

**WRITING THE COVID PANDEMIC:
THE POLITICS OF STORYTELLING IN *FOURTEEN DAYS*
(EDITED BY MARGARET ATWOOD
AND DOUGLAS PRESTON)**

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***Abstract:** The paper aims to reveal the complex strategies of storytelling (a politics that is, at the same time, a biopolitics) in *Fourteen Days. A Collaborative Novel*, edited by Margaret Atwood and Douglas Preston. While Hannah Arendt connects speech and deed to storytelling in order to preserve their impact and coherence, Gayatri Spivak warns that not all voices that tell stories are heard in the public sphere, therefore their role must be acknowledged and renegotiated. I shall integrate the volume into the vaster corpus of pandemic literature and I shall identify its distinctive features as a humanist endeavor, in contrast with the posthumanist critical environment often dominant in today's debate concerning the historical significance and impact of the Covid pandemic. The aim of this approach is to challenge the dominant perspective of posthumanism and its evident symmetries with the dynamics of the pandemic. The stories about this crisis could be seen as instruments meant to reshape the dominance of posthumanism in the intellectual climate of the pandemic.*

***Keywords:** contagion, pandemic literature, biopolitics, Covid, storytelling, posthumanism*

1. Introduction: the literature of the great pandemic of two thousand and twenty

Humanities scholarship has mobilized significant resources to investigate the complex meaning and impact of the 2020-2023 coronavirus pandemic. Comprehensive theoretical approaches (Ağın, Horzum: 2023; Manoj, Saeed, Patton (2024) attempted to understand the varied social and cultural phenomena manifested during the pandemic by connecting its historicity to a solid corpus of philosophical theories already circulating, from authors such as Michel Foucault (1975), Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari (2005) or Giorgio Agamben (2020). In its turn, literature echoed the sense of crisis and profound change triggered by the pandemic on a vast scale, projecting the individual and collective effects of the global health emergency against the background of unprecedented social transformations. However, a new dimension emerged: one of cultural clarity and cohesion, and the relatively new genre of pandemic literature reflects it consistently.

Numerous recent titles can be easily included into this emerging genre - *The Sentence* by Louise Erdrich (2021), *Companion Piece* by Ali Smith (2022), *Joan is Okay* by Weike Wang (2022), *Delphi* by Claire Pollard (2022), *Violeta* by Isabel Allende (2022), *The Fell* by Sarah Moss (2021), *Emergency* by Daisy Hildyard (2022), *The Pandemic and Me* by Debbie Quinn (2024). They are part of a vaster framework that includes classical works such as Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Albert Camus' *The Plague*, Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Others, such as Lauren Beukes' *Afterland* (2020), also qualify as pandemic literature, although the novel had been several years in the making before the COVID pandemic unfolded. One of the most anticipated titles was the collective novel *Fourteen Days*, edited by Margaret Atwood and Douglas Preston, reuniting thirty-six American and Canadian writers from a wide spectrum of literary styles and genres*.

I shall explore the politics of storytelling, that is the ways in which storytelling is instrumentalized as a social connector in this pandemic-themed collective novel, while also relying on a theoretical background articulated by contemporary authors, who reframe pandemic-related preexisting concepts already naturalized in the critical vocabulary of poststructuralist theory. They refer to the 2020 pandemic as to an event that had a major impact on all areas of life, from the medical and physiological, to the social, psychological and political. Moreover, this event proved disruptive and destabilizing, with long-term consequences, many of them still visible today. NY Manoj's (2024: 13) arguments for a "Posthuman ontology" emerging from the cultural and political climate imposed by the restrictive codes of the pandemic. This new understanding of the human/posthuman dichotomy should be integrated into a wider, "revolution of our understanding of life and the human" (Manoy et al. 2024: 2).

