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**ARISTOTLE'S LOGIC OF SYLLOGISM AND MIMESIS AS
APPLIED TO SPECULATING AND IMITATING
PANDEMICS IN ST. JOHN MANDEL'S STATION ELEVEN
(2014) AND AMIR TAG ELSIR'S EBOLA 76 (2012)**

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the applicability of the Aristotelian logic of syllogism and mimesis to speculating and imitating epidemics through two pandemic narratives. Two literary texts relating to two different cultures are analyzed: *Ebola 76* (2012) by the Eastern Sudanese Amir Tag Elsir, which is considered a prescient of the second wave of Ebola in 2014 and *Station Eleven* (2014) by the Western Canadian St. John Mandel, which is also considered a prescient of COVID-19 in 2020. These viruses are logically speculated and imitated in fiction because of the certain mutation of previous similar viruses. Following Aristotle's logic, these two novelists apply the deduction method of reasoning to speculate pandemics. Aristotle's logic claims that any certain conclusion should start first with two premises. In these two texts, the first premise is that there is a virus. The second premise is that this virus mutates. Then, the certain conclusion is a newly mutated virus. Thus, despite cultural differences, both novelists can imitate the past and the present just to speculate future pandemics in real life.

Introduction:

The disease is considered a type of catastrophe that spreads panic and terror in our world causing a universal predicament. The hasty outbreak of COVID-19 has greatly motivated worldwide panic, horror and dismay causing catastrophic events. This virus and the 2014 Ebola are claimed to have a documented genealogical family tree. Highly contagious, the virus soon mutated from epidemic to pandemic. An epidemic means, “spreading rapidly and extensively by infection and affecting many individuals in an area or a population at the same time” (598). Whereas, a pandemic is an “epidemic over a wide geographic area and affecting a large proportion of the population” (Mifflin 1273).

The contagious disease is usually narrated in literary fiction whether mimetic or speculative. The apocalyptic feature of epidemic diseases and their worldwide terror have been portrayed in the narrative texts with which we are now used to explain our existence on earth. Consequently, since the millennium, there has been an overflow of fictional writing that speculates and imitates pandemics. Any virus can cause social disorder and the COVID-19 virus is one of these viruses that has motivated many readers to rush to the genre of speculative pandemic fiction. Previous fiction about pandemics became very popular once the disease started to invade the world. One of these literary fictions is *Station Eleven* (2014), which has been published before COVID-19 that causes the death of a lot of the world’s population. Another literary work is *Ebola 76* (2012) that has been published just two years before the second wave of Ebola in 2014. Both are pandemic fiction from two different cultures, depicting characters doing their best to stay alive and avoid a deadly pandemic.

Being an Earthling, one has to go beyond the local and the national, and sometimes, even the global, by adopting a larger worldwide awareness and knowledge as the combination between speculative fiction and pandemics runs fast. They are connected by a notion of globality, which the British sociologist and theorist of globalization

Roland Robertson (1938-2022) describes as “the consciousness of the world as a whole” (8). Thus, globality seems to be at the core of pandemic speculative fiction. In other words, pandemic speculative fiction writers have, indeed, always adopted globality. Humans of all cultures, nations, races and genders have to unite in order to be able to protect themselves from any epidemic or pandemic. Therefore, the role of literary men is to imitate the past and the present and speculate the future to warn the reader.

The word ‘prediction’ consists of a prefix meaning, “before” and a root meaning, “to speak”. It refers to the future. Speculative writers ‘speak’ or narrate ‘before’ occurrence. Therefore, many novelists could predict or speculate upcoming predicaments, such as the Canadian novelist Emily St. John Mandel (1979-) and the [Sudanese](#) Amir Tag El-Sir (1960-). The multiple deaths depicted in literary texts like these indicate the fact of the termination of the globe. As the French philosopher Jacques Derrida argues that “For each time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end of the world” (140). This end has been experienced widely in the border between fact and mimesis. Mimesis is “the Greek word for imitation, a central term in aesthetic and literary theory since Aristotle” (Baldick 311). Therefore, it is evident that this apocalyptic feature of any contagious disease in addition to its worldwide horror can be portrayed through a collection of apocalyptic imitations which are continuously detected in narratives with which literary figures attempt to speculate our future. Noticeably, the term ‘apocalyptic’ “derives from the Greek apocalypse, ‘to disclose’” (Cuddon 47). Thus, apocalyptic fiction is used to disclose the future. These literary texts can predict the future by imitating our past as well as our present.

