



**Pandemic Digital Poetry:
An Analytical Study of
Two Selected Social
Media Poems as Examples**

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الشعر الرقمي في مرحلة ما بعد الجائحة:
دراسة تحليلية لقصيدتين مختارتين من وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي
كمثالين

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المخلص :

ظهر الشعر الرقمي أو ما يعرف بالشعر الإلكتروني – كأحد فروع الأدب الرقمي أو الإلكتروني – منذ منتصف القرن العشرين وواصل انتشاره السريع حتى وقتنا الحالي، واعتمد في ذلك على تقنية أجهزة الحاسوب والشبكة العنكبوتية و شبكات الهواتف الذكية و منصات التواصل الإجتماعي المختلفة. وأسهمت التقنية الحديثة في مزج مؤثرات صوتية أو مرئية أو كلاهما للقائد، فأضفت عناصر من الإبهار والجمال عليها. وراح الشعر بقيمته الجمالية المتأصلة فيه والمجبول عليها يكسو تلك الوسائل التكنولوجية بحلة من الجمال المبهر، فنشأت علاقة جمالية تبادلية بينهما. ولكن ككل جديد: انقسم نقاد ذلك النوع من الشعر ما بين مؤيدٍ و معارضٍ أو مادحٍ و قادحٍ وهذا ما أبرزته الورقة البحثية كأحد أهدافها. ثم فاجأت جائحة كورونا العالم، كأسوأ كارثة عالمية منذ عقودٍ طويلة، ملقية عليه بظلال كئيبة من الموت والمعاناة و الخسائر المادية. ولم تجد الحكومات بد من فرض الحجر الصحي والإغلاق الكامل، فأصبحت كافة مظاهر الحياة بالشلل التام، و عانى الجميع من الإكتئاب و العزلة و افتقاد ذويهم. فأتى الشعر الرقمي كعلاج ناجع لتلك المشاعر السلبية والآثار النفسية المدمرة،

وزادت قيمته الإنسانية و الأدبية. ومن هنا نبع أهم أهداف الورقة البحثية ألا وهو إبراز دور الشعر الرقمي المتداول عبر منصات التواصل الإجتماعي في فترة مابعد جائحة كوفيد-١٩ أو ما يعرف بفيروس كورونا. و تستشهد عن طريق دراسة تحليلية بقصيدتي: "السطور الأولى للإيميلات التي تلقيتها في الحجر" و "الإغلاق" لجسيكا سالفيا و ريتشارد هندريك على التوالي كأمثلة، حيث نُشرت الأولى على موقع تويتر و الثانية على الفيسبوك و حققنا انتشارا واسعا. عالجت قصيدة "السطور الأولى..." لسالفيا العديد من مظاهر وعواقب كارثة كورونا، بينما تناول هندريك في قصيدته "الإغلاق" بعض الجوانب الإيجابية للأزمة وبعض الطول والإستراتيجيات لمواجهتها فجاءت قصيدته باعثةً على الأمل داعيةً للتكافل الإنساني. وبذلك تفتح الورقة البحثية المجال لإجراء دراسات مماثلة في هذا النوع من الشعر الحديث.

كلمات مفتاحية: الشعر الرقمي أو الإلكتروني، الجماليات، وسائل التواصل الإجتماعي ، جائحة (وباء) ، حجر صحي.

**Pandemic Digital Poetry:
An Analytical Study of Two Selected Social Media
Poems as Examples**

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Abstract:

Digital poetry or electronic poetry (e-poetry) – as a branch of digital literature or electronic literature (e-lit) - has sprung and spread during the twentieth and the twenty first centuries. It has depended on the technology of computers, WWW (World Wide Web), smart phones' networks, and the different social media platforms in composing, producing and disseminating the digital poems. Sound and/or image may be merged to produce these poems. Both the digital poetry and the internet have added to the aesthetic qualities of each other. Posting or publishing the digital poems on the different social media platforms has advantages and disadvantages. Yet, the value of the digital poetry has increased worldwide during the last year because of the quarantine imposed due to the dangerous wide spread of Covid-19 known as Corona virus pandemic. Online digital social media poems have expressed clearly the social, economic, psychological and political consequences of this crisis. Social media platforms have facilitated online poets/poets and/or poets/audience meetings and symposiums. The two poems: “First lines of emails I’ve received while quarantining” and “Lockdown” for Jessica Salfia and Richard Hendrick successively are discussed as

examples. Salfia's poem was posted or published on Twitter, while Hendrick's on FaceBook. Both of them have been read, liked and shared widely achieving a notable success. Salfia's poem deals with some of the devastating aftermaths of the crisis of Covid-19 and some of the shared subjects between people during the quarantine. While, Hendrick's tackles the positive sides of the crisis and suggests hopefully and optimistically some counteractions and strategies to overcome its horrible effects.

Keywords: Digital / Electronic poetry (e-poetry), Aesthetics, Social media, Pandemic, Quarantine

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In its beginnings, digital poetry depended on computers - or technical media - whether in its composition or in its presentation and publication. Accordingly, digital poetry or electronic poetry (e-poetry) could be simply defined as “a new genre of literary, visual, and sonic art launched by poets who began to experiment with computers in the late 1950s” (Funkhouser 1).

Norbert Bachleitner in his essay “The Virtual Muse: Forms and Theory of Digital Poetry” offers a somewhat detailed definition of digital poetry, as “innovative works with specific qualities that cannot be displayed on paper” (303). In opposition to traditional poetry, oral or written by pen and paper, ‘digital poetry’ merges text with sound and/or image. The poem has become not only read, but also viewed and heard. By the time, all kinds of media could be engaged in producing it. Consequently,

technology has reshaped poetry, producing a new field in the poetic studies, and the WWW (World Wide Web), the mobiles' networks and the social media platforms have disseminated it worldwide. Therefore, digital poetry has been changed, developed and improved over time since its first appearance or creation.