Literature has constantly been a medium of reflection and resonance for the new global reality since the early months of the pandemic, as the first projects, aimed at exploring the individual and collective experience of the pandemic, started to gain consistency and shape. The specific aim of these projects was, among other potential ones, to create a sense of community between literary imagination and objective experience. Capturing history as it unfolds, reflecting the endless forms in which a major crisis impacts individual lives, rendering the workings of a creative consciousness alerted by disaster, all these elements could articulate the purpose of an immediate literature mirroring the present time. However, for the purposes of this paper, a necessary conceptual anchoring of the analysis requires an itinerary into a terminological field, reuniting biopolitics, posthumanism and the revival of the essential locus of all stories – the humanist dimension. Saima Saeed, for example, in a chapter titled "COVID-19 and the Production of Knowledge: Communication, Control, and the Citizenry" in the volume edited by Manoj, Saeed and Patton (2024: 79), focuses on the representations and discourses about the pandemic in the public sphere, where we can argue that biopolitics and narratives collide. The implementation of power (thorough restrictions and an often contradictory and unreliable public discourse) was managed by institutions having the authority to adapt measures intended to control the multiple layers damage of such a remarkable

crisis. The result was a “misrepresentation of the pandemic” (idem: 80). This calls for an incisive conclusion – the public discursive misrepresentation of the pandemic can be balanced by stories and fiction that aim to identify and reveal concise, objective acts that value the human element under virological attack.

In an explanatory “Note from the Authors Guild Foundation” (that is “the charitable and educational arm of the Authors Guild” (Atwood, Preston 2024: viii), to which the proceeds of this equally charitable book project were redirected), the authors of this collective novel stated their intention to present it as a collaborative enterprise mirroring the embedded values of the Foundation itself – diversity of background, genres and styles, democratizing the literary craft, promoting the social value of writing and literary art. Moreover, this is reflected in the diversity of characters aligned in a seemingly endless parade throughout the novel – a wide cultural, racial and demographic spectrum is involved in creating the fictional melting pot that contains the essentialized melting pot of the building, and that of the city, too. The creative device that makes these worlds visible and accessible to the fictional characters inscribed into the fictional world and to the readers is an ingenious reinterpretation of the classical frame narrative, although its manifest “novelty” (the authors of this introduction insist on defining it as “an epic novellus in the ancient and truest sense of the word”, that is “a story that was not the reworking of a familiar tale, myth or Biblical parable, but something new, fresh, strange, amusing and surprising” (idem: vii)). Early reviewers praised the book’s originality as a work of popular entertainment – “an immensely enjoyable product of an immensely unenjoyable time” (Clark 2024), but also deplored its problematic eclectic nature– “The book is a marvel of organization but unavoidably uneven and funky” (Jacobs 2024). The volume’s connection to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, although instantly recognizable, is also a problematic benchmark of the transgressive nature of storytelling in pandemic times. It is an act of protest against the norm of social distancing and a negation of the symbolic attenuation of voices behind face masks, and it is also a postulation of freedom - of speech, thought, feeling, affiliation and dislike. The condensed social universe of the Fernsby Arms building is wider and more diverse than Boccaccio’s famed *brigata* - it is a reflection not only of its time, but of its sensibility and quest for political balance. Much like the plague figuratively lying at the core of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, Covid imposes its paradoxical destructive and rehabilitating authority on the micro-society of the building. On Day One, as she was preparing the stage for the first story, Yessenia Grigorescu, the superintendent, draws the wider frame of the context. The social fabric reverberates the immense strain of the crisis, exposing fractures, inequality and resentment: “Naturally, anyone who could had already left New York. The wealthy and professional classes fled the city like rats from a sinking ship, skittering and squeaking out to the Hamptons, Connecticut, the Berkshires Cape Cod, Maine – anywhere but New Covid City. We were the left-behinds” (Atwood, Preston 2024: 9).

The superintendent takes the role of a metanarrator, whose omniscience is supported textually by the building’s Bible, a descriptive text written by the former superintendent about the Fernsby Arms apartment block and its tenants. This element is pivotal in arguing for the essential narrator/text relationship as fundamental to the

articulation of this fictional world that also functions as a world of fiction, of stories and narratives that have a unifying, defensive role in the difficult context of the first weeks of the pandemic. The volume itself, readers are warned on its front page, was “transcribed from an unclaimed manuscript found in storage at the property clerk division, New York City Police Department, 11 Front Street, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Archived on April 14, 2020, retrieved and published on February 6, 2024” (idem: xii).