Using the qualitative methodology through deductive reasoning research method using grounded theories, this paper is going to show how the Aristotelian logic of syllogism and mimesis has affected literary authors to write pandemic speculative fiction. The study tries to prove

that by applying Aristotle's syllogism and mimesis, Mandel succeeded in 2014 to speculate and portray a future pandemic like COVID-19 that spreads all over the world in 2020. As well as Elsir has imitated reality in his fiction depicting the first wave of Ebola recently before its second wave in 2014 as if he was speculating it. The article clarifies Speculative Pandemic Fiction, Aristotle's Logic of Syllogism and Mimesis and an Aristotelian Reading of Mandel's and Elsir's pandemic speculative narrative texts.

Speculative Pandemic Fiction

It is evident nowadays that the recent rise in literary attention to speculative narratives mirrors the fact that speculative fiction, as a genre, has got to be an influential tool for the construction of literature in the 21st century. The rapid changes in the world make it critical to use this genre as a means of thinking about the future; it can investigate the status quo and speculate how society can function differently. Andrew Hoberek (1967-), a literary writer and professor of English, claims that speculative pandemic fiction presents "narratives of contemporary life that are paradoxically more real than the ones realism can manage" (31). Furthermore, *The Journal of American Studies*' 2015 issue on "Fictions of Speculation" states that speculative fiction has succeeded to grasp "the mantle from realism, renewing the urgency of its 'mimetic certainty,' albeit through new aesthetics and alternative ways of knowing" (657). As said by the critic Kathryn VanArendonk, pandemic fiction helps us "feel some small piece of what the real version could feel like. And then, because it's a story, it gives viewers the comfort of turning fear into an arc."

Speculative fiction asks: what if? It is distinguished by futuristic fiction aspects. This kind of fiction relies on reconstructing a version of the past that is true. Speculative fiction demands adopting a universal viewpoint in which we encounter otherness and hence grasp more about ourselves. Speculative fiction "invents nothing we haven't already

invented or started to invent...every novel begins with a what-if and then sets forth its axioms” (Atwood “Writing Oryx” 285-6). Speculative writers imagine and record their fiction from current tendencies and experiences that prosper into the near future, which comes from both prediction and satire. Within these texts, everything that takes place is possible and may even have already occurred. In other terms, “fiction in which things happen that are not possible today” (Le Guin). The Canadian writer Margaret Atwood (1939-), well-known for her speculative writings, discriminates in “The Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake in Context” between two kinds of fiction: speculative fiction and science fiction. Whereas science fiction portrays things that “we can’t yet do or begin to do, talking beings we can never meet, and places we can’t go,” speculative fiction imitates “the means already more or less at hand, and takes place on Planet Earth” (513).

Readers can observe that the plot in this genre resembles their daily life events. Katherine V. Snyder (1964-), an associate professor of English at the University of California, shows this notion of cognitive dissonance as the result of a probable social realism:

Dystopian speculative fiction takes what already exists and makes an imaginative leap into the future, following current sociocultural, political, or scientific developments to their potentially devastating conclusions...These cautionary tales of the future work by evoking an uncanny sense of the simultaneous familiarity and strangeness of these brave new worlds. (470)

Trying to explain speculative fiction and how literary figures think, the Australian Coral Ann Howells (1939-) manifests how Atwood comments on this feature throughout her literary works:

Speculative fiction...based on an accumulation of well-documented research, “so there’s nothing I can’t back up”. For years, she had been clipping news items from papers and popular science magazines and “noting with alarm that trends derided

ten years ago as paranoid had become possibilities, than actualities.” (*Margaret* 173-4)

Critics agree on the belief that speculative fictions like Elsir’s, Mandel’s as well as those of others function as a warning. Howells believes that speculative fiction works “to send out danger signals to its readers” (*The Cambridge* 161). Thus, *Ebola 76* as well as *Station Eleven* announce those risk signals to their literary audience. The American literary author, J. Brooks Bouson (1946-), assures this theory of the warning message driven by speculative fiction when she shows *Oryx and Crake* (2003) as well as *The Year of the Flood* (2009) as a pattern of “environmental consciousness-raising” motivated by Atwood’s theory of “the transformative and ethical potential of imaginative literature” (23). Speculative fiction reveals cultural worries about human behavior in addition to its predictable and probable results. Therefore, speculative fiction grants us assistance to imaginatively rehearse the deduction we dread and worry about, and consequently abolish it; at the same time, it lets us face the terror of confronting our “interior worlds nightmarishly returning from without” (Synder 486). This type of fiction may help us accommodate our doings before its outcomes turn out to be doomed.

