

Managing Pandemic Isolation With Literature as Therapy

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Preface

This book focuses on the effects the current COVID-19 pandemic has had on the population at large and the use of reading and writing as educational and therapeutic tools to help ease the effects of isolation and trauma. The many academic areas covered in this publication include, but are not limited to: Anxiety, Brain Neurology, Children's Literature, Clinical Psychology, Distance Education, Isolation, Literature, Stress, Therapy, Reading & Writing. In addition, the articles hereby contained could be of use for a variety of professionals such as psychologists, medical personnel, policy makers, government officials, researchers, scholars, academicians, practitioners, instructors, and students.

Literature has always played an important role in dealing with catastrophic events, including pandemics, as the case of Boccaccio's *Decamerone* makes clear. A number of contributors to this volume analyze different literary works, genres, and periods in order to determine the curative and balsamic effect of literature in times of crisis. Vicent Martines ("The Power of the Word that Can Lead to Healing") focuses on the contributions of some medieval and Renaissance writers towards what he terms therapeutic writing and bibliotherapy and studies some compositions by the French Duke Charles d'Orléans, the Valencian knight Jordi de Sant Jordi and Renaissance author Joan Roís de Corella. He analyses the concept of literature as therapy to overcome personal (sentimental) setbacks (Corella). Charles d'Orléans and Jordi de Sant Jordi wrote works during their imprisonment requesting their freedom, either asking for ransom money or using artistic words as balsam for processing his personal situation. Francisco Conejero Pascual ("The Valencian Annals, Reflex of the current Pandemic") studies a work that chronicles events that took place in the city of Valencia during the 15th and 16th c. Just as our contemporary society faces a "new reality" after the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic, the author explores how late medieval society moved towards a new outlook on life in the midst of the fears provoked by intellectual crisis, plague and social upheavals and restructuring. Barbara Greco ("A song to life in pandemic times: *Primavera extremeña* by Julio Llamazares (2020)") focuses on Julio Llamazares's *Primavera extremeña* as the author is confined during the pandemic to a country farm. Through a diaristic and odeoporistic text that reflects on the landscape and the essence of life, "he experiences, for the first time, the arrival and blossoming of spring, of which he absorbs smells, colors and sounds. The sensory adventure that Llamazares experiences to the full, invites him to reflect on the meaning of existence, to remember time gone by and the homeland lost under the waters of a dam, but also to simply enjoy the landscape, its tranquility and to penetrate its mystery." Following in the footsteps of the foundational works by Cicero, St. Augustin or Boethius, and as the author recalls, literature has a consolatory effect, both for the writer and the reader. Katuscia Darici ("*El tiempo que nos robaron* (2021) utilizes Rosa Huertas's book as an excuse to theoretically study "pandemic narrative" to describe the traumatic experience during Covid-19 emergence. In her diary, Huertas highlights that rituals in general during confinement are salvific mainly

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because “aplacan los malos pensamientos.” The diary ends up being Rosa main daily ritual. Thus, we can observe the importance of writing as a tool to objectify and distance oneself from the disease. The long period of introspection also leads the writer to the conviction of personal change as well as a reconciliation with the past. Veronica Orazi (“August Bover, *El contagi* (2021)”: Pandemic, isolation and the therapeutic power of poetry”) focuses on a collection of 41 poems mostly composed between March and June 2020 during the lockdown that was decreed in an attempt to contain contagions in the first phase of the pandemic. The poems reveal the prevalence of the theme of isolation, taken up with a number of variations in most of the them, the need for a behavioral and psychological response (resilience) in order to manage and contain the fallout from a dramatic situation, and the function of artistic creation and, in particular, of literary production, as a powerful tool for conceptualizing and problematizing the lived experience and the trauma that results from it. Eduard Baile-López (“About some Spanish Graphic Novels in Times of COVID-19 Pandemic: Cathartic Panels for the End of the World”) studies comics produced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are utilized to comment on reality from psychological and sociopolitical standpoints. In addition, the author observes how fiction as an analytical tool about reality can also become a tool to transform it. The comics are studied according to several axes: fear (the bewilderment before *status quo* is changed); anger, a feeling associated with stupefaction and the inability to find solutions; humor as a defensive weapon or an antidote to cope with misfortune; and healing (a light at the end). Belén Lozano Sañudo (“Pandemics, Illness and Impairment as Reflected in Borges’s Literature and as a Key Factor to Shape his Authorial Style: Searching in Literature the Epic Fate Frailty had Denied to Him”) analyzes the seemingly scarce presence of the topic of Spanish Flu in literature, contrary to other pandemics and illnesses like the plague or tuberculosis. In stark contrast, war is seen as something glorifying and is more prevalent in literature. In addition, pandemics and epidemics have undergone processes of metaphorization and mystification that have associated, for instance, plagues to divine punishment and phthisis to profound spirituality and sensitivity. In addition, after the II World War writers did not want to dwell on suffering. Finally, the author studies the role Spanish Flu (and a frail health) and home confinement had in Borges’s immersion in literature as a escape from reality.