Set within fourteen days, between March 31 and April 13, 2020, this “novellus”, tries to embody the story of the first weeks of the pandemic, with their often irrational, exacerbated fear of illness and death, its new routines – pot banging at 7 o’clock in the evening to salute and encourage first-line workers, mask wearing, social distancing. Despite its obvious similarities with classical literary works such as the *Decameron*, *Fourteen Days* aims for originality and authenticity. Although it relies heavily on the mannerisms of popular fiction, the volume elevates the narrative tone by projecting the fast-paced dynamic of stories and characters against the backdrop of collective drama. As each of the storytellers reveal their tale, “the super”, like an omniscient consciousness presiding over the nightly gathering, intervenes to administer a blunt dose of reality by mentioning the day’s grim record – the number of new Covid cases, hospitalizations, intubated patients and deaths: “I looked up the numbers so I could record today’s daily statistics. I don’t know why I find this calming when the numbers themselves are anything but – I guess they delimit the catastrophe in my mind” (Atwood, Preston 2024: 47).

The Covid pandemic has been understood by humanist scholars as a paradox that challenges our common understanding of concepts and matters pertaining to the public/private divide, to rights, obligations and priorities. In their comprehensive *Introduction* to their edited volume of *Critical Reflections on Covid 19, Pandemic, Event and the Immanence of Life*, NY Manoj, Saima Saeed, and Paul Patton (2024: 2) argue that the paradoxical nature of the pandemic became visible on all levels of social and individual life. “On many levels, the pandemic confronted us with irreconcilable demands”, they wrote, referring to the unsurmountable contradictions of the global crisis. The principles of modern governing state the primacy of human life, as outlined by public health policies meant to regulate social interaction in times of contagion and major health risks. Social disruption has significant economic consequences, and this clash of principles posed one of the most significant and apparently unsolvable challenges of the 2020 pandemic. Distancing, masking, and vaccination mandates represent significant issues concerning individual rights, despite their collective implications. It is obvious that the pandemic put a major strain on the limits between individual choice and collective consequences and, ultimately, on the very relationship between the individual and the social environment. The alignment of characters in *Fourteen Days* mirrors these dichotomies clearly. As if isolated in their private bubble, the participants to the 7 o’clock rooftop gatherings are initially shy and reluctant to interact with fellow participants. The space of the roof is an exit to freedom (the fact that it was actually illegal to sit and spend time on the roof amplifies its role as a space of transition to a different reality) and the wish of the tenants to be there attests to their need to escape the bewildering new context of everyday life during a pandemic.

2. The quarantine of fiction

The politics of storytelling in this collective narrative project is grounded in the principle of participation and active validation – as each speaker tells their story, the others react, share their impressions, express emotion freed from the restrictive social codes and mannerisms of former times – like Boccaccio’s plague, the pandemic unearthed and unlocked tempestuous feelings and violent emotions. But unlike the fourteenth-century scourge, the Covid pandemic paralyzed the global community instead of projecting it into frenzied celebrations of life and lust. By carefully articulating the connective parts that hold all narratives together, Douglas Preston sought to unify the stage onto which the storytellers perform. Although their stories are unequal in consistency and style, they all reach for a deeper, universal level of emotion, one that could galvanize the small narrative community out of the stillness of fear and lack of perspective brought on by the pandemic. There is also a spatial politics derived from the contextual limitations imposed by public health regulations. By placing the action on a rooftop, the narrators draw a clear boundary between the outside world – where the ravages of the pandemic were evident and unsurmountable – and the protective ecosystem structured around stories and the need for a sense of belonging and togetherness. The building’s superintendent, Yessenia Grigorescu, an immigrant woman who anxiously tries to contact her father living in a retirement home, acts both like a connector and an archivist – she “governs” the micro-universe of the building, while, at the same time, secretly recording the stories rooftop visitors tell. The volume’s classical frame includes Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, the *One Thousand and One Nights*, *The Canterbury Tales* and elements derived from the historical tradition of the novel in the Western canon – an original, hidden manuscript that reads as a palimpsest (the superintendent received a “Bible” from her predecessor, a “book” in which he had written the nicknames and a short biographical description of the building’s inhabitants), the notion that narratives defend and preserve life, as cohesive social elements that reunite people even in dire times and the authority of oral literature and narratives to create specific chronotopes that facilitate an escape from perilous circumstances.

