

A Journey of Diversity and Humanism during the Pandemic

by Lucien Yan

During this period, reading the works of many famous 20th century writers made me think more during the pandemic. The books gave me the way to the new world for my thought on the humanism area, social problems, and society, I summarized the insights that I got from these books. First, I read Coates, and Baldwin's work has a full understanding of American racism in the 20th century. Second, *The Great Gatsby* gave me a better idea of the American golden age after the World War in the 1920s. Third, Conrad's writings profoundly describe the suffering of native Africans under colonial rule. In the three months of our semester, the coronavirus has spread widely throughout the world; from China to Ireland, throughout Europe and Asia. More than 400,000 people were infected, including Tom Hanks and the Prince of Wales. As I was reading the news, I was empathetic to reading the text of the plague description by Thomas Mann and Albert Camus. Xingjian Gao's *Soul Mountain* gave me a great idea on how to face the difficulties during the plague and Kafka's *Metamorphosis* gave me a figure of love during the plague. *No Exit* and *Cutting Stone* made me thought more during the days at home. All in all, these readings have given me a lot of insights into the world, which is very meaningful to me. The content of these books allows one to think during the pandemic. The importance of diversity, healthy humanity, and love to the world.

I would introduce my bio, background, and my academic background in this paragraph. I am living in Queens and I was born in Nanjing, a city of Eastern China. Absolutely I am a one hundred percent Asian. My Parents operated electronic business in China after they graduated

from University. When I was a child, they are always busy so the lonely feeling came through my child's time. After I graduated from high school, my parents sent me to the United States for University. My Grandma and my aunt moved to Queens about 25 years ago. My mom wanted to move to the United States with them but she gave up this idea because of her job in China. Maybe that's the reason why they sent me to New York. As a result, I moved from a small Chinese city with eight million people to the biggest city in the United States with eight million people. I just transferred from Stonybrook University with a major in Economics this semester. The reason for me to transfer is that I want to have experience and better education quality. I chose this major because I wanted to learn widely about economics and finance system for my future graduate study. Moving to the United States gives me to get a chance to do what I want to do; living in New York City gives me a lot of chances to play golf and sailing. I am interested in car racing as well. In summer 2017, I took the Porsche Professional Driving course in Los Angeles. Four years in New York City makes me feel that this city is home to me.

For my future plan, I would like to try to attend law school and become a lawyer. I live in a Chinese and Korean community in Queens; there are a lot of new immigrants here. Even though some of them had been here for decades, they still do not have enough knowledge of the law. One of my friends Ben is an undocumented immigrant from Canton; he moved to the United States for political asylum. He told me a lawyer in Queens promised to help him to get a green card for fifty thousand dollars. Sadly the lawyer lied to him. In minority communities, due to language and culture barriers, many minorities do not know how to use law knowledge to protect their rights; therefore I want to be a lawyer to help minorities protect their rights. I talked to my friend and family members about my plan and they said they appreciate that and they will support me.

I have many fears about the future. COVID-19 has been raging around the world recently and I live in Manhattan. More than 200,000 people throughout New York City have been infected with coronavirus; unfortunately, a friend of my father has also been infected and lived in the ICU. Many of my neighbors are also infected. When I saw the ambulance leaving the lobby of my building, I was deeply worried about the future. If the virus continues to spread like this, it will be a disaster for New York. What scares me, even more, is the future financial crisis and unemployment rate. Many people have lost a lot of their savings and jobs in the stock market; many people are struggling with life. I am very scared of this world, I am afraid of getting the COVID-19 virus and I am afraid that the whole society will be hit by COVID19.

After reading the book *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, I feel the necessity to give equal rights to all races. In the book, the author writes about his experiences and how his experiences have made him feel the existence of racial discrimination and separation in society. At that time, young African American people had experienced racial discrimination. The unfair social system made African Americans stay in their own communities and had no access to people from other races. Though the US culture has changed, minorities now have the same rights as white people do; some of the white people still feel they have priority over the African Americans. The author thinks the white supremacy still remains in American society; therefore, he disagrees with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s optimism of integration and Malcolm X's optimism of nationalism.