As a new technological and literary field, digital poetry has granted poets unprecedented facilities that were unavailable to previous generations of poets. Consequently, digital poetry has made different effects on the reader. The various strategies of presenting the poem, its visible or dynamic content interwoven sometimes with symbolic derivations heighten the reader's expectations. These strategies create or re-create new experiences. They suggest more and more probabilities to the reader affecting his responses to it and urging him to be interactive. Accordingly, this efficient positivity of the digital poems produces an interesting and an aesthetic result.

“How has poetry changed the internet? Has poetry, even for a brief moment, made some small corner of the

internet a more interesting, surprising, challenging, playful, or possibly beautiful place?” wondered the famous digital poet, Jim R. Carpenter, stating that she has been “rather more preoccupied” with these questions, than the question: “How do you think the internet has changed poetry and the role of the poet?” asked by Ana Hine in an interview on 19 October 2016 on NEEoN (North East of North) website. Carpenter sees that the digital poets should do their best to find answers to these questions. So, the mutual aesthetic relation between poetry and the internet can be shown clearly.

Showing the mutual aesthetic relation between poetry and the internet is one of the main aims of this research paper. It also purports to shed light on the advantages and disadvantages of posting or publishing the digital poems on the different social media platforms. Additionally, the research paper tends to pinpoint the significance of the social media digital poems in expressing a worldwide crisis as Covid-19 or Corona Virus Pandemic clarifying its psychological, social, economic and other consequences. In doing so, the research paper uncovers the increasing importance of the digital social media

poems in sharing the human feelings everywhere during the quarantine imposed by the governments and authorities because of this fatal pandemic. Two selected poems are analyzed as examples. They are: Jessica Salfia's "First lines of emails I've received while quarantining" and Richard Hendrick's "Lockdown". These two poems are considered comprehensive; they tackle most of the sides, effects and consequences of the crisis presenting it from different perspectives and showing some benefits which can attenuate the burden of the crisis.

Posting the digital poems on the different social media platforms may have some advantages. These platforms have imparted these poems a new tinge. By its traditional aesthetic value, poetry has enhanced social media heightening its emotional essence from one hand; and social media has merged poetry with new technological means and spread it all over the world instantly from another. Thus, this mutual relation between poetry and social media has added to the aesthetic value of each one of them. It is also worth considering "the very important more recent development of accessing information via

portable devices, especially the mobile phone and tablet. This has greatly increased ease of access to online information, and therefore potentially online poetry and poetry information” (Monks 38).

Additionally, online social media platforms have supported traditional published poems from all the literary ages by re-publishing and spreading them online from one hand, and have disseminated modern digital poems all over the world by only one click from another. The digital poems have become to some extent shorter than the traditional printed ones, and their language simpler. This has helped in sharing them easily - on the different social media platforms - and in reading them everywhere by readers from all ages and from different cultures.

Social media platforms have also helped to create such an active interaction between the poet and his audience or his followers. Kirsty Melville, president of Andrews McNeel Publishing House, states that “the digital age has facilitated a connection between writers and readers” (qtd. in Maher). The readers began to feel that the poet is nearer to them than before, especially after the wide

spread of the smart phones. They can comment on his work supporting him, and he can read and reply instantly. However, “not all online and social media interactions are benign” (Monks 19). Sometimes, there are frustrating comments. Additionally, the poet himself can add notes, photos, images, videos, comments, explanations, autobiographical information or points of view on his online platforms; this addition “works best for poems that are expressions of attitude, emotion or insight clearly identified with the writer, rather than more abstracted work” (Monks 23). However, some social media sites on different platforms work as organizations or “proxy interlocutors”, such as “the poetry society” or “the poetry archive”. These organizations include the readers’ interactive discussions and comments “without the involvement of the poet himself” (Monks 31).

In addition to the above advantages of social media digital poetry, which may increase the mutual aesthetic relation between poetry and internet, we can add that the success of any digital poem can be judged more quickly than that of any traditional printed one: by the number of followers, shares and comments online. The online

published or posted poems have become fresher than those traditional printed ones written many years ago. Using effective images, photos, videos and/or sounds has helped to heighten the moving impact of the digital poems. "Social media made a lot more people interested in poetry, including myself," said Danique Bailey, a teenager social-media poet. She added that posting poetry on social media platforms is a "really fun" and a "satisfying way to express yourself in a short amount of space" (Bailey). The possibility of using visual and aural effects with the digital poem duplicates its influence, more than that of the traditional printed poem. Moreover, the online published poems overcome traditional printed ones in that they can be linked to "other sites for additional information such as references, source material, notes on the poet ... by that key digital feature, the hyperlink" (Monks 125).

Furthermore, social media poetry helps the poets to mirror current events instantly (as happened during the pandemic of Corona Virus - as will be discussed in the following pages). They can share with anyone in the world their own feelings supporting them or expressing

their dilemmas; “The internet allows people to form communities that aren’t geographically based, so you can share aesthetic sympathies among a group that are all over the place” (Peter-Agbia). Consequently, social media poets have attracted many readers or fans because “first, they are present anytime on their smart phones. Second, their works are short and easy to digest. Third, this is the most important point; they voice the audience’s feelings and thoughts” (Batubara). Hence, the digital poet has not only literary and creative faculties and skills but also technological and presentation ones.

In spite of all these above qualities or advantages of the social media poetry, there are some conservative critics still prefer traditional pen-and-paper or printed poetry; as digital or electronic poetry published on the different social media platforms may have some disadvantages. For example, by writing the poem on the social media, it loses much of its literary glamour. Poetry becomes scattered here and there on the cyberspace or on the different sites of the social media platforms: “In this way, all poetry finds itself disembodied and disseminated throughout social media” (Glossi). The easiness of

publishing or posting the electronic poem and its effortless accessibility weaken its elegance and make it an “ephemeral” fashion. “The immediacy, fluidity and self-publishing ethos of online publication make it harder to pin down and control, but it also gives it less weight, for both good and ill. The pervasiveness of the online world is counteracted by its ephemeral nature” (Monks 20).