Speculative fiction theory suggests that fictional context has to sort information into noncontradictory divisions while an authenticating force confirms that incidents belong to the fictional world. Authentic literature signifies narratives that are written in the natural language of the literary authors. Speculative fiction, hence, persuades the reader to accept unusual and curious events (Eco 246). Lubomir Doležel (1922-2017), one of the founders of fictional worlds theory, argues that authentication is perhaps the most influential constituent of speculative fiction theory. Fictional worlds are not beamed into the reader’s head but are originated from various textual debates: the discourse of a narrator, and the discourse of characters through descriptions, conversation, and internal beliefs.

Authentication fails and a fictional world cannot occur when the

authenticator shows contrasting announcements. Thus, if the narrator portrays two whole possible events in contrast to each other, the world seems unimaginable. Literary authors can stipulate a world, and this fictional world is successfully constructed. This process is called voiding by Doležel (165). Paul de Man (1919-1983), the American literary critic, states that literature “involves the voiding, rather than the affirmation of aesthetic categories” (10). The American literary critic Marie-Laure Ryan (1946-), too, describes a similar situation as noncommitment; a failure or refusal to commit something or someone (115). Therefore, if the fictional text authenticates knowledge and eliminates opposites, then the text states a world clearly and the fictional world is created.

Speculation is not only found in fiction but also nonfiction. For example, the American author Sylvia Celeste Browne (1936-2013) has vaguely written in her book *End of Days* (2008) that a respiratory disease would spread across the world in 2020. She states:

In around 2020, a severe pneumonia-like illness will spread throughout the globe, attacking the lungs and the bronchial tubes and resisting all known treatments. Almost more baffling than the illness itself will be the fact that it will suddenly vanish as quickly as it arrived, attack again ten years later, and then disappear completely. (312)

Browne died in 2013. Even before the outbreak of COVID-19. She has predicted the future out of her background of the history of this virus; starting from Sars to Ebola.

Aristotle’s Logic of Syllogism and Mimesis

As it is certainly faithful that all sciences rely on mathematical or theoretic methods, and that all perceptions of human relations demand the normative standpoint of valuation, it looks obvious that the logic of existence is based on the logic of validity. The sphere of the reasonable and predictable deduction is, hence, larger than the sphere of fact or reality. Therefore, the logic of fiction is closely linked to this domain of

nonfactual deduction and reasoning. The Aristotelian logic divides all propositions so sharply into the existentially true and false as to leave no room for poetry or fiction except in the realm of the false. However, in a popular passage in his *Poetics* (335 BC), the Greek philosopher Aristotle himself rejects the positivistic suggestion of his logic, by insisting that poetry is truer and more intense than history or factual survey.

Aristotle's logic of syllogism has had a unique impact on human belief. All of Aristotle's logic focuses on that theory of deduction (syllogisms). A syllogism is "(Gk 'reckoning together'). Deduction, from two propositions containing three terms of which one appears in both, of a conclusion that is true *if they are true*" (Cuddon 699). Deductive reasoning is a method of reasoning that starts with a premise, followed by another one then, finally, these two premises lead to a certain conclusion. Syllogistic reasoning is usually displayed in a three-line format:

Premise 1: All men are mortal.

Premise 2: Socrates is a man.

Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal. (Smith)

Similarly, pandemics are speculated and imitated in Mandel's and Elsir's: Premise 1: There is a virus. Premise 2: Any virus mutates. Conclusion: Therefore, a newly mutated virus, like COVID-19 in 2020 as well as the reappearance of Ebola in 2014, is predictable.

As claimed by Aristotle, a deduction is a discourse (logos) in which certain matters can be suggested, something distinct from those expected outcomes of certainty on account of their being so (Striker 63). Each of the matters claimed is a premise of the discourse; as a result, what stems from this certainty is the conclusion (deduction). The root of this meaning depends on the belief of the resulting necessity. This matches a modern thought of logical reasoning and conclusion: XX derives, certainly, from YY and ZZ. It would be illogical for XX to be fake if YY and ZZ are accurate. This represents the global concept for the

valid argument. “In a valid argument, it is not possible that the conclusion is false when the premises are true. Or, in other words: In a valid argument, whenever the premises are true, the conclusion also has to be true” (Matthias).

