

## **Solitude and Solace: The Impact of Physical Confinement and Social Isolation on Fray Luis de León**

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From Boethius to Nelson Mandela, the experiences of numerous political and literary figures have demonstrated the formative impact of imprisonment. Similarly, John Bunyan, Sir Walter Raleigh, the Marquis de Sade, Rudyard Kipling, and Beatrix Potter are examples of authors whose lives and writings bear the mark of loneliness. In the field of Spanish letters, Miguel de Cervantes' capture by Algerian pirates (1575-80) is undoubtedly the best known example of an author whose corpus was influenced by captivity, but Fray Luis de León's Inquisitorial trial (1572-76) has also received a great deal of scholarly attention.

Concerning Fray Luis, critics have focused principally on the historical details of the trial, such as the reasons for his arrest and the nature of his defense, and to a lesser degree on how the trial affected his later works. However, the exact nature of his experience while a prisoner in Valladolid has remained veiled in the silence the Inquisition imposed on all discharged prisoners: as was the norm, upon his release, Fray Luis was forbidden to reveal any details of his experience.<sup>1</sup> Knowing that this experience was fundamental, but lacking an explicit commentary by the prisoner himself, critics have expressed divergent and even contradictory interpretations of the trial's impact on the Salmantine scholar. Getino, for instance, argues that Fray Luis must have enjoyed the freedom he had to read and study, and writes of how the accused later pined for the tranquility of his jail cell, concluding, "en unas cárceles lóbregas y hediondas, no se conciben las serenas y esplendentes páginas de los *Nombres de Cristo*" (216). In contrast, Alcalá describes León's experience in quite different terms: "en la cárcel [Fray Luis] sufre y vela y piensa y se irrita y se rebela" (*Proceso* lii). The incompatibility of these two perspectives demonstrates the need for a more thorough analysis of the trial's impact.

Recent studies on stress now allow us to examine Fray Luis' ordeal from a more empirical perspective than was possible in the past. Our understanding of stress has expanded dramatically in the last half century, as medical and psychological researchers have analyzed the effects of psychosocial and physical strain. These findings provide a scientifically grounded foundation for drawing conclusions about what Fray Luis endured during his five years of solitary confinement.

In this study, I will first summarize recent literature on stress. We will also consider historical and autobiographical testimony from individuals who endured involuntary confinement similar to that which Fray Luis suffered. I will then analyze the Belmontine monk's trial: using various lists of instructions published by Inquisitors General in the sixteenth century (Jiménez Montserín), as well as the transcript of Fray Luis' audiences throughout his imprisonment (Alcalá, *Proceso*), I will discuss what types and degrees of stress the accused endured. Finally, I will analyze the way the stress of the trial affected León's later writings, both prose and verse. This analysis of the impact of stress will shed new light on such questions as how Fray Luis could have composed his doctrinal treatise *De los nombres de Cristo* during the trial, and why he appropriated the Horatian motto of *ab ipso ferro* (from the axe itself) as his

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<sup>1</sup> According to standard Inquisitorial procedure, upon their release all prisoners were to be warned "so graves penas" against disclosing anything they had seen or heard while imprisoned (Jiménez Montserín 227). Fray Luis was so admonished prior to his discharge from Valladolid (Alcalá, *Proceso* 701).

post-trial emblem. It will also deepen our understanding of the topos of solitude that appears so prominently in his poetry.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the concept of stress has become ubiquitous in popular culture and the media: Amazon.com lists more than 34 thousand books dealing with the topic, and a Google search returns more than 540 million hits for this term. For that reason, it will be helpful to begin with a clear definition of stress.

According to Levi, stress in the broadest sense occurs anytime an environmental demand on an organism triggers the “fight or flight” response (9). Lazarus and Folkman develop this concept in more detail, defining stress as “a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (21).<sup>2</sup>

One source of stress can be the physical environment. Any environmental factor that places significant or novel demands on the body can produce stress: a physically demanding job (construction, logging, etc.), enforced confinement, living at high altitude or in a frigid climate, or a major alteration in diet can all produce physical stress. In such circumstances, a person may experience a variety of physiological symptoms, including sleep disturbances, reduced productivity, elevated blood pressure, suppressed immunity, and recurrence of chronic diseases (Natani 297-99; Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegel 614).

Stress can also result from purely psychosocial demands, such as struggling to meet a deadline at school or at work, or dealing with a conflictive relationship. Like physical stress, psychosocial stress can have physical manifestations, including suppressed immunity, delayed wound healing, aggravation of chronic conditions, restlessness, and insomnia (Kemeny and Schedlowski 1009, 1014; Levi 21; Peplau and Perlman 10-13; Rahe and Romo 116; Storr 44). Psychosocial stress can also lead to memory problems, as well as gastrointestinal complications (Levi 20; Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegel 612; Storr 44). The negative effects of psychological stress on the heart and circulatory system are particularly well documented (Hawkey et al 132; Levi 20; Porges 232; Rozanski, Blumenthal, and Kaplan 2198-99, 2204). Psychological stress can also have important impacts on mental health. Anxiety and worry are obvious examples, but in addition Paykel and Klerman found that significantly stressful situations, which they defined as “life events” (Marital separation, Start new type of work, Death in immediate family member, etc.), were closely connected to depression (Paykel 136-39).

Another key finding about stress is that “People and groups differ in their sensitivity and vulnerability to certain types of events, as well as in their interpretations and reactions” (Lazarus and Folkman 22). In other words, it is the individual’s own appraisal that determines whether a given situation will produce stress, and there are abundant examples of environments that are highly stressful for some persons but desirable to others. To cite just one such instance, some people enjoy living in large cities, while others find urban life produces significant anxiety.