Additionally, in the electronic poems, the understood “instantaneity of meaning” is regarded as “a cheapening of the craft” (Glossi). The mystery and charm of the poem can be lost by the clear ‘exposure’ and the used visual, auditory and kinetic tools on the social media. Moreover, the availability of the social media poems may be a sharp edged weapon; as it may contain a devastating content. Their backgrounds and connotations may differ from one person to another, from one society to another, from one culture to another and/or from one civilization to another: “An e-poem is therefore something like a multidimensional text which changes in meaning depending on the place and time of its reading and which can be apprehended in its totality only by great numbers of different readings” (Funkhouser 83-84). Notably, the

intellectual property rights and the copyrights laws are, indeed, much more guaranteed in traditional poetry than in electronic poetry. Besides, the social media has given an opportunity to non-professional poets to write poetry; any poetaster or even any one can write on these means of media, whoever they are and whatever they write.

Rhetorical and technical poetic value can be lost in electronic poetry as another disadvantage. Publishing the same poem on different social media platforms may change its form and consequently its content and its intended meaning; as “the form can be such an intrinsic part of the content that changes in format from one device to another and can alter the way the poem is read and interpreted and therefore, either subtly or more fundamentally, its meaning” (Monks 74). Also, the possibility of categorizing the digital or electronic poems is difficult. Critics cannot define which poem belongs to which literary school, movement or trend. Some poems can be grouped by hashtags only (e.g. #coronapoetry). Thus, these hashtags’ groups transfer the critical literary focus from the literary schools or from the poets to the poems or to their subjects only.

But, anyhow, to have an excuse for poets, who write on social media platforms: they “produce poetry that is perfectly situated for social media. There is no need to rip short resonant lines away when they are already just that” (Glossi). Those who attack social media poetry may be “subjected to accusations of elitism” (Glossi); simply, because, by the time, this poetry may be enrolled as literary as traditional poetry, as free verse and as other modernist poetic genres.

To look again to the social media poetry’s merit of reflecting current events and sharing the people’s feelings, as mentioned above, it can be found clearly during the pandemic of the last year. The appearance of Covid-19 (Corona Virus Pandemic) and its spread all over the world have overshadowed all other national and/or international world problems. Social media poetry has played a vital role during this crisis and its aftermaths. During the quarantine imposed by the governments because of Covid-19 pandemic, indoor poets have found a refuge in social media poetry; as it is the only available and wide spread means of communication. Additionally, the different social media

platforms have facilitated online poets/poets and/or poets/audience interactions, meetings and symposiums.

Covid-19 known in the world as Corona Virus Pandemic may be considered the worst crisis of its kind since the Spanish flu of 1918-1919 or the First and the Second World Wars: 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 successively. All over the world, the countries tried to take preventive measures against the spread of this fatal virus. For instance, they prevented travelling, cancelled large gatherings, announced partial or full lockdown and obliged people to stay at their homes in a nearly global Quarantine. This Quarantine and its psychological, economic and social consequences have imparted both people and poets the opportunity to share the same feelings of pain, depression, fear, despair, loss and sadness on the different social media platforms. Online social media digital poetry was the only way out in order to attenuate these feelings; “without” online poetry, “this pandemic would feel suffocating” (Tiwari). It also has discussed the pandemic’s emotional, psychological, physical, social, economic and/or political effects. The social distancing and the wide spread of the social media

platforms has helped in sharing and increasing the aesthetic value of this kind of poetry. “Online poetry creates a good audience. People who earlier didn’t attend physical sessions are now attending online sessions in good numbers. Poetry is something that comes from inside your heart. It’s a feeling and that’s why it helps calm anxiety” (Ricchharya). Nowadays during the second wave of this pandemic, online social media poetry is still playing its important role, although the measures of quarantine are less applied.

Jessica Salfia, an English teacher, writer and co-director in [West Virginia](#), posted a poem on Twitter on 05:43 p.m., Saturday 11 April 2020. This poem is titled “First lines of emails I’ve received while quarantining”. In less than a day, Salfia’s poem had been liked more than 83,000 times and shared by 23,000 accounts, and inspired other poems (Cain). It became a Trend. As the title of the poem indicates, it was composed out of the first lines of the received e-mails by the poet during the quarantine time. Thus, Salfia was inspired by these received e-mails, then she composed this Twitter poem; in doing so she has related two digital platforms together

(the Email and the Twitter). Therefore, I sent an email to Salfia asking her about the poem and how it came to be, she replied: “Each line of the poem is an actual first line of an email I received in those early weeks of quarantining in the US (March-April).” She completes writing to me about how the poem came to be, that:

In those early weeks of lock down in the U.S., I started noticing wild trends in my email inbox. The subject lines and first lines of emails seemed to be both attempting to address the Covid crisis, but also maintain cliché capitalist trends and educational jargon. So I started keeping a running list of first lines of emails in my inbox as they appeared, and eventually it started looking like a poem. The line lengths were similar--the rhythm was poetic.

So I tried to craft the lines into stanza that captured first the sincerity with which people addressed the crisis, then the absurdity of how people were addressing the crisis, and then finally, the empty capitalist nature of how people addressed the crisis.

(Salfia)

During the Quarantine, Salfia has received many e-mails concerning the crisis of Covid-19. Most of their first lines were similar. They were dealing with most of shared subjects during quarantine. Instead of deleting these e-mails, Salfia composed her wide-shared Twitter poem, “First lines of emails I’ve received while quarantining”. She has woven professionally the first lines of the received e-mails to form it. By doing so, she “has captured the essence of this bitter” (Douglas). The first stanza begins as the following:

In these uncertain times
as we navigate the new normal,
are you willing to share your ideas and solutions?
As you know, many people are struggling.

(@jessica_salfia)

Salfia’s poem, “First lines”, consists of eight quatrains and an extra line, with a variation in the lines’ lengths. There is no rhyme scheme. It has a refrain repeated at the end of each stanza: “As you know, many people are struggling”. This refrain summarizes the feelings and conditions of all the people regardless their place or their

country. Indeed, many people at that time were already “struggling”. Judith Palmer, director of the Poetry Society, suggested that people were turning to poetry during crises because it grapples “with existential questions that people are trying to come to terms ... about our lives in uncertain times” (qtd. in Agency).

