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# Morbus Anglicus; or, Pandemic, Panic, Pandaemonium

Justin Clemens

**Abstract:** Mid-17th century England births two fateful new signifiers: pandemic and pandaemonium. Although both words are founded on a Greek root *pan*, meaning all, neither designate a firm or flourishing polity. The words also retain close etymological, homophonic, and semantic relations to another crucial word of the time: panic. Yet these terms do not simply indicate the destruction or abolition of politics or the political, but rather reconstitute the problem of politics according to a radical paradox. This essay examines the emergence and reconstitution of these signifiers in a philological matrix inflected by plague, civil war, religious violence, scientific inquiry, and monarchical restoration, in order to proffer several theses about their significance and operations in and for politics that subsists beyond the specificities of that site.

**Keywords:** Panic, Pandemic, Pandaemonium, Giorgio Agamben, Thomas Hobbes, John Milton.

*Fama erebat enim, sparsitque per oppida nostra  
Extremum genti classe venire diem;  
Atque metum concepit tunc mea mater  
Ut pareret geminos meque metumque simul.<sup>1</sup>*  
Thomas Hobbes, *Life*

'yet is there great difference between *spot and spot*, *plague and plague*.'  
John Sheffeld, *The hypocrites ladder*

*We're all in this together.* Whatever this phrase — which circulates everywhere in 2020 — might mean, it is simultaneously unclear, imprecise, and offensive. As a kind of anticipated proof of its unbiddable obscurity, mid-17<sup>th</sup> century England births two fateful new signifiers, still momentous today: *pandemic* and *pandaemonium*. Although both words are founded on a Greek root *pan*, meaning *all*, neither designate a firm or flourishing polity — precisely putting into question the status of the 'we,' the 'all,' the 'this' and the 'together.' Yet neither term simply indicates the destruction or abolition of politics or the political, but rather reconstitutes the problem

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<sup>1</sup>There are a number of near-contemporaneous English translations of this verse, e.g., 'For Fame had rumour'd, that a Fleet at Sea,/Wou'd cause our Nations Catastrophe;/And hereupon it was my Mother Dear/Did bring forth Twins at once, both Me, and Fear,' Anon. 1680, p. 2. Another version runs: 'For Fame now raised and scattered through the land/News that the day of judgment was at hand,/Which struck so horribly my mother's ear/That she gave birth to twins, myself and fear.' I would also like to thank Joseph Hughes and Tom Ford for their extensive critical remarks on a draft version of this essay.

according to a radical paradox. The words furthermore retain close etymological, homophonic, and semantic relations to another crucial word of the time, perhaps for all times: *panic*. This essay examines the emergence and reconstitution of these signifiers in a philological matrix inflected by plague, civil war, religious violence, scientific inquiry, and monarchical restoration, in order to proffer several new theses about their significance and operations in and for politics that subsists beyond the specificities of that site. This examination will move from the political, medical, and literary ferment of the 17<sup>th</sup> century back to Plato, before returning to Thomas Hobbes and John Milton. It concludes with several methodological remarks about the status of what Jacques Lacan would call *lalangue* or a kind of ‘political unconscious’ of language itself.

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In 1666, Gideon Harvey published *Morbus Anglicus*, the *English Sickness*. In characteristic 17<sup>th</sup> century style, the full title of this treatise spares no detail of its contents:

*Morbus anglicus: or, The anatomy of consumptions Containing the nature, cause, subject, progress, change, signes, prognosticks, preservatives; and several methods of curing all consumptions, coughs, and spitting of blood. With remarkable observations touching the same diseases. To which are added, some brief discourses of melancholy, madness, and distraction occassioned by love. Together with certain new remarques touching the scurvy and ulcers of the lungs. The like never before published.*<sup>2</sup>

Harvey, a successful London physician who had been educated at Oxford and Leiden,<sup>3</sup> was concerned, as the title suggests, with what he figured as the *national* character of the condition. The title concerns itself not only with the physical vicissitudes of the disease that is consumption — tuberculosis, which directly affects the lungs of those it afflicts — but, in accordance with a kind of physico-philological confusion, moreover promises to treat of several associated disorders of love, etc. (which, as we will see, remain surprisingly germane to the matter). Yet, if we are still in the realm of the humours, of the transmission of diseases through

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2 Harvey 1666, title page. According to Cesari et al. 2011, the term also signified what we now call ‘rickets’: ‘the first clear descriptions of rickets were provided by Daniel Whistler in 1645 and by Francis Glisson in 1650 in England, where this condition was endemic at the time; it was even called *morbus anglicus*, or “the English disease.”’ The translation of Glisson’s Latin treatise into English uses the term *morbo puerili*; its chapter XIX poses the question ‘Why this Disease happeneth more frequently in England, then in other countreys?’ There, the reasons for specifying a disease by a national modifier are clearly enumerated, as wide distribution (‘frequency’), topical inclemency, greatness of topical inclemency, frequency of recurrence: see Glisson 1651, pp. 202-3. There was evidently a widespread (pandemic?) drive to typify a disease in national terms at the time.

3 Wallis 2008.

miasma, of a fondness for organology and Aristotelian-style taxonomies, something new is also materializing.