Given the complex interrelationship between different types of stress and the individual, it will sometimes be difficult to trace the physical symptoms of which Fray Luis complains to the specific physical and psychological stressors he endured. In fact, researchers have documented that the kind of “clustering” of multiple stressors such as Fray Luis experienced not only

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<sup>2</sup> See also Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, and Miller 1685.

complicates diagnosis, but also can produce a compounding effect, a point to which we will return later in this study.<sup>3</sup>

From this brief survey of recent research on stress, it is clear that both physical and psychological stress can have a major impact on health and quality of life. The physiological and emotional manifestations of stress documented here will now serve as the foundation for moving to an analysis of what Fray Luis actually endured during his imprisonment. Since the accused was prohibited to speak or write openly of what he suffered, it is necessary to focus primarily on lists of protocols published by successive Inquisitors General regarding treatment of prisoners (Jiménez Montserín), and on the trial transcript (Alcalá, *Proceso*), which details what actually took place in Fray Luis' experience. I will also reference the trial transcripts of three other university professors who were imprisoned at the same time as Fray Luis, and for similar reasons. Martín Martínez Cantalapiedra and Gaspar de Grajal, Fray Luis' colleagues at the University of Salamanca, were arrested the same month as he, and Alonso Gudiel, of the University of Osuna, was arrested just four months later. All four were alleged to have committed similar offenses, and all were imprisoned in Valladolid. The trial records of Martínez, Grajal, and Gudiel can help confirm details that are alluded to in Fray Luis' trial.

Fray Luis' nearly five years of incarceration in Valladolid were a watershed experience, and the imprint of this trauma can be seen in all his post-trial works. This is entirely natural when we consider that only the death of a spouse or a child produces greater emotional distress than imprisonment (Paykel 150). The stresses León endured during the trial were of remarkable variety, intensity, and duration, which explains why his particular experience was so formative.

One of the most obvious stressors was physical confinement, which impacts prisoners in several significant ways. Evidence indicates that confinement is inevitably trying (Blair 57). In part, this is because hypokinesia—limited motor activity—is very disruptive, both physically and psychologically (Natani 299-300). Moreover, confinement involves “irregular or unnatural light cycles, [...] fluctuating or extreme temperatures, [and] poor air ventilation (Carrère, Evans, and Stokols 230), all of which present physical stress and can be psychologically disorienting. In nursing homes, where residents face involuntary confinement analogous to that endured by prisoners, one study found more than half of residents battling depression, with many pointing to restricted mobility as a major source of stress (Choi, Ransom, and Wyllie 539-40).<sup>4</sup>

Another obvious stress Fray Luis and other Inquisitorial prisoners endured was social isolation. Whatever the specific setting, isolation is stressful for most individuals (Haythorn 225), producing such diverse symptoms as anxiety, tension, sleep and eating disorders, headaches, nausea, restlessness, and increased risk of heart disease (Peplau and Perlman 10-13; Rozanski, Blumenthal, and Kaplan 2197, 2203-04). In space flights, it has been found to be “a significant source of stress” (Levine 307), and U.S. military personnel who endured solitary confinement during the Vietnam War unanimously describe the experience as arduous (Coffee 106; Naughton 5).

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<sup>3</sup> Levi describes and analyzes the impact of “constellations” of stimuli (23), while Lazarus and Folkman discuss what factors determine how multiple stressors compound each other (111-13).

<sup>4</sup> Choi, Ransom, and Wyllie's analysis of depression in nursing home residents highlights many stressors that Fray Luis also experienced, including the involuntary nature of the confinement (538), and factors such as “loss of independence, freedom and continuity with [...] past life; feelings of social isolation and loneliness; [...] loss of autonomy due to the institutional regimen and regulations; [...] ever-present death and grief; [...] and lack of meaningful in-house activities” (536). Regarding the effects of confinement, see also Suedfeld, “Changes...” 165, Zubek 68, and Zuckerman 54-57.

The instructions the Inquisitor General circulated in 1561, eleven years before Fray Luis' arrest, demonstrate that the Holy Office was quite aware of the psychological effects of long-term isolation, and strove to harness those effects in order to loosen prisoners' tongues. The instructions mandated officials to grant prisoners audiences as often as they requested it, since loneliness might lead to confessions: "porque a los presos les es consuelo ser oídos" (Jiménez Montserín 212). Though there were some exceptions, such as when the number of prisoners made solitary confinement impossible, most prisoners endured isolation throughout their trials (Kamen 186; Lea 2: 513-15; Pérez 144). In Fray Luis' case, apart from a passing allusion to his fear of dying "con un moro a la cabecera" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 604),<sup>5</sup> there is no evidence in the trial record to suggest that Fray Luis had a cellmate. We must therefore conclude that he was alone for all or at least the majority of his incarceration.

Besides confinement and social isolation, the loss of control and the feelings of helplessness that accompany imprisonment would have created significant emotional trauma for Fray Luis (Suedfeld, *Restricted* 74-75). Lazarus and Folkman confirm that, especially when a person has a great deal at stake, "helplessness is potentially devastating" (35). Fray Luis' complaints of requests that received no response demonstrate that he was utterly at the mercy of Valladolid officials, whose indifference or inefficiency produced tremendous anxiety (Alcalá, *Proceso* 161, 319-20, 482). In one instance, their delay in arranging for a certain piece of evidence to be admitted caused the accused considerable frustration— on 6 October 1572, Fray Luis asked inquisitors to bring from Salamanca a copy of the Vatable Bible, which he considered important for his defense; the tome did not arrive until 12 February 1574, despite numerous reiterations of his request (Alcalá, *Proceso* 141, 301, 319, 336, 342, 364, 395, 397).