Aristotle’s fictional worlds are created through an imitative act called mimesis: the fictional actions imitate real people or archetypes that the audience is familiar with (9-16). Fiction stems constantly from our past. Real emotions evoke only from actual incidents. Thus, any literary figure imitates an actual situation. The author can speculate the future by imitating the past. Mimesis is based on the notion that there is only one world, the one in which we live, and all fiction should imitate it. Aristotle claims that a play can create a fictional world only if the incidents and characters seem “necessary or probable” (*Aristotle’s* 11). Possible world fiction theory similarly demands rules that govern what is possible, impossible, and necessary within its world (Doležel 12–24).

In *Poetics*, Aristotle highlights the significance of ‘probability and necessity.’ He believes that characters, objects, and events generate a fictional world if they are “possible in accordance with probability or necessity” (*Aristotle’s* 39). The fictional expectation is “defined in terms of observable fact” (Goebel 42); to be predictable in fiction is to be possible and believable in the spectator’s daily observable world. *Poetics* provides a significant contribution to this supposition: for example, Aristotle claims that skillfully constructed tragedies portray historical persons because we “do not believe that what has never happened is possible, but things which have happened are obviously possible” (15-8).

Moreover, Aristotle asserts that “impossible incidents that are probable should be preferred to possible ones that are unbelievable” (*Aristotle’s* 28-9). By dissociating “believability” and “possibility,” Aristotle suggests that fiction can provide the spectator with a way to accept dramatic action that is impossible in our daily life since believable

rules control what is possible within the literary text's plot. The connection between dramatic probability and mimesis is strong enough to produce and generate a fictional world. Consequently, dramatic content must be possible in the spectator's everyday observable world for the world-creating enterprise.

However, the Romanian literary theorist and novelist, Thomas G. Pavel (1941-), realizes that the possible world's semantics may admit scholars to distance their work from Aristotle's mimesis; it explains how a text can impose its domain of reference, a possible world, instead of referencing the real world through mimesis (175). Both of them are true. Writers imitate but they can imitate just the possible. In other words, they imitate actual life. Therefore, speculative fiction writers can just predict relying on the theory of syllogism and the notion of deduction.

Umberto Eco (1932-2016), an Italian medievalist and philosopher, considers literature as a "machine for producing possible worlds". The interaction between predictions and reasonable context creates a series of possible worlds extending between the reader's temporary notions and predictions, the author's intended sphere, the speculations of characters, and more (246). Furthermore, Doležel confirms that fiction is a speech act that, having the right relevant conditions, is capable of "a world's creation or destruction" (146) by stating a fictional realm and then referencing that same realm. Considerably, David Kellogg Lewis (1941-2001), an American philosopher, is the first to state clearly this condition in "Truth in Fiction," claiming that fictional worlds are shaped after the real world, and readers thereafter analyze and estimate fiction concerning the real world (37-46).

While Aristotle views fiction as a scheme of rearranging and imitating actual world patterns (mimesis) that causes an emotional reaction, speculative fiction (possible world fiction) authors recognize fiction as a system of prediction and requirement that causes interpretation or understanding (Doležel 24). This idea seems to be originated from Roman Jakobson's communication model outlined in

1960, which analyzes communication as a bi-directional meaning-making affair. Relating to the reader-response theory, the author establishes a message with an intended meaning and the reader re-establishes that meaning through familiarity with the language and its context. Considerably, the author (sender) constructs the fiction aiming to a specific message and meaning throughout some situations and events; the reader (receiver) then mentally reconstructs these fictional situations and incidents through familiarity with the context (fictional conventions) (Jakobson 353).

Concerning the validity of syllogism, Aristotle is convinced that:

We must understand ‘that which belongs to every’ with no limitations in respect of time, e.g. to the present or to a particular period, but without qualification. For it is by the help of such propositions that we make deductions, since if the proposition is understood with reference to the present moment, there cannot be a deduction. (*Aristotle’s* 7-10)

An Aristotelian Reading of Mandel’s *Station Eleven* and Elsir’s *Ebola 76*

Some similar diseases, like the Spanish flu of 1918 that reorganized the world causing the death of 50 million people, closely after the 10 million dead from World War I; the first eruption of Ebola virus disease that was announced in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976 and the 21st-century contagious diseases, Sars in 2002 and Mers in 2012, have motivated novelists all over the world to imitate past and present viruses and speculate a mutated one, then portray them throughout pandemic fiction. Mandel’s *Station Eleven* is considered one of these fictions. The plot jumps back and forth between two timelines: before the virus eruption and twenty years after the pandemic demolishes 99.99 % of the whole population. *Station Eleven* combines actual future events with imaginative fiction. It echoes some features of what previously existed and speculates the future. The novel narrates the story

of a group of performers who acts in Shakespeare's plays in Toronto. The events occur in the Great Lakes territory. The imaginary swine flu epidemic, the Georgia Flu, is portrayed as the antagonist. It spreads rapidly destroying people everywhere and terminating most of the inhabitants of the world.