For it is in justifying his nomination of this *morbus* as characteristically *anglicus*, that Harvey mobilizes a fateful signifier. He writes: ‘Some diseases do more generally haunt a Country... whence such diseases are termed Endemick or Pandemick.’<sup>4</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this is the first attested use of *pandemic* in English to denominate the universal spread of a disease. The year — 1666 — is of course not insignificant in English epidemiological history either: it is the year of the Great Fire of London, which itself followed the last Great Plague of 1665. Indeed, in 1665, Harvey had himself already rushed *A Discourse of the Plague* into print, which spoke of ‘The Nature, Causes, Signs, and Presages of the Pestilence in general. Together with the state of the present Contagion.’<sup>5</sup> What we might today call an epidemiological state of emergency is unsurprisingly the occasion for the word’s appearance as such in English medical texts: it concerns not only a contagion that is widespread and virulent across a particular locale or locales, but the whole of the people *per se*. Harvey’s tract itself seems to have been moderately successful, being reprinted at least twice within the decade; the word itself has enjoyed an even better run.

Let us moreover note that Harvey’s leading syntagm *morbus anglicus* wasn’t always strictly applied to consumptive disorders alone. The scurrilous playwright Robert Greene, notorious early critic of none other than William Shakespeare, and decisive contributor to the popular genre of ‘coney catching’ — ribald tales of con-men and -women — had already applied it over 70 years before Harvey to the syphilitic pox in his 1592 text *A Disputation, Betweene a Hee Conny-Catcher, and a Shee Conny-Catcher, whether a Theefe or a Whoore, is most hurtfull in Cousonage, to the Common-wealth*. ‘Whensoueu it first grew,’ announces Greene’s saucy whore Nan a Traffique, ‘it is so surely now rooted in England, that by S. (Syth) it may better be called *A Morbus Anglicus* then *Gallicus*.’<sup>6</sup> Greene’s sally — that the French pox was now so entrenched that it was to be considered native to English soil — compounds the *con* with the *con* with the *con*, *connerie* with *conny* with *contagion*, deception with sexuality with infection. This triple *con* is articulated with (or by) yet another *con*, with the *with* itself, the Latinate prefix of binding. Whatever *together* is, is in other words, freighted by this conning *with*.<sup>7</sup> And it is not

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4 Harvey 1666, 1.2.

5 Harvey 1665, title page.

6 Greene 1592, np.

7 Indeed, in 17<sup>th</sup> century English, ‘con’ could also mean a rap with the knuckles or to steer a ship, and could be homophonic and homonymic with cunning, conning (as in knowing), canny (wise), etc. A coney is a rabbit, both the animal, and ‘a bunny’ as one still can say of a potential dupe.

just the content of the conny-catching pamphlets that is important, but their form: their success as a genre was one of the preconditions for the massive explosion of comparable printed materials through the century.<sup>8</sup>

The word *morbus* was indeed popularly variably applied for its mixed medical-moral significations. In 1657, only a few years prior to Harvey's medical disquisitions, John Sheffeld, the soon-to-be-ejected minister at St. Swithins, had published his own fulmination against the Protestant disease par excellence: hypocrisy. Sheffeld's title does the job you might expect: *The hypocrites ladder, or looking-glasse. Or A discourse of the dangerous destructive nature of hypocrisie, the reigning and provoking sin of this age*. Sheffeld writes of hypocrisy as 'Wee had once, our Chronicles tell us, a disease very infective and destructive to the English called *Morbus*, or *sudor Anglicus*, the Sweating Sickness.... this is a worse disease with which the English are now tainted, this may bee called *Morbus Anglicus*, too properly.'<sup>9</sup> Four years later, we find an anonymous preacher writing in similar vein that 'possible it is for men (yea too ordinary) to fall from grace: the Text supposeth it, and in another place, *Heb. 12.15* the Apostle *Items* us to *look diligently lest any fall from the grace of God*, the Angels did so at first, and *Adam* soon after, and that which was *Morbus Angelicus* then, is *Morbus Anglicus* now.'<sup>10</sup> À la the famous Pereckian lipogramatic fiction *La Disparition*, the excision of the letter *e* irreparably marks by its absence the Fall of the English from their angelic ancestry.

The revivification of the Latin pun *angels/Angles* clearly does a lot of work for the 17<sup>th</sup> century English, as indeed does the pun *mors* (death)/*morbus*. Disease, death, spiritual sin, and medical morbidity: these are self-evidently fundamental terms of a *national* politics as much as they are of physic, which are seeking their paradoxical binding in a new substantive.<sup>11</sup> As we can see in the otherwise diverse uses made of *morbus anglicus* by Greene, Harvey, and Sheffeld, it manifests as a sickness that bears the name of the nation, of the people itself. Whatever the differences that these authors intend by the name — pox, hypocrisy, consumption — the disease remains at once physiological, sexual, and theologico-political. Utterly real, it is spread by the promiscuous mingling of dissimulating bodies. It affects — or threatens to affect — everyone. The whole, the all, of the polity is at stake. One can immediately see why a new adjective such as *pandemick* might just pop out under the pressure of such febrile circumstances.

8 See Bayman 2007; Raymond 2003.

9 Sheffeld 1657, np.

10 Anon 1661, p. 74.

11 For an unexpected modern revivification of the term *Morbus Anglicus*, this time in the context of the 'invasion of Anglo-American terms' into contemporary Italian, see Castellani 1987.