The possibility of torture was another significant strain. Indeed, Inquisitors were well aware of the dread it inspired among prisoners: the Inquisitorial instructions of 1561 encourage prosecutors to request torture, adding, "parece cosa conveniente y de que pueden resultar buenos efectos" (Jiménez Montserín 208). The instructions specify that this request should be made right after the formal charges are submitted, with the accused present, which is precisely how the matter was handled in Fray Luis' trial (Alcalá, *Proceso* 74). Though the topic did not come up through the rest of the trial, concern over the possibility of being tortured cannot have been far from Fray Luis' mind: at the conclusion of his trial four of the seven inquisitors presiding voted that he be tortured, and only the intervention of the Supreme Council prevented it being carried out (Alcalá, *Proceso* 675-76, 698-700).

Fray Luis also faced considerable uncertainty, not only concerning torture, but even regarding such fundamental questions as why he was arrested and how the trial would proceed. The 1561 Instructions mandated that formal charges be lodged "con brevedad" (Jiménez Montserín 213), but such a vague mandate meant little. The prosecutor did not file charges in Fray Luis' case until 3 March 1573, nearly a year after his arrest (Alcalá, *Proceso* 200-17). In such circumstances, it was impossible for a prisoner to know how long his trial might last. Kamen observes, "The effect of this enforced ignorance was to depress and break down a prisoner" (193). Indeed, Storr confirms that "Many prisoners find that *uncertainty* is the worst torment which they experience" (46), and Hartog notes that "The worst torment of all is being cut off with no end in sight" (11).

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<sup>5</sup> Alcalá reminds us that numerous *moriscos* were imprisoned in Valladolid at the time (*Proceso* 604). See also Kamen 223-25.

Another source of anxiety, for Fray Luis as well as for other Inquisitorial prisoners, came from denial of the sacraments, which was a standard Inquisitorial protocol.<sup>6</sup> The relationship between beliefs and emotional health has only recently begun to attract the attention of researchers, but evidence is quickly mounting that prayer and other forms of religious observance not only are common coping mechanisms but also have a significant impact on physical and mental well-being.<sup>7</sup> In particular, many Catholics describe a “psychic pressure to confess” (Murray-Swank, McConnell and Pargament 279), reporting that confession profoundly alleviates feelings of moral isolation (Evans 85; Murray-Swank, McConnell and Pargament 279). Likewise, the Eucharist constitutes a “powerful psychological experience” for church members (Evans 82). As a member of a religious order in the Spain of the Counter-Reformation, Fray Luis’ daily life would have revolved around these mandated religious observances. Naturally, then, the Inquisition’s practice of denying the sacraments to prisoners produced enormous religious anxiety for him. In one energetic protest in March of 1575, he complained that throughout these first three years, “e estado sin el uso de los sacramentos con detrimento de my anima” and pleaded for permission to attend mass and confession periodically (Alcalá, *Proceso* 492-93). A few months later he used similar language to protest being held “como si fuese hereje privado del uso de los sacramentos y con notable peligro [...] de mi alma” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 567). He also expressed fear of dying without receiving absolution (Alcalá, *Proceso* 489, 594, 604).

What of the living conditions in the jail in Valladolid? Lea has commented that prisoners’ welfare depended largely on the disposition of the local inquisitors, and that conditions varied from one prison to another (2: 519-28). The facility in Valladolid would probably not have been a source of pride to the Holy Office when Fray Luis and his colleagues were imprisoned there. Given that, early in the trial, Fray Luis requested a knife with which to cut his food (Alcalá, *Proceso* 44), we may surmise that his daily ration was being provided. However, three years later, he complains of being faint from hunger, remarking, “no tiene quien le cure en su cárcel sino un mochachico que está ally presso que es simple y para avelle de despertar padece trabajo con el y a venido dia de quedarse desmayado de hanbre por no tener quien le dé su orden que le sirva” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 594). It seems that a mentally disabled fellow inmate was charged with serving Fray Luis his food, but that this person sometimes forgot to do so. In addition to malnutrition, this situation would have created psychological tension. In a study of nursing homes, “cognitively intact residents also revealed their stress due to having to live with cognitively impaired peers, who simultaneously aroused sympathy, resentment, and fear about their own uncertain future” (Choi, Ransom, and Wyllie 544).

Sanitation in the Valladolid facility also seems to have been a problem. Fray Luis’ numerous complaints about his health, a point to which we will return shortly, are by no means the only clues. Grajal complained about being housed in such a “triste lugar” (Pinta Llorente, *Procesos* 170) and Martínez, like Fray Luis, also complained about sickness (Pinta Llorente, *Proceso* 361). Gudiel’s cell was evidently in appalling condition: he requested winter clothes during his first summer there (Pinta Llorente, *Causa* 152) and in late March the next year (1573), an inquisitor noted in the record that Gudiel had contracted leprosy and had been bled several times, and remarked that the cell was damp (Pinta Llorente, *Causa* 189). The inquisitor’s

<sup>6</sup> According to the 1561 Instructions, confession was only to be afforded prisoners who were gravely ill; “Pero si el preso tuviere salud y pidiere confesor, más seguro es no se le dar” (Jiménez Montserín 234).

<sup>7</sup> See Belding et al 184-85; Bell Meisenhelder and Marcum 551; Strawbridge et al 68; Wadsworth, DeCarlo Santiago, and Einhorn 415.

decision to move the inmate made little difference: by early April, a physician noted a severe case of scabies, fever, and probable dysentery,<sup>8</sup> along with “otros muchos accidentes que tiene,” which together convinced the physician that Gudiel was “en peligro yminente de morir” (Pinta Llorente, *Causa* 190). Less than two weeks later, Gudiel did indeed die (Pinta Llorente, *Causa* 200).