Starting with the presentation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, an aging Hollywood actor, Arthur Leander, had the main role in the play recently before his death. Onstage with Arthur is Kirsten Raymonde, a young girl who plays the role of one of Lear's daughters. Unexpectedly, Arthur suffers a severe heart attack. Jeevan Chaudhary, a former paparazzo and now an EMT in training, jumps on stage trying to save Arthur with CPR. As a doctor, Jeevan comforts Kirsten and informs her that Arthur has died. Comparable to real life during COVID-19, the narrator states that many of the characters in the novel that had crowded to lament Arthur's death face the same fate during the next three weeks. At the same time, Jeevan receives a phone call from his friend Hua telling him about the upcoming explosion of the Georgia Flu, which Hua believes will become a worldwide pandemic. Likewise, Jeevan acts quickly, stocking up on survival utensils before going to board up with his brother, Frank.

Narrating the plot, Mandel can depict a futuristic picture of the effects of the 2020 virus. Any gathering or crowd spreads the virus.

In the lobby, the people gathered at the bar clinked their glasses together. 'To Arthur,' they said. They drank for a few more minutes and then went their separate ways in the storm...Of all of them there at the bar that night, the bartender was the one who survived the longest. He died three weeks later on the road out of the city. (15-6)

Speculating the future in her fiction, Mandel depicts terror, a large number of deaths, anxiety and horror that increase rapidly. Even doctors are infected during treating patients. Amounts of the perished duplicate, like copies emerging from an image-mutating copying machine. The

single death of any individual in plague periods supposes the probability of demise of the total species since we ignore who infected who, who transferred or passed it to whom. Mandel narrates that inhabitants “had fought off ferals, buried their neighbors, lived and died and suffered together in the blood-drenched years ... and then only by holding together into the calm” (48). Thus, this novel supposes that the world seems to be in terminal decline out of this contagious disease.

Station Eleven deducts imaginatively, from past and contemporary features and incidents, the upcoming future epidemic that is partly prediction, partly imagination. It does not narrate “fiction in which things happen that are not possible today” (Le Guin). Thus, Mandel could reflect in her text some features of what already happened during the COVID-19 predicament:

No more trains running under the surface of cities on the dazzling power of the electric third rail. No more cities. No more films...No more pharmaceuticals. No more certainty of surviving a scratch on one’s hand...No more flight. No more towns glimpsed from the sky through airplane windows, points of glimmering light; no more looking down from thirty thousand feet and imagining the lives lit up by those lights at that moment...No more Internet. No more social media. (31-2)

In Act II of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Mandel speculates the side effects of this supposed pandemic:

What was lost in the collapse: almost everything, almost everyone...Plague closed the theaters again and again, death flickering over the landscape. And now in a twilight once more lit by candles, the age of electricity having come and gone. (57-8)

Relating to Aristotle’s logic and theory of syllogism, several incidents have affected Mandel and offered her an opportunity to speculate about the newly mutated virus. One of these incidents is the

breakout of the bubonic plague known as the Black Death in Asia, Africa, and Europe in the 14th century, causing the death and termination of around a quarter of the residents of the whole world. It is caused by the Yersinia bacteria that lived in rodents and spread by fleas that bite animals, and then transferred to humans through these infected animals. The epidemic attack has irregularly reoccurred, causing the frequent closure of theatres in Shakespeare's England that present Shakespeare's plays. The additional incident that has aroused Mandel's speculation is the 2009 'Swine Flu' plague that caused enormous terror as well as broadcasting exposure. In addition to this 2009 flu, there was the 2014 Ebola eruption that appeared recently before the publication of the novel. All these events have presented a widespread source of information and facts for Mandel to create her characters and imagine similar events to portray them in fictional writing, in far yet identical surroundings to the society demolished by the fictionalized Georgia Flu. Such outbursts can cause horror associated with fatal infections and viruses, though providing some features of reliability to the future that Mandel speculates. Whereas the Georgia Flu is fictional and not found in actual life, Mandel can deduct and predict a state like this. These previous contagious diseases have really represented a worst-case background and outline that makes it possible to predict and speculate an upcoming virus that similarly attacks the respiratory system like the Coronavirus. Mandel says in her text via Jeevan: "It'll be like SARS...They made such a big deal about it, then it blew over so fast" (28).