Yet Harvey's is not the first known use of the word in the language. It had recently been used in the bitter context of late-Commonwealth political pamphleteering. In 1659, the millennial Fifth Monarchist writer John Rogers had published *Diapoliteia*, an attack on Richard Baxter, William Prynne, and James Harrington, in which he had announced that:

it is a *wicked thing* to appoint the *equality* simply, altogether according *to tother* (i.e., upon the whole *number*, or Promiscuous *Chaos* of the people.) And it appears from what happens, that no *Commonwealth* of this kind, hath *stability*, or can stand long! (mark that!) and the reason is this, because it is impossible from the first error committed in the beginning (or first laying of the *Commonwealth*) there should not happen some *extream evil*, or other. Thus far for the *sence* (and sentence) of his own *Oracle* (to name no more) against such an unjust *Equality of Pandemick Government* and foundation; without distinction of *Dignitaries*, or discrimination of the *Good* from the *Bad*, as a very unadvised thing, that will certainly *rob* the *well-affected* of their *Rights*! give them up to the *Dammees* of the Times! and but put them into an *equal capacity* for present! and into an under-capacity for future! (or by unavoidable consequence, through *over-balance of Number*) with their *enemies*!<sup>12</sup>

Rogers here makes a distinction between the *number* of the people (the whole) and their *worthiness* to govern (their dignity). The whole of the people — as a 'promiscuous chaos,' a 'pandemick government' — would inevitably entail for Rogers the engulfment of Reason, and the collapse of the government into something like Hobbes' state of nature, a war of all against all. Yet he agreed with Harrington that 'both desired a commonwealth, adding that we can live "with more freedom" if there are no lords. He opposed monarchy and cried up the Good Old Cause.'<sup>13</sup> The barrier against the chaos of numerical distribution — whether by all (democracy), some (aristocracy), or one (tyranny), by tithes and law — would require a rule by the 'saints,' the messianically-driven conviction of the Fifth Monarchists. If we hardly need add that this dream did not eventuate, one can immediately see the crypto-Leninist commitment: Rogers envisages a vanguard of steely-minded, exemplary men who will lead and govern the people to salvation through action, not inheritance.

12 Rogers 1659, p. 78. As Christopher Hill summarizes the Fifth Monarchist position: they 'believed that the reign of Christ upon earth was shortly to begin. This view was held by many respectable Independent divines, who drew no directly political conclusions. But for less-educated laymen, under the economic stress of the revolutionary decades, especially after the defeat of the Levellers and the dissolution of the Barebones Parliament, Fifth Monarchy became a desperately held hope,' 168. See also Hill 2016, pp. 51-68; Strumia 1989.

13 Hill 2016, p. 60; Hammersley 2013.

The book's alarming title — which one might be tempted to mistranslate into a more contemporary idiom as *Dissensus* — directs its attentions to the political splitting and traversal of the body politic, which is precisely figured in medical terms. *Diapoliteia* expressly addresses itself to the Council of State, in presenting the Commonwealth anatomically, physiologically, pathologically, as a body mangled or otherwise maltreated by the attentions of politico-theological butchers such as Prynne: 'As to the Gentleman's SKILL, it is apparent to most men, that he succeeds more in the *Ektomy* & *Apotomy* (or most cruel incision & wounding) then in the true Art or *Anatomy* of the *Commonwealth*... (with a rough, rash, rending, vulnerary *Dissecting*, or rather Bis-secting (in his two Books) of the most Principal Members of it, without order, Rule or Reason in it.'<sup>14</sup> Rogers' rhetoric also shows a propensity for organ medicaments: Physick, Hepaticks, Cephalicks, and so forth. What is precisely lacking from the botched dissections and prescriptions of his enemies is a true *panacea*, a spiritual cure-all for the ills of the commonwealth.

Although the Fifth Monarchists were obliterated as any kind of social or political movement by the Restoration, Rogers himself survived to study — what else! — medicine in Holland, before returning to England... where he possibly died in the 1665 plague. In any case, it is certain that — like most if not all of his interlocutors — Rogers had knowledge not only of the Galenic, but of more strictly philosophical antecedents of the term *pandemic*.

Certainly, the adjectives *pandemial* and *pandemical* had already been in sparing use in English medical and theological texts since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, deriving from the *pandemus* of post-classical Latin, itself an incorporation from the Greek. One religious controversialist, the Puritan minister and unlicensed medical practitioner Alexander Leighton had deployed it in his *Speculum belli sacri* of 1624, written in the form of a military treatise: 'I haue laid open (according to my small skill) the *pandemicall* diseases of warr, together with the remedies: by the way, I haue touched vpon domestick affaires: and in all this course I haue made the sacred word the *loadstone*, the *compasse*, and the *lesbian rule*, whereby to square and direct all the rest.'<sup>15</sup> The formation *pandemial* is even older. Given this context, is there then any real difference between 'pandemical' and 'pandemic,' other than a minor, irrelevant excision of the little letters 'all'?

Three brief remarks. First, it is at the very least amusing that the

14 Rogers 1659, p. 3. Note the cruelty of Rogers' rhetoric, in that it alludes to Prynne's physical torments following two famous trials in the 1630s: found guilty of sedition by the Star Chamber in 1633, Prynne's ears had been 'lightly cropped'; after the 1637 reappearance before the chamber, his ears were fully excised, his nose was slit, and the initials S.L. (for 'Seditious Libeller') were branded on his cheeks in a public torment that was moreover badly botched by the executioner.

15 Leighton 1624, np. Not irrelevantly, Leighton himself had been an intimate of Prynne's, and himself suffered public torments and mutilation.

word *pan* in Greek means *all*, which suggests the latter's vanishing is simultaneously a kind of vanquishing of a trans-lingual semantic redundancy. Second, the suffix 'all' or 'al' is a signature adjectival termination in English.<sup>16</sup> Its disappearance in *pandemic* nudges the word towards a more typically nominal form.<sup>17</sup> On the model of quasi-technical terms like *prognostic* or *hypochondriac*, *emetic*, and *cathartic* — frequently used both nominally and adjectivally in the period — we will posit that a *crypto-nominalization* is at play, an instance of the null conversion or zero derivation that so often occurs in English, such that 'pandemic' is no-longer-simply-adjectival yet not-yet-nominal. Third, this period is widely considered to have given the decisive impetus to the forging of a new kind of scientific discourse in English, one of whose key operations is precisely such a nominalization.<sup>18</sup>

