



The Future of Pandemic Literature in the Face of Digitalization

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Abstract:

In times of crisis, people need some solace, a ray of hope, an experienced guidance and a living proof that "this too shall pass". There is no better incarnation of all of these combined than a story of a similar experience. While you are turning the pages of a pandemic novel, for example, you come to the realization that this novel succeeded to defy a previous pandemic, it refused to perish and managed to reach your bookshelf to inspire you that survival is possible and continuity is the doctrine of life. Here lies the significance of literary fiction and how it intersects with pandemics. Reflecting on this, the present paper attempts to explore this multifaceted intersection between pandemics and literature and how digitalization can reinforce this intersection and pave the way for pandemic literature to depart from the theoretical sphere to forge more practical areas of application such as online bibliotherapy.

المستخلص:

يحتاج الناس في أوقات الأزمات إلى بعض العزاء، وبصيص أمل، وتوجيه متمرس ودليل حي على أن "هذا أيضا سيمر". لا يوجد تجسيد أفضل لكل هذه الغايات مجتمعة من قصة تجربة مماثلة. وأنت تقلب صفحات رواية جائحة، على سبيل المثال، تدرك أن هذه الرواية نجحت في تحدي جائحة سابقة، ورفضت أن تهلك وتمكنت من الوصول إلى رف الكتب الخاص بك لتلهمك أن البقاء ممكن والاستمرار هو سنة الحياة. هنا تكمن أهمية الخيال الأدبي وكيف يتقاطع مع الأوبئة. بالتفكير في هذا، تحاول هذه الدراسة استكشاف هذا التقاطع متعدد الأوجه بين الأوبئة والأدب وكيف يمكن للرقمنة أن تعزز هذا التقاطع وتمهد الطريق لأدب الوباء للخروج من المجال النظري لتشكيل مجالات تطبيق أكثر عملية مثل العلاج بالقراءة (البيبليوثيرابي) عبر الإنترنت.

Keywords:

Pandemics, literature, digitalization, bibliotherapy.

Introduction:

As the saying goes, “change is the only constant in life”, and among the major changes brought about by the last pandemic outbreak, Covid-19, is the surge in book sales of literary fiction in general and pandemic literature in particular. Overnight, people found themselves face to face with a lethal virus that lockdown, vaccination and other precautionary procedures could only save them from its fatal effects on their bodies but not on their souls. As a result, to vaccinate their souls, people turned to pandemic literature in an unintended bibliotherapeutic process. Hence, the present study highlights the significance of bibliotherapy through pandemic literature as one of the features of the intersection between pandemics and literary fiction. Furthermore, the study proposes categorizing readers into three groups; common readers, politicians and physicians, claiming that such a categorization is related to the different approach of every group members that will eventually affect their interpretation of and approach to the pandemic literary work they read. Some masterpieces of pandemic literature are mentioned as examples. Finally, the study states the role of digitalization in the proliferation of pandemic literature and how digital pandemic literature can be a more suitable material for online bibliotherapy during pandemics.

Research Limitations:

Of course, literature in general is claimed to have a healing power but for the purposes of this study, this paper will confine its scope to pandemic literature.

Research Importance, Problem and Questions:

Although research has been done on pandemic literature and bibliotherapy, much research has been done separately with no focus on their intersection nor on their potential practical areas of application and significance for physicians, politicians and other society members in the age digitalization. The present paper attempts to fill this gap through answering the following questions?

- How does pandemic literature intersect with bibliotherapy?
- What is the significance of the intersection between pandemic literature and bibliotherapy for physicians, politicians and other society members?
- What is the influence of digitalization on pandemic literature and bibliotherapy?

Discussion:

(وَكُلًّا نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الرُّسُلِ مَا نُنَبِّئُ بِهِ قُلُودَكَ ۖ وَجَاءَكَ فِي هَذِهِ الْحَقُّ وَمَوْعِظَةٌ وَذِكْرَىٰ
لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ)

(And each [story] We relate to you from the news of the messengers is that by which We make firm your heart. And there has come to you, in this, the truth and an instruction and a reminder for the believers .

