaction during the period. Her book attempts to narrow this gap by analysing *Der Stürmer* and its interactions with readers via letters to the editors and the proliferation of public display cases, which functioned as a two-way medium reinforcing antisemitic sentiment and hatred.

Wager's study is structured into two main sections, supplemented by an extensive appendix. The first section provides a detailed portrayal of the newspaper and its publishing house, from its origins, editors, and staff, to its production, content, layout, and the various marketing and distribution strategies employed. In the second section of her study, Wager turns to her central interest: the propagandistic impact of *Der Stürmer*, which she explores through the interactions between the medium and its readership.

Through meticulous archival research, Wager's first section addresses the history of the newspaper and its founder Julius Streicher, a close associate of Adolf Hitler since the early 1920s and a fanatic antisemitic ideologue. Wager also investigated other employees of the publishing house, such as editor Karl Holz, who drove the paper's strongly antisemitic stance and heaped public hatred on the Jewish population. In total, the staff of the *Stürmer* publishing house numbered in the hundreds, including both permanent and freelance editorial employees.

Der Stürmer gained its notoriety through the often obscene anti-Jewish caricatures on its front page. A key part of Wager's discussion is how illustrator Philipp Ruprecht, using the seemingly harmless pseudonym 'Fips', developed his antisemitic views and his interpretation of antisemitic stereotypes in his drawings over the years, turning them into the newspaper's trademark. "*Der Stürmer* without Fips would not have been *Der Stürmer*", Wagner quotes from a Denazification court trial against Ruprecht after the end of the war (97). Furthermore, the technical aspects of the production, such as special editions, extra issues, and sister publications, provide an important insight into the sheer magnitude to Streicher's media empire. By the mid-1930s, Streicher was seeking diversification in his range of publications, with antisemitic illustrated books, manuals, specialist volumes and even children's books. The first such volume *Trau keinem Fuchs auf grüner Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid!* ('Trust no fox on the green heath and no Jew on his oath!') from the *Stürmer* publishing house appearing in 1936 (176).

In the second section, Wager turns her focus on illuminating the interactions between the medium and its readership. Most significant here are her accounts of the mass submissions from readers, the notorious '*Stürmerkästen*' (*Stürmer* display boxes) erected on private initiative (232). She addresses the traces the paper left in both national and international press coverage. Through tracking official records, ego-documents, and legal assessments and an examination of the postwar legacy of its propaganda, *Der Stürmer* has remained synonymous with Nazi propaganda to the present day (346).

Der Stürmer thrived primarily on its direct interaction with readers, which the paper actively exploited to promote the social stigmatisation of individuals who failed to conform to its antisemitic worldview and to reinforce extremist anti-Jewish narratives. Its notorious 'letters to the editor' column exemplified the close bond between the newspaper and its readership, as many contributors began with the formula '*Lieber Stürmer*' ('Dear *Stürmer*') (204). In addition, submitted photographs of individuals were used to enable public denunciations and expose alleged misconduct – such as shopping in Jewish-owned shops – thereby further reinforcing the antisemitic worldview (228). In this context, the author refers to interactions between readers and the newspaper as an 'analogue social network' and describes the readers as 'content providers' akin to echo chambers in contemporary social media (343). Her analogy seems fitting, considering the use of privately erected display cases in which parts or full issues were presented, allowing for public reading and discussion of the paper's content. Notably, Wager has meticulously researched the locations within the sphere of influence of the German Reich and recorded in her book a chronologically arranged list of 2,128 display boxes, while acknowledging that the actual number was considerably higher.

In this respect, Wager's study demonstrates that the narrative of the 'seduced Germans' who simply fell victim to National Socialist propaganda is not sustainable (347). Far too many contemporaries participated eagerly in antisemitic narratives and

incitement, opportunistically aligning themselves as ‘*Volksgenossen*’ (National Comrades) in these campaigns.