Thus far we have catalogued the chronic stressors Fray Luis faced during the trial, including physical confinement, social isolation, loss of control, uncertainty, threat of torture, malnutrition, and unsanitary conditions. The trial record demonstrates the strain that these factors produced in León, both physically and emotionally. Diverse physical ailments, anxiety, anger, and even bouts of despair are evident in Fray Luis’ audiences and written petitions.

The easiest of these symptoms to document is the impact the ordeal had on Fray Luis’ health. His constitution was fragile to begin with: within days of his arrest, he claimed death was imminent, and a year and a half later again referred to his weak health (Alcalá, *Proceso* 43, 371). The inquisitors even noted Fray Luis’ frailty twice (Alcalá, *Proceso* 44, 675). It is likely, then, that the stress of the trial impacted León’s health negatively, consistent with the effects of stress noted above. In addition to the chronic health issues Fray Luis faced throughout the trial, however, the summer and fall of 1575 were unusually dangerous. In July, Fray Luis argued that his confinement was presenting “notable peligro de my vida” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 567). The following month, the accused complained that he was “muy enfermo de calenturas” and feared dying (Alcalá, *Proceso* 594), and in mid-September, the Supreme Council wrote authorizing a priest to see the prisoner, given his “indispucion” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 601). By November, Fray Luis again requested confession, “para que si en este tiempo el Señor me llamare, lo qual devo temer por el mucho trabajo que paso y por mis pocas fuerças, muera como christiano” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 604).

Fray Luis’ colleagues were faring no better at that time. Gudiel had already died by this point, as noted above, but Grajal complained in early August that he was “falto de salud y con gran afflictión” (Pinta Llorente, *Procesos* 466), and by 6 September, unable to come to an audience, sent a plaintive request to inquisitors for a servant to attend to him (Pinta Llorente, *Procesos* 478-79). He died within 72 hours (Pinta Llorente, *Procesos* 479). During the same summer, Martínez was seen by the prison physician for recurring fever and a severe lice infestation. Having never fully recovered, by November he had relapsed so badly that the physician recommended removing him from jail: “esta tan flaco y gastado y tan maltratado y suzio de bestidos [...] que tiene temor que se morira, si no le sacan a curar para de las carceles, adonde le curen con linpieza y cuidado” (Pinta Llorente, *Proceso* 275). In May of 1577, shortly before his release, Martínez referred to the trial having destroyed his health (Pinta Llorente, *Proceso* 392).

In addition to physiological stress, it is clear that Fray Luis experienced significant anxiety during the trial. As early as April 1572, when he presented his first lengthy written statement, the strain of the trial was evident: “estoy agora tal que lo cierto se me haze sospechoso y dudoso” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 58). León echoed this sentiment in a written statement that October: “como otras vezes e dicho agora todo se me haze dudoso” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 140). Predictably,<sup>9</sup> anxiety was interfering with cognitive processes as well: “yo tengo flaca memoria y despues que estoy en la carcel e perdido gran parte della” (Alcalá, *Proceso* 88). Shortly past the one year

<sup>8</sup> According to the doctor, Gudiel suffered from “vna ebacuaçion de sangre demasiada por la sylla” (Pinta Llorente, *Causa* 190).

<sup>9</sup> See Suedfeld, “Changes” 127-29.

mark of his imprisonment, when Fray Luis submitted his full written response to the witnesses' statements, he remarked that "el estado en que estoy me haze reçeloso aun de my mismo" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 289). The depth of his anguish was apparent in February of 1575, when he commented despairingly that "le ha sido quitado sin culpa todo lo que en la vida se puede desear" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 489). That November, which we have already underscored as a time of grave health problems, he remarked in similar language, "me an quitado lo que en la vida se desea" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 604).

In addition to anxiety, León expressed significant anger, owing to uncertainty about his status and to the glacial pace of the trial. On dozens of occasions, he vented his impatience, often in aggressive terms. During his first December in prison, he repeatedly protested the Holy Office's tardiness in presenting the full witness statements, the *publicación de testigos* (Alcalá, *Proceso* 161-63, 167-68). He continued to inveigh against the inquisitors' inertia throughout 1573 (Alcalá, *Proceso* 197, 320, 371, 385), and in January of 1574, he rebuked his captors for refusing to "densengañarse con la verdad" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 396). The clearest example of Fray Luis' frustration with his situation is a statement he made in an audience in May of 1575, as inquisitors contemplated seeking outside opinions on his orthodoxy. Exasperated with their plodding, he pointedly insisted that what they proposed "sera solamente dilacion para que este negocio nunca tenga fin" and appealed to them "que sean servidos de estar y examinar este negocio y acavalle de una vez" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 548). The trial record is replete with other manifestations of the annoyance he experienced during the trial.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond these ongoing symptoms of stress, Fray Luis' anxiety level was heightened by several *acute stressors*, specific events which "amplify the psychological and physiological" impacts of underlying chronic stress (Carrère, Evans, and Stokols 231). The first acute stressor was the arrest itself. Although Fray Luis knew that he was in danger at least three weeks before his arrest,<sup>11</sup> the arrest itself must have come as a surprise. The experiences of World War II concentration camp internees suggest how the arrest may have impacted Fray Luis: "For all, the initial stage of captivity was one of shock, terror and a sense of unreality" (Arthur 198). At the very least, the arrest and initial imprisonment were jarring enough to imperil Fray Luis' health, which was never very sturdy, as documented above. We have already seen that less than a week after his arrest, before even being called for his first official interview, he submitted a written protestation of his devotion to the Church, "si le tomare la muerte subitamente" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 43). The same day he also sought an audience to request "una caja de unos polvos" which he kept in the monastery "para mis melancolias y pasiones de coraçon" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 44). Since there is extensive evidence of the impact of stress on the cardiovascular system (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, and Miller 1685; Hawkley et al 132; Rozanski, Blumenthal, and Kaplan 2912), there is no reason to assume that Fray Luis was exaggerating his claims of frailty in the week after his arrest.