In that time of uncertainty and desperation, Salfia’s poem has been posted. It tackles many problems and consequences of the crisis. Each stanza hints to one or more of them. The above first stanza gives a panoramic view to the current conditions: “In these uncertain times” which have become “the new normal”. The adjective “uncertain” indicates the mysteriousness and doubtfulness of these times. People are suffering. They have also doubts in everything, they are terrified of everything. Anything could be a carrier of the virus. The new circumstances of the crisis, the quarantine, the numbers of the patients and even the death toll have become “the new normal”. Everyone has tried to adapt himself to or to “navigate” these “new” circumstances. The verb “navigate” symbolizes the ‘difficulty’ of these

circumstances. All people live carefully and with difficulty: “humans have always had their own ways to cope with disaster, and literature and poetry have always been born out of great suffering” says Bhaskaran Bara, an artist, writer and poet; thanks to social media poetry as “now, we have the facility to air our haikus and verses instantly as they occur to us” (qtd. in Menon). The first person plural pronoun “we” generalizes the meaning to include all the people worldwide. The run-on-line technique and the enjambment relate the first three lines together. The hyperbaton between these three inaugural lines, as the third line should be the first, gives an initial panoramic view to the conditions, and stresses one of the consequences of the crisis: the “uncertainty”. In the third line, the poet shifts to the second person pronoun “you” to address any reader or listener anywhere; it expresses generalization. The poet also shows that the addressee is very near; as if he sits in front of her listening and can answer her yes-or-no question: “are you willing to share your ideas and solutions? The use of the yes-or-no question in this initial quatrain is suitable for the general state of the uncertainty, confusion and hesitation. Salfia

completes the poem writing the second stanza as the following:

I know you're up against it:
the digital landscape.
We share your concerns.
As you know, many people are struggling.

(@jessica_salfia)

The poet, Salfia, shifts in this above second quatrain to the first person pronoun “I” expressing her personal feelings sympathizing with the addressee; who may refuse to share his “concerns” on the social media: “the digital landscape”. Yet, in the third line, using the plural pronoun again “we”, as in the first stanza, shares and unites the feelings of all the readers all over the world in a collective way: that we all share the same “concerns”. We all have the same feelings. This third line is an end-stopped-line; it makes the idea complete in itself briefly in a moving way (all the people have the same concerns at this difficult period). The fourth and the last line is the refrain which is repeated in every quatrain, summing up the people’s suffering and emphasizing it by repetition. The third stanza is written as the following:

We hope this note finds you and your family safe.
We've never seen anything like this before.

Here are 25 Distance Learning Tips!

As you know, many people are struggling.

(@jessica_salfia)

The ideas of the first three lines of the above third quatrain appear typical and expected during this pandemic; as every one of us has received or sent one (or all) of them during that period. The used end-stopped-line technique in this stanza separates the lines giving them diversity; as they are the initial sentences of different received emails. Also, they express three different ideas related to the conditions of the people during the pandemic. The first line expresses a wish for being safe. The second expresses the surprise, confusion and shock caused by the pandemic. The third line expresses an offer for the distance learning, as schools, universities and other educational institutions have been in a complete lockdown during the quarantine. Although these three end-stopped lines discuss three different ideas, they refer to the same intended meaning which is the fearful effect of the pandemic. Consequently, in the following five stanzas the poet enumerates the phases, conditions and the aftermaths of the pandemic and the quarantine. She writes in the fourth and the fifth stanzas the following:

Feeling Fiesta today? Happy Taco Tuesday!
Calories don't count during a pandemic.
Grocers report flour shortages as more people are baking
than ever!

As you know, many people are struggling.

Count your blessings. Share your blessings.
Get free curb-side pickup or shipped to your house!
Chicken! Lemon! Artichokes!
As you know, many people are struggling.

(@jessica_salfia)

The first line of the above fourth stanza: “Feeling Fiesta today? Happy Taco Tuesday!” represents the religious occasions during the pandemic and the quarantine time. The rhetorical question and the medial caesura in the first half of this end-stopped line indicate the sadness of not celebrating or even “feeling” of these sacred occasions. The exclamation mark at the end of the line adds to the surprise and the wonder of the reader. Then, the poet shifts in the second and the third lines of the fourth stanza and the first three lines of the fifth to humanistic, domestic and social matters. All people have

gained weight during the quarantine. They have shopped and stored too much food. They eat healthy food so that they can protect their immunity system: “Chicken! Lemon! Artichokes!” Salfia’s sense of humor attenuates the sad and the depressive effect of the circumstances. The poem is completed as the following:

How are you inspiring greatness today?

We have a cure for your cabin fever.

Pandemic dial-in town hall TONIGHT!

As you know, many people are struggling.

Mother's Day looks a little different this year.

You're invited to shop all jeans for 50% off.

Yes, buy 1, get 1 free!

As you know many people are struggling.

Call us to discuss a loan extension without penalty.

ACT NOW: Tell Congress Charters should Not Line their Pockets During the COVID crisis.

Now shipping face masks as recommended by the CDC.

As you know many people are struggling.

This is not normal.

(@jessica_salfia)

The above final three stanzas of Jessica Salfia's poem, "First lines of emails", sum up some of the phases of the confusion that has happened because of Covid-19. The poet has turned from discussing social effects in the preceding stanzas to educational and health matters and economic consequences in these last three stanzas. On asking the poet about the first line of the sixth stanza: "How are you inspiring greatness today?" in an email, She replied: it "was a first line from a tech tool company that was trying to sell me an educational distance learning program" (Salfia). In the second line, "cabin fever" refers to the suffering of all people during the quarantine. Cabin fever is "a popular term for a relatively common reaction to [being isolated](#) or confined for an extended period of time". It "is not a specific diagnosis, but rather a constellation of symptoms that can occur under these circumstances" (Fritscher). All of us, in fact, have suffered from it in that period because of the "social distancing" and the quarantine. The symptoms that may accompany 'Cabin fever' are: "restlessness, irritability, decreased motivation, difficulty waking, food cravings,

frequent napping, hopelessness, lack of patience, lethargy, sadness or depression, and trouble concentrating” (Fritscher). The capitalization of the word “TONIGHT”, in the third line, refers to the urgency and danger of the matter; as all people were horrified of infection, anyone should dial for help directly and instantly if he felt infected.