Author Michelle Alexander from New York Times comments on Coates; she writes, “Perhaps Coates has not yet discovered for himself the answers to the questions he poses in *Between the World and Me*. But I suspect that he is holding out on us. Everything he has ever written leads me to believe he has more to say. He may imagine that we are better off figuring out for ourselves the true nature of the Dream and what it means to be engaged in meaningful Struggles. But I believe we could only benefit from hearing what answers Coates may have fashioned for himself. Whether you agree or disagree, one of the great joys of reading Ta-Nehisi Coates is being challenged in ways you didn’t expect or imagine” (Alexander). Though Coates’ idea can be considered controversial, I still think his idea is meaningful for us to understand the racial problem in the United States.

As I am a minority, his words make me understand that I should be proud of my race and not to be afraid of racial discrimination. When I read *Between the World and Me* and *The Fire Next Time*, I also felt two distinct attitudes of African Americans when they were subjected to racial discrimination; regardless of hatred and active resistance.

After reading Baldwin's letter to his nephew in *The Fire Next Time*, I feel as impressed as I read Coates' letter last week. In terms of writing styles and ideas towards racial discrimination, Baldwin and Coates' styles, and conceptions portray similarities as well as some differences. African Americans' lives matter. I do not think racial discrimination is a topic that is much related to politics, in which politics could not solve the racial problem effectively. In order to fully withdraw racial discrimination from society, the most important thing is to change people's minds towards races.

In Coates' letter, I learned about why he hates racial discrimination. Coates' letter infers that the reason why African American people were isolated from white society is that there were biases towards African American communities. In this case, African American communities were not able to merge themselves into the white community. As for today, the supremacy of White people still remains in American Society.

In Baldwin's letter to his nephew, Baldwin shows his view on racial discrimination in the United States. Baldwin was born and raised in Harlem; Harlem was and is still a district that consists mainly of African Americans. In Baldwin's book and from his life experiences described in the book, he indicates that he feels afraid when he leaves Harlem every single time, and he feels unsafe and nervous because of racial discrimination towards African Americans. In the 1950s, when Baldwin visited the Southern states, the racial division in the south shocked him even more: African Americans and White people must sit separately in a cafe; white kids could curse Baldwin in the street randomly. Baldwin does not encourage expressing anger to white people; instead, he suggests his the nephew that African Americans should take the experience of racial discrimination as an important memory, which gives them passion for the African American civil rights movement. Even though both Baldwin and Coates suggest young African

American boys to take the idea that African Americans are inferior to white people, Coates' view seems to be more aggressive than he writes in his letter that African Americans should not use love to triumph over racial discrimination. Comparing to Coates' idea, Baldwin's idea towards racial discrimination seems to be much more peaceful than he believes hatred towards white people is not a way to solve this problem; instead of hatred, African Americans need to learn to solve racial discrimination in a more harmonious way.

Baldwin believes that hatred towards white men could only drive people apart as he states in his book, "This is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become" (Baldwin, 35). Hatred is not the solution to unite people or to end racial discrimination. Even though African Americans have suffered a lot from racial separation and racial discrimination, hatred and revenge towards white people would ultimately divide the country apart. The United States of America is now known for its diversity; it is united by different races and the United States history is more about the unify of people of different races: since the time of British North America, White people are not the only race on this continent.



This is a photo of African American soldiers in Vietnam observe the birthday of late civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. in 1971. When this picture was taken, racial discrimination in the United States was very serious. Baldwin believes that the way for African Americans to gain recognition from other races is to contribute to this country. These young African-American soldiers fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia for the freedom of the United States and the Republic of Vietnam; although they were discriminated against in their homeland, these young people were still using their lives to serve the country. Although it is controversial whether this war is correct, the behavior of these African Americans is respected by African Americans. They use their actions to remind others that African Americans should also be respected.

Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah and Isabel Wilkerson from *The Fire this Time* hold similar points of view regarding racial issues as they both share Baldwin's thoughts toward black problems; contrasting to Coates' understanding of racial problems, Coates seems to be more extreme on black matters. After these conclusions, I would talk about *The Great Gatsby*, I think this book gave me a chance to understand more about the topic of the crisis on different races and social statuses.

