



Editorial

The Master, Professor Christopher Kelly

The University is shuttered. The College courts are empty. The sun still shines, eager to tease us out of our self-isolation. But there is no place for us in the sun (unless taking our daily exercise). And the world has changed – in ways we might never have thought possible – in the short space of six weeks. This small collegiate world has been turned upside down. It is Easter Full Term and our students are still at home. They are working as hard as ever; adapting to the régime of distance learning, Zoom supervisions and virtual meeting with their tutors. What has seemingly dissolved is that extraordinary face-to-face community (in Hall, in the Pelican Bar, in Chapel, in a one-to-one supervision, in a class or a seminar) – or at least it has been displaced.

This week I joined the first of a series of Zoom seminars for Corpus classicists (Fellows, postgraduates and undergraduates). One of our finalists read an excellent paper from his Part II thesis (on the first-person voice in Latin lyric poetry). Of course it was frustrating – video conferencing holds out the promise of real live face-to-face communication without it ever being realised. The experience is somehow hollowed out. More important than these petty dislikes, what struck me was how quickly and how well our students had adapted to exploit the best of this opportunity. Distance learning is no substitute for the real thing – and one day (not too far away) the core of the collegiate experience will return. In the meanwhile we should congratulate and support our students as they continue to push forward with their studies – and perhaps especially those in their final year deprived of the rigour of examinations (so not then an utter disaster), the Lucullan delights of May Week and the applause of graduation.

Our students are a resourceful and resilient group with all the high hopes and proper ambitions of youth. Their drive for academic excellence was brilliantly captured last week by this College's remarkable success on University Challenge. Was I the only person in the (virtual) room who thought this was an unfair contest? Imperial College London has ten thousand undergraduates – so comfortably thirty times the size of Corpus. That puts our splendid achievement in proper perspective. It was a moment to cheer on the College; it was a moment to cheer us all up. It was a moment to be unashamedly proud of being part of our shared endeavour. It was a moment to remind us – even in these long and tedious days – that this College does indeed deserve a place in the sun.



News from the College

Dr Michael Sutherland, Tutor for Undergraduate Admissions and College Teaching Officer in Physics

For Cambridge offer-holders, the month of August is usually filled with nervous anticipation, as exam boards across the UK get set to release the results of the June examinations. For some, there is disappointment when grades fall just shy of their offers. For others, there is relief and a sense of pride when offers are met, and the path is clear to matriculation in October.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education at all levels here in the UK and internationally. As a result, many students will not be sitting formal school examinations this year, and A-level and other grades will be awarded on the basis of internal assessments and the predictions of teachers and schools. This presents new challenges for Corpus and for higher education providers across the country.

At Cambridge, we have rightly taken the decision that all grades awarded in August will be treated in the normal way, and students who meet the conditions of their offer will be accepted to the University as usual. It is difficult however to predict with certainty how this will play out. For UK students, there may be a greater (or smaller) number achieving their offers than anticipated. For international students, there may still be barriers to travel in the autumn preventing them from studying in the UK, a particular worry for the 60% of our postgraduate students who come from the EU or overseas countries.



At Corpus we are watching the situation very closely, and are able to provide the latest advice and guidance to our understandably anxious offer-holders. As I see it, one unavoidable outcome of this situation is that the incoming cohort will likely benefit from additional help in adjusting to the rigors of university, and here there is cause for optimism. The robust teaching and tutorial support network implicit in the tightly woven Corpus community is ideally placed to assist these students. Our [Bridging Course](#), which is designed to provide three weeks of individualised preparatory teaching to students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds is a perfect example of this. We intend to run this as planned in September, either in person or remotely with the aim of helping students to start their university careers with confidence.

Looking ahead to future applicants, I am struck by how quickly my Corpus colleagues have adjusted to the use of new technologies to deliver our outreach programmes. Our Schools Liaison Officer, Will Moorfoot, has, for instance, opened up a hugely popular [booking system](#) for year 12 students to have online consultations about their university applications. Other Fellows have arranged to deliver remote taster lectures for prospective applicants, or record videos of themselves giving advice.