(Hud ١٢٠)

(Tafheem-ul-Quran by Syed Abu-al-A'la Maudud)

Like many of the Quranic verses, the abovementioned verse highlights the importance of reflecting on stories of the past to get guidance, strength and knowledge in the present. The Quranic approach stresses the educating, soothing and strengthening power of stories of past events, especially stories of hardships and misfortunes, and how such stories can sum up a whole experience, pass more information and deliver more lessons concerning how to deal with and overcome similar hardships than any other means.

The anecdotes of the past Messengers and their sufferings are mentioned in the Quran to help the Prophet (Peace be upon Him) and other believers to reflect on them to get inspiration, solace and guidance and eventually make their hearts firm in the face of similar misfortunes. Hence, in a relevant context, old time physicians realized the healing power of past stories for the ailments of the soul and used to prescribe specific Quranic Chapters for their patients not as a religious therapy but as bibliotherapy depending mainly on the healing effect a story can have on the mind and soul.



Inspired and guided by the Quranic model of healing and educating through reflecting on the stories of the predecessors with similar experiences, this study argues that among the most effective ways for people to escape fear, paranoia, depression and other negative feelings associated with pandemics can be to resort to stories of past pandemics. Through reflecting on such stories, people can educate themselves about pandemics and how to deal with them and hence become more aware, prepared and reassured when they face a similar situation. Resultantly, the present study suggests adopting bibliotherapy through pandemic literature as a social vaccination to overcome fears and negativity that prevail during pandemic times. Furthermore, the study asserts that there should be more efforts exerted towards producing more translations of pandemic literary works from different cultures and digitalizing pandemic literature to make it more accessible from home and ensure more proliferation even if people are in lockdown.

Pandemics are “large-scale outbreaks of infectious disease that can greatly increase morbidity and mortality over a wide geographic area and cause significant economic, social, and political disruption” (Madhav ٢١٥). Evidences suggest that increased global travel and integration, urbanization, changes in land use, and greater exploitation of the natural environment are the reasons why the likelihood of pandemics has increased over the past century (Jones et al ٢٠٠٨; Morse ١٩٩٥). These trends likely will continue and will intensify. Significant policy attention has focused on the need to identify and limit emerging outbreaks that might lead to pandemics and to expand and sustain investment to build preparedness and health capacity (Smolinsky et al ٢٠٠٣).

From a scientific perspective, it has been proven that the study of epidemics helps us comprehend politics, personal relationships, and socio-economic structures. Their outbreaks span across centuries and continents. From the earliest times to the present, epidemics have affected human history in several ways:

demographically, culturally, financially, politically, and biologically. The earliest plague epidemics raised questions about human's relations to God. Yellow fever led to the success of the Haitian revolution. Epidemics of cholera exposed how the industrial revolution created conditions for contagion to spread among workers and the poor. The global influenza epidemic of ١٩١٨-١٩٢٠ led to an outpouring of altruism and self-sacrifice.

From a literary perspective, pandemic literature vividly depicts how "pandemics can cause sudden, widespread morbidity and mortality as well as social, political, and economic disruption." (Madhav ٣١٧). Actually, the world has endured several notable pandemics that have been explored and written about by several authors, including the Black Death, Spanish flu, and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS). Consequently, in this research, it is claimed that the study of pandemic literature is imperative and beneficial.

As Emmanuel Stip, et al state in their article, "Bibliotherapy: Reading OVID During COVID", "An epidemic of an infectious disease such as COVID-١٩ is often a source of emotional distress, even among those who have not been directly exposed to the disease. The period following the acute phase of the coronavirus epidemic and the mitigation measures will likely be the hardest for medical professionals in terms of the psychological impact" (١). Hence, it is timely to explore some ways to help people overcome the diverse emotional turbulences associated with pandemics.

Among the tried ways to strengthen resilience during pandemics is watching horror and pandemic movies. In their study, "Pandemic Practice: Horror Fans and Morbidly Curious Individuals are more Psychologically Resilient During the COVID-١٩ Pandemic", Coltan Scrivner, et al tested whether past and current engagement with thematically relevant media fictions, including horror and pandemic films, was associated with greater preparedness for and psychological resilience toward the pandemic. In a relevant context,

the present study postulates that reading pandemic novels can be consistent with these results and with the hypothesis that exposure to such fictions “allow audiences to practice effective coping strategies that can be beneficial in real-world situations.”(ibid)

It can be argued that pandemic narratives in general have a great impact on both individual and collective world-making. They shape the perception of reality influenced by potentially traumatizing events, such as the WHO's proclamation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its worldwide aftermaths. Therefore, the present study bases its foundation on Nünning's (٢٠١٣) assertion that narratives massively influence our perception of reality (cf Völkl ٣٣٨). They can be regarded as “Means of Living and Means of Survival” (Ette, ٧).