The great Gatsby talked about a fantasy story in the United States in the 1920s, although it seems that this story has nothing to do with the stories of Coates and Baldwin we have read before. But I think these books have the same tragic ending. In *Great Gatsby*, Gatsby expresses his expectation that everything will finally turn out better as he "believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And then one fine morning—So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past." (Fitzgerald). The green light mentioned in the paragraph shows that Gatsby hopes his future life will be as smooth as a

green light; however, the reality is the power of the tide that keeps pulling them back. In this situation, Gatsby still maintains an optimistic attitude towards the future and still insists on achieving the next goal. This passage demonstrates the effort Gatsby put in in order to achieve a brighter future. Gatsby is like the authors of books I've read before: they have all been in bad times but they are still trying their best to do better in the future.



This is the interior of Gatsby house. For Gatsby, his dream was to win Daisy's love with a luxurious life. After his arduous business journey, he bought this huge mansion. However, I finally realized that no matter what he did, he couldn't get the love he needed. In his huge mansion, he felt no joy because he felt his life was meaningless.

Comparing to Coates and Baldwin we have read before; I think they all share something in common. Although Gatsby becomes a billionaire after the war, Tom still looks down on him because Gatsby is poor before the war. Comparing to Baldwin and Coates, even though Baldwin and Coates were well-educated and they were very successful in their area, they still felt they were racially discriminated: white people still judged them because of their races even though they were much more successful than many white people. The white supremacy was based on white people's stubborn concept of racism. White people felt that whites were superior to African

Americans and they could not accept blacks could be more successful than they were. As Baldwin mentioned after he returned from France to the southern States in the 1950s, he found that blacks in the southern United States could not sit close to whites in coffee shops. In *The Great Gatsby*, Tom is born rich; he can not accept that Gatsby, who is at first in low social status, is doing as better as him in business and finally reaches the same social status as Tom relying on Gatsby's own effort. Gatsby's story is a great tragedy but next I want to talk about black Africa, Conrad wrote the *Heart of Darkness* and that gave us a window to see how native African people suffering from the European colonial rule.

"Heart of Darkness," highlights Marlow's experiences as he travels across different African countries. He notices the inhumane behavior and brutality of the Europeans towards the Africans because of the Africans are perceived as inferior. The Igbo community in Nigeria viewed these individuals as intruders and revolted against them. The diverse historical perspectives of colonialism are imperative because they aid in the conceptualization of the interactions between the natives and their oppressors.



The colonizers perceived the Africans as a means to an end. They were used for hunting for ivory and mining of minerals useful in European industries. Individuals who revolted against them were brutally executed to instill fear among the Africans. In the novel, Marlow mentions the killing of the African helmsman before he could use the steam whistle to disperse the natives. He asserts, “there was an alternative approach to interacting with these people since the use of violence prompted them to retreat”(Conrad 42). Kurtz believes that his intellectual capacity is superior to that of the blacks and should not be questioned. Overall, the narratives on colonialism in Africa highlight the plight of the natives and the approaches used by the colonizers to maintain dominance and influence over them. Most resistance against slavery and oppression were futile because the colonialists instilled fear in the natives through brutal killings and torture. The rulers looked for precious minerals and goods such as ivory. Those who faced extreme opposition from the Africans posed as missionaries and convinced the local leaders that

they aimed to improve their lives and wellbeing. These readings have helped to conceptualize the historical injustices that occurred in the past and how they have shaped modern-day society. I would talk about *Death in Venice* and *The German Mujahid* in the following paragraphs, I think these two books can connect with the current Coronavirus plague worldwide.