Education also plays an important role in trying to overcome the effects on the pandemic. Two more articles focus on literature but this time paying attention to the sociological and educational contexts in which it can be articulated. Marinos Bouchtsis (“The contribution of Children’s Literature to the development of the child - Book therapy and narrative therapy”) conceives of the “book” as essential for the development of the child because it contributes to the spiritual, cognitive and linguistic development, mental and emotional maturation, and aesthetic cultivation. Book therapy and therapeutic writing play a leading role in psychoanalysis and help individuals overcome their phobias or traumas. In sum, reading books can help children cope with worries, feel better and deal with difficult times, always using a list of books chosen and recommended by leading health professionals in cooperation with children and families. Mourad Kacimi (“Algerian Literature as Socio-Educational Therapy during the 2020-2021 Pandemic”) focuses in general on the therapeutic function of Algerian literary production during the pandemic between 2020 and 2021. Algerian authors engaged at this time in the writing of works of literary studies and criticism, poetry, novel, as well as numerous articles that flooded journals and social media. The author also analyzes the role of these media (television, the internet, social networks and digital books) in transmitting literary works that have made people aware of the situation and contributed to alleviating their pain, making them forget their loneliness and the restrictions imposed on them.

Finally, a group of articles continues to focus on the psychological and therapeutic effect of reading and learning at large, although this time they adopt a more educational focus (in particular on popula-

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tions at risk) than those of the previous section. Evangelia Gkigkelou (“Coronavirus Pandemic and the Isolation of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children in Greece”) focuses on the difficulties faced by deaf and hard-of-hearing children in Greece during the closure of in-person and face-to-face attendance to schools, since this population relies heavily on their facial expressions for communication. Masks and social distance have also proved to be very challenging for them, increasing their feelings of isolation. The article discusses several improvements over the last two years in distance learning, digital literacy and the use of technology in order for people to come closer to each other and leave no students excluded from the educational process. Maria Mouchrista, Ainara Romero-Andonegui, Urtza Garay Ruiz, and Spyridon Kazanopoulos (“E-Inclusion and COVID-19 Pandemic: Inclusive Digital Classrooms and Collaboration Between General and Special Education Teachers”) also focus on distance learning, this time arguing that more efforts should be made to help special education students improve their learning. For these authors, computers, tablets, or smartphones during a pandemic are not sufficient to ensure learning. To achieve effective electronic inclusion, activities must be organized in such a way that they meet the needs of students with special needs, and modern, asynchronous tools must be available to assist in this process. They also argue that some national platforms’ online materials and resources are inaccessible to students with disabilities or learning disabilities. For the most part, education providers have not received additional training to better serve students with disabilities, and as a result, the vast majority of teachers are unqualified to provide inclusive education materials to distance learning students. Spyridon Kazanopoulos, Eneko Tejada, Xabier Basogain, and Maria Mouchrista (“Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs and COVID-19 Pandemic: The Collaboration of School and Family in Distance Education Conditions”) set out to evaluate school-family collaboration throughout the pandemic period. Their conclusion is that distance learning methods have shattered the conventional knowledge of in-person learning, while parents’ educational level and time commitment to their children’s education have been critical to the educational process’s efficacy under these crucial circumstances. The findings revealed that interactions between students and their families were especially critical during the pandemic. Distance learning approaches have shattered the form of knowledge about in-person learning. Christos Lalos (“Distance Vocational Education and Training During the Pandemic. Adaptations and Challenges for Learners and Trainers in Europe: How the Pandemic affected Distance Vocational Education and Training”) focuses on another group of at-risk educational population whose practices were developed on the basis of physical presence of the trainee. Vulnerable learners are less likely to participate in distance education, while their detachment from the learning process can lead to their early withdrawal from Vocational Education and Training. The author analyzes the challenges this particular population has posed to the educational system, while affirming that this crisis can provide an opportunity to focus on creating a workforce of teachers and vocational trainers of Highly qualified Education and Training. Juan-Francisco Álvarez-Herrero (“Therapeutic and Learning Benefits of Reading During the COVID-19 Among Spanish Secondary Students”) studies once again the therapeutic value of reading, this time with a focus on a particular student group in the educational system. He concludes that the promotion of reading is not exclusive to the areas of languages. Also in the areas of science, reading should be encouraged among the students, even from an early age. With the promotion of reading in the areas of science, not only is it possible to improve the reading competence of the students, but an improvement in motivation and interest in learning these subjects can also be achieved. Finally, Margarida Castellano Sanz (“Challenging Picturebooks and Domestic Geographies: A Multimodal Learning Path to Discuss the Consequences of the Covid-19 Lockdowns in the Classroom”) is a perfect representative of the combination of literature and education that has been the leitmotif of this book. As a crossover

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genre, picturebooks perform both an educational and therapeutic function. A new modal, aesthetic, and multidimensional world can use visual literacy to offer an understanding of the world of the educational subjects and their search for their self.

In sum, a variety of approaches and a focus on numerous geographical areas and time periods and cultures point to the same conclusion, the validity and effectiveness of reading, literature, and writing for educational purposes and in times of distress and trauma. Literature (as well as reading and writing), then, is not only valid for its aesthetic value but finds a deep imbrication in human life as a way of making sense of the world and of engaging the reader in a process of self-knowledge, trauma healing, and coping with reality at large. As this book has explored, epidemics like COVID-19 are not new to the human race. And in all of them, the power of the word has always been crucial to help us cope with and learn from our travails and difficulties.

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