Despite the solid substantiation of her sources, her insights remain relatively fragmentary, as questions concerning the broader impact of propaganda beyond the immediate newspaper–reader interaction remain unanswered, not least because the Nazi regime did not systematically investigate media effects (14). The study, for example, does not address how the antisemitic narrative evolved over the course of publication – from the Weimar Republic to the end of the Third Reich – nor what influence *Der Stürmer* exerted on other media.

Ultimately, Melanie Wager’s case study compellingly illuminates the history and principal figures behind *Der Stürmer*, with the strength of her research located in the analysis of the paper’s distinctive relationship with its readership. She demonstrates how this connection fostered a form of fan culture and fanaticism, transforming readers through a process of self-empowerment from passive consumers of the publication into active participants and players. *Der Stürmer and It’s Readers* clearly shows how *Der Stürmer* served to reinforce an already entrenched antisemitic worldview in large parts of the population. Wager’s work constitutes a significant scholarly intervention, offering a distinctive contribution to an extensively researched historical period.

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Telò, Mario, *Greek Tragedy in a Global Crisis*; London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2023; paperback, pp. 294, RRP: \$39.95; ISBN 9781350348127.

In *Greek Tragedy in a Global Crisis*, Professor Mario Telò of UC Berkeley continues his rhetorical exploration of the enduring relevance of Graeco-Roman antiquity to the modern world. Written during a COVID-19 isolation period, his close readings of ‘ten emblematic Greek tragedies’ draw on a vast breadth of multidisciplinary works – from queer theory to contemporary art and classical reception – to uncover thematic resonances between the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and the anxieties of the (post)pandemic era (4). This is Telò’s first publication to directly address the COVID-19 pandemic, building on his earlier studies using antiquity as a lens through which to rethink contemporary modes and concepts, such as *The Materialities of Greek Tragedy* (2018) and *Queer Euripides: Re-readings in Greek Tragedy* (2022).

This work contributes to a growing classical engagement with the unfamiliar terrain of the ‘post’ – the post-human, the post-Anthropocene, and now, the post-pandemic – challenging modern conceptions of humanness and the biopolitical axiologies that assign greater value to some lives over others. While scholarship in the field of classical reception has frequently addressed political and ethical questions, there has been little focused engagement with the post-pandemic moment itself. Telò’s work breaks new ground by placing the pandemic’s specific pressures at the heart of his analysis, even as some aspects of this post-pandemic discourse remain fluid.

Greek Tragedy in a Global Crisis is divided into four parts, each thematically distinct yet interconnected. Part one foregrounds breath and bodily suffering; part two focuses on relationality, kinship, and disposability; part three turns toward the posthuman and planetary scale; and part four returns to breath as political resistance.

A primary emphasis throughout Telò’s work is on the strained, suffering, or expelled body. In chapter one, he connects Oedipus’ wish to ‘close up his wretched body so that (he) could be blind and hear nothing’ with the pandemic-driven impulse to disconnect from a world in crisis (15). For me, this moment extends beyond metaphor, capturing the profound desire to erase the body as a site of suffering, a situation familiar to anyone who has endured the severe physical congestion symptomatic of coronavirus. While the social focus of the text is insightful, Telò’s repeatedly overlooks these immediate, embodied realities central to the epidemic’s lived reality; a strange oversight that contrasts sharply with his broader conceptual focus upon the corporal, visceral body.

Nevertheless, the thematic grouping of suffering, insurrection, and breathlessness forms a throughline across the text. In chapter eight, Prometheus’ ‘frantically gesturing body’ becomes a site of breathless rage and infinite subversion, as he breathes and re-breathes his final breath, defiant in his deviance (177). In chapter

nine, Hecuba shatters dialogically into a series of breaths in the play's closing lines, literally 'becoming the air' as she exhales a final, breathless protest (189).

