LITERARY HUES ON PANDEMIC CANVAS

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Abstract

The current unprecedented times, thanks to Covid-19 has drastically changed the normal way of life. The 'New Normal' is leading to changes in the human behaviour mindset and invasions into social and cultural matrix. As in past whenever the World is struck by pandemics and wars literature becomes the mirror of the societal changes. There has always been a shift in the literary writing styles, be it the switching tone of writing over the pandemics and wars. Earlier writers or literary scholars like Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, John Webster and other Elizabethan age they all wrote sonnets and plays mainly on the concept of romance or war romances where a solider is writing and reciting a prose for his beloved changed to singing patriotic songs for their motherland in the times of both the World Wars such as T.S. Eliot's 'Four Quartets' which was a masterpiece on the War. In 1817, "The Cholera Plague", which was the small intestine infection originated in Russia, where one million people died. Similarly, at present, the world is fighting a war against the Covid -19 pandemic. The pandemic has turned into a biowarfare not limited by the geographical boundaries made by man. The paper focuses on the "Conquest of the New World on Literature", where various authors through their art of expression accounted pandemics. The only way forward for the world is to embrace this socio change the 'New Normal'.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Pandemic, Literature, T.S. Eliot, New Normal, Spanish Influenza*

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"Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change."

- ***Marry Shelley***

Introduction: Covid-19 pandemic has promised the humanity to alter us all in strange ways. There has been paradigm shift of events that divides lives and culture before and after the pandemic. The sensory details of this outbreak like masks, the faces of doctors and nurses creased with worry and fatigue, the closure signs, the antiseptic smells, the empty streets and the stack of coffins piled up in the morgue, will weave their way back in forth in our minds and triggering us to wonder hat future might be. Over past few centuries the world has witnessed many pandemics, from the time of 1350, like the "Black Death" hit Europe that wiped out almost 1/3rd population and made England and France incapacitated. At that time various writers like Thomas Walsingham struggled to make sense of the situation as the pandemic was considered as *'disease without borders.'* England was again hit by the plague in the 1665, *"The Great Plague of London"* where *Daniel Defoe's 'A forward of the Plague War'* was highly received and appreciated. Indian authors like Salman Rushdie through his book *'Midnight's Children'* or Vikram Seth's *'A Suitable Boy'* which highlighted the Colonial Period in India, and the way society was being set out. Thus, one can be assured that there was a dynamic shift in the style of writing and the way authors approached literature.

Literature Work in the times of Pandemic: There has always been literature of pandemic because there have always been pandemics. What marks the literature of plague, pestilence, and pandemic is a commitment to try and forge if not some sense of explanation, then at least a sense of meaning out of the raw experience of panic, horror, and despair. Narrative is an attempt to stave off meaninglessness, and in the void of the pandemic, literature serves the purpose of trying, however desperately, to stop the bleeding. Thus, here are few of the mention from the literary world.

The Master of Playing Card's largest engraving, however, was the aforementioned depiction of the unfortunate third-century martyr who suffered by order of the Emperor Diocletian. A violent image, but even several generations after the worst of the Black Death, and Sebastian still resonated with the populace, who remembered that "To many Europeans, the pestilence seemed to be the punishment of a wrathful Creator," as John Kelly notes in *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of all Time*. Medical historian Roy Porter writes in Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul that the "Black Death of the mid-fourteenth century and subsequent outbreaks…had, of course, cast a long, dark shadow, and their aftermath was the culture of the Dance of Death, the worm-corrupted cadaver, the skull and crossbones and the charnel house." All of said accoutrement, which endures even today from the cackling skulls of Halloween to the pirates' flag, serve to if not make pandemic comprehensible, then to at least tame it a bit. Faced with calamity, this is what the stories told and the images made were intended to do. Religion supplied the largest storehouse of ready-made narrative with which to tell stories, even while the death toll increasingly made traditional belief untenable.

A Journal of the Plague Year (1722) Defoe's novel is a fictional account of the bubonic plague epidemic which hit London in 1655. The literary work by Defoe is being noted more detailed than Samuel Pepy's real life plague diaries. Another author whose work was compared to Defoe's was Shilts. He gave an epidemiological account of the numbers, letting the horror speak through science more effectively than had it been rendered in poetry. Such staidness is its own requirement and can speak powerfully to the reality of the event, whereby "the unalterable tragedy at the heart of the pandemic.