In unprecedented times, people have turned to fiction both for comfort and for distraction, and also to try to understand and anticipate what might come next. (Morgan ١) Sales and rental figures for works of fiction about pandemics and other disease outbreaks surged in ٢٠٢٠. This practice of calming the soul through the power of stories has its roots in literature. Even pandemic literature itself directs people towards immersing themselves in stories at times of plagues and pandemics. For instance, the renowned writer Giovanni Boccaccio in his masterpiece, *The Decameron*, provides the readers with a manual on how to survive a pandemic through what seems to be bibliotherapy and how the power of a story a day can keep the pandemic away.

In their article, “Pandemic Fiction as Therapeutic Play: The New York Times Magazine's The Decameron Project (٢٠٢٠)”, Stephanie Downes and Juliane Römhild explore the therapeutic potential of narrative fiction during a global health crisis. They focus on The Decameron Project (٢٠٢٠), a collection of short fiction by writers from around the world, commissioned by the New York Times Magazine. The Decameron Project references the narrative framework established by Giovanni Boccaccio in the mid-١٤th century, when the

Black Death devastated Europe. Drawing on aspects of psychoanalytic theory and principles of bibliotherapy employed since the Middle Ages, Downes and Römhild argue that “The Decameron Project offers strategies to simultaneously confront and contain the anxious mind. Storytelling, according to both Boccaccio and to the editors of The Decameron Project, is not merely a source of distraction but a means of survival.” (٤٥).

Drawing on the aforementioned, the present study asserts that there is an intersection between pandemics and literary fiction that can be reflected in the inclination towards resorting to (pandemic) literature at times of global upheavals, like the Covid^{١٩} pandemic, as a source of solace and understanding. “I intend to offer some solace”, Boccaccio writes in his Prologue, “to those who stand in need of it” (٢). As a matter of fact, at times of pandemics, stories can have a healing power. As Gilles Deleuze states, literature is “an enterprise of health,” in which “the writer as such is not a patient but rather a physician, the physician of himself and of the world.” (cf Hall ٢٣٨). In this sense, it can be claimed that reading pandemic literature during pandemics can be regarded as a bibliotherapeutic experience, even if it is done unintentionally, where the writer is the therapist and the reader is the patient. This postulation applies to pandemic novels and their writers such as Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*.

In “Bibliotherapy: A Therapeutic Adjuvant in Medicine” ,Vishnu Gupta, et al assert that bibliotherapy is not a new concept in the field of Library science. Nevertheless, Samuel McChord Crothers, a Unitarian minister and renowned essayist, first coined the term “bibliotherapy” in a ١٩١٦ Atlantic Monthly article, “A Literary Clinic”, but this concept has a long historical track. Its history is rooted in the soil of ancient Greece around ٣٠٠ BC ago, where doors of library at Thebes engraved the phrase “Place of healing for the Soul.”

Similarly in ancient Rome, the speakers were strongly recommended as “reading material for improving judgments” (Brown,



١٩٧٥, ١٠). Brown also called a library as an “intellectual pharmacy” (Brown, ١٩٧٥, ١٠). In ancient time, the Bible was most used book to treat the sick. This indicates that the bibliotherapy was directly related to religion.

The therapeutic value of reading books was also mentioned by Aristotle. He indicated that “it aroused emotions within the person which did, in effect, heal” (Cardenas, ١٩٨٠). One more inscription was discovered in a library placed at medieval church in Switzerland, which engraved as “The Medicine Chest of the Soul” (Salup and Salup, ١٩٨١, ٣). William Shakespeare also authenticated this idea when he wrote, “Come, and take choice of all my library and so beguile thy sorrow” (Cardenas, ١٩٨٠, ٤).