Not insignificantly, the *locus classicus* for *pandemic* comes from none other than 'the divine Plato' himself (to use a phrase beloved by Sigmund Freud). In the *Symposium*, Pausanias is the second of the assembled speakers following Phaedrus, who had himself identified Eros as the oldest of the gods, and the greatest benefactor of humanity. In Phaedrus' wake, Pausanias announces that:

you will all agree, gentlemen, that without Love, there could be no such goddess as Aphrodite. If, then, there were only one goddess of that name, we might suppose that there was only one kind of Love, but since in fact there are two such goddesses there must also be two kinds of Love. No one, I think, will deny that there are two goddesses of that name — one, the elder, sprung from no mother's womb but from the heavens themselves, we call the Uranian, the heavenly Aphrodite, while the younger, daughter of Zeus and Dione, we call Pandemus, the earthly Aphrodite.<sup>19</sup>

Eros, too, supposedly follows the division of Aphrodite into *Uranian* and *Pandemos*: pandemic love is the love of men and women, of bodies,

16 The suffix *-al*, according to the OED, is used for 'forming adjectives with the sense "of or relating to that which is denoted by the first element,"' and is attested in forms such as *-ale*, *-alle*, *-ell*, *-ell*, *-al*, *-all* from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on.

17 Trevian 2015 remarks that 'Whether separable or not, *-ic*... is chiefly adjectival. Over 90% of the *-ic* words delivered by the Corpus are labelled as adjectives only. Most of the remaining 10% are described in dictionaries as alternately adjectival and nominal,' p. 21. The latter is now indeed the case for *pandemic*, which is, moreover, also exceptional in that it contravenes the principle that 'The suffix *-ic* is theoretically always denominal' (as we shall see in more detail below).

18 On the operations and ordering implications of nominalization in scientific discourse, see the classic account of Halliday 2004; also Bello 2016.

19 Plato 1961, p. 534-535, 180d.

whereas Uranian love is that love which inspires enthusiasm for *arete* (excellence, virtue, thriving). The word *pandemos* itself derives immediately from ‘pan’ (all, everything, and also from the name for the theriomorphic god), and ‘demos’ (the people). *Pandemos* is earth-born and earth-borne, mixing men, women, and boys rapidly and indiscriminately in its shallow quest for enjoyment. Uranian love, by contrast, is (allegedly) not vitiated by femininity nor by vulgar physicality as it is linked to ‘a goddess whose attributes... are altogether male’: an older elite man selects a younger elite man for physico-psycho-pedagogical ends. The mob versus the cosmos, then, a false or degraded universal versus an elite universal.

In his commentary on Pausanias in *Seminar VIII*, Jacques Lacan notes that the former offers ‘the discourse of a social observer’ in his descriptions of the laws of love in the Greek world — an account of the production and operations of social values in the sphere of love — before linking the spirit of Pausanias’s account to the contemporary story of ‘a rich Calvinist.’<sup>20</sup> Lacan underlines that Pausanias approves of the Athenian legal restrictions insofar as they are concerned with a certain goal of virtue. The beloved, though younger than the lover, must already have some power of nascent discernment, just as the older, exemplary lover must be seeking something virtuous in the beloved. The lover provides *phronesis* and an entrée to *arete*; the beloved stands to gain *paideia*, education, and *sophia*, wisdom. As a recent commentary on *Seminar VIII* underlines: ‘Even though Pausanias’ higher love is based on a meritocracy — one in which it is ignoble to love someone for their money — it is still founded on an exchange at the level of profit.’<sup>21</sup> Supply and demand, then, as the sign of a certain social election, a careful investment in a set of imaginary goods.

Pausanias, in other words, is a prudent financial advisor in the field of love, and it is as such that Lacan suggests that it is the ludicrous sophistry of his speech that has inspired Aristophanes to such uncontrollable laughter that it leads to the hiccups that prevent the latter from speaking in his own proper turn. Lacan thereby strenuously repudiates the position that sees Pausanias’s position as a distant anticipation of Kantian morals. If Pausanias’s disquisition is itself presented within the dialogue as comic, it is not only because its division of kinds is subsequently shown to be at once narrowly partisan and conceptually unsustainable, self-serving, and sententious — Lacan notes that several years after the time of the dialogue Pausanias elopes to Macedonia with Agathon! — but because it is undermined by the economics of its own putative virtue.

20 Lacan 2017, p. \*\*.

21 Swales 2020, p. 45. See also Fink 2016, p. 170.

However funny one might find Pausanias’s efforts, it is the distinction that he makes between the Pandemical and the Uranian that re-emerges in the treatises of Harvey, Rogers, and others (who often directly cite Plato<sup>22</sup>), if in an unutterably different context. If Lacan’s drawing a link between Pausanias and a contemporary French Calvinist as exemplifying a rich man’s ideology may seem a long bow, it certainly speaks to something desperately urgent for the English Puritans. ‘Pandemic’ can now modify both ‘government’ and ‘sickness’ equally. And as we have suggested, the *pandemical* is itself on the way to becoming *pandemic*, a substantive: in doing so, it no longer modifies a becoming but prefigures an actuality. That paradoxical actuality is the self-dissolving uproar of a community whose unity and equality are merely numerical and topical, not bound according to reason’s light but to pure aggregation in a place. The *pan* of the *demos* marks the *atopia* and *chaos* of *hedone*.