Telò's engagement with breathlessness reaches its culmination in the final section, which offers a sense of critical closure through a renewed focus on breath. This ties together his classically informed readings of the pandemic's necropolitical violence and viral death to stage a call for insurrection – both literary and literal (143). Here, Telò centres the death of George Floyd, invoking the 'respiratory crises' of COVID-19 to endow Floyd's final words – 'I can't breathe' – with transhistorical, multivalent significance (154).

Telò's sustained focus on George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement introduces another vital strand of the book: the unequal valuation of life during the pandemic, and the question of who gets to be protected, preserved, or sacrificed in the name of collective survival. Drawing on tragic examples, he examines the devaluation of Black, queer, and aging bodies during this period. His reading of *Iphigenia in Aulis* is particularly striking; framing Iphigenia, sacrificed for the good of the martial masses, as a symbol of the disposability of certain bodies, which became 'shockingly explicit at the outbreak of the pandemic' (76). Just as Iphigenia is offered up for the preservation of the state, the pandemic exposed how certain lives were disproportionately placed at risk or treated as expendable in the name of collective survival, particularly those already marginalised by race, sexuality, age, or class.

From this inquiry into precarity and expendability, Telò turns to the affective and relational dimensions of queer life under pandemic conditions. Centring the queer body in *Alcestis*, he surfaces moments of homoeroticism in tragedy to explore how non-normative attachments unsettle dominant narratives of kinship and survival. Despite the plague-haunted backdrop of both ancient tragedy and modern crisis, queerness here ultimately resists the normative logic that renders certain lives and forms of intimacy expendable, creating space for alternative, fluid modes of intimacy and care.

While his reading of the 'tragedy of heterosexuality' is both provocative and illuminating, its relative neglect of gendered violence – and its rise during the pandemic – feels disconnected from the previous chapter's focus on bodily vulnerability and structural abandonment (79).

Telò's most speculative, and arguably most ambitious, readings come as he shifts from pandemic-specific suffering to planetary-scale meditation. These chapters explore how the pandemic made tangible the prospect of human extinction and briefly revealed the Earth's capacity to heal in the absence of human intervention.

At the centre of this exploration are Telò's perceived tragic characters, who are desperate to reconnect with the earth. In this context, chapter six reads Antigone's famous desire to join her dead brother in the ground as a longing for reconnection with Gaia. In chapter seven, Aeschylus' Niobe not only reconnects with Gaia but becomes her. For Telò, frozen and weeping on stage, she comes to symbolise the enduring resources gifted by the Earth (or the mother, Gaia) which are ultimately

pillaged and depleted. Though these readings are particularly inspired – and satisfy my own obsession with the classically posthuman – the book’s previously sustained focus on the COVID-19 pandemic becomes noticeably obscured here. The shift from pandemic-specific suffering to speculative ecology risks fracturing the cohesiveness of his otherwise incisive analysis. Antigone’s yearning to physically connect with the deep earth and Niobe’s transformation into stone are deeply corporeal gestures, and while Telò draws out their materiality, his retreat from the visceral realities of illness and isolation blunts their impact.

Telò’s greatest strength lies in his ability to trace unexpected continuities between ancient theatrical imaginaries and contemporary crises in a way that remains innovative and relevant even years after the pandemic’s onset. His readings are ambitious and often dazzling in scope, and his talent for mobilising classical texts to interrogate present-day politics is undeniable. The work pulses with the momentum of the burgeoning field of classical posthumanism alongside the philosophical uncertainties of a (post)pandemic future, a pairing rich with striking potential. Though Telò’s engagement with the body is a compelling thematic constant, the book occasionally sacrifices experiential immediacy for theoretical reach, particularly when moving into speculative posthumanism in the later chapters, where the immediacy of pandemic suffering becomes more diffuse. In privileging structural and symbolic registers, Telò at times sidelines the raw, embodied realities that these tragedies so powerfully convey. Ultimately, *Greek Tragedy in a Global Crisis* reminds us that the classics are not relics but restless companions, breathing with us even through our most difficult moments.

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