Like any organisation that measures its lifespan in centuries, one of the strengths of Corpus is the ability of its members to respond to change and to adjust to new ways of carrying out our core missions of education and research. I remain confident that we will be able to greet our new undergraduate and postgraduate students in the coming academic year with the high quality teaching and support networks for which we are known.



Reflections from the Fellowship

Professor Christopher Hann, Fellow in Social Anthropology and Director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, reflects on the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arcane academic debates (in my case in economic anthropology) are sometimes overwhelmed by real-world events that grip the researcher as a political citizen, and perhaps even personally, emotionally. This happened to me at the end of the last century with the collapse of Soviet socialism, and again in recent years with global financial collapse and the European "migration crisis" of 2015. The coronavirus of 2019 continues this series.

I flew Ryanair from Stansted to Berlin on 10th March and have been unable to return. The Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (one hour south of the capital) has been my vantage point to observe surreal sequences of events, locally and around the world. Most of our staff are in "home office" but I am able to work almost normally in my office. We subscribe to the international edition of the *New York Times*, which I read while eating my sandwiches at lunchtime (observing social distance, of course). The coverage and analysis of the NYT complement what I glean from the BBC and the German media. Most evenings (with the help of a satellite dish on our balcony) my wife and I watch the news on Hungarian state television.



In an [earlier blogpost](#), reflecting on pan-Eurasian dimensions of the pandemic and perhaps clinging irrationally to the banality that every crisis should harbour opportunities for creative renewal, I tried to be optimistic. I speculated that, following macabre statistical analysis, we can surely look forward to conclusive proof of the superiority of well funded welfare states, compared with countries lacking universal health care. Economists would concede the merits of public furlough programmes, when compared with the scale of instantaneous layoffs and social polarisation in the world's largest economy. If capitalism can only be saved (again) by massive state interventions, perhaps neoliberal free market dogmas would be rejected once and for all? If competent political management by the coalition government in Germany undermines extremist critics, perhaps populists elsewhere would be similarly starved of their oxygen?

A few weeks later, I have become more pessimistic. In Hungary, Viktor Orbán is continuing to undermine parliamentary democracy and playing sordid games to discredit the opposition (try imagining Boris Johnson attacking the Mayor of London for the deadly spread of the virus in an old persons' home for which the city is responsible). Not that those leading the UK or the US responses have distinguished themselves through their crisis management. Yet, in what Germans are calling *die Stunde der Exekutive*, even the ratings of incompetent, narcissistic leaders appear to be rising. The rancour of the Brexit debates is giving way to inclusive rhetoric invoking the spirit of the Blitz. The stock markets are already recovering. How quickly can labour markets follow? Will the improvements of decades in working hours and workers' protection now be jettisoned for the sake of accelerating the economic recovery? Small steps to avert global ecological devastation are already being reversed, because they conflict with the interests of powerful transnational corporations.

I would like to be proved wrong but, writing these lines at Easter, I now find it hard to believe in silver linings.



Alumni Perspective

Emily Jordan, Corpus alumna and start-up founder, has launched [Ancora.ai](#) to address the Coronavirus pandemic by connecting COVID-19 clinical trials to participants.

I left Cambridge in 2012, leaving the academic stresses of my laboratory studies behind for an entirely different set of challenges working in the digital health start-up world.

My entrepreneurial ambitions were realised in 2019 when I cofounded a company, Intrepida, with two former colleagues. We focus on artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to address problems in healthcare. We built a product called Ancora.ai to help patients search for and connect to clinical trials, and very shortly before our first launch for oncology patients, the Coronavirus pandemic occurred.

The pandemic has brought many disappointments and challenges for start-ups. Pitch events and venture capital fundraising opportunities were cancelled or put on hold, and the clinical studies sponsored by our target customers were paused. However, we also quickly realised that our product met a key need in the Coronavirus crisis and that we could help, which has been extremely motivating in such an unsettling time.

