Introduction

World Literature In and For Pandemic Times

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Each year, an issue of *jwl* is based on a theme raised in a summer session of the Institute for World Literature. Our topic for this issue has an experiential basis as much as a scholarly one. Our 2020 session was to be held at the University of Belgrade, but Covid-19 changed that plan, and we shifted to meeting virtually. As we made our revised arrangements, I recalled hearing from Orhan Pamuk that he was nearing completion of a novel based on a plague epidemic in Istanbul in the late nineteenth century, and I invited him to join in for a plenary session on the subject. Though he was still working on the novel, its English translation was already well along, and he kindly gave us a draft chapter to share with our participants. The novel was published the following spring in Turkish (*Veba Geceleri*, 2021); the English translation (*Nights of Plague*) is forthcoming in October 2022. The draft he shared at the Institute has a particular interest in itself, as it didn't end up appearing in the finished novel.

That session became the nucleus of this special issue on *World Literature in and for Pandemic Times*, which has a continuation in *jwl*'s next issue, as more excellent essays came in than could fit in a single issue. This issue begins with an edited transcript of the conversation with Orhan Pamuk at our virtual *jwl* meeting. This is followed by the draft chapter from *Nights of Plague*, courtesy of the author. Then come six essays on the theme of world literature in, and for, pandemic times. In the first of these, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen looks at ways in which literature can help us think about the contradictory blend of nationalism and universalism seen in responses to the global crisis of Covid-19. Four essays follow that discuss creative responses to pandemic times: Luis Medina Cordova's account of Latin American *microcuentos*; Javid Aliyev on a collaborative Portuguese hypertext novel; a comparative analysis by Anhiti Patnaik of two collections of literary responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, one from India, the other from the United States; and Danielle Terceiro's comparison of two recent graphic novels dealing with medical crises during World War One.
The issue concludes with Delia Ungureanu’s searching meditation on the possibility for times of solitude and isolation to inspire revolutionary literary and cultural change.

In the continuation of this topic in JWL’s upcoming issue 7:2, four essays offer case studies of pre-Covid literary works that take up epidemic and pandemic themes, illustrating ways in which world literature offers us resources for dealing with the emotional and political ramifications of our own pandemic experience.

Taken together, these ten essays treat literature in wide a range of genres, from Egyptian wisdom literature and Stoic philosophy to historical fiction, poetry, graphic novels, and hypertexts, and they discuss works from Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Guatemala, India, Italy, Mexico, Portugal, Turkey, and the United States. The authors of these ten essays themselves hail from seven countries: Australia, Denmark, England, India, Romania, Turkey, and the USA. Even if the Covid-19 pandemic is gradually brought under some degree of control, the lessons – and the wounds – of this traumatic time will long be with us. In the process of our recovery and re-engagement with the world, world literature can help us create solidarity and collective connection in the months and years ahead.