ABSTRACT

Pandemic fiction has yet to receive the attention and recognition it deserves as an instrument of fostering compassion. Reading pandemic fiction is a proven remedy against the desolation and dehumanizing tendencies of a global pandemic such as the one recently witnessed in the form of COVID-19. My thesis explores and examines the ways pandemic fiction can be read and taught to foster compassion among the readers. The primary focus of my thesis are selected stories from two anthologies of pandemic fiction *The Decameron Project: 29 New Stories from the Pandemic* and *The Stained-Glass Window: Stories of the Pandemic from Pakistan*. I explore how pandemic literature can connect people across nationalities, cultures, and religions. I also examine the ways in which reading about the struggles of people affected by the pandemics helps nurture compassion for society at large. I focus on how shared experience as community leads them to be compassionate towards others. I explore the potential of selected pandemic fiction in fostering compassion through Marc Gopin's theory of compassionate reasoning, which entails incorporating compassionate thoughts, experiences, and practices to cultivate ethical principles that promote compassion towards oneself and others. Recent developments in the intersecting fields of bibliotherapy, applied ethics, and literary studies provide the framework to approach the process of reading from the perspectives of what precedes and what is the outcome of reading in general. I conclude that close textual analysis, character analysis, discussions on plot and characters' actions and motives, empathy building exercises, writing exercises, comparative analysis, and role-play are some of the ways in which pandemic fiction can be read and taught in order to spread compassion.

Keywords: Compassion, pandemic fiction, close textual analysis, empathy building.