A brief analysis on the significance of *contagion* is also relevant, as the volume clearly proposes a particular dynamic of negotiating behaviours meant to protect the participants against contracting the virus. The tenants of Fernsby Arms “who had discovered the roof came up and hung out” (Atwood, Preston 2024: 9), although “in the beginning, no one talked” – “they spent their time flicking at their phones, pounding down beers or glasses of wine, reading books, smoking weed, or messing with a laptop” (idem: 10). This designates a typically urban mode of behaviour, with strangers brought together circumstantially, each remaining in their protective bubble. The first ice-breaking interaction occurred between two tenants who disliked each other – the talkative, outgoing Florida from 3C and Vinegar, the misanthropic artist from 2B. “Aren’t you going to join us?” (idem: 11) Florida asked Vinegar, prompting a narrative line that marks a shift from individual isolation to communicative participation. Their reciprocal animosity remains unaltered throughout all fourteen days of storytelling, establishing one of the active tension poles of the novel.

It is relevant to observe that *Fourteen Days* marks a deviation from the standard of a narrative style Priscilla Wald (2008: 3) called “the outbreak narrative”, a rather standard formula meant “to designate those epidemiological stories”. Her 2008 analysis of the HIV epidemics of the 1980s and the SARS epidemic of 2003 focuses on the traits that define this particular literary code. Imagined as narratives, outbreaks and epidemics configure specific models that guide specialists in identifying patterns that may lead to establishing public health measures and diagnostic instruments. Wald (2008: 12) also invokes the etymological meaning of contagion (from the Latin *con-tangere* – “to touch together” in order to designate a reunion of individuals and communities that are brought together by the unavoidably equalizing effects of an epidemic. It is important to note that, in the case of this particular novel, the collective dimension permeates all levels of the narrative poetics, revealing a complex allegory of togetherness that binds structure and meaning in an overarching projection. Textual identities are intentionally blurred - writers, narrators and characters are superimposed like old manuscripts bearing multiple strata of fictional life. Moreover, the tales told during the rooftop gatherings are often fashioned as essential tales of life, death, loss, survival, longing, mourning, strength, grit, etc., bearing a certain parabolic value that makes them relevant and significant at a time when symbolic anchors promise some of the stability and certainty that have been wiped out by the pandemic.

It is also significant to observe that, despite the abundance of medical jargon that flooded everyday speech since the March 2020 debut of the pandemic in Europe and the West, this novel tries to maintain a neutral climate that only allows common, unavoidable elements to penetrate its atmosphere. Social distancing, masking, intubation, daily reports, ICU wards, life-support systems, SARS-COV2 and the supremely reigning Covid form the fundamental vocabulary of the pandemic adopted by the nighttime gatherers of Fernsby Arms. Although less obvious than in other books detailing the dystopian world of the pandemic, the notions of surveillance and control, as theorized by Michel Foucault’s philosophy of biopower and biopolitics need to be brought forth. Discipline and restrictions have been enforced in plague times in order to contain the spread of pathogens, and their direct effects, as Foucault (1976) outlines in his seminal *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, can be integrated into the semantic area of punitive power. Drawing on Foucault’s theory of the regulatory power of biopolitics, Daniele Lorenzini (2021) connects its ramifications to the ever-shifting epistemic landscape of the Covid pandemic – as medical science proved hesitant and unprepared to intervene efficiently to combat the ravages of the virus, it is possible to assume that one of the immediate effects of the global health crisis was to equalize differences and level out certain inequities. All humans were, at least ontologically, equally vulnerable to the virus’ ferocious initial rate of attack. It is not coincidental, though, that the politics of storytelling reveals the uniformity of fate and biology rather than unrealistic models of social equity. Two tales could be invoked for this purpose as revelatory examples. A rather casual and ironic evocation of the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) the pandemic was most like going to trigger on a mass scale was picked up by a young tenant, “a woman in her thirties [...] I recognized her from the book as Merenguero’s daughter” (Atwood,