Fray Luis encountered another acute stressor two years later, when he was charged by inquisitors to select a *patrono teólogo*, or theological patron, to aid him in his defense. The accused already had a court-appointed lawyer, but given the complexity of the charges then being considered, on 1 April 1574 he was commanded to choose a theological patron as well (Alcalá, *Proceso* 427). However, it took nearly three months simply to assemble a list of

<sup>10</sup> See also Alcalá, *Proceso*, 428, 445, 489, 491, 493, 558, 567, 594, 598-99, 604, 637-39, and 641. Complaints about delay are one of the most prominent ongoing themes in Fray Luis' many statements throughout the trial.

<sup>11</sup> On 6 March, 20 days before the order for his arrest was issued, he submitted a written statement to the Inquisition, maintaining his own orthodoxy (Alcalá, *Proceso* 24-29).

candidates (Alcalá, *Proceso* 449). In October, a patron was finally selected who was satisfactory both to Fray Luis and inquisitors, one maestro Mancio, professor of theology at the University of Salamanca (Alcalá, *Proceso* 470). However, by December, the accused was protesting vigorously that Mancio had kept important trial-related documents for over a week, had submitted opinions on Fray Luis' orthodoxy without informing him, and had returned to Salamanca without concluding an issue that should have been handled in a few days at most (Alcalá, *Proceso* 481, 86). In February 1575, Fray Luis again protested Mancio's handling of the case, claiming he had been trying to get an audience with his *patrono* since Epiphany without success (Alcalá, *Proceso* 488-89). Mancio did not render his final opinion until early April (Alcalá, *Proceso* 545-47). This whole stage of the trial corroborates Kamen's contention that the Inquisition's policies regarding theological advocates "sometimes rendered the use of a lawyer farcical" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 194).

Though the process involved considerable vexation, Fray Luis assumed that the approval of Mancio, a hostile Dominican, should have been sufficient to clear him definitively (Alcalá, *Proceso* 557-62), but instead the events following the Mancio episode produced even more critically elevated stress, which presented grave risks to the well-being of the accused. Incredibly, when Mancio finally issued his opinion and declared Fray Luis' opinions safe, the inquisitors in Valladolid rejected his verdict, and elected to solicit opinions from a newly appointed group of theologians. Given that it took an entire year to obtain Mancio's evaluation, we can imagine Fray Luis' reaction to the notion of repeating the process by committee. No wonder that León lashed out at inquisitors when he was informed of their decision. His first audience after receiving the news was on 6 May 1575, and his tone was as pointed as at any time in the trial:

En el dicho nuevo examen que Vs. mds. hazen recibo notable agravio y dilatan Vs. mds. la conclusion de my pleito y my prision sin causa ninguna juridica. [...] No quieran con dilaciones y examenes escusados y en ninguna manera necesarios ocuparse a si y atormentarme a my. [...] Y sobre todo pongan Vs. mds. a Dios delante de los ojos y a su juicio delante del qual estaremos todos presto. (Alcalá, *Proceso* 563-65)

The statements León submitted that summer and fall demonstrate that his resentment continued to simmer throughout these months. In July, he insisted the inquisitors had allowed themselves to become the tools of his enemies (Alcalá, *Proceso* 566-68). In late August, he declared himself unwilling to respond to further questions and demanded that the Holy Office issue its verdict without further delay (Alcalá, *Proceso* 593-94). Less than a month later, in a long statement of protest, León even insulted the Inquisition's theological censors for questioning his teachings: "es cosa de gran lastima que en juicio tan grave aya consultores theologos que noten cosas semejantes, y se tengan por theologos" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 598).

It has already been shown that the summer and fall of 1575 were particularly strenuous, not only for Fray Luis but for other prisoners in Valladolid as well. As noted above, Grajal died that September, and Martínez's health was also in jeopardy. Similarly, although allusions to Fray Luis' frail health can be found throughout the trial, the middle of this year was clearly the time when he was at greatest risk. From July forward, his complaints of ill health take on a desperate tone (Alcalá, *Proceso* 567, 594, 600) and we have seen that in September the Supreme Council, in response to a petition from officials in Valladolid, gave authorization for the accused to see a priest (Alcalá, *Proceso* 601). Although this letter arrived in Valladolid on 20 September, on 21 November Fray Luis again pled for a priest, as previously documented, declaring himself on the verge of death "por el mucho trabajo que paso y por mis pocas fuerças" (Alcalá, *Proceso* 604).



Did the priest never come, or did the prisoner rally in September only to relapse with the approach of winter? In either case, it is beyond doubt that Fray Luis' health was in grave jeopardy. Although his fellow prisoners were in similar straits, the evidence suggests that for León, the crisis of 1575 was closely connected to the vexation of seeing release apparently within reach with Mancio's endorsement, only to have inquisitors dismiss the *patrono's* approbation and seek other evaluators.