But this deadlock is also precisely why the theologico-politico-medical polemics of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century found it impossible to construct and maintain an idea of polity that did not fall back into ochlocracy or tyranny. When Cromwell died, nobody could present a better model for the transmission of power than blood inheritance itself; Oliver’s own son Richard briefly becomes Lord Protector before the English call back the very son of the king they tried and executed to revivify the institution of monarchy they had so radically abolished. And the deadlock achieves its apotheosis barely a few decades later in the Glorious Revolution of 1688/9, where William and Mary sail over from the Netherlands to share the throne in the bizarre English parliamentary monarchy that has subsisted to our day.

We have mentioned that it is difficult in English to say *pandemic* without hearing the *panic* that is literally in it. Difficult today, it would have been nearly impossible in a 17<sup>th</sup>-century England in which the word *panic* — in all its orthographic variations, such as *panique*, *panick*, *pannicke*, and so on — was a staple of political discourse. Once again, a pun may be involved, for instance, in *panic seed* and *panic grass*, from the Latin *panicum* for a kind of grain: give us this day our daily bread. *Panic* qua fear had entered English via French by the 16<sup>th</sup> century — it is a word used by Rabelais — and was preponderantly used adjectivally, for example, as ‘panic fear,’ to designate a sudden and unreasoning terror (although it too seems to have been used, rarely, as a noun).<sup>23</sup>

22 See for instance the extraordinary little tract *Erotomania*, in which the author remarks ‘But we are to observe with Pausanias, that as there are two Veneres: the one Heavenly, called Urania, the daughter of Coelum, brought forth without a Mother: the other the daughter of Iupiter and Dione, commonly called Pandemia, or Vulgar: so likewise are there two Amores, Sonnes of these two Goddesses; the one Divine, and the other common and vulgar,’ Ferrand 1640, p. 3. See also Evelyn 1656, p. 99.

This standard use is precisely the target of Thomas Hobbes's correction in Chapter VI of *Leviathan*, 'Of the Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions; Commonly Called the Passions. And the Speeches By Which They Are Expressed,' in which he remarks:

*Feare*, without the apprehension of why, or what, Panique Terror; called so from the Fables, that make *Pan* the author of them; whereas in truth, there is alwayes in him that so feareth, first, some apprehension of the cause, though the rest run away by Example; every one supposing his fellow to know why. And therefore this Passion happens to none but in a throng, or multitude of people.<sup>24</sup>

Hobbes's correction or rather specification directly brings out the paradoxes of *knowing* at stake in panic: although one does not know why the other is panicking, one supposes that the other knows; panic depends on a subject supposed to know. And although it is a sudden reaction on the part of the individual to another individual's actions, the passion itself is distributed across a multitude that comes into existence as its own dispersal. This specification proves absolute for Hobbes. In the state of nature, an endless war in which life is nasty, brutish, and short, such panic terror makes no sense; one flees because another is approaching you; one in fact rationally flees, knowing that the other appears only to assault you. Neither multitude nor non-knowing is at stake. Panic fear can only take place amongst a constituted multitude: one flees because the other flees because one presumes the other knows something one doesn't.



23 There are literally hundreds of surviving pamphlets from the 1640s and 1650s, the time of the civil wars in England, in which the phrase appears in free variation: 'pannick fear,' 'panick Fear,' 'Panique terrours,' 'pannicke fear,' 'panicke feare,' etc. If Trevian 2015 emphasizes that in contemporary English, *panic* is one of the few nouns and verbs in *-ic* that *isn't* today adjectival, it certainly was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

24 Hobbes 2004, p. 36. Pan is mentioned once again in the section 'Of Religion,' where ancient humans invented spirits in nature: 'they filled almost all places, with spirits called *Daemons*: the plains, with *Pan*, and *Panises*, or Satyres; the Woods, with *Fawnes*, and *Nymphs*...', p. 80.

In a recent commentary on the famous frontispiece that guards the entryway to the *Leviathan* — that of the great crowned composite figure wielding a sword and a crook over a near-emptied city, while images of the engines of war and ideology take their place below, on either side of the knotted and tasselled curtain on which the title and author's name are embroidered — Giorgio Agamben picks up on a number of enigmatic details. Why is the colossus depicted as outside the city? Where does the figure stand in relation to the other elements of the image? Why is the city itself empty, excepting several tiny figures?

Agamben proceeds to suggest that the extraterritorial aspect of the figure designates the separation between the political and physical bodies of the city; the recomposition of the scale of its hidden body (on Vitruvian principles by Reinhard Brandt) implies that its feet 'float' somewhere behind the name of Thomas Hobbes himself, indicating the pertinence of the Schmittian geopolitical opposition of land and sea<sup>25</sup>; that this composite body is imaginary (an optical illusion), not real; that it indicates a division between the multitude of *citizens* and the *people* as such; that the only visible creatures remaining in the city are armed guards and the two figures that bear 'the characteristic beaked mask of plague doctors'<sup>26</sup>; that, following his own translation of Thucydides, Hobbes is recalling the plague of Athens. 'Hence the notion,' Agamben writes, 'that the *dissoluta multitudo*, which inhabits the city under the Leviathan's dominion, may be compared to the mass of plague victims, who must be cared for and governed.'<sup>27</sup> Following this insight, Agamben offers the term *ademia*, the absence of people, as the perennial condition of the state form as such.