Economically, the crisis has overshadowed the markets as tackled in the seventh stanza: “Mother’s day looks .../.../ ...get 1 free”. Financial losses and the economic depression during the lockdown doubled the weight of the quarantine’s aftermaths. Even during the social occasions, as Mother’s Day, in which the markets were achieving high profits in the past, there has been economic depression. Shops have been obliged to make a discount or a sale in order to attract the attention of the customers to buy their products. Food goods have been the only things bought and stored during the crisis.

Even loans could be without profits, or one can have extension to pay them without penalty; as presented in the

first line of the eighth and the last stanza of Salfia's poem, "First lines of emails". The used idiom: "line their pockets", in the second line means "to make a large amount of money for oneself in a way that is considered greedy or dishonest" ("Line one's own pocket"). It is not a time of selfishness, greed or of achieving personal profits.

The third line of the last quatrain: "Now shipping face masks as recommended by the CDC" discusses the urgent need for providing "masks" to protect people from infection as decreed by the CDC. CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) Organization is "one of the major operating components of the Department of Health and Human Services", it "[works 24/7](#) to protect America from health, safety and security threats" ("About CDC"). In this end-stopped line there is a poetic license as there is no verb. The adverb "Now" as the first word and the trochee hexameter with an extra stressed syllable symbolize the threatening danger and the urgency for instant shipping:

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | extra
/ × | / × | / × | / × | / × | /

"Now ship | ping face | masks as | recom | mended | by the | CDC".

Jessica Salfia's poem, "First lines of emails I've received while quarantining", ends up with a last separated end-stopped line: "This is not normal". This line sums up the themes and the ideas discussed in the poem. All the pandemic conditions and aftermaths are "not normal". This line also is resonant of the second line of the first quatrain: "as we navigate the new normal". Yet, the poet reveals at this final brief line that what we live "is not normal".

However, some social media poets are optimistic. They have tried to give hope to people that Covid-19's crisis will have an end. They tried to show that it may have some positive sides. They have also seen that it is a good opportunity to "love" each other and to know how we are really weak; so we should "slow down" and taste life. A good example of tackling these ideas is Richard Hendrick's poem, "Lockdown". This poem has been posted on FaceBook on Friday 13 March 2020, 07:07 p.m. Then, it has become "viral ... it has been shared and re-posted over 34,000 times, striking a chord with so many and mirroring humanity's boundless capacity to

love” (Doshi). BBC Radio of London has broadcasted it on 21 March 2020, achieving 18,649 views. Its video can be found also on YouTube achieving 19,604 views. Brother Richard Hendrick is a Capuchin Franciscan living in Ireland. The poem consists of 55 lines, with no stanza division and no rhyme scheme. There are variations in lines’ lengths and meter. Its rhythm is close to the rhythm of everyday speech. The tone shifts from sadness to cheerfulness. Figures of speech are few. Some poetical devices are used to give a musical pleasing effect to help the poet in achieving his aim. Some images are scattered here and there serving as a tool for drawing the intended pictures. The poem begins as the following:

Yes there is fear.

Yes there is isolation.

Yes there is panic buying.

Yes there is sickness.

Yes there is even death. (5)

(Hendrick, “Lockdown”)

The above five initial lines of Hendrick's poem, "Lockdown", emphasize extensively the suffering of the people all over the world during the pandemic. The affirmative answers, the short sharp simple sentences, the anaphora and the end-stopped lines are orchestrated together to draw the painful picture of the current circumstances. The used new word or two in each line is the only indicator of the intended meaning; as: "isolation", "panic buying", "sickness", and "even death". These words sum up the main aftermaths of the crisis and the conditions of the people.

Then, there is a sharp shift in the sixth line in the tone and the ideas. The tone of the poem has been changed completely from sadness and agony to happiness and optimism. The reader or the listener finds out that the poet expresses the negative sides of the Corona virus' crisis in the five initial lines only. Thereafter, the poet proposes in the remaining fifty lines of the poem the positive sides of the crisis in a try to give hope, optimism, reassurance and advising to his readers or followers. He deals with these positive sides from different perspectives, as will be discussed in the following pages.

Accordingly, the poem can be divided into two blocks: the first one consists of the first five lines, while the second consists of the last fifty lines; in an observable and considerable disproportional way which serves his optimistic aim. The poet surprises his readers in the following six lines writing:

But,

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise

You can hear the birds again.

They say that after just a few weeks of quiet

The sky is no longer thick with fumes
(10)

But blue and grey and clear.

(Hendrick, “Lockdown”)

These above six lines begin with the conjunction “But”; it is the only word in the first line of the second block of Hendrick’s poem, “Lockdown”. It seems as an opening tool which prepares the reader to the sharp shift and the unexpected contrast in the ideas by attracting his attention. Hence, from this pivotal line, number 6, the

crisis of Covid-19 will be discussed from a new hopeful perspective. The poet begins by speaking about “Wuhan”, the Chinese city in which the disease appeared for the first time. After that, the virus was transmitted and spread all over the world. There, in Wuhan, all the phases of life were paralyzed or stopped. The death rate was very high. There were lockdown and quarantine. Yet, the poet sees that it was a good opportunity for the people to hear the birds sing. Besides, the factories’ fumes have disappeared. As a consequence, the sky has turned blue and clear again after so many years. Hence, the poet begins this section by the source of the problem, Wuhan, and finds there signs of optimism. So, any other infected place in the world can be optimistic more and more.

