

## Call for Articles

### ***Pandemic Protagonists – Viral (Re)Actions in Pandemic and Corona Fictions***

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The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its containment measures such as lockdowns, social and physical distancing, or face coverings hit most of us unprepared. In order to better understand the individual and collective reactions to the pandemic outbreak, many turned to existing cultural productions holding pandemic knowledge.

In March 2020, the reception of existing ‘pandemic fictions’ such as Albert Camus’s *La Peste* (1947) or Wolfgang Peterson’s disaster movie *Outbreak* (1995) rose drastically. Simultaneously, we saw an enormous increase in what can be subsumed under the term *Corona Fictions* across different media. These written and audiovisual productions process the new life circumstances and draw on everyday media and political discourses as well as on previous pandemic fictions.<sup>1</sup>

Due to their capacity to convey their “knowledge to [their audiences] as experiential knowledge which can be reconstructed step by step, or even more, can be acquired by reliving it,”<sup>2</sup> pandemic and Corona Fictions provide the public with a first-hand account of (previously) experienced or imagined health crises and numerous possibilities of individual and collective (re)actions, represented by a variety of fictional main characters. Each of these pandemic protagonists show distinct (re)actions to the outbreak. Taken collectively, they offer an insight on how communities at large act in and react to epidemic/pandemic situations.

In the peer-reviewed edited volume on ***Pandemic Protagonists*** we seek to gain insight into the array of main characters or certain groups of characters appearing in **pandemic and Corona Fictions** from a literary, cultural, and media studies point of view. Therefore, we invite critical reflections on:

**(a)** the representations of stereotypical or astereotypical individual main characters, e.g.

- the **doctor**, such as doctora Tadic in Edmundo Paz Soldán’s novel *Los días de la peste* (2017) or Elena in David Chapon’s novel *Éloge du cygne* (2021).
- the **outbreak carrier** embodied by a ‘femme fatale’, such as the character Beth Emhoff in the disaster movie *Contagion* (2011), or in the form of ‘untori’, such as the two men in Manzoni’s *Storia della Colonna Infame* (1840) falsely accused of spreading the plague.
- the **personified Death**, such as in Poe’s *The Mask of the Red Death* (1842).
- the **researcher** or **specialist**, such as the virologist Gaia in the dystopian story “El equilibrio natural” by Yaque Vara (2020) or the biologist Emeraude Pic in J.D. Kurtz’s novel *Aquariums* (2019).
- the **writer/chronicler**, such as Dr. Rieux in Camus’s *La Peste* (1947) or the novelist Juan in the comedy film *iNi te me acerques!* (2020).
- the **immune protagonist**, such as the doctor’s wife in José Saramago’s *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* (1995) as the only one not losing sight.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Research Group Pandemic Fictions. “From Pandemic to Corona Fictions: Narratives in Times of Crises.” *PhiN-Beiheft*, vol. 24, 2020, pp. 321-344. <http://web.fu-berlin.de/phn/beiheft24/b24t21.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ette, Ottmar, *TransArea: A Literary History of Globalization*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, 5.

(b) the representations of certain groups, e.g.

- **children**, such as in “Soy caramelo” by Coan Gómez from the anthology *Delirios de cuarentena* (2020) written from the perspective of an unborn child, or including a three-year-old co-protagonist in Chiara Gamberale’s *Come il mare in un bicchiere* (2020).
- **elderly**, such as the old couple in the Spanish TV series *Diarios de cuarentena* (2020) struggling with new communication technologies.
- **ethnic minorities**, such as indigenous people in the Quebec TV series *Épidémie* (2019/2020), who are scapegoated because they are accused of transmitting a deadly virus.
- **system relevant workers** who kept the infrastructures running during lockdowns while the rest of society was obligated to stay at home, such as in Ana Freire’s *El invierno de las flores* (2021).

(c) the virus<sup>3</sup> as protagonist. Hereby, the following questions may arise:

- How is the virus represented on an (film) aesthetic level, e.g. via colours, sound, symbols, etc.?
- In what ways does the virus drive the storyline? E.g. ways of transmission or bodily symptoms of the sick, such as the appearance of sudden sadness, hunger, or anger attacks preceding each stage of the advancing disease in the disaster movie *Perfect Sense* (2011) directed by David Mackenzie.
- What is the purpose of a concrete visual representation of the virus, such as in the movie *Outbreak* (1995), where microscopic images of the virus and its effect on the body cells are shown, although the main enemy are the military leaders rather than the virus itself.

(d) the virus as a trigger for the subsequent storyline, e.g.

- Does the virus merely serve as a background for the story such as in *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* (1985) by Gabriel García Márquez or as in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1349-1353)?
- Does it appear to aggravate social inequality issues and environmental pollution, or function as a divine punishment?
- Why and how do certain TV/web series include the virus into their episodes, such as “Plan confiné.e.s” in *Plan cœur* (2020)?

We intend to create a comprehensive overview of fictional pandemic protagonists; therefore, we especially encourage the submission of inter- and transmedia analyses as well as comparative studies of pandemic and Corona Fictions. We also welcome essays on this topic.

Our main focus lies on cultural productions from the French-, Spanish-, Italian-, and Portuguese-speaking world. For an international outreach of our volume, we prefer articles in English, but – of course – articles in any other Romance language are welcome!

The peer-reviewed open access publication is scheduled for June 2023 and will be followed by a conference in Graz (Austria), where you will have the opportunity to present your paper.

We are looking forward to your contributions and presentations!

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<sup>3</sup> Or other communicable diseases as not all pandemics originate from a viral outbreak.

**ROADMAP to publication and subsequent conference:**

May 1, 2022	submit abstract (about 200 words) and short bio until 1 <sup>st</sup> of May to <a href="mailto:yvonne.voelkl@tugraz.at">yvonne.voelkl@tugraz.at</a>
in Jun. 2022	notifications
Oct. 1, 2022	submit full article (followed by the peer review process)
until Dec. 2022	get feedback from the peer reviewers and adapt your article
Jan. 2023	re-submit revised article
Feb. 2023	review galley proofs
Thur, June 1 – Sat, June 3, 2023	present article at the conference in Graz (Austria)