Our own analysis suggests that, rather than *ademia* — a construction which appears nowhere in the period — *pandemia* would be a better term for what Hobbes is presenting. The streets of the city have indeed been emptied due to a plague, but it is a pandemic plague

25 For the most part, the interpretations of the figure (including Agamben's) fail to interrogate the sex of the figure, silently assuming that it is indeed a 'masculine' sovereign, composed either of synecdochally masculine bodies or some kind of mixture. This presumption, however, has precisely been interrogated by Janice Richardson, who in addition to an analysis of many recent accounts (including the intriguing Schmittian-inspired suggestion that, rather than comprising a human figure, what is concealed is that the figure in fact bears a fish's tail), invokes the legal doctrine of *persona covert* and proposes 'the frontispiece portrays the secularisation of another birth fantasy; that of Adam giving birth to Eve,' p. 69. Further along these lines, then, one might ask whether all the little bodies are in fact those of *adults*. In a private communication, Marion J. Campbell has suggested that the stage curtain itself covers what any psychoanalyst should expect: *nothing*, an empty and in-existent stage. The veiled open secret is that Leviathan is castrated, and Hobbes is literally covering for him.

26 Agamben 2015, p. 38. Agamben credits Horst Bredekamp for noticing the detail, but Francesca Falk for its first proper discussion, see Falk 2011. It is surely significant that recent 'pandemic philosophy' has enthusiastically returned to the plague aspects of the image, see e.g., Botting 2020, Poole 2020, Toscano 2020, in the wake of Falk's discussion.

27 Agamben 2015, p. 38.

of the paramount political affect that is *panic terror*. The *urbs* suffers a constitutional *morbis*; much like Hobbes says of himself, the city and panic were also born prematurely as twins. If this account is correct, then we can further confirm that by the 1660s the medical, politico-theological and philosophical histories of *pandemic* and *panic* are more generally in the course of their nominalization and integration. Not unexpectedly, then, this also becomes the moment and trigger for a radical revision of the homonymy by means of a poetic neologism.

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The first edition of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1667 in 10 books; the now-canonical 12-book version in 1674, just before Milton's death. If Milton — whose survival following the Restoration of 1660 was anything but assured — had previously published a volume of his poetry in 1645, he remained most notorious as a regicide, as the man who had penned *the* defences and justifications for the execution of Charles I. Still, *Paradise Lost* was an immediate hit. As is well known, the poem's action begins in appropriate epic tradition *in medias res*, with the devils awakening in the abyss of hell, discoursing of the causes and consequences of their diminished state, before setting about building themselves a palace. Mammon digs out the gold; Mulciber is the architect; Satan is underneath the lot:

Anon out of the earth a Fabrick huge  
Rose like an Exhalation, with the sound  
Of Dulcet Symphonies and voices sweet,  
Built like a Temple, where *Pilasters* round  
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid  
With Golden Architrave; nor did there want  
Cornice or Freeze, with bossy Sculptures grav'n,  
The Roof was fretted Gold. Not *Babilon*,  
Nor great *Alcairo* such magnificence  
Equal'd in all thir glories.[...].  
Meanwhile the winged Heralds by command  
Of Sovran power, with awful Ceremony  
And Trumpets sound throughout the Host  
A solemn Councel forthwith to be held  
As *Pandaemonium*, the high Capital  
Of Satan and his Peers...<sup>28</sup>

This name appears twice in the poem proper. In Book IX, Pandaemonium is again invoked as 'Pandaemonium, Citie and proud seate/Of Lucifer,

28 Milton 1667, 1.710-719, 1.752-757.

so by allusion calld,/Of that bright Starr to Satan paragond' (9 424-6). It is now a staple of commentary that Pandaemonium is modelled on St Peter's in Rome, and that its auxiliary images further emphasize the devilish Papal allusions; for instance, Urban VIII's personal insignia was a bee.<sup>29</sup> We could also emphasize the moral and material significance of the mining that founds the city.<sup>30</sup> The name *Pandaemonium* is modelled on *pantheon*, literally a place of and for *all demons*; it is first and foremost a toponym. The subsequent senses of wild uproar and Babelian confusion — if certainly at play in certain images of the devils and their spiritual progeny throughout the poem — are nonetheless not paramount in Milton's descriptions, which, at least initially, quite deliberately appear to have an impressive organisation and orderliness, propriety and property, much like the city on the *Leviathan* frontispiece.

Certainly, the prefix *pan* is emphasized. The mythic Pan and Pandora both feature in the poem. Pan appears in the description of Paradise itself as 'Universal Pan/Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance/Led on th'Eternal Spring' (4.266-268), and again in the description of Adam and Eve's bower: 'In shadier Bower/More sacred and sequesterd, though but feignd,/Pan or Silvanus never slept, nor Nymph/Nor Faunus haunted.' (4.705-7). Pandora follows rapidly after, diminished in comparison to Eve: 'More lovely then Pandora, whom the Gods/Endowd with all thir gifts' (4.714-715). These metaphors are not only bravura scene-setting indices of Milton's learning, allusions to a great classical tradition of pastoral and didactic poetry; they also evince two techniques that he characteristically deploys together. The first is his propensity to adjectival explication of proper names to the point of semantic redundancy — which might be considered Leibnizian if Leibniz were not already unconsciously Miltonic — such that Pan is introduced as 'Universal' or Pandora as 'endowed with all thir gifts.' The second is his radicalization of negation, such that the classical myths are not invoked simply as paradigms, but paradigms that, however magnificent, necessarily fail in comparison to the Biblical figures.