The trial record offers clear evidence, then, not only of the stressful nature of Fray Luis' imprisonment, but of the degree of physiological and psychological strain the accused experienced. The years of chronic stress, punctuated by several acute stressors, profoundly impacted Fray Luis' physical and emotional health. Undoubtedly, the "clustering" of these "constellations" of stressors, which was noted earlier, amplified their effect on Fray Luis' well-being.

Given his frail constitution, and the deaths of Grajal and Gudiel in prison, it is surprising that Fray Luis survived his ordeal. In order to explain his remarkable endurance, we will consider research on stress and coping. It is also important to consult autobiographical accounts of individuals who suffered confinement similar to what Fray Luis endured. In addition, the same legal statements that document the strain León experienced also suggest how he coped with such intense chronic stress. Often, these clues are confirmed by his post-trial publications. Considering all this evidence together provides important clues as to how Fray Luis managed his stress, and also how the experience of the trial shaped him both as poet and as theologian.

First, I would like to explore the composition of Fray Luis' doctrinal work, *De los nombres de Cristo*. Despite the Inquisition's prohibition on prisoners having paper for personal use (Jiménez Montserín 216; Pérez 143), there is considerable evidence to suggest that Fray Luis could have easily composed *Nombres* in prison.<sup>12</sup> But given the amount of stress he was under during the trial, we might well question his motivation to undertake such a time-consuming project. After all, while struggling to maintain his health and manage enormous emotional strain, why would the prospect of a lengthy and complex theological exposition appeal to him?

In fact, research indicates that the stress of the trial, rather than hindering the composition of *Nombres*, would have stimulated and facilitated it. That is, composing an extensive, detailed doctrinal treatise, rather than adding to the stress of the trial, would have been a highly effective coping mechanism, with the potential to significantly mitigate the physical and emotional strain of imprisonment. This is evident not only from research on stress and coping, but also from autobiographical accounts of victims of long-term confinement and isolation, which describe how individuals overcame stressors similar to those Fray Luis faced.

To begin with, it is important to note the well-documented association between isolation and creativity. Storr has observed that seclusion has contributed to the achievements of most writers, thinkers, and artists, and stimulates the imagination of children (ix, 17). Similarly, Landau explains that "loneliness is, or can be, an important ally to the artist, to all creative people, and to the creative process in general" (486). Although creative persons may seek privacy to develop their ideas, often the relationship is inverted, with creative activities arising as a way to cope with involuntary solitude. According to Hartog, "highly motivated hermits, martyrs, scientists, artists, and explorers" find that productive or creative work "is crucial to their personal sense of meaning and provides an insulation against loneliness" (10).

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<sup>12</sup> See Fulton.

There is certainly an abundance of autobiographical evidence to support the notion of creativity as coping. Storr cites Beethoven, Goya, Boethius, Thomas More, Walter Raleigh, John Bunyan, and Dostoevsky as examples of historical figures who were more productive as a result of isolation or confinement (52-57). Recent examples are abundant as well, and include Edith Bone, who described reciting, translating, and composing poetry to pass the time during seven years of solitary confinement in Hungary, from 1949-56 (103-04). In like manner, Natalie Crouter, detained in a Japanese civilian POW camp in the Philippines (1941-45), composed a novel on toilet paper (393). In a North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war camp, U.S. Navy Capt. Gerald Coffee sought relief from the boredom of solitary confinement by composing poetry on dozens of cigarette wrappers, which he took with him upon his release (190-91, 265).

In Fray Luis' specific case, most critics have interpreted the dedication of *Nombres* as a reflection of this very principle. In the oft-cited *dedicatoria*, León describes how he has long desired to discourse on the names of Christ, but has been unable previously: "Mas ya que la vida pasada, ocupada y trabajosa, me fue estorbo para que no pusiese este mi deseo y juicio en ejecución, no me parece que debo perder la ocasión de este ocio, en que la injuria y mala voluntad de algunas personas me han puesto" (*Obras completas* 1: 408). He goes on to add, "veo ahora y puedo hacer lo que antes no hacía" (*Obras completas* 1: 408). This passage seems to support the traditional view that León's solitary imprisonment contributed to the composition of *Nombres*.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the connection between isolation and general creativity, it is important to point out the specific role that mental activities have played in coping with isolation. Clearly, composing *Nombres* would have required considerable mental effort, such as in cataloguing the titles given to Christ and how they are used in the Bible, assembling and organizing key passages from the Old and New Testaments, and presenting arguments and counter-arguments systematically and coherently. Once again, however, rather than creating an additional mental burden, research shows that such an endeavor would have been a highly effective strategy for dealing with strain. Krzemien, Monchietti, and Urquijo argue that self-distraction is an effective means of coping with difficult circumstances which one cannot change (195-96), and anecdotal evidence confirms the usefulness of diverse mental activities for coping with isolation. For instance, Coffee and other U.S. POWs in North Vietnam reported inventing and solving complex mathematical problems, playing imaginary games of chess, making mental inventories of song lyrics or past experiences, or building imaginary dream homes (Coffee 117; Hubbell 409; Rutledge 60). Edith Bone described using the same techniques to keep her mind occupied (103, 111, 166).

Research also indicates that the religious character of *Nombres* is related to stress and coping. A "substantial body of evidence" shows that religious activities have a profound mental and physiological impact (Strawbridge et al 68), and are an effective means of alleviating stress (Belding et al 184; Bell Meisenhelder and Marcum 548). In one study, 93% of nursing home residents reported using religious activity to cope with isolation (Choi, Ransom, and Wyllie 543), a finding consistent with the accounts of numerous U.S. POWs in solitary confinement in North Vietnam (Coffee 211; Rutledge 34-37, 53-54; Hubbell 80-81, 309-11). The five months that Admiral Richard Byrd spent alone at a weather observation post in Antarctica in the winter of 1934 also prompted profound religious reflection (Storr 35-37).