Benjamin Rush, the father of American Psychiatry delivered a lecture on ١٠ November, ١٨٠٢, emphasizing the importance of library in a hospital. He said “for the amusement and instruction of patients in a hospital, a small library should by all means compose a part of its furniture” (Rush, ١٨١١, ١٩٢).

A renowned British scholar, priest, and physician, Robert Burton (١٥٨٣) in his book ‘Anatomy of Melancholy’ jotting down various references to the use of literature in curing a troubled spirit. The Bible is repeatedly cited as the most used book. Burton represented Bible as an apothecary shop, with remedies for every disease of the human body. Along with medical and surgical care, the Al-Mansur Hospital at Cairo, Egypt, offered the services of priests to read the Koran to sick people day and night during thirteenth century. (Vishnu Gupta, et al ٣٣)

Further in the year ٢٠٠٥, Whalen, in the simple words, defined the term as “reading as a healing therapy.” In this definition the author emphasizes on reading for the only purpose of healing of mild depression. The definition of bibliotherapy according to the Online Dictionary for the Library & Information Science (ODLIS) (٢٠١١) is “the use of books selected on the basis of content in a planned



reading program designed to facilitate the recovery of patients suffering from mental illness or emotional disturbance. Ideally, the process of bibliotherapy occurs in three phases: personal identification of the reader with a particular character in the recommended work, resulting in psychological catharsis, which leads to rational insight concerning the relevance of the solution suggested in the text to the reader's own experience. Assistance of a trained psychotherapist is advised."

Reading (pandemic) literature can be more effectively healing and educating than years of study of psychology as Pamela Enders, a psychologist, musician, and group/individual therapist in Massachusetts, says, in an online essay by Chaya Bhuvanewar on How Books Sustain Mental Health Professionals,: "When I was an undergrad, majoring in psychology, I found that I learned much more about human psychology reading literature than I did from my psych classes. I am a firm believer that the best, most astute psychologists are writers of fiction." (online)

Lokdeshwar More assumes that "literature of pandemics exhibits commonality of humanistic concerns; to explore the meaning of painful experiences through reading, reflection and storytelling, shaping our experiences of health, disease, and illness and providing us with insights into how our ancestors internalized pain and anguish from pandemics." (٢) In addition, Pandemic literature has always proved to be a window on societies inflicted with plagues and pestilences, thereby offering a close picture of semblances and differences, from minor to major, from social, political, health-related, and economic problems encountered by them.

Building on the aforementioned assumptions, the researcher suggests that pandemic literature specifically, rather than any other literary form, should be revisited and explored during and after pandemics like Covid^{١٩} from a bibliotherapeutic standpoint and before pandemics as a precautionary procedure. People should

consider reading as a prescription to strengthening their mental health and well-being. As Jenni Ogden, PhD, a neuropsychologist and the author of multiple nonfiction and fiction books, including *The Moon is Missing* says: “The idea of reading as a healing activity is not new; apparently, King Ramses II of Egypt had a special chamber for his books; above the door were the words “House of Healing for the Soul.” Sigmund Freud incorporated literature into his psychoanalysis practice at the end of the nineteenth century. Medical professionals and psychologists have been "prescribing" books for their patients to read for a hundred years or more. But it was more as an adjunct to other treatments rather than a treatment in itself.” “Books can help people reduce depression, cope with grief and trauma, and improve their mental health. Through stories, readers can self-reflect on problems and empathize with characters who are facing similar issues. It provides a type of catharsis.

While science can provide a vaccine for the body during a pandemic, the researcher claims that literature can serve as a vaccine for the soul. Pandemics cause collective traumas that can be healed through bibliotherapy and reading pandemic stories that Prisco Piscitelli describes as “a ‘social vaccination’ against all the restrictions because it can help readers find a way to exit what COVID-١٩ put into play”. (cf Yelena Moroz Alpert).