Despite all the *pans* that proliferate within the poem, neither *panic* nor *pandemic* appears there. Yet the use of either or both would be easily imaginable, given the scenes of the devils' rout by Messiah in heaven, or in the historical vignettes of the late books. Moreover, given Milton's intimate knowledge of the political discourses of the 1640s and 1650s, and not least his apparent fondness for some aspects of the Fifth Monarchist platform<sup>31</sup>, he could not have been unaware of the importance of panic

29 See *inter alia* McHenry 1995; Simons 1987.

30 See Clemens 2013 for an account of the links Milton makes between mining, slavery, and ecological destruction.

31 See Hill 2016, p. 68.

to, say, the proposals of Thomas Hobbes.<sup>32</sup> So is it mere homophony or alliteration that induces our invocation of Milton's pandaemonium in an essay on pandemic?<sup>33</sup>

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As noted, when it does appear in 17<sup>th</sup> century discourses, *pandemic* and its variants are explicitly referred to Pausanias's separation of the two kinds of love in the *Symposium*. Presumably due to the context of disease, we do not hear so much about Uranian or Uranick love in such accounts.<sup>34</sup> But 'Urania,' the proper name of the muse of Astronomy, appears very frequently in the period, in mathematical, astronomical and astrological texts, and indeed in poetry. One work from 1629 by Samuel Austin even contains a couplet signed by Austin's Muse, Urania herself, to the book's readers: 'You that are troubled with the Dog-disease,/Pray reade me o're; then censure what you please./Vrania.'<sup>35</sup> Examples could be multiplied. As for Milton, his invocation of Urania in the proem to Book VII is among the most famous sequences in all English poetry:

Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name  
If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine  
Following, above *th'Olympian* Hill I soare,  
Above the flight of *Pegasean* wing.  
The meaning, not the Name I call: for thou  
Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top  
Of old *Olympus* dwell'st, but Heav'nlie borne,  
Before the Hills appeerd, or Fountain flow'd,

.....  
32 There are two mentions of the Leviathan by name in *Paradise Lost*, which may or may not also be alluding to Hobbes' great text. But there are also other images that can look like pointed if esoteric jokes at Hobbes' expense if one takes the fishy interpretations of the *Leviathan* frontispiece seriously; for instance, there is this image from the catalogue of devils in Book 1: 'Next came one/Who mourn'd in earnest, when the Captive Ark/Maim'd his brute Image, head and hands lopt off/In his own Temple, on the grunsel edge,/Where he fell flat, and sham'd his Worshipers: Dagon his Name, Sea Monster, upward Man/And downward Fish,' (1.457-463).

33 The theologian Catherine Keller (2020) has recently picked up on the homophony, but without further investigating the philological network of these terms, i.e., 'Pandemic and pandemonium — was it mere alliteration insistently linking those two words in my head? They seem disconnected: the pandemic has spread eerie silence and ordered separation far more than the pandemonium of wild and noisy disorder. Then I remembered the original meaning of pandemonium "all the demons." Ah. That's it. What a host of demons the pandemic has been revealing: not supernatural spooks but hellish systems of collective oppression, of normalised injustice — normally hidden, like all smart demons, in plain view.'

34 We could find no references to the form 'Uranic' at all *before* 1680, when it starts to fitfully appear; and only three to 'Uranian,' perhaps the most pertinent in this context being to Cyril Tourneur's *The Transformed Metamorphosis* of 1600, in which he writes: 'He bent his mind to pure Vranian vses,/Vranianie, him did to heau'n vpreare,' n.p.

35 Austin 1629, np. One might also refer to *The Countesse of Mountgomerie's Urania*, the first known prose romance written by an English woman, Lady Mary Wroth in 1621.

Thou with Eternal wisdom didst converse,  
Wisdom thy Sister, and with her didst play.  
In presence of th'Almightie Father, pleas'd  
With thy Celestial Song (7.1-12)

So, whatever else it may mean, Urania goes in completely the opposite direction from Pandaemonium. Milton is directly alluding to the Pausanian division between two kinds of love, but gives it a twist; it can no longer be a true division.<sup>36</sup> For the heterodox Christian messianist Milton, there cannot be two kinds of love, only one. What seeks to separate and mingle promiscuously is demonic: so *pandaemonium* absorbs its adjectival antecedents *pandemic* and *panic* into a new proper name that simultaneously crystallizes their truth. In doing so, it drags us inexorably downwards: *facilis descensus Averno*, in Virgil's famous phrase. How then does one escape Pandaemonium in the fallen world, as the literal capital and place-holder of every human act? By the grace of God, of course. For Milton, this grace is given an ancient catachrestic name for a hazardous cosmic media event: Urania.

As I have noted, with other proper names of varying provenance Milton tends to explicate their sense and reference as continuous with, as enfolded within the name. Where Urania is concerned, he does something quite different. The name is a place-holder for something properly nameless, a Christian muse never named by the Bible, so much *of* the heavens that she cannot be seen by mortal sight: she speaks only to a blind man of things he then recites to be transcribed by others.<sup>37</sup> In governing his song, Milton hopes that she will 'drive farr off the barbarous dissonance of *Bacchus* and his Revellers' who destroyed Orpheus — themselves self-evidently figures that express and participate in pandaemonium. Milton's revolutionary nominations absorb a sequence of philological and political operations upon the *pan*, the *demos*, and the *demonic*, in order to oppose them to the insubstantial operation of poetic grace. The political aporia of the English *pan* is brilliantly resolved and sublimated — except, sadly, not as politics but as poetry.

\*

It would certainly be possible to trace this network forward, for example as it re-emerges in the work of Sigmund Freud, where *Panik* arises in a group when the leader is destroyed.<sup>38</sup> As an anonymous review in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* brilliantly phrases it: 'When these

.....  
36 See Samuel 1944 for a chronological table of Milton's citations of Plato, which tracks his explicit references to the dialogues, including the *Symposium*.

37 See Clemens 2012 for an account of the relationship between Milton and Galileo in *Paradise Lost*, whereby Milton seeks to trump Galileo's telescope with his muse Urania.