This evidence demonstrates that the process of planning and writing *Nombres*, rather than taxing Fray Luis' frail health and limited emotional stamina, would have instead provided vital

<sup>13</sup> Alcalá (*Proceso* lxvii-lix; *Literatura y ciencia* 74) rejects this view of the dedication, however.

release from the physical and psychological strain of his trial. Although he was doubtless busy planning his defense, analyzing the allegations of hostile witnesses, and preparing written statements to submit to inquisitors, he would nonetheless have found working on this text to be a source of solace, not an additional burden.

In addition, research on stress can also inform our understanding of the relationship between Fray Luis' personality and his ordeal: his direct, sometimes obstinate exchanges with inquisitors suggest a degree of resilience that has been shown to provide health benefits and protect against the effects of stress, which likely played a key role in his surviving the trial.

Recent psychological studies have explored the correlation between certain personality traits and resistance to adversity. Kobasa defines "hardiness" in terms of a trio of related characteristics: *challenge*, which is a predisposition to view change as an opportunity for growth, rather than as a threat; *commitment*, the conviction that one's life has purpose and meaning; and *control*, a confidence that one can influence one's own life (3-4). These traits enable hardy individuals to weather stress more effectively (Dolbier, Smith, and Steinhardt 424). Similarly, Ong, Bergeman, and Boker describe "ego resiliency" as "the capacity to overcome, steer through, and bounce back from adversity" (1782), a trait which they argue mitigates the effects of stress and helps people recover more quickly (1786-87).

Fray Luis' post-trial publications provide convincing evidence that he possessed a high level of hardiness or ego resiliency, particularly in relation to the poet's repeated evocation of the *ab ipso ferro* ("from the axe itself") motif. Taken from Horace's fourth book of odes, this image of an oak tree, shorn of its branches but thriving even more than before, inspired the emblem in all Fray Luis' post-trial publications, and appears as a prominent theme in two of his original odes and in his treatise on the book of Job.

In the source text, Horace depicts Hannibal grudgingly admitting that Rome, like a pruned oak tree, derives renewed vigor from the very axe that severed its branches (*ab ipso ferro*).<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in his twelfth ode, "A Felipe Ruiz,"<sup>15</sup> Fray Luis describes the equanimity of the virtuous soul who is indifferent to fortune and riches, and therefore cannot be harmed by adversity:

Bien como la ñudosa  
carrasca, en alto risco desmochada  
con hacha poderosa,  
del ser despedazada  
del hierro torna rica y esforzada. (31-35)

Whereas this image of the triumphant oak tree occupies a mere four lines in Horace's ode, Fray Luis extends the description for another five stanzas. He ends by giving the resilient tree its voice, but with language more descriptive of his own imprisonment than any personification of flora:

Rompiste mi cadena,  
ardiendo por prenderme: al gran consuelo  
subido he por tu pena.  
Ya suelto, encumbro el vuelo,  
traspaso sobre el aire, huello el cielo. (61-65).

<sup>14</sup> The image comes from the fourth ode of the fourth book (Horace 294-301). Fray Luis translated the first and the thirteenth odes from Horace's fourth book (*Obras completas* 2: 945-48), which demonstrates that he would have been familiar with the fourth ode as well.

<sup>15</sup> Citations from Fray Luis' poetry are taken from the Cuevas edition.

León develops this theme further in his exposition on Job, emphasizing the Biblical subtext as well. Analyzing a comment by one of Job's accusing friends, "de quien parece haber hurtado Horacio aquesta comparación" (*Obras completas 2: 176*), Fray Luis introduces a modified version of one stanza cited above, in order to expand his commentary:

Bien como la ñudosa  
 carrasca, en alto monte desmochada  
 con hacha poderosa,  
 que de ese mismo hierro que es cortada,  
 cobra vigor y fuerzas renovada. (*Obras completas 2: 177*)

He then goes on to explore the spiritual significance behind the comparison, citing both the Old and the New Testament. The Biblical symbol of the flourishing tree, which represents the righteous soul, and the theme of divine pruning producing new fruit, appear several other times in the exposition (*Obras completas 2: 172-73, 179, 184, 256*).

The imagery of resiliency evidently had great meaning for Fray Luis. Moreover, the triumphant, even contemptuous tone he adopts in his poetic treatment of the *ab ipso ferro* motif is suggestive of his views of those who sought to cut him down to size. Certainly his language indicates a personality characterized by great tenacity and perseverance. Fray Luis' development of this imagery suggests the very sort of challenge, commitment, and sense of control which constitute the personality trait of resiliency, a quality which was likely fundamental to his surviving his incarceration.

In addition to hardiness, Fray Luis' post-trial writings reveal another personality trait which helped him cope with incarceration—his deep love of solitude. Indeed, in his post-trial works, the quiet meadow and the lonely mountain path are among his most eminent leitmotifs. The importance of this topos in Fray Luis' post-trial works demonstrates that years of involuntary isolation did not extinguish his love of peace and quiet, which stands as one of the more remarkable aspects of the trial. Paradoxically, although León's imprisonment forced him to become intimately familiar with the ache of loneliness, he nonetheless continued to delight in seclusion. In order to understand this enigma, it is important to note that psychologists are careful to distinguish between *loneliness*, a subjective dissatisfaction with one's social relationships, and *isolation*, the objective reality of being alone. This distinction is the key to understanding how Fray Luis could evoke both the pain of loneliness and the joy of solitude.