Preston 2024: 13). She tells the extraordinary story of a woman, her father's friend, who found the great love of her life when fifty years old and had his child, defying all social norms that might condemn such extravagance. Eva fell in love with a much younger Dominican man, in spite of the common fear of "el qué dirán" ("What will the neighbors say?"), but, on September 11, 2001, she had an appointment in New York, in the Wall Street area and witnessed the first plane crash into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. She subsequently finds herself struggling with a severe form of PTSD and decides that her husband and son should temporarily move to Santo Domingo, so she could recover in peace for a while. They carefully avoid embarking on a plane on November 11, as she thought "there's no way that I am letting my family travel on any eleventh of any month ever again" (Atwood, Preston 2024: 20). Flight 587, with her son and husband on board, crashed ninety seconds after takeoff. Indeed, the pandemic had a powerful fateful component, at least in the beginning, when medical protocols relied on empirical data, in the absence of concrete experience with a respiratory virus of that degree of infectiousness. This first story sets the tone of the novel by placing it under a specific tragic sign – that of inevitability, a fate that one cannot control or rationalize, even while carefully avoiding it. The initial phase of the Covid pandemic was largely perceived as a fateful event, a large-scale medical incident that spiraled out of control, escaping definitions, recent precedents, guiding patterns and any kind of predictability. This allusion to fate subtly foreshadows the ending, with all tenants haunting the building, ghost-like and confused, suspended between worlds.

The second symbolic narrative that alludes to the uniformizing effect of the pandemic as fate is the story told by a medical doctor from apartment 2C, who seemingly sabotages with her unannounced presence the recently settled comfort and familiarity of the daily meetings. Upon hearing she was a doctor, the participants suddenly felt uneasy, scared they might be infected by one of the first line covid fighters they applauded every night from the shelter of their building's roof. A declared rationalist scientist, the doctor did not intend to deliver a lecture on the virtues of medical progress, nor on the widely acclaimed faith that salvation would necessarily come from medical science, as it had happened with other plagues, from the Middle Ages to the mid-20th century outbreaks of polio. Jennifer, as she introduced herself to the small crowd, told them a story about a nun, Sister Mary Francis, who worked at a Catholic hospital, where she would bizarrely feel death approaching, thus she would briefly sit outside the hospital room of the doomed patients, sealing their fate with a short prayer and a blessing. Her presence on the corridor would always signal someone's end, although those patients seemed in good health, on their path to recovery. Sister Mary could not explain her strange gift as an angel of death, as she was not a disguised killer euthanizing her victims. Confronted by the doctor/narrator, she simply answered that "Death has an odor. [...] I can't really describe it. [...] It smells like the earth. Like wet leaves" (Atwood, Preston 2024: 98). If still alive, she'd be an old woman now, and she would certainly feel death approaching her, when the time comes. "And she will smile" (idem: 99). The doctor's tale implies her clear intention to re-center the absurdly imploded order of death amidst the chaos of the pandemic. Large-scale death, ominously announced by the ceaseless sound of

ambulance sirens, previewed by the sinister nighttime trucks carrying dead bodies to overflowing morgues, became part of everyday life in big cities like New York. Nobody, not even medical professionals and the science they served could predict who would survive and who would die.

Another significant element of the volume's policy of storytelling is its wide-ranging interest in mapping crisis, disaster, and the confrontation with suffering and death. The tales cover a vast area of conflict, from personal dramas to wars and other epidemics (such as the polio epidemic of the 1948-1955 interval). The social diversity of the narrators imprint the stories with a dynamic that apparently aims to reveal the necessary survival not only of stories, but of the human element itself. This calls for a critical inquiry of the humanist/posthumanist divide, frequently invoked in commentaries concerning pandemic biopolitics.

Posthumanism and the posthuman are terms that often enter the terminological sphere associated with pandemics and contagion. Posthumanism calls for a revision of universalist humanism (and of the concept of Man, as a generic term) and of the ways in which the human element interacts with non-human elements coexisting on the planet. This includes the microbiological world, viruses and bacteria, as competing forms of life that greatly outnumber humans. Technological creations and artificial intelligence are also integrated into this conceptual frame. The pandemic was the result of an unfortunate, uncontrollable form of contagion between the human and the animal world. Their boundaries had been violently broken by abusive commercial practices and a long-lasting negation of the effects of environmental neglect. To aid the conceptual background that structures human action in relation to other forms of life and technological models simulating it we could also invoke the notion of the anthropocene, designating a distinct era in the history of life on our planet, during which the human presence left a potentially permanent mark on nature and the environment. This period, theorists have remarked, is "born of anthropocentric illusions of our ontological separation from nature" (Newman, Topuzovski 2021: 2). However, *Fourteen Days* is a composite creation, delimiting a humanist core within a posthumanist frame. As the virus closed the world and forced humans to retreat to interiors, a vertical, in-depth perspective prevailed. The substance of the forty stories is, in a larger sense, human nature, but, upon closer inspection, it is the human element, in its essential complexity and vulnerability. Humanism postulated the centrality of the human element as a strategy of discovery and perpetual inquiry and narratives have historically provided the adequate tools for this endeavor. The clear, uncomplicated substance of these stories, resorting to simple narrative devices – framed stories, autofiction, ghostwriting, recycling classical tragic conflict, among other forms – pave the way for the articulation of multiple answers to the riddle of human nature.