In the extraordinary time of the COVID-١٩ pandemic, people are experiencing unexpected changes and challenges in their everyday lives. , Hyerim Cho, et al state that undergoing social lockdowns and encountering new lifestyles have changed how people enjoy leisure materials. E-book reading has been booming due to closed libraries and bookstores (Pressman, ٢٠٢٠; Parikh et al., ٢٠٢٠). According to Merry and Johnson (٢٠٢٠), people are reading more “dystopias, social justice, and steamy romance.” The researcher claims that such a booming in e-book reading reflects the necessity to digitalize the rich canon of pandemic literature to make it accessible for readers seeking help while in lockdown and quarantine. This shift

from printed books to e-books marks the beginning of a new era of proliferation of pandemic literature through digitalization.

Digitalization makes pandemic literature more accessible for both bibliotherapists and patients and hence allows pandemic literature to enter more practical areas of application. E-books and other digital formats of pandemic literature are more suitable for the demands of the new era of globalization and quick-paced lifestyle. Digitalization grants literature more chances of viral proliferation in the age of viral pandemics. It changes the bibliotherapeutic setting and adds more platforms for literary appreciation and communication.

The present study highlights the role of digitalization in making literature available through different versions of production. For instance, the audiobook as a new format of literary production has been of a great aid for both busy and illiterate people. It helps people dismantle the obstacles to practicing bibliotherapy such as time shortage and illiteracy. It even opens the door for new trials of self-dependent home-based online bibliotherapy.

Previous studies show that bibliotherapy—using books as therapy in the treatment of mental or psychological disorders—may be helpful for people who have experienced psychological trauma (Glavin & Montgomery, ٢٠١٧) and depression or anxiety (Peterkin & Grewal, ٢٠١٧). Schutte and Malouff (٢٠٠٦) also state that reading has an emotion-altering power for some readers going through harsh living conditions or physical/emotional distress.

In a relevant context, as it is mentioned in “Digital Bibliotherapy and Psychiatric Patients in a Hospital” by Dr. Eleni Semertzidou & Maria Georgala, digital bibliotherapy, which involves the use of digital literature as a therapeutic tool, has shown promising results in managing various mental health disorders. Studies have found that it can help reduce symptom severity in conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, it offers greater accessibility, overcoming geographical and temporal

constraints, thus benefiting a wider audience. However, potential challenges, such as technological literacy among patients, privacy concerns, and the need for professional guidance, have been identified. Despite these challenges, digital bibliotherapy holds immense potential in enhancing mental health care within hospital settings. Further research is needed to fully realize its potential and address implementation challenges.(٣)

Ceridwen Dovey states that since the discovery, in the mid-nineties, of “mirror neurons”—neurons that fire in our brains both when we perform an action ourselves and when we see an action performed by someone else—the neuroscience of empathy has become clearer. A ٢٠١١ study published in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, based on analysis of fMRI brain scans of participants, showed that, when people read about an experience, they display stimulation within the same neurological regions as when they go through that experience themselves. We draw on the same brain networks when we are reading stories and when we are trying to guess at another person’s feelings. Consequently, the present study suggests that using pandemic literature in bibliotherapy whether online or offline can raise people’s awareness about and resilience to pandemics because a pandemic novel can provide its readers with a sense of experience through simulation.

Keith Oatley, a novelist and emeritus professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto, has for many years run a research group interested in the psychology of fiction. “We have started to show how identification with fictional characters occurs, how literary art can improve social abilities, how it can move us emotionally, and can prompt changes of selfhood,” he wrote in his ٢٠١١ book, *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, “Fiction is a kind of simulation, one that runs not on computers but on minds: a simulation of selves in their interactions with others in the social world...based in experience, and involving being able to think of possible futures.” This idea echoes a long-held belief among both

writers and readers that books are the best kinds of friends; they give us a chance to rehearse for interactions with others in the world, without doing any lasting damage. (Oatley ix-x)

Hence, the present study suggests categorizing the readers of pandemic literature into three groups that each of them can benefit differently from the process of bibliotherapy whether online or offline according to the attributed category. These categories are as follow: politicians and people in authority category, physicians and medical practitioners category, and common readers category. This categorization of readers is drawn on Liz Brewster and Sarah McNicol's hypothesis of a person-centered approach to using books for bibliotherapy. In the light of this hypothesis, each reader has a different approach to pandemic literature according to the category s/he belongs to. Hence a pandemic novel can benefit its readers variably.