Death in Venice by Thomas Mann, published in 1912, is following an aging German artist Gustav von Aschenbach on his seemingly ordinary holiday. The man leads an extremely ascetic lifestyle in Munich. Still, Aschenbach does not hesitate to pursue his urge to travel and proceeds to an island resort in the Adriatic. However, he instantly gets exhausted from the place and catches a steamship to Venice, where he meets a man wearing makeup to appear younger, which disgusts Aschenbach. During his stay in Venice, Aschenbach is struck with the beauty of a fourteen years old Polish boy Tadzio. Aschenbach starts to obsessively seek out the boy over the hotel territory and Venice canals. At one point, the man decides to leave the city due to health concerns, but his luggage gets mislaid (Mann). He is beyond excited to return to the hotel and observe Tadzio. Aschenbach fights his urge to speak to the boy fervently. Soon, the aging man witnesses the number of patrons in the hotel declining. Moreover, the scent of antiseptic is emanating from the streets. Later, he manages to uncover that there has been a cholera outbreak in the area. Even though Aschenbach is aware of the fact that he needs to flee the town rapidly, he continues his stay and pursues Tadzio with renowned enthusiasm. Aschenbach loses grip of himself and starts to adjust his appearance to seem younger. He begins dressing in colorful pieces of clothing, dyes, and curls his hair (Aran). Moreover, he wears blush even though he found it despicable earlier. Tadzio notices Aschenbach's obsession but does not share it with anyone letting the man watch him from a distance. Meanwhile, the aging man imagines the

relationship between the two being the Greek Platonic ideal fantasizing that they mirror Socrates and Phaedrus. In the end, the famous artist Aschenbach died in a beach chair watching Tadzio.



At the moment, people witnessed a severe threat posed by a coronavirus. On the eleventh of March, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who is the current Director-General of the World Health Organization, declared "We have therefore made the assessment that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic" ("WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks At The Media Briefing On COVID-19 - 11 March 2020"). Nowadays, we can observe an increase in the number of death caused by COVID-19 and the growing panic among people. Thus, according to WHO, "There are now more than 118,000 cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 people have lost their lives" ("WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks At The Media Briefing On COVID-19 - 11 March 2020"). As a result, people are in fear of getting infected and lose people they love. People are panic buying products and personal hygiene items since governments of many

countries have already announced mandatory quarantines, which forced cafes, restaurants, and shopping malls to close to prevent the spread of disease.

The German Mujahid Boualem Sansal's book *The German Mujahid* was inspired by his visit to a European-style Algerian settlement where the retired SS officer was a mayor. The picture of the severe imperatives of the past follows two brothers, Rachel and Malrich Schiller, who are total opposites. They were born in a tiny community in Algeria to a German father and an Algerian mother and fostered by an aging uncle in one of the most troublesome ghettos in France.



The story is narrated by Malrich, an angry and alienated teenager who gets expelled from school. After that, he hangs around the streets, gets some part-time jobs, deals, goes to the mosque, which is characteristic of youngsters from his environment. When Malrich is seventeen his thirty-three years old brother commits suicide.

The older man was a model immigrant, educated, and hard-working. However, the diaries she leaves behind turn Malrich's world upside down. He finds that their parents who sent the boys to Paris were murdered by Islamic fundamentalists two years prior during the "dirty war" in Al-geria (Sansal). Moreover, when Rachel went to visit their grave, he uncovered that their father, Hans Schiller was a former SS officer and eradicated thousands of Jews at Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Malrich's streetsmart diary narrative is spattered with entries from his brother's diary, which are reflective at first. The next ones become increasingly desperate and eaten up by guilt and rage. Rachel tracks back his father's dealings and decides to kill himself while in Auschwitz and Birkenau. He transforms himself into a concentration camp victim and gasses himself on his father's death anniversary. Malrich, on the other hand, determines that he has to persevere and tries to save his "Sensitive urban Area, Category 1" housing project. He tells his friends that it is his responsibility to fight "Nazi jihadist[s]" and then share the truth with the whole world (Sansal). Therefore, he would withstand all the terrors that life brings upon him.

To sum up, *Death in Venice* is a masterpiece of literature. Thomas Mann tells a story, which is not only about art and the artist, love, and beauty but also about the ways Indian cholera spread and impacted people's lives. That epidemic was spreading quickly, caused panic and hundreds of death; thus, it can be compared to the present situation with coronavirus. Therefore, coronavirus has also affected many countries, caused thousands of people's death, and still make people panic.

Finally, I want to talk about the book about the Memoir of a Female Doctor. The author can be said to be a respectable feminist. Her resistance to sexism is worth learning. She behaves the same as Coates, Baldwin, and those native Africans who fight racism in Africa. Through her

complicated life experience, she finally discovered that women should also have rights, which has the same central idea as the books we read before.