Tyler Leander, Arthur's only son, tells Kristen and her peers,

those of you who remember the world before the Georgia Flu, consider the iterations of the illness that preceded it, those trifling outbreaks against which we were immunized as children, the flu of the past. There was the outbreak of 1918, my people, the timing obvious, divine punishment for the waste and slaughter of the First World War. But then, in the decades that followed? The flu came every season, but these were weak,

inefficient viruses that struck down only the very old, the very young, and the very sick. And then came a virus like an avenging angel, unsurvivable, a microbe that reduced the population of the fallen world by, what? There were no more statisticians by then, my angels, but shall we say ninety-nine point ninety-nine percent? One person remaining out of every two hundred fifty, three hundred? (61)

A lot of what Mandel has speculated and portrayed in her fictional text could be seen in the actual world in 2020 when the pandemic COVID-19 emerged. In chapter 11, Mandel says, “What was lost in the collapse: almost everything, almost everyone” (57). However, Chapter 2, ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ starts with the post-collapse theatre troupe arranging a scene for Shakespeare’s popular comedy. Philip Smith states that if “*King Lear* heralds the apocalypse, then *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* heralds the possibility of rebirth” (294). Therefore, *Station Eleven* acts as a warning and a prescient.

The second pandemic narrative in this article is Elsir’s *Ebola 76*, which is perhaps considered the most genuine portrait of a viral outbreak ever conceived. *Ebola 76*, named after its eponymous antihero, is published first in Arabic in 2012 and then translated into English in 2015. It reflects the Arab’s fictional experience in examining epidemics and pandemics. When Elsir published it, some critics considered it as a prediction of the predicament of the new virus in 2014. Like *Station Eleven*, it is said to be prescient. Elsir seems to speculate the second wave of Ebola in his country, South Sudan. Elsir, who is not only a writer but also a physician, imitates the 1976 pandemic Ebola and speculates the second wave in Sudan throughout a pandemic literary work just recently before its outbreak in 2014. According to Aristotle, we imitate the past to speculate future.

The plot narrates the history of infection with Ebola. As inferred from the title, it narrates the first outbreak of Ebola in the year 1976, when

Ebola first appeared in real life. Considering history, the first-ever wave of this widely mortal virus emerges during summer in the Yambuku region, Zaire, known nowadays as the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2014, Ebola extends over the town of Nzara located in the southern borders of Sudan, known currently as South Sudan. This pandemic virus is eager to sow wreck and ruin in the whole world. Elsir has succeeded to interweave some historical and medical facts throughout the plot. The introductory statement of this literary text starts with a short prologue written in verse that confuses fact and fantasy:

*In times of tragedy
All appear real
Eyes are real
The hand that greets a neighbor is real
The moon is no longer a distant fantasy
It is real (1)*

As if this prologue urges the reader to speculate the second wave of Ebola by imitating the pandemic in real life.

The text narrates that the pandemic Ebola hits Sudan via a textile-factory laborer who undertakes it through a tour to Congo and then comes back across the borders reaching Nzara. This worker is the protagonist, Lewis Nawa, who works in Nzara and has been provoked to visit the Congo suddenly after knowing the abrupt sickness and demise of Elaine; that lady with whom Lewis has been having an amorous extramarital romantic and sexual relationship for a couple of years. Returning from Congo, Lewis acts as a carrier of the virus after having a lecherous relationship with Kanini, a penniless woman of the streets who works for herself, he transmits the infection to Tina Azacouri, his wife, who works as a water seller. After many days of not-attending, Lewis backs to work before knowing that he has been fired. He faints in the factory. He is carried to the hospital in a miserable state then the cause of his sickness is known later.