In an online interview broadcasted by Catholic Voices (CV) website with the poet, Hendrick, on April 30, 2020, he has commented on the poem saying that he wrote the poem as “a response emerging from prayer from two or three of the events that I had heard about that are mentioned in the poem”. The first one of these motivating events is an opinion of a woman from Wuhan in an article read by the poet. Although the woman has admitted the

“negative” sides of the crisis of Covid-19 which has overwhelmed them, she has seen “positive” ones: “one of the things was that as the factories had closed one by one she was suddenly aware of the beauty of the birds’ singing around her, and she said to her grandmother, I think it was, 'I didn't know that we have birds singing and living around us' because the industrial noise had just been so great” (Hendrick, “Interview”). The poet deals with the positive sides of the pandemic from an environmental perspective and its psychological effect on the human beings.

In these above six lines, the poet, Hendrick, uses run-on-line technique in order to relate the lines together and to be able to draw the hopeful picture completely. The used alliteration, assonance and consonance add a musical effect matching the singing of the birds, as for example in: “They – that”, “But – blue” (alliteration), “They – say”, “thick – with” (assonance), and “years – noise”, “can – again”, “that – just – quiet”, “with – fumes” (consonance). Repetition is used in the lines to emphasize the idea. The antithesis between: “so many years of noise” and “a few weeks of quiet”, and between:

“thick with fumes” and “blue and grey and clear” clarifies the intended meaning by contrasting the two pictures before and after the crisis. The audible image in the eighth line: “You can hear the birds again” and the visual image in the tenth and eleventh lines: “The sky is no longer thick with fumes (10) / But blue and grey and clear” create a vivid hopeful picture to the pandemic conditions in Wuhan. The adjective “thick” shows how those “fumes” were stratified densely for a long period of time. The used colors “blue and grey and clear” impart brightness and serenity. Then, Hendrick moves in the third section of the poem, which is considered the second one in the second optimistic block of the poem, as mentioned before, to Assisi, in Italy. He writes the following:

They say that in the streets of Assisi
People are singing to each other
across the empty squares,
keeping their windows open (15)
so that those who are alone
may hear the sounds of family around them.
(Hendrick, “Lockdown”)

Hendrick transfers the scene of the poem from Wuhan in China to Assisi in Italy in order to discuss the second event which has motivated him to write the poem. During the quarantine, the people of Assisi were “singing to each other across the squares”; this has created “a great joy” (Hendrick, “Interview”). Assisi also is a sacred place for Hendrick as a Franciscan friar. It is “the origin place of the gift that is St Francis and St Clare to the Church” (Hendrick, “Interview”). Italy has suffered so much because of Corona Virus, mortality rate was horrible. Yet, the poet mentions that people were singing in order to amuse and console each other, so that no one can feel lonely. This represents a great state of solidarity in a highly sensitive human feeling. The choice of the vocabularies has added perfectness to the intended aim of the poem. For example, Hendrick chooses intentionally Assisi with its spirituality and sacredness which impart comfort and quietness, although the act of singing has been repeated in other parts of the world. The continuous present tense “are singing” expresses constant trials for self-reassurance and rejoicing. The audible image in the whole sentence: “People are singing to each other” gives

pleasure and overshadows the sadness and suffering caused by Covid-19. The phrase “to each other” indicates intimacy. The adjective “empty” in the fourteenth line summarizes the conditions of isolation and lockdown during the quarantine. In the fifteenth line, the phrase “...keeping their windows open” reveals their hopeful insistence on overcoming their suffering. The section is culminated in the last two lines, line 16 and 17, the consolation of the lonely. The word “family” communicates intimacy, love, belonging and warmth which attenuate the effects of the calamity. The used run-on-line technique and enjambment help the poet to complete his related recitation and enable the reader to follow him quickly in a cheerful mood. All the section is one sentence only running over these six lines, symbolizing the solidarity of the people of Assisi. The fricative sounds, such as: /th/ and the sibilants: /s/ and /z/ create musical and pleasant effects on the reader or the listener and match the overall hopeful aim of the section and the poem as a whole. The poet completes the poem writing that:

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.
Today a young woman I know (20)
is busy spreading fliers with her number
through the neighbourhood
So that the elders may have someone to call on.
(Hendrick, "Lockdown")

The above fourth section of Hendrick's poem, "Lockdown", begins with the same repeated sentence: "They say that..." as the second and the third sections preceding it. It shows the easy quick transmission of news among the countries of the world in this digital time. The digital cyberspace has made the world as a small village. The poet moves in this section to Ireland. He presents another event for the people's solidarity in the crisis. He mentions that there is "a hotel in the West of Ireland / Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound". Although hotels have suffered economically so much during the quarantine, this hotel volunteers to offer free meals and to deliver them to the confined and the

isolated. The present continuous tense expresses constancy and continuity.

Then, from line 20 to 23, the poet focuses on “a young woman” only. The poet received an email from a young woman “who said that now she had been sent home from work, she was going to be using her time to reach out to the elders in her community” (Hendrick, “Interview”). This woman has no work now and perhaps she suffers financially. Yet, she wants to help others. The short sentence: “I know”, in line 20, imparts authenticity to the matter. The poet assures that he knows this woman. The poet doesn’t mention her name or her nationality and uses the indefinite article “a” to give the matter a probability of generalization; many volunteer women all over the world are ready to help the elders and the needy in their communities. This hopeful section of the poem deals with the crisis from an economical and social perspectives. In spite of the economic depression and financial suffering, people are able to help each other and charity still exists between them. The poet uses some poetical devices to give musical effect to the lines, such as: alliteration (“they”- “that” – “the”), consonance (“that – “west”),

assonance (“free” – “meals”), the fricative /th/ and the sibilants (/s/ and /z/). Run-on-line technique and enjambment are used twice in this section of the poem; as it deals with two ideas (the hotel and the young woman); while end-stopped-line technique is used at the end of each idea of them. The poet completes the poem as the following:

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples

are preparing to welcome (25)

and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way

All over the world people are waking up to a new reality

To how big we really are. (30)

To how little control we really have.