Dr. el Saadawi, in her book "*Women at Point Zero*," furthers her argument on how the confines of the society make women act as slaves to men. Women have for long acted as subordinate to men to the extent that they have been enslaved both physically and mentally. By analyzing Dr. el Saadawi's text, it is evident that women in Egyptian society were perceived as slaves for men in society. In her novel, el Saadawi introduces her readers to a character named Firdaus, who encountered numerous challenges while growing up in the chauvinistic society. Firdaus recounts memories of how she was subconsciously taught to confide in women. The woman remembers a time when the mother was supportive but cautioned that the world is a treacherous place. This information was negative, but her mother's support offered comfort. Her mother played a vital role in protecting her from the vulnerabilities of the world. El Saadawi later learns the negative side of being overprotected since it prevented her from facing reality. As Firdaus grew older, she noticed that her mother did not care about her as much as she did when she was younger. Due to the different problems in her home, she escapes her uncle's house, hoping that she would find peace when away from his relatives. Firdaus encounters a man who looked at her up and down her body as if to make sexual advances. The article states that the man looked at her as if her body was his. Inherently, bigoted men in society view women as sex tools, which are at their disposal.



Dr. el Saadawi propagates the theme of objectification of women by men as a source of turmoil for females. At some point, Firdaus gets married to Sheikh Mahmoud; however, the issue of the female of objectification becomes evident in her new marriage. Markedly, Firdaus believes that marriage is an institution that should be built on mutual love and respect; as a result, she attempts to reclaim her body as her husband acts in a possessive manner towards her (Wangmo 14). Firdaus explains that Mahmoud looked at her constantly as though he is jealous of her food. Mahmoud, although married to Firdaus, considers that women are subordinate to men and that they should serve them. To ascertain that the practice is deep-rooted in society, Firdaus states that a significant percentage of men she has encountered exhibit similar behavior towards women. Notably, the men she has encountered exhibit voyeurism attitudes, which make her feel that her body exists only for them. El Saadawi also highlights the issue of sexual violence in her

text. In the book, Bayoumi locks Firdaus in his apartment and lets his friends have sex with her as an indication of the power and control he has over her. Thus, it is evident the society has reinforced the notion that men are superior to women, and they can do as they please with their bodies. el Saadawi's text highlights the nature of power in Egyptian society. Notably, she asserts that for the likes of young Firdaus, the nature of power is simple, men possess it, and the women do not, due to the psychological limitations that the immediate environment has placed on them. For instance, her father has power over her mother, and her uncle has power over her. When Firdaus is married, Sheikh Mahamoud has power over her; furthermore, on the streets, men have power over the women they come across. Dr. el Saadawi highlights the fact that women can restore their dignity if they fight for their empowerment. From Dr. el Saadawi's article, women must use the power of the desire men have for their bodies to their advantage. Importantly, the author's final argument is that women can wield power too.

Compared with the previous article, *Memoirs of a Female Doctor* further illustrates that in many cases, passive gender or race often encounters huge racial discrimination and sex discrimination. Advantageous races or genders often exert mental or physical violence.

Staying at home to save the world in this coronavirus epidemic has changed my lifestyle in a great way. I seek to relate my life in quarantine with that of the characters in the play *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre. The play has three main characters; Inez, Estelle, and Garcin. The setting is a drawing room (hell) that Sartre uses to resemble our real world. Existentialism is a philosophical view of life that claims that we all attach meaning to our lives, are responsible for our actions, and that we exist before nature (Bolea 65). More to losing count of the days, I feel lost because it has become uncertain when this pandemic will end and if I will survive it or not. Life under quarantine is much akin to facing the unknown. Waking up to the reality that the

nightmare is now happening is a sad state of affairs. How I wish all this could go away. Here, my character relates to Estelle when she wishes that they were not dead and suffering; *Please, please don't use that word [the dead]. It's so – so crude. In terribly bad taste, really. It doesn't mean much, anyhow. Somehow I feel we've never been so much alive as now. If we've absolutely got to mention this – this state of things, I suggest we call ourselves – wait! – absentees* (Sartre 120).