The volume's grim ending, meant as an obvious unexpected twist, is the final accent of its popular literature status. On the fourteenth day, the final one, Yessie saw her father miraculously appear among the storytellers on the rooftop. He was in better shape than the last time she had seen him, and even the ravages of dementia seemed attenuated. He told the audience a story about his wife's depression and suicide (a direct allusion to the immense psychological strain brought on by the pandemic)

intertwined with a more hopeful story about his daughter's attachment and friendship with a bird, whom she ultimately set free. In a rather tragic turn of events, Yessie and her companions realize the meaning of their liberation from the fear of disease and death – they were all already dead: "...the haunted feeling of the building – it all suddenly made sense. We were the haunts. Covid had taken us all. The lightness and even relief that had taken hold in me was spreading to the others. We didn't need to be afraid of each other anymore, terrified of the danger of human contact, worried about breathing or touching or sharing" (Atwood, Preston 2024: 352). The ending reconfigures the inner core of the volume by operating an essential mutation in its fundamental ontology – presences dissolve into ghosts, thus negating the specters of absence and death defining the first deadly wave of the pandemic. "I imagined the ghosts of Covid all around us, everywhere, and I knew: There were so many, many more stories" (ibid.). The volume's circular dimension is certified by another official statement, similar to the one opening the book. This one is from the NYC Fire Incident Data and shows that a fire was reported on the rooftop of the abandoned building at 2 Rivington Street, the possible cause being unattended burning candles. A manuscript was found on the premises: "No identification recovered except for one (1) large, bound, handwritten manuscript, name and address on inside cover: Yessenia Grigorescu, 48-27 Poyer Street, Queens, NY 11373" (idem: 353).

The ending also postulates the supremacy of narratives, memory and imagination in times of death and hopelessness, but it simultaneously acknowledges what would probably lie at the center of the massive denial emerging in its aftermath – the pandemic took the lives of seven million people, and its effects would ripple for many years to come through the lives of many others. This collective novel reflects the canonic belief that stories, as a literary quintessence, transcend the crisis they help humans overcome and echo further beyond the limits of its historical moment. *Fourteen Days* reunites forty stories in a symbolic reflection of the initial meaning of the Italian term "quaranta" (forty), implemented in the fourteenth century as an institutional measure meant to contain the plague epidemic in 1377. The fourteen/quarantine implicit wordplay also suggests that, although the number of stories that can be told in a given period of time is limited, their "spread" goes beyond the limits of a given interval. The novel is, therefore, a trigger of stories: it tells the ones connected to survival and death and it also stimulates others, still untold, that could be part of mourning and, ultimately, healing.

3. Conclusion

As one of the protagonists of *Fourteen Days*, a woman aptly nicknamed Hello Kitty, remarked, the pandemic would be an endless topic of discussion, confession and remembrance for a long time after it actually ended: "*Let me tell you all about how I survived the Great Pandemic of Two Thousand and Twenty.*" She ignores the less enthusiastic warning of the more reserved Therapist, who calmly declared that trauma is the subject of psychological analysis not of social open talk. In a twist of tragic irony, nobody in the building survived. As Elizabeth Outka (2020: 14) detailed in her exploration of the literature about the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic, difficult

issues such as these are surprisingly rarely the subject of literary fiction. Although it was a massive event that partially coincided with the Great War, this first pandemic of the 20th century is dramatically underrepresented in literary thought and imagination. The major trauma of the 2020 pandemic is still acute in public consciousness, which could explain its apparent fading from immediate attention and interest. Unlike the *Decameron*, where narratives are anchored in a specific genealogy that stipulates an ethical and moral dimension (Farneti 2009), *Fourteen Days* relies on fictional speculation to reveal that storytelling is an instrument of knowledge and exploration, reconfiguring social and humanistic projections that could articulate a policy of survival and transcendence.

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