For the common readers' category, reading pandemic literature can be used to help people of all ages realize that they are not alone in what they are feeling or experiencing. Other men and women, real and fictional, have dealt with and overcome challenges similar to what modern-day readers may experience. Many characters in books offer examples of those who have emerged stronger and more resilient after facing tremendous trials. Providing comfort and calming fears, offering new perspectives and stimulating personal growth — these are all goals of bibliotherapy.

Among the rich pandemic novels that can benefit the category of common readers greatly is Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. Madison U. Sowell, in his article, "Seeking refuge from COVID-19-induced isolation? Try bibliotherapy", suggests that one of the most pertinent examples of reactions to a plague occurs in the 14th century. It is found in Boccaccio's "Decameron," a collection of 100 fictional stories whose narrative frame is the actual bubonic plague that undermined the social order of Florence. Between 1347 and 1351 the plague



peaked as it spread throughout Italy and the rest of Europe. This pestilence, later known as the Black Death, killed tens of millions of people and led to massive social upheaval and economic chaos.

In the introduction to his tales Boccaccio graphically describes the effects of the unrelenting disease on the citizens of Florence. Sick persons were barred from entering the city. Neighbors stopped visiting each other in their respective homes. The government issued safeguards for protecting the people's health, but they were often disregarded. Large groups of people gathered in churches to pray, only to end up spreading the disease. Most medicines were of little to no avail. Hospitals were overcrowded. The sick and the dying felt abandoned by friends and family members. Funeral ceremonies were canceled. The bodies of the dead were stacked up in the streets. Mass graves were hastily dug for the multitude of corpses. Do these events not have parallels in our own day?

Boccaccio's account of how his fellow Florentines responded to the plague proves instructive. He describes two main reactions to the ensuing chaos. One group shrugged off the plague as if it were a big joke — a medieval version of "fake news." They believed in eating, drinking and merrymaking to the greatest extent possible. They would visit one tavern or bar after another. They refused to speak about the pestilence and insisted on focusing only on subjects that were pleasant or entertaining. In their conduct, they disrespected the laws of God and man. When they were exposed to the plague, these plague-deniers suffered greatly or died.

The other group was of the opinion that a sober and abstemious mode of living considerably reduced the risk of infection. They formed themselves in tight-knit groups that lived in isolation. They ate healthily and moderately, avoiding excesses, and they refrained from interacting with outsiders. The 10 storytellers who are the fictional protagonists of the "*Decameron*" leave Florence for the countryside, where they enjoy fresh air and diversion. In essence, they quarantine



or isolate themselves in a country villa with a private garden; they separate themselves from the pestilence that is rife in their hometown; they use stories to instruct and to lift their spirits. What is more important, in doing this the ten narrators survive the plague and thrive. Sharing, discussing and commenting on stories are their therapy.

If we are open to dialoguing with voices from the past and, like Boccaccio's narrators, are willing to engage in sharing and pondering stories, we may learn life-enhancing lessons from great literature. Bibliotherapy, in other words, may offer insights and solutions as well as hope and solace. For the modern reader, *The Decameron* serves as a reminder that disease is a part of life; that art can come from chaos; that rebirth and renewal follow death and destruction; and that humanity has been here – or somewhere strangely like it – before. (Downes et al ٤٧)

Boccaccio's *Decameron* is perhaps the best known and earliest specific treatment of the life-saving potential of narrative in the medieval West (Forni, ٢٠٠٥; Olsen, ١٩٨٢; Marafioti, ٢٠١٨; Mazzotta, ١٩٨٦; Psaki, ٢٠١٩). The recent success of organisations like The Reader in the UK – which runs shared reading groups with a therapeutic focus in a range of settings including local libraries, hospitals and prisons – highlights the desire for a return to the communal reading practices of the past, of which *The Decameron* offers a working model. (Downes et al ٤٩)

The Italian literature specialist, Martin Marafioti, argues that Boccaccio's *Decameron* established a 'tradition of using narration as prophylaxis during episodes of contagion' (x). In the light of this argument, the present study proposes that adopting bibliotherapy through reading pandemic literature can be regarded as a precautionary procedure that is supposed to raise the reader's awareness concerning pandemics and the scenarios of people's

reactions to them, lessen the fear associated with ignorance and lack of knowledge and enhance people's preparedness and resilience.