When Estelle Rigault finds herself in hell, she retreats to “bad faith”. According to Sartre, bad faith is a term that labels the attempt of human beings to deny that they have the power to change their characters and situation (Mart 52).

News updates and other online platforms continue to give horrifying updates on how the situation is worsening. Even after the recommended fourteen days of quarantine, we really do not know what happens next. Most probably, the quarantine will not be lifted if the number of new cases continues to rise.

Some of the most remarkable changes that have happened in my quarantine life are; schools are now hosted on virtual classrooms, public gyms are off the table; I now have to get creative with my physical exercises and food deliveries have changed with a little precaution not to overspend. Directives to social distance have left so many of my plans rescheduled and others canceled and the best way to make of for this is only to wait. Even as safety is the first priority, spending time with my loved ones, school or work obligations and financial concerns are still at the back of my mind.

Amidst all the chaos, support from family and friends has been outpouring. Even though we cannot hang out and attend parties like before, most of them are constantly calling to check on me and see if they can help with anything. I have also teamed up with other friends as well as strangers in quarantine on social media platforms where we share updates, provide emotional

support, show solidarity, and sometimes even make jokes about the situation to lighten the mood. People who have shown me they care relate to the character Garcin; Joseph Garcin seems to be the nicest person in hell. He is accommodating, does not want to bother anyone and wishes to suffer on no one; *“No, I shall never be your torturer....”* (Sartre 203). Even in hell, Garcin exudes courage; *Anyhow, I can assure you I'm not frightened. Not that I take my position lightly; I realize its gravity only too well. But I'm not afraid* (Sartre 76). Garcin feels that it is a mistake that they are in hell. The solution he provides is that they should start to help one another (Sartre 348). Despite the heat in hell, Garcin lends his jacket to Estelle. Garcin resembles many people who have gone out of their way to give a helping hand. Some of them are in quarantine themselves but by helping others they have exuded courage.

However, not all people I have related to have been kind. Some actually insist that we deserve the quarantine life because we were not careful with who we were interacting with. These people relate well with the character Inez Serrano. She is convinced that they should all pay for their actions; *“Anyhow, I can assure you I'm not frightened. Not that I take my position lightly; I realize its gravity only too well. But I'm not afraid”* (Sartre 262). She also tries to guide her other two companions into accepting the reality that they are in hell and coping with their situation, although she does this in a tough way. As a good existentialist, she is conscious of herself in her mind. Inez brings out Sartre's point of view on existentialism; that human beings define their own actions and are responsible for those actions.



In *No Exit*, people are full of mistrust and deception in hell because they are isolated. During this period they have undergone tremendous changes. The very disturbing environment is disturbing. Despite being forced to quarantine at home, my friend and I still comfort each other by calling and communicating. My cat also became my listener at this time.

In conclusion, Sartre writes: *Hell is other people*. This is as a result of competitive subjectivity that emerges when people having a conversation tend to fight over the role of a subject. Consequently, one character is a force to be a subject by the other. When we interact with others, our freedom will always be threatened even by another's gaze. According to Sartre, it is agony attached to the threat of objectification is hell.

The novel *Soul Mountain* is about a man who wanders in China, looking for the legendary Soul Mountain. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator, traveling from Beijing, arrives in a remote village in South China. The narrator, who has only been identified as "He," has been diagnosed with lung cancer, the same disease that killed his father. However, doctors later realized that it was a misdiagnosis. Excited to learn that he does not have cancer, the narrator plans to travel and experience nature and adventure. During his travels through

woodlands and wildlife preserves, he develops a strong liking for rural life. At some point, he meets a female nurse with whom he has intimate sexual relations. As he continues to travel, he meets an elderly Taoist who tells him that no matter how long he keeps traveling, he will have to return to normal life. The statement forces the narrator to reflect on his life, and he concludes that he should focus on searching for self-realization. At the end of the novel, the narrator has become an old man who is at the top of a snowy mountain, which is possibly the Soul Mountain.