To what really matters.

To Love.

(Hendrick, “Lockdown”)

In the above section of Hendrick’s poem, “Lockdown”, he departs mentioning specific events in

specific countries or places (Wuhan, Assisi, and Ireland), as he does in the preceding ones, to deal with universal feelings and situations in a trial to unite humanity as a whole in such a horrible crisis, regardless religion, nationality, and race. He makes a justified preparation to the reader by writing those previous examples, so that he can move from the specific to the general, from the national to the international and from the local to the universal. Consequently, one humane event has happened in one place can be applied to all places and one noble situation of one person can be the behavior of all mankind.

In the first line of this section, line 24, Hendrick mentions the sacred places of worshipping in nearly all religions: “Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples”. They all are united in one aim which is ‘helping the needy’: “to welcome / and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary”. The poet points out here to the important role of the religious institutions in the society. He sees that one of the positive effects of the crisis of Corona virus is the restoration of this important social role.

Another positive effect of the crisis of Corona virus is that it has made people “slow down and reflect”, they began to “look at their neighbours in a new way”, and “to wake up to a new reality”. The anaphora: “All over the world people are” stresses the universality and the generalization of these feelings. Henderick states that:

We live a very fast-paced distracted life and so one of the difficulties about that is we end up living alive with very little reflective space, so we go straight from stimulus to response without recognizing that between stimulus and response there is *a point of stillness* if we want to inhabit it. In fact that still point is the place in which we can discern the presence of God in the circumstances of our lives.

(Hendrick, “interview”)

In the modern life, human beings live like machines disregarding their feelings. They have no time to stop and contemplate everything around them, as Hendrick sees. They have no “reflective space”. As a consequence of this way of life, everyone responds directly and quickly to any “stimulus” without stopping and contemplating for a period of time in order to understand the wisdom of the

matter. Hendrick calls this stopping and contemplating a “*point of stillness*”, in which we have the opportunity to “slow down” and contemplate, a merit of which we were deprived in the modern life due to its high speed. The crisis of Covid-19 has conferred us this opportunity. People began to look to each other “in a new way”, to take care of each other and to regard their feelings. All over the world, people began to realize new fact or “a new reality”, as the poet sees, that: we are powerful together so that we should help each other, we are too weak to face such a horrible virus; in spite of the amazing technology and progress which we have achieved, we should take into consideration the ‘important matters’ only and disregard the conflicts and the insignificant cases, and finally we should love each other: “To how big we really are. (30) / To how little control we really have. / To what really matters. / To Love.” Hendrick uses the first person plural pronoun “we” to include all human beings. The used anaphora: “to”, and the end-stopped lines stress the intended meanings and goals. The poet completes the poem and writes the sixth section as the following:

So we pray and we remember that

Yes there is fear. (35)

But there does not have to be hate.

Yes there is isolation.

But there does not have to be loneliness.

Yes there is panic buying.

But there does not have to be meanness. (40)

Yes there is sickness.

But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Yes there is even death.

But there can always be a rebirth of love.

(Hendrick, “Lockdown”)

Hendrick presents in the above section of his poem, “Lockdown”, some solutions of the current horrible conditions and aftermaths of the crisis of Covid-19. These solutions come in the form of the confession of these conditions, adaptation, compromise and taking actions. Although there are: “fear, isolation, panic buying, sickness and death”, there should be counteractions. There should not be: “hate, loneliness, meanness, and

disease of the soul”. There should be a chance for “the rebirth of love”. The poem appears round; Hendrick ties up the above section, which is before the last, with the first pessimistic one. Yet he presents here the counteractions, as said before. The section begins with “So” as a conjunction, which relates all the previous sections of the poem with this one; as if the poet has made a warm up, by mentioning some positive situations, to represent finally the counteractions and how we can overcome the current dilemma. After the conjunction “So”, Hendrick, mentions: “we pray”. As a religious man, Hendrick advises his readers to adhere to “pray”. He emphasizes also in his interview on *Catholic Voices* website the idea that we should “create a discipline of prayer in our lives”, although we may be overburdened by business and responsibilities. But

What's important is that we try and keep the discipline, that we at least offer the time. To dedicate a period of time even if it seems absolutely empty is enough for the *Spirit* to work in us ...the best times for contemplative prayer – if we can – are early morning, as soon as we've gotten up, and – this is key for us – before we have switched into the media of the day. Before we have become distracted by the news or the latest

Corona Virus numbers or by anything else, to dedicate that first moment, to give primary intention to *our connection* with the *Divine* is extremely important. Because then everything else in the day is consecrated, is made holy by that.

(Hendrick, “Interview”)

Hendrick sees that early-morning praying before being busy of our daily responsibilities helps us to contemplate and to elevate the soul so that we can feel the divinity of God and achieve a real connection with Him. This can have its reflection on our behavior. We can reach to a high state of serenity: “Our moments of contemplative prayer are re-tuning the attention of our heart so as to be aware of the God who is already present within and without”. After reaching this state, we can be able to achieve solidarity, humanity, co-operation and love by them we can attenuate and overcome any consequences of the crisis. The poet reveals that this poem itself was written “after a time of prayer” (Hendrick, “Interview”). Notably, mentioning ‘praying’ and ‘love’ in one stanza, in the first and the last lines, reminds the readers with the traditional famous verses of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s

“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, in which he says:
“He prayeth well, who loveth well / Both man and bird
and beast / He prayeth best, who loveth best / All things
both great and small” (Coleridge 22). In his praying, one
can be close to God and can achieve the purity of soul
only if he loves and respects all the creatures regardless
they are mean or great. Hendrick’s poem, “Lockdown” is
ended by the following lines:

Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now. (45)

Today, breathe.

Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic

The birds are singing again

The sky is clearing,

Spring is coming, (50)

And we are always encompassed by Love.