This short and fast-paced epidemic hits a small town inhabited by the poorest factory workers and street laborers. It rapidly and abruptly attacks life. Elsir portrays Ebola as being: “all around, it hovered inches from him, anticipating its moment to pounce. The virus had already claimed the bodies of most of the people he encountered there” (2). Once the Ebola virus becomes much more extensive, it becomes a necessity for people not to leave their homes in order to keep themselves away from the infection. Unfortunately, there have been only two doctors living in the country where the virus has spread. One of these doctors has been infected and finally dies. However, Luther, the other doctor, and his only assistants have recovered and survived. It seems difficult for hospitals to take care of all the patients. As a result, the treatment wards shift into the square. Then, this square, famous for historical revolutions, becomes popular as ‘Ebola Square’. “On the outskirts of the city. There, Ebola’s many victims lay side by side, struck down in the overwhelming chaos of its recent outbreak” (9).

Ebola, the virus, has been depicted as a predator chasing its prey to pursue them. It is manifested in the description of the debauchery of Nawa and Kanini:

Hovering nearby, Ebola broke into a grin as Kanini sidled seductively up and pressed herself against Lewis. It watched as she brought her lips close to his scarred face, cackling with glee as Lewis left with the young girl whose blood it had infected the previous day. Ebola sidled after them as if they stumbled through filthy, deserted alleyways until finally reaching their destination, a low building whose walls reverberated with shrieks of raucous laughter. (15)

As a physician, Elsir is capable of depicting the variant reactions of panic, fear and doubt that resemble reality: “The dull pain behind his eyes had extended to his whole head, his knees were stiff and his nose was running. He was also shivering slightly and one of his hands had broken out in red spots” (33). From the early beginning of the narrative

text, Elsir personifies the Ebola virus. Elsir personifies the virus and depicts it as a wicked antagonist that intrigues and giggles with joy when it sneaks up on prey while irritating once a prey flees. “Lewis laughed and Ebola laughed with him, having penetrated smoothly into the body of his wife, whose armory of seductive charms had stood no chance against it” (34). Via the virus’s crosshairs, the reader is aware of the virus impulse of the victim and the way it passes from one host to another. Resembling the 21st c. pandemics, it transmits from one person to another through a kiss, a fatal sneeze, an indiscreet cough, or through expressing intense emotions and feelings (40).

Disease, the terror of it, and how human beings try to avoid and resist it, act as the major theme of the novel. Elsir connects disease with the lack of doctors, hospitals, medicines and ambulances. This resembles fact. He has succeeded to follow the mimesis referred to by Aristotle just to speculate the future recently before the second wave of Ebola. Throughout the plot, the narrator unfolds the way each of the virus’s preys is infected as well as presents and portrays their terminal destiny. All characters in this literary text are surrounded by their horror of the virus. The brilliant physician writer, Elsir, portrays Nawa’s body under the effect of infection. He describes Nawa’s puking as bloody and narrates that his “hands and feet were covered in gruesome lesions and the pain in his knees was crippling” (41). Tina, too, suffers extremely from the bleeding of her intestines and kidneys and from severe pain in her knees (43-8). The Kenyan Anami, the musician, is also bleeding from his skin, throat and scalp to the extent that he feels like a child “wrenched from his mother’s womb only to perish before it could even reach her nipple” (57).

Sarcastically, the workers at Riyyak’s factory assert that there is a curious disease among monkeys. They claim that anyone who catches this disease “must therefore be a monkey” (61). So, they check their backs and narrate that Nawa and other victims have a tail and eat bananas like monkeys. Thus, monkeys work as virus carriers. This resembles

what happened in 2020 when the coronavirus is first carried by animals. The text seems to act as a warning:

scenes of tragedy filled the streets: invalids carried aloft, carted by donkeys, or simply dragged over the rough ground. Schools and government offices had been abandoned, and all those with the means and the will were preparing to flee before the borders closed and the towns were cut off from the outside world. (66)

Resembling real life that Elsir imitates, the following quotation narrates the terrible state of the virus and how the city hospital is unable to provide patients with suitable medical care. However, the authoritarians claim arrogantly that they can control the situation and show no mercy to the patients' suffering:

The last IVs were hooked into bleeding arms and every available scrap of cloth draped over a feverish brow. Now Novalgin had run out, this was the only way to lower temperatures. Gone were all semblances of care and tenderness. Gone were all attempts at a decent, dignified burial... Following this, in a tone of utmost optimism, authorities announced that the situation was under control. (67)

Elsir depicts how the inhabitants behave when the virus extremely damages the city. It shows a chaotic situation; all laws and systems have been broken. Corpses of infected patients are heaped up disrespectfully in giant holes underground.