The writer of the novel largely dwells on the subject of nature. The narrator has a major interest in the protection of the environment and enjoying its beauty. He does not get tired because of visiting reserves in different parts of China. He also laments deforestation because of the dangers it poses to the wellbeing of animals and society. The narrator notes that some animals, such as tigers, golden monkeys, pandas, and cranes, are already vanishing from forests in China (Moran 207). The environmental destruction that has happened in many parts of China due to human activities has left many animals without their natural habitats. At the same time, poachers kill wild animals for their benefits, an activity that the narrator laments. During his travels, he gets overjoyed whenever he comes across a preserved forest. For example, he enjoys the beautiful sight of the riverside village as well as the sounds and smells of nature. Moreover, his entire journey was made in search of the Soul Mountain, which must have been green, thereby proving the narrator's love for nature.

The protagonist in the novel understands the challenges that characterize contemporary society. However, the author does not make references to the popular culture or major political events that are the case with many other novels. Instead, he uses small real-life events and people's opinions about various subjects (Wu 101). The novel seems long because it does not follow the usual order of such pieces. Despite the vagueness of the novel, the description of

simple experiences enables the reader to relate to the narrator's situation. At some point, for example, the protagonist is in a hurry to get to town. However, he arrives late because the bus driver decided to stop at a café and resume the journey the following day. The author shows that everyone involuntarily abides by undesirable rules and schedules. In another case, a woman tells the narrator that her girlfriend was disowned and jailed. Such sad stories are not pleasant to the protagonist or the reader, but they are a reflection of the challenges that society faces.

In the end, the narrator realizes that it will be best for him to concentrate on self-realization. He has kept himself away from political concerns because he is focused on himself. Despite the novel is apolitical, the protagonist speaks against the loss of privacy and freedom as government officials try to control the whole society (Nagle). Having gone through a traumatizing time after the doctors told him that he has lung cancer, the narrator prefers to live the rest of his life fulfilling his desires, the main one of which is exploring nature. He sets to look for Soul Mountain, even if he is not sure if it is real or just fictional. However, when he meets the elderly Taoist, he starts feeling that even touring the country and looking for Soul Mountain is not that important for him in his life. The Taoist reminds him that he will still go back to his people and live an ordinary life with them. At that moment, he decides that self-realization is more important than any other dream. Moreover, he feels that he cannot prevent people from destroying the environment. Hence, it is better to focus on what matters most to him.

In this era of the coronavirus, people have also had to change their perspectives of various aspects of life. Previously, people placed value on different activities and commodities. However, people are now living in quarantine while others are isolated because they have contracted the disease. In all parts of the world, the priorities seem to have changed because most of the people are only concerned about their safety now. Ironically, the environment is not being

destroyed now that industries are closed and poachers are indoors (Davies). When everyone is outside and looking for their happiness, they end up causing more harm to themselves and the environment. Life in quarantine is difficult for most people because they are not used to staying indoors for a long period. However, it also gives someone an opportunity to reflect on their lives and determine what is most important for them. For example, the protection of life should be a priority for all people. The narrator in *Soul Mountain* wanders across China, but he finally decides to reflect on his life. He did not change his perception of life until he met the elderly Taoist who shared some wise words with him. Similarly, life in quarantine can make many people have a different perspective on life and change how they conduct themselves in the future.



Gao has gone through a long journey in southern China. He used to find destinations that did not exist in the mountains. Although the long journey was very difficult, it also gave him many new experiences. Eventually, his spirit was relaxed and he had a deeper understanding of his own value. The process of climbing a mountain is hard, but in the end, there will always be gains. Just like the pain we are experiencing now, despite the pain of the process, in the end, we can realize our self-value.

The novel *Soul Mountain* tells the life of a man who travels to many parts of China as he enjoys the beauty of nature. In the journey, he has many experiences, each teaching him a different lesson. The novel defies the typical order of such books, but it has crucial lessons presented in an order that can be difficult to understand. The protagonist is interested in conserving the environment and ensuring that it is suitable for wild animals. Additionally, he is determined to go to the famous and legendary Soul Mountain. When he meets a Taoist, however, he starts a journey to self-realization, which becomes his new target. With the world currently experiencing a pandemic, most people are now staying at home more than usual. The coronavirus has prompted people to adopt a different lifestyle with new goals, just like the Taoist did to the narrator in the novel.