Ormond; Or, The Secret Witness (1799) Charles Brockden Brown's nove; was set during devastating yellow fever outbreak of 1793 which afflicted Philadelphia's population. This was an event which the author Charles Brockden Brown lived through and lost his best friend to. Ormond is a gothic story of Constantia Dudley, a young woman who struggles to keep her family housed and fed when her father loses his business during the outbreak. Some of the gory details regarding the effects of the plague might disturb even disentailed modern readers. *The Last Man (1826)* Marry Wollstonecraft Shelly This Novel made her previous one far less famous than *Frankenstein,* her largely forgotten novel is arguably just as ground breaking. Displaying the trademark uneasiness about the idea of fictionality that often-marked 19th-century novels, Shelley's conceit is that what you're reading are transcriptions of parchment containing ancient oracular predictions that the author herself discovered while exploring caves outside of Naples that had once housed the temple of the Cumae Sibylline. Her main character is a masculinized *roman a clef* for Shelley herself, an aristocrat named Lionel Verney who lives through the emergence of global pandemic in 2073 up through the beginning of the 22nd century when he earns the titular status of The Last Man. All of Shelley's characters are stand-ins for her friends, the luminaries of the rapidly waning

Romantic age, from **Lord Byron** who is transformed into Lord Randolph, a passionate if incompetent leader of England who bungles that nation's response to the pandemic, to her own husband, **Percy**, who becomes Adrian, the son of the previous king who has chosen rather to embrace republicanism. By the time Verney begins his solitary pilgrimage across a desolated world, with only the ghosts of Homer and Shakespeare, and an Alpine sheepdog whom he adopts, he still speaks in a first person addressed to an audience of nobody. "Thus, around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirts of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold…the LAST MAN." Thus, in a world devoid of people, Verney becomes the book and the inert world becomes the reader.

The necessity of literature in the aftermath of pandemic is movingly illustrated in **Emily St. John Mandel**'s novel *Station Eleven.* Mostly taking place several years after the "Georgian Flu" has killed the vast majority of humans on the planet and civilization has collapsed, Mandel's novel follows a troupe of Shakespearean actors as they travel by caravan across a scarred Great Lakes region on either side of the U.S.-Canadian border. "We bemoaned the impersonality of the modern world," Mandel writes, "but that was a lie." *Station Eleven* is, in some sense, a love letter to a lost world, which is to say the world (currently) of the reader. Our existence "had never been impersonal at all," she writes, and the novel gives moving litanies of all that was lost in the narrative's apocalypse, from chlorinated swimming pools to the mindlessness of the Internet. There is a tender love of every aspect of our stupid world, so that how the crisis happened can only be explained because of the fact that we were so interconnected: "There had always been a massive delicate infrastructure of people, all of them working unnoticed around us, and when people stop going to work, the entire operation grinds to a halt." As survivors struggle to rebuild, it's the job of narrative to supply meaning to that which disease has taken away, or as the motto painted on the wagon of the traveling caravan has it: "Survival is insufficient." The need to tell stories, to use narrative to prove some continuity with a past obliterated by pandemic, is the motivating impulse of English professor James Smith, the main character in **Jack London's** largely forgotten 1912 post-apocalyptic novel, *The Scarlet Plague.* With shades of Edgar **Allan Poe**, London imagines a 2013 outbreak of haemorrhagic fever called the "Red Death." Infectious, fast-moving, and fatal, the plague wipes out the vast majority of the world's population, so that some six decades after the pestilence first appears, Smith can scarcely believe that his memories of a once sophisticated civilization aren't illusions. Still, the former teacher is compelled to tell his grandchildren about the world before the Red Death, even if he sometimes imagines that they are lies. "The fleeting systems lapse like foam," writes London, "That's it a foam, and fleeting. All man's toil upon the planet was just so much foam." Although, one cannot forget 1817, "The Cholera Plague", which was the small intestine infection originated in Russia, where one million people died. Spreading through feces-infected water and food. The reach of the British Empire and its navy spread cholera to Spain, Africa, Indonesia, China, Japan,

Italy, Germany and America, where it killed 150,000 people. Furthermore, one of the worst pandemics was Spanish flu which resulted in 50 million deaths worldwide.