Open the windows of your soul

And though you may not be able

to touch across the empty square,

Sing. (55)

(Hendrick, “Lockdown”)

In the initial line, of the above seventh - and the last -
section of Hendrick’s poem, “Lockdown”, line no. 45,

Hendrick attracts the attention of his readers and followers that they should be careful when they make their choices: “Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now”; as these choices will define the future features of the world. In line 46, the purpose of imperative verb “breathe” is to make a petition for his readers; it thus summarizes one of the poet’s philosophical points of view. Hendrick thinks that breath is a “sacred” thing. We live by “inhaling” and “exhaling”; so to be aware of breath is simply to “be aware of God” (Hendrick, “interview”). Consequently, “It’s about coming to the awareness that in each breath God is saying ‘yes’. Yes to your being, yes to your existence, yes to the fact that he loves you”. When we “notice” our breath and follow it, we can reach to “the centre of our being, and a gentle, calming begins to take place, a stilling of the mind and of the heart” (Hendrick, “Interview”). The adverb “Today” stresses the necessity of “breathing” in the way intended by the poet at the present time or the current difficult events: “The one thing you are always doing in the present moment is breathing” (Hendrick, “Interview”). In these pandemic sorrowful conditions, we

should realize the bliss of breathing, and be aware of God's greatness.

This final section recalls the second section of the poem and reminds the readers with the positive sides of the crisis discussed before: the noise of the factories has stopped, the birds sing again, the sky becomes clear, and spring "is coming". The imperative "Listen" attracts the attention of the readers and prepares them to the following audible image: "The birds are singing again". This imperative and the present continuous tense express continuity and impart optimism. Additionally, the visual image: "The sky is clearing, and the personification: "Spring is coming" enhance and clarify the intended aim of optimism and the positive energy. The metaphor: "we are always encompassed by Love" with its implicit comparison transfers the connotations of its vehicle which is: physical substances, materials or limits, to its tenor which is: "love", whereas its ground of comparison is: the spread of love among all human beings regardless of their place, race, color, religion and / or nationality. The word "Love" is capitalized as if it were a proper noun; in order to stress its importance and necessity.

The last four lines of Hendrick's poem, "Lockdown", lines 52 – 55, send the last message to the readers: you should "open the windows of your souls" and "Sing". The imperatives: "open" and "sing" are for advising. They also summarize all the above strategies of the poet to face the crisis. The poet again concentrates on the importance of elevating the "soul". The verb "Sing" ends the poem delightfully. However, the two lines: 53 and 54, "And though you may not be able / to touch across the empty square" represent the current depressing psychological and social conditions of the people in the quarantine. Yet, the poet sees that they should overcome these conditions and "Sing". The poem ends here hopefully and cheerfully. Thus, in a great part of this optimistic poem, Hendrick has shown some positive sides of the crisis. He also has discussed and suggested counteractions and strategies to face the pandemic and its effects.

Finally, the emotional restorative condensed power of poetry, as it is the "Queen of Arts" (Wilson 357), has always appeared clearly along the literary history especially during the crises. One of the critical crises in human history is the pandemic of Covid-19 known as

Corona Virus; which surprised the world in the beginning months of 2020. Digital poetry as a new genre of modern poetry has played a great role in the pandemic period.

Digital poetry or electronic poetry appeared nearly in the mid years of the twentieth century. Computers have helped in shaping and reshaping this new poetic genre, as other literary digital or electronic genres. Visual and / or acoustic effects have been added to the poem making it more attractive and more innovative than traditional written poem. With the appearance of WWW, the smart phones' webs and the various social media platforms, digital poetry has spread widely. Nowadays, in this age of globalization where the world has become a small village, digital poetry published or posted on the different social media platforms has created and recreated the experiences in a new fashionable way and disseminated them all over the world by just one click. Thus, poetry has added to the aesthetics of the internet and the social media and vice versa. Yet, this type has advantages and disadvantages.

The advantages of the social media digital poetry have increased greatly when the world was taken by surprise because of the pandemic of Covid-19 known as Corona Virus. Governments have imposed general quarantine as one of the preventive measures against the spread of this fatal virus. Death rate has been horrible. People have suffered psychologically and economically. Social media digital poetry has helped to attenuate the horrible effects of this crisis. It has enabled the confined or the indoor people all over the world to express their feelings of shock, fear, anxiety, pain, depression and loss. It also has facilitated online poets/poets and/or poets/audience interactions, meetings and symposiums.

This research paper tried to analyze two social media poems written and posted at the pandemic period of Corona Virus as examples. Both of them have been discussed thematically, though technique never ignored. They achieved a great success on the social media and were shared thousand times becoming a trend. The first poem was the Twitter poem of Jessica Salfia: “First lines of emails I’ve received while quarantining”. It was composed from the first lines of emails received by the

poet at that period, during the quarantine. Consequently, it discusses some of the shared subjects of the psychological, social and economic effects and aftermaths of the crisis. The second poem was a FaceBook one composed by Richard Hendrick. It sets an example of facing the calamity with an amazing optimism and humanitarianism. In it, Hendrick has shed light on some environmental benefits and positive sides of the crisis and proposed some strategies and counteractions in order to defy it. Praying, moralities, optimism, solidarity and love among mankind were the most significant ones of these strategies and counteractions.

To sum up, by doing all the previous points, the research paper tried to achieve its intended goals. It defined the digital poetry clarifying its mutual aesthetic relation with the internet and social media platforms. Secondly, the research paper showed its advantages and disadvantages; as some people praise and prefer it more than traditional pen-and-paper written poetry, and others criticize and discard it. The research paper also elucidated the important role played by the social media digital poetry in the pandemic global quarantine and the

aftermaths of Corona virus. This vital role added to its advantages. Notably, it still plays the same significant role nowadays; as we live in a second wave of the pandemic. The research paper, thus, traced this role by discussing two example social media poems tackling the pandemic from different perspectives. Consequently, the paper tried to shed light on such fields of studying digital literature. It also attempted to point to a new multidimensional branch of poetic studies.

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**Pandemic Digital Poetry: An Analytical Study of Two Selected Social
Media Poems as Examples**