At that point, now that time had come for her daughter to be buried in the mass grave the authorities had assigned to Ebola's victims-people of all races and creeds slung in together, without time spared for them to be bathed or covered. (77)

Hungry poor begin to rob markets using violence. Murder, robbery and drunkenness are all around. Elsir narrates the traumatic death story of Kanini whom the virus murders savagely:

the wayward country girl became the latest name on the list of

people to die needlessly for the simple reason that the world is home to peculiar folk who enjoy gratuitous slaughter. Perhaps if she survived until Ebola had taken her she wouldn't have been chopped into pieces and dumped in some bin. (84)

Imitating reality, terror is found everywhere. At the borders where “fugitives from Congo had gathered” (88), the magician Jamadi Ahmed is so worried because of his inability to cross the borders. At the Ebola Square, “the dead and the half-dead were piled high” (93). The square is full of victims wailing in pain. In such extreme fear, the blind guitarist, Ruwadi Monti, feels the virus in “every cell of his body...dancing gleefully all around” (Elsir 92). The novel does not have a conclusive ending. The author offers some options for how such a story might end. Maybe to let the reader predict the future of this city and disease. By imitating what really happened in 1976 and narrating the incidents in a literary text recently before the second wave of Ebola in 2014, Tag Elsir applies, through his literary text *Ebola 76*, the logic of syllogism to imitate and speculate the mutation of the first wave of the Ebola virus, and have the second wave in his country Sudan.

These two fictions arise before massive pandemics that exterminate a great portion of the world's population. They center around characters facing a deadly epidemic and trying to do everything they can to stay alive trying to avoid this pandemic plague. According to those fictions, the World seems to be in terminal decline. The death of only one person during plague periods supposes the probability and prediction of termination of all human kinds. Critics claim that these several deaths indicate the belief of the end of the world.

Despite the variable differences between St. John Mandel and Amir Taj Elsir including cultural, regional, and religious backgrounds, they are proficiently capable of imitating and speculating pandemic diseases and presenting fictions that portray humans' response during calamitous times like pandemics and epidemics. Both can portray and depict the demise terrors by dramatizing the end of humanity. They can portray the

side effects of the epidemic on human bodies. Both portray the disease as an antagonist predator trying to catch preys and put an end to the world. Both portray people as powerless and unable to fight against pandemics. They portray disease as a being that is more powerful than all the surroundings. They portray the virus as a superior organism that can trigger pain and horror in humanity.

Contrary to Mandel's characters who try to help each other, Elsir's characters are portrayed as antiheroes who offer no mercy to each other. They never ignore their needs for the sake of their society. They spread rumors, blame and self-interest among others who are already miserable and troubled. Easterners' behaviors reflect that these communities used to be humiliated because of colonialism. They used to aggressively face life's plights.

Conclusion

The contemporary 21st-century pandemics have provoked both authors and readers to turn to pandemic fiction. Reading this genre of fiction proves that the Aristotelian logic of syllogism and mimesis is applied in contemporary literary works. Following this logic of reasonable and predictable deduction, literary authors like St. John Mandel and Amir Tag Elsir, write speculative pandemic fiction that authenticates information. They stipulate a world and this fictional world is successfully constructed.

According to Aristotle's syllogism, both Mandel and Elsir are logically able to imitate and speculate the impending epidemics because of the undoubted mutation of the viruses. They are not able to deduct the conclusion of the mutated viruses unless they logically consider the first premise, which indicates that there is a virus as well as considering the second premise, which claims that all viruses mutate. Thus, the conclusion is the eruption of newly mutated viruses: 2014 Ebola and COVID-19. They have speculated the upcoming future pandemics

depending on our past and present. They are able to narrate the future.

Both novelists revolve around the notion of deduction. These speculative authors present not only imitations of reality and predictions of inevitabilities, but also warnings of possibilities. Despite their different cultures, religions, and races, both of them can portray the disease in their fiction; extreme terror, many people perish, agitation increases, and doctors catch the virus.

Even though this pandemic mood is calamitous, it can also redeem those bad and poor aspects at the end of the literary texts. Depending on this fact, people throughout the whole world are waiting for this redemption after the Coronavirus. The globe is going to reach an end, which relies on the zero-point that constitutes “the chance of a new beginning” (Zizek xii). According to what the French philosopher Michel Foucault terms an ontology of the present, there are three of survival in humankind life, the beneath, the behind and the beyond. It is the persistent notion of the apocalypse that helps people to perceive a new revival at the end of any outline (306). Therefore, we are still waiting for post-COVID pandemic novels.

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