As for the category of physicians and other medical practitioners literature in general and pandemic novels in particular can have tremendous benefits. Rita Charon et al propose that by including the study of literature in medical education, five broad goals are met: ١) Literary accounts of illness can teach physicians concrete and powerful lessons about the lives of sick people; ٢) great works of fiction about medicine enable physicians to recognize the power and implications of what they do; ٣) through the study of narrative, the physician can better understand patients' stories of sickness and his or her own personal stake in medical practice; ٤) literary study contributes to physicians' expertise in narrative ethics; and ٥) literary theory offers new perspectives on the work and the genres of medicine. Particular texts and methods have been found to be well suited to the fulfillment of each of these goals.(٥٩٩)

What reinforces the researcher's claim that reading pandemic literature can greatly benefit the category of physicians and medical practitioners is the Disease Literary Theory, promulgated by Ifeoma Onyemelukwe. This Disease Literary Theory is used by Onyemelukwe in combination with historical, descriptive and sociological methods to study representation of disease in literature. Onyemelukwe states that pandemic novels can be ranked as disease literary narrative and has used *The Plague* by Albert Camus as a study text.

The Plague by Albert Camus is an example of such a great work. Camus explores the personal, professional, and political implications of a physician's work through the eyes of Dr Bernard Rieux as he fights against an outbreak of the bubonic plague in Oran, a French city on the Algerian coast, during the ١٩٤٠s. *The Plague* can be understood on several levels. The first of which is that it is a



compelling story of a society suffering from a deadly infectious disease prior to the time of an effective treatment.(Winter et al ٢٢٦)

According to Onyemelukwe, it is found that Camus, in *The Plague*,

“describes in great details the various stages of development of the plague in Oran, a coastal city of Algeria; its signs and symptoms, its prevalence, its negative and positive consequences, the preventive measures adopted by the government to check the spread of the disease like social distancing, isolation and complete lockdown. It is discovered that after roughly a year of quarantine of the city of Oran, the plague comes to an end. It is also established that the plague reflects the cholera epidemic that ravaged Oran in ١٩٤٩ as well as past and present plagues/human suffering and pains like World War II and COVID-١٩. The study concludes that Camus’ *La peste* qualifies to be classed as disease literature and is vividly relevant to the present-day world stricken with corona virus pandemic among other plagues”.(٥١)

Hence, in the light of the conclusion that pandemic novels, like *The Plague*, can serve as examples of “Disease Narrative”, the researcher asserts the significance of reading, studying and examining pandemic literature for the category of physicians and other medical practitioners. Because, as Ya Fen Huang mentions, in “The Disease Narrative in Albert Camus’ *The Plague*”, through such Disease Narrative:

“humans throughout history have constructed knowledge about various diseases and their symptoms ... These often function as historical records as characters suffering from diseases and illnesses are subjected to the current body of knowledge about pathology, pharmacy, pharmacology, and anatomy. In this way, the relevant vocabulary, psychoanalysis, and philosophical concepts or cultural discourses could be simultaneously

presented and recorded in the literary narratives of disease, implying that literary works could help people understand the historical subtext about the relationship between illness and humanity throughout history.” (٢)

Furthermore, such an examination of pandemic literature as disease narrative “enables readers to question whether traditional medical science and theories are still workable at an age of modernization.” (ibid)

Concerning those who belong to the category of politicians and people in authority, pandemic literature holds a great opportunity for them to reflect on the dynamics of the relationship between the sovereign and the people in times of pandemics. It also provides them with negative and positive examples of pandemic crises management strategies to avoid or follow when faced by a real pandemic. Pandemic literature enriches politicians with stories of old nations' fight against pandemics that can be a valuable reference for politicians and decision makers to look back on for guidance and inspiration when dealing with similar incidents. A politician who reads pandemic literature is more aware of the obstacles that might hinder the government's attempts towards containing a pandemic scene. These obstacles may be caused by people's belief in conspiracy theory, superstitions and sense of detachment from the government and may in turn lead to resistance to vaccination and perpetuation of fear, scapegoatism and discrimination.