Since the start of the pandemic, many COVID-19 clinical trials have commenced around the world. The pace is increasing: Intrepida has tracked a 389% increase in the number of new trials initiated in the past two weeks. These COVID-19 clinical trials immediately need to recruit more than 415,000 participants to be fully enrolled. Healthcare systems are overwhelmed due to the pandemic and most institutions have little spare time or resource to devote to recruiting for and conducting clinical trials. However, clinical trials represent the most effective way to generate scientific evidence on prospective testing, treatment and prevention strategies to combat the pandemic. Ancora.ai supports trial recruitment and can help facilitate clinical research during this challenging time, so we worked tirelessly over several weeks to update our algorithms, originally designed for oncology, to support COVID-19 trial matching for patients and healthy volunteers.



Currently, more than 320 COVID-19 trials are live on Ancora.ai and trial data is updated on a daily basis.

Of the clinical trials for therapeutics and vaccines, 82% are for treatments already approved and on the market for other diseases. These have a history of safety data behind them and are likely to be approved faster for COVID-19 compared with other treatments in development. You can register for free at www.ancora.ai to search for and connect to these trials, as a patient or a healthy volunteer, and could gain early access to innovative treatments and new vaccines for COVID-19.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.intrepid-analytics.com/> and <https://www.ancora.ai/>

Emily Jordan (PhD alumna, 2009–2012, Neuroscience) is the COO of Intrepida, a health tech company focused on building technology solutions for healthcare, specifically using Artificial Intelligence (AI). Emily graduated from Columbia University and then earned her PhD in Neuroscience at the University of Cambridge as a Gates Cambridge Scholar.



New Fellows

Dr Han Yu, Non-Stipendiary Early-Career Research Fellow in Mathematics

Han is a postdoctoral research associate at the Department of Pure Mathematics and Mathematical Statistics. He completed a BA in Optical Engineering at Zhejiang University, Hangzhou and then a MSc in Theoretical and Mathematical Physics at Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich. From 2016–2019, he was a PhD student in pure mathematics with Dr Jonathan Fraser at the University of St Andrews. Han's research mainly focuses on pure mathematics, more specifically, Fractal Geometry, Dynamical Systems as well as Number Theory.

To relax, Han enjoys reading story books on Harmonic Analysis, Probability Theory and Combinatorics (together with Jazz or traditional Chinese music). Outside of mathematics, Han is an unskilled pianist, painter and BADminton player.