38 See Freud 1955, p. 96.

mutual bonds (which all depend on the great bond with the leader) break, then we have libido with the negative prefix — the stricken terror of panic.<sup>39</sup> As Freud underlines in a Hobbesian vein, in such panic the effect seems to be much greater than the cause. And in their own commentary on Freud's politics, in a presentation titled precisely '*La panique politique*,' Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy remark that: 'panic is the best and paradoxical representative of the essence of the *Masse*: It is the critical moment when, the affective bond having gradually been lost, the *Masse* breaks up into what really composes it, into narcissi which are estranged and opposed to each other.' Hence: 'The narcissus and the death of "the Other" are the panic truth of the political... which only assembles that which, by itself, disassembles and excludes itself.'<sup>40</sup> Panic is therefore an apocalypse of the political, insofar as it reveals precisely the absence of the All-Father, the Pan in the field of narcissi.

This essay has attempted a kind of logological reconstruction of certain decisive shifts in a network of crucial medical, moral, political and poetic signifiers in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century England, whereby literal fragments such as *pan*, *con*, *all*, *ic*, among others, are transformed and reconnected along quite novel pathways. The brief mapping of the vicissitudes of these pathways here has suggested, among other things, that *pandemic*, *panic*, and *pandaemonium* became key operators of a 'political unconscious' of the English language in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and, to some extent, have remained so ever since. It is no surprise, then, that another favourite word of the period proves to be *panacea*, a cure-all, whether it came, by century's end to mean tea, tobacco, opium, the blood of Christ, or some other confection.<sup>41</sup> Another very ancient word, a panacea is a *pharmakon*, an assay at a technopolitical solution for a morbidity that strikes at the whole. Still, as Leonard Cohen puts it, 'there ain't no cure for love.'

In the short self-critique that is 'Back and Forth from Letter to Homophony,' Jean-Claude Milner points to a passage of Lacan's presentation *La Troisième*, first delivered in Rome in 1975, in which the psychoanalyst proffers a critique of Saussure's nomination of the 'arbitrariness of the sign' in the name of the homophony of *lalangue*. 'It is neither pure chance nor arbitrariness, as Saussure says,' says Lacan, 'It is the deposit, the alluvium, the petrification [...] of the handling by a group of its own unconscious experience.'<sup>42</sup> What does this mean? Homophony, Milner glosses:

39 Anon 1923, p. 188.

40 Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1997, p. 10.

41 There are an extraordinary number and variety of texts spruiking an equally extraordinary number and variety of panaceas throughout the century and, again, which propose themselves as simultaneously physiological, sexual, political, etc.

42 Cited Milner 2017, p. 82.

is not an addition to the various dimensions of language; it is not an ornamental superstructure that does not modify the foundations of the building. On the contrary, it transforms radically everything that can be theorized about the Unconscious and its relationship to the fact of *lalangue*.<sup>43</sup>

Milner notes that his own resistance to such late statements by Lacan was a resistance to homophony: 'the material of *lalangue* is homophony, but homophony does not belong to *la langue*.'<sup>44</sup> Why is the material of *lalangue* homophony? Precisely because the same material — which is not yet a signifier *stricto sensu*, but a mark (whether aural, visual or other) which is in course of becoming-individuated in the perceptual field insofar as it is also becoming-bound to *jouissance* — draws in many different directions at once. But this is also why '*lalangue* is not a whole, it is *pastout* [notall]. There is no x that does not belong to *lalangue*, while there is an x at least that does not belong to *la langue*.'<sup>45</sup> Homophony precisely does not form an all or whole, a *pan*, because its subtraction from the (imaginary) 'whole' of *la langue* arises only insofar as it is entirely submerged in the latter. Yet nothing in *la langue* can be in principle excepted from homophony; the former is literally built on it. Moreover, homophony *effects* itself insofar as it cannot not recur in any situation of language, if in ways that are necessarily equivocal and literally unspeakable, as kind of enigma-event. Yet this is what links Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's remarks to Milner's: homophony qua material of *lalangue* is not only a *jouissance*-saturated enigma, but an event of *langue-panic* or *-pandemic* as such.

I would like to draw further on Milner's remarks in proposing the paradoxical concept of *synonymy*: an intra-linguistic event that, through a kind of internal short-circuiting of language, enables a kind of discrimination of indiscernibles through a binding of disparities that opens up new semantic possibilities, including the creation of new signifiers.<sup>46</sup> What seems to be self-identical significatory matter — at once homophonic and synonymous — turns out in fact to be a compacted heterogeneity, a constellation of black holes. So the phrase *morbus anglicus* starts to connect to *pan*, to *panic*, to *pandemic*, to *pandaemonium*, to *panacea* — as it itself vanishes into irrelevance. Yet it thereby leaves its residues in canonical political theories and practices of public safety,

43 Milner 2017, p. 85.

44 Milner 2017, p. 85.

45 Milner 2017, p. 89.

46 See Clemens 2015 for (comic) diagrams and (more serious) references. See also Ford 2018 pp. 205-215 for a brilliant demonstration of synonymy's operations in the difference between 'O' and 'Oh!' in William Wordsworth's poetry.

of biopolitics, in the divided figure of the absent and infected people.<sup>47</sup> Finally, it also induces the revolutionary restoration of an ancient signifier, *Urania*, that needs to be enunciated as the index of a breach with the *pan*, but whose meaning is other than any received signification — a movement of the immanent outside, neither one nor many, an other *jouissance*.

.....  
47To give only one, relatively recent example: ‘On May 21, 2009, WHO’s Director-General, Margaret Chan decided that influenza A (H1N1) was not going to become a pandemic. Not because of any epidemiological rationale but because the very term “pandemic” was feared to trigger global panic,’ Gilman 2010, p. 1866.

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