Compression between Spanish Influenza and Covid-19: Comparisons between the influenza pandemic and COVID-19 have been widespread as we scramble for some map of how this outbreak might unfold. Through a medical lens, we ask which virus is worse. Do they spread in similar ways? How did public life change both then and now? Are there lessons that might be drawn or mistakes that might be avoided? Some differences between the two outbreaks are already clear: the 1918-19 pandemic killed healthy young adults at astonishing rates, and influenza seemed like a familiar rather than a new threat, despite the unique virulence of the strain, which meant it was even easier to dismiss at least at first. And the timing mattered: the influenza pandemic came on the heels of the deadliest war the world had yet to see, an overlap that meant the pandemic received far less attention, despite killing so many more people. The second mass-death event in five years, the pandemic arrived when the world was already overrun with corpses and grief. Yet the literature that arose from the influenza pandemic speaks to our current moment in profound ways, offering connections in precisely the realms where art excels: in emotional landscapes, in the ways a past moment reverberates into the present, in the ineffable conversation between the body's experiences and our perception of the world.

Right now, every few days brings another reality into focus; what seemed far-fetched yesterday arrives tomorrow. The past is always another country, but the speed at which knowledge becomes outdated, naivete turns to realization, and basic truths change is dizzying during a pandemic. In "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," Porter wove her own paradigm-altering experience into a broader meditation on the vertigo induced by such shifts. She encodes these swings in a play of styles, moving between a hallucinatory, dreamlike language to convey the virus's invasion of bodies and a more straightforward, realist style to convey the war. Part of the challenge for the characters is to read correctly the story they are in; saturated in a war story that is terrible but familiar, this narrative is what seems real. They know their roles (male soldier, female civilian), the threat (artillery warfare), the enemies and the allies, and they know how this story ends (death for the soldier). Caught up in this paradigm, they miss that reality has changed, that the enemy is now invisible, that women face equal threats, that the home front is as dangerous as the front lines. There are consequences for misreading: as they worry over the threat to the soldier's body in war, they circulate through restaurants, theatres, hospitals, and workplaces. Even after one of them falls ill, they touch and kiss and share cigarettes, believing themselves in the outdated story as a new delirium takes over the narrative and their lives. Porter captures the emotional and physical jolts of a constantly shifting reality, and the inherent risks in failing to adjust quickly enough to a new paradigm.

One's reality doesn't simply shift in a pandemic; it becomes radically uncertain—indeed, uncertainty is the reality. The unpredictability of the COVID-19 virus and all we don't know about it means we have no idea where we are in the story or even what story we are in. Is this the first wave of something even deadlier to come? Have we reached the top of the curve? What's the scope of the tragedy? Is the economy the real story? What do we think we know now that may prove fatally wrong? The narrative uncertainty causes many of us to turn to genre fiction and predictable movies (even if they are about disaster)—they allow us to pull down another story like a shade and sit in a place where we already know the ending. The modernist literature I spend my days teaching and studying typically grants the opposite, capturing the fragmentation and plot lessness of a post-war/post pandemic world. *T. S. Eliot*, who along with his wife caught the flu during the pandemic, felt weighed down by what he termed the "domestic influenza" of his health and home life, and his worries that his mind had been affected by his illness. *The Waste Land*—a poem about so many things and one that channels the larger zeitgeist of his moment and turns this uncertainty into a climate, with its fogs, its corpse-haunted domestic landscape, its pervasive sense of living death, and its delirious language.

The uncertainty rises, too, from the invisibility of the enemy. The consciousness is tuned to a threat that might be everywhere but cannot be seen. A world of surfaces and people become suspect, the body porous and vulnerable. *W. B. Yeats* captures this sense of menace in *"The Second Coming,"* a poem composed in the weeks after he watched his pregnant wife come close to death in the pandemic. The 1918 virus routinely drowned people in their beds as their lungs filled with fluids, and it caused sudden bleeding from the nose, mouth, and ears. The poem's sense of chaos and horror comes, of course, from many causes, including war, revolution, and Ireland's political violence, but the poem also speaks to the terror of an agentless, hidden threat, one that drowns innocence and lets loose mere anarchy and a blood-dimmed tide.

Conclusion: There has always been literature of pandemic because there have always been pandemics. What marks the literature of plague, pestilence, and pandemic is a commitment to try and forge if not some sense of explanation, then at least a sense of meaning out of the raw experience of panic, horror, and despair. Narrative is an attempt to stave off meaninglessness, and in the void of the pandemic, literature serves the purpose of trying, however desperately, to stop the bleeding. Whether in illness or in observation, our own bodies are busy now. They are recording our pandemic, setting in place the reverberations that will echo into our future, and thus, it will lead us to accepting the change in life style towards 'New Normal'. The paper focuses on the "Conquest of the New World on Literature", where various authors through their art of expression accounted in the above-mentioned pandemics and the way forward where a new pandemic has folded in and the worlds is exasperating 'New Normal'.

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