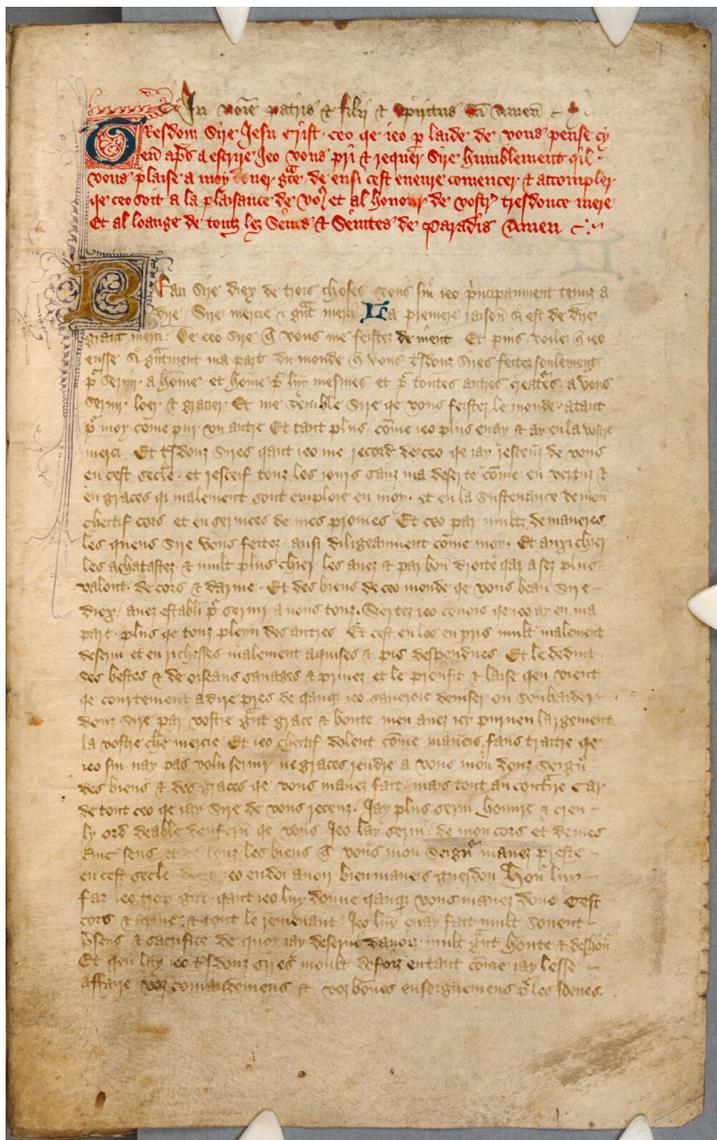
Observations from the Past

Dr Philippa Hoskin, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Fellow Librarian, shares fourteenth-century reflections on healing the sick.

Parker manuscript 218 *Le Livre de Seintes Medicines*, a late fourteenth-century volume, is the earliest surviving Anglo-Norman treatise known to have been written by a layman. That layman was Henry first duke of Lancaster (c.1310 – 23 March 1361) who applied to Edward III, on behalf of the guilds of Mary the Virgin and Corpus Christi, for permission to found the new college.

It is a devotional text in which sickness of the body is compared to sickness of the soul: Christ, as doctor, heals the senses from infection. When Henry wrote this work in 1354, plague was a familiar visitor to England (in fact, Henry died of plague himself in 1361). Not surprisingly, then, his descriptions of physical sickness reflect experience of the disease. We learn that goat's milk drunk in May was considered efficacious, on the grounds that the vegetation eaten by goats in May had absorbed the goodness of the sun, which could be passed on to the sick. Warm rose water was used to refresh those with fevers (although, presumably only those who were rich, like Henry) and, if a fever got worse, the still bleeding body of a freshly-killed cock might be placed on a patient's head.





In particular, Henry describes the use of 'triale' – a medicine made of poison, used to drive out the other poison of infection.

'If a man is poisoned, he has to get some medicine or else he is doomed to die quickly. And nothing is so good for him as triacle. This triacle is made and tempered with the strongest venom one can find anywhere. And, if it is stronger than the venom within the man, it expels that venom through its strength and virtue, and so the man is cured and does not die. But if the venom in the man is particularly potent and pernicious and has lingered in him for a long time, then the triacle cannot help and the man is made worse by it. For if one venom cannot expel the other, they will unite to destroy and kill the man.'

Henry tells us that this perilous medicine is made by smothering a scorpion so it disgorges its venom. In fact, we know from other sources, that it was usually made from the mashed flesh of snakes – rather cheaper and easier to obtain than scorpion venom.

This process, he says, is like the war between good and evil fighting with each other in the human soul. Triacle is like the traps of the devil. These temptations can have a good result for the sick soul if they make a person turn to God for help. On the other hand, if the temptations are strong and spiritual sickness has gone untreated for too long, they may lead to the destruction of the soul.

There was always a tendency in the medieval mind to try and find direct, causal links between natural occurrences, particularly those that caused human suffering and death, and internal spiritual states. Earthquakes, floods, droughts and plague were commonly explained as a result of human sin. In Henry's treatise we can see how a devout individual was able to transform his own experience of physical illness and contemporary medicine into a powerful allegory about the health and wellbeing of people's souls.

Images: CCCC ms 218, f. 1v. *The opening of Le Livre de Seintes Medicines*

Pelican in Brief is available on our website and all issues can be found [here](#).

The next issue will be published on 11 May.

For further information, please visit our website www.corpus.cam.ac.uk or contact

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