With regard to loneliness, Fray Luis demonstrates intimate knowledge of its impact. For example, in *Nombres*, he writes that even God dislikes loneliness, which was one motivation for His creating humanity: "porque la soledad es cosa tristísima" (*Obras completas 1: 701*). Similarly, Fray Luis' analysis of the suffering Jesus endured during his trial and execution emphasizes the disciples' abandonment of their teacher: "la pena que es ser vendido y traído a muerte por sus mismos amigos, como El lo fue en aquella noche de Judas; el ser desamparado en su trabajo de los que le debían tanto amor y cuidado; el dolor de trocarse los amigos con la fortuna" (*Obras completas 1: 582-83*). Similarly, in the exposition on Job, León compares Job's trials to Christ's suffering on the cross, arguing that for both, the most acute pain derived from "el no sentir dentro de sí y en su ánimo las consolaciones de Dios" (*Obras completas 2: 67*), a feeling Jung refers to as "moral isolation" (qtd. in Murray-Swank, McConnell and Pargament 284). Fray Luis also argues that those who condemn Job's complaints of spiritual abandonment or explain away Christ's lament on the cross ("My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matt. 27.46) "nunca hicieron experiencia de lo que la adversidad se siente ni de lo que duele el trabajo" (*Obras completas 2: 65*).

However, despite his familiarity with loneliness, Fray Luis maintained his affinity for solitude upon his release. In fact, his post-trial works describe the pleasure of seclusion more often than the melancholy of loneliness. We have already noted the dedication to *Nombres*, in which Fray Luis describes the silver lining in his confinement—the opportunity to work on projects which had taken a back seat to other responsibilities prior to his arrest (*Obras completas* 1:408). Immediately afterwards, readers are introduced to the text's three protagonists and the solitary glade where their conversations take place: “la soledad de una granja” beside the Augustinian monastery in Salamanca, where the trio retired “como a puerto sabroso” (*Obras completas* 1: 410). This *locus amoenus*, with its scattered trees, abundant shade, and a spring bubbling from a hillside, inspires the meditations that constitute the text of *Nombres*.

Fray Luis' original odes commence in a similar manner. The dedication's allusion to Fray Luis' preference to “vivir desconocido” (*Poesías completas* 77) segues naturally into the first ode, which describes the joys of a “Vida retirada.” The “mundanal ruido” (2) and the striving for rank, privilege, and fame (7-10), stand in opposition to the “descansada vida” (1) that awaits those wise enough to ascend the “escondida / senda” (3-4). This hidden path leads to a hillside orchard that closely resembles the three interlocutors' retreat in *Nombres*: a quiet breeze ruffles the leaves and flowers, as a stream meanders through the grove, watering the fruit trees (46-60). Here, the speaker affirms, “Vivir quiero conmigo” (36), “a solas, sin testigo” (38). At the end of the poem, the reference to a skillfully played “plectro” (85) implies the presence of another, but the musician neither speaks nor is seen.

Other odes treat privacy similarly. In “En una esperanza que salió vana” (XVII), the speaker, beset by frustrations, alludes longingly to “las inocentes soledades” (49), and urges the reader to serve as a buffer against unwanted intrusions: “de aquellos que de mí saber desean / les di que no me viste en tiempo alguno” (66-67). In like manner, “A la salida de la cárcel” (XXIII) describes the blessings of the “sabio que se retira / de aqueste mundo malvado” (4-5): with a simple dwelling and plain, wholesome food, “con solo Dios se compasa, / y a solas su vida pasa” (8-9). León even composed an entire ode on the theme of solitude—“Al apartamiento” (XIV)—in which a hillside retreat offers the speaker hope of spending his days “en gozo, en paz, en luz no corrompida” (35).

Research on isolation suggests that this love of seclusion helped insulate Fray Luis against the prolonged solitary confinement he endured during the trial. It has been well documented that some individuals react more positively to isolation than others, and may even prefer to be alone for extended periods. Adm. Richard Byrd volunteered to spend four winter months alone in Antarctica, for example, moved by a longing “to taste peace and quiet and solitude long enough to find out how good they really are” (qtd. in Storr 35). Carrère, Evans, and Stokols point out that people continue to volunteer for work in Antarctica, and suggest that prolonged confinement and isolation are seen as desirable when there is a perception that the benefits outweigh the downsides (234-35). Certainly, many major religions, including Christianity, highlight the benefits of withdrawal from the company of others (Storr 33-34; Suedfeld, “Social Isolation” 8-10). As we have seen, the leitmotiv of solitude in Fray Luis' post-trial works suggests the very sort of preference for privacy described here. León's statements during the trial prove that his love of retirement did not transform his imprisonment into a vacation, but it is incontrovertible that it aided in coping with nearly five years of solitary confinement.

In summary, we have seen that medical and psychological studies on the nature and effects of stress shed new light on Fray Luis' Inquisitorial trial. His imprisonment in Valladolid involved such stressors as confinement, social isolation, loss of control, the threat of torture, uncertainty about his fate, denial of the sacraments, malnutrition, and unsanitary conditions. In addition, Fray Luis endured several acute stressors, such as the search for a theological patron and the delays imposed by inquisitors. As a result, he experienced significant anxiety and anger, and suffered physically as well, being in grave danger of dying at least once. One way León coped with the strain of his imprisonment was by working on *De los nombres de Cristo*. The creativity, mental stimulation, and religious reflection required in such a project would have been effective in mitigating the effects of physical and psychological stress. In addition, it is clear that the resilient personality and the natural love of solitude that are evident in his post-trial works helped him endure the strenuous conditions in which he was housed.

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