

PANDEMIC LITERATURE: AGAINST THE INVISIBLE ENEMY

The roots of pandemic literature reach back to the plague-ridden hell of fourteenth-century Florence. Giovanni Boccaccio wrote the Decameron (1353) in the very heart of that hell, or in its immediate aftermath. Ten young people flee a city ravaged by the Black Death, take refuge in a villa, and tell each other a hundred stories.

SEBAHATTİN ÇELEBİ

The plague is humanity's oldest and most silent enemy. It cannot be seen, it knows no borders, it observes no justice. And with each arrival, it brings not only death but also a compulsion to write. As though the pen were obliged to ignite even in the midst of plague fire; as though words could form a shield against microbes, like incense smoke. History has left behind a literary legacy after every great epidemic, because writing is the most primal form of both mourning and survival.

Literature did not merely document the plague; it transformed it, philosophised it, made it metaphor. Viruses became allegory, hospitals became theatre, death statistics became poetry. Every epidemic lifted the veil from society and brought into the light everything hidden beneath: inequality, fear, love, betrayal. Literature's task was to look upon that nakedness, to sustain the gaze, and to record what it saw in words.

Stories Against the Plague

Literature took up arms against the plague with Boccaccio. In the shadow of the Black Death, he gave the world the Decameron — a testament to the enduring power of storytelling. Even as death claimed thousands daily, narrative became a form of resistance, proving that the human spirit could still create beauty and meaning in the face of annihilation.

The work is not merely a collection of tales; it is a throw of the dice against death, a chorus raised against silence. Boccaccio's discovery would become a legacy for all ages: narrative is a survival strategy. To tell a story is to resist death.

The plague was like a flood sweeping everyone before it, but the pens kept standing in the midst of that flood.

Cholera Laid Bare the Rotting Face of Civilisation

The nineteenth century was the age of cholera. This epidemic, which built bridges from Asia to Europe and America, also brought to light the dirty legacy of the Industrial Revolution: the sewers of cities collapsed, the poor were ruined, the wealthy fled. Thomas Mann, in Death in Venice (1912), deployed the shadow of cholera with great aesthetic mastery. The slow dissolution of Gustav von Aschenbach in the streets of Venice symbolises not only the end of one individual but the inner decay of European civilisation. In Mann's hand, illness is an instrument: it brings to the surface desires suppressed for years, shatters the disciplined bourgeois life, and even loads death itself with aesthetic meaning, making it almost beautiful.

Gabriel García Márquez, in Love in the Time of Cholera (1985), carried this metaphor into an entirely different dimension. In this epic love story set in Colombia, cholera is both a real disease and the