In fact, pandemics and infectious diseases can be depicted both literally and metaphorically which may doubly benefit readers, especially those in authority, and widens their horizons to new meanings when handling a pandemic situation. In addition, epidemics are “a common figure for social disorder” (Sontag ٥٨), as in many literary works, “a character's physical disease or illness also metaphorically references various universal characteristics of the human condition—death, religion, politics and relationships—as they

are interworked amidst healthy and unhealthy bodies.”(Huang ١) Hence pandemics can be used allegorically as a metaphor of war, injustice, discrimination, stigmatization, scapegoatism, violence and other social diseases. In this sense, pandemic literature can be regarded as the mirror of societies and their fight with social, political and economic upheavals.

From this perspective and drawing on Project Cassandra, which is mainly based on the idea of literature as an early warning system, the researcher proposes that pandemic literature can be used as a prepping modality for future pandemics in reality. Project Cassandra is a project aimed to use literature as "a tool for early crisis detection". The project was funded by German Federal Ministry of Defence and was led by Jürgen Wertheimer, a professor of comparative literature of Weltethos Institut. (Wikipedia) The main idea behind the project was studying fictional literature of specific regions prone to crises to examine if it is possible to identify potential future threats through literary texts. The project is entitled “Projekt Cassandra”, alluding to the Greek mythological figure of Cassandra, who was famously able to predict the future, although cursed so that nobody would believe her prophecies.

It is true that pandemic literature cannot predict when a next pathogenic pandemic will be. However, it can also tell how people will react to it. In addition, on a metaphorical level, as Project Cassandra establishes literature as a source for predicting wars, the researcher suggests that it can also be highly useful in predicting social diseases and disorders associated with pandemics through a close reading of pandemic novels that chronicles social pandemics to pinpoint their causes and effects.

As *Cristina Coellen* mentions, for instance, a health crisis such as the Covid-١٩ pandemic can hardly be said to have been predicted by Camus, merely because his novel *The Plague* (١٩٤٧) describes a situation that is eerily similar to current events.(Online) Nevertheless,

“the physical illness that the townspeople in *The Plague* suffer from can also be read as a metaphor for evil in the world and how people either fight against that evil or succumb to it.”(Winter et al ٧٢٦)

The BBC's Lucy Ash finds parallels between Albert Camus' *The Plague* and how the present world, including Algeria, is coping with the coronavirus pandemic amid political upheaval.(Online) In countries with weak institutions and legacies of political instability, pandemics can increase political stresses and tensions. In these contexts, outbreak response measures such as quarantines have sparked violence and tension between states and citizens. (Madhav ٣١٧)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, from the abovementioned, the researcher argues that revisiting pandemic literature from a bibliotherapeutic approach is imperative. Modern time readers should resort to pandemic novels as prophylaxis to vaccinate their souls in advance and to not be taken by surprise when they face a future pandemic. A pandemic is a collective calamity that should be faced with joint efforts of the whole society. Hence, there should be enlightening endeavors to spread awareness among people whether they are common people, physicians or even politicians. The researcher argues that people's gateway to healthy body and society is bibliotherapy. However, sometimes, in a pandemic scene, we are not lucky to have a library at home with the chosen books and in a familiar language. Fortunately, digitalization can solve this problem and make it easier for us to access e-books and electronic libraries where we can practice online bibliotherapy and enjoy reading and dreaming.

Research Results:

-The research asserts the intersection between pandemics and literature on one hand and pandemic literature and bibliotherapy on the other.



- Bibliotherapy by using Pandemic literature can help people get inspiration, hope and resilience to go on and start anew.
- A pandemic novel is no less important than a first aid course for a physician and a strategic planning course for a politician, as pandemic literature can help them better understand their roles and others'.
- Digitalization can increase the effectiveness of the intersection of pandemic literature and bibliotherapy as it raises the levels of literature accessibility and proliferation and provides people with a chance to enjoy bibliotherapy online.
- Digitalized formats of pandemic literature are more suitable for the quick-paced lifestyle and (post)pandemic world of today.

Recommendations:

- Adopting bibliotherapy by pandemic literature as a healing and prepping modality.
- Merging the study of pandemic literature in physician and political education and practice.
- Translating pandemic literature to different languages and turning all printed pandemic literature into digital formats for an easier, faster and safer accessibility.



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