Abraham Verghese's text, "Cutting for Stone" is a medical fiction text that reveals the little-known human side of medical doctors. Set in Ethiopia in the 1950s, the story is told in the first person, which makes it refreshingly honest and straightforward. The author delves into a world of religion, medicine, love, and politics with sublime ease(Verghese). The narrative follows the lives of Shiva and Marion Stone, two conjoined twins born of an Indian nun and British Surgeon. Their birth is dramatic just like the rest of their lives, which seem to be a never-ending calamity. Marion and Shiva are well-developed characters who allow the audience to

experience the full length and breadth of their lives. The two boys take different paths in life, which cause them pain and joy in equal measure, casting light into the complex relationship between family, love, and loyalty. The novel explores the themes of love, betrayal, and reconciliation against a medical background.

Betrayal is one of the prominent themes in the novel. According to Bunkers, the feeling of betrayal holds within it a possibility of transformation, but not without struggle (10). The twins are hostile about being abandoned by their father at birth. The narrator records the hatred their father had towards the twins even at birth. He says, "What cheek this invader had to put Mary's life in jeopardy! It was as if he'd spotted the corpse of a burrowing mole that had attacked Mary's body, and the only way he could bring her relief was to extract it" (76). Their father showed no remorse or love for his unborn children. Instead, he blamed the twins for killing their mother. Hema and Ghosh, who are doctors at the mission hospital, brought the two boys up and nurture their interest in the medical field. Marion feels betrayed again when Shiva has sexual intercourse with Genet, the girl he has always loved and admired. Marion leaves Ethiopia and flees to America where he becomes a doctor. The story ends as Marion meets his father in a hospital ward in America. Marion has to trust his father and Shiva, both of whom have caused him great pain in the past. Despite their differences, these characters have a passion for medicine, which seem to be their guiding light to reconciliation

Betrayal leads to forgiveness as evidenced in the text. The characters overcome their personal inhibitions and seek forgiveness from the people they love. Raj et al. note that forgiveness is the process of making peace with life, and it enhances physical and psychological well-being (2). Marion reconciles with his father when he was already an adult. Genet also reunites with Marion in the United States. Marion contracts Hepatitis, which leads to liver

complications. Thomas has to send for Hema and Shiva, who immediately travel to America to be with him. Shiva proposes a liver transplant from a living donor although they are sure Marion is going to die. Although science plays a big part in bringing the family together, forgiveness plays a bigger role in their healing.

Although the text may be classified as a fictional romance, it also plays an advocacy role. The text reveals the struggling medical conditions in developing countries (Verghese). The economic factors that affect medical practice in developing countries and low-income neighborhoods in the United States are manifested. The shortage of medical professionals in some parts of America and India was apparent throughout the text. The hospital Marion works when he moves to America is underfunded, betraying the dire situation of the public health system. More so, Dr. Thomas Stone is a British doctor contracted to work at the mission hospital. Outsourcing doctors from foreign countries suggests a deficit in the medical field in Ethiopia. The challenges in Ethiopia's health system can be attributed to the country's unstable political past.

The funding of the mission hospital is dependent on the prevailing relationship with the Ethiopian regime. Schumpeter and Watabaji observe that political instability deters countries from supporting fundamental activities of enterprises the quality of institutions (3). For example, a minister working on behalf of the Emperor orders for a soldier to be turned back when seeking services from the hospital. Such actions prove lack of ethical standing, especially when doctors start to treat high ranking officials and members of Emperor Haile Selassie's family. Balancing between serving the government and the community leads to skewed ethical decisions. Working in such a regime calls for ultimate caution and wisdom to discernment.

Characters in this novel are shaped by experiences and hardships. Sister Praise finds Dr. Thomas sick while in the ship looking for medical help for her ill colleague. Thomas asks her to come with him once the ship gets to shore, but she declines. Sister Praise finds her way into the same hospital where Thomas practices surgery after a difficult time in Yemen. The two lovers stay together for seven years. The narrator says, “For seven years Stone and Sister Mary Joseph Praise kept the same schedule. When he operated late into the night and into the morning, she was across from him, more constant than his own shadow, dutiful, competent, uncomplaining, and never absent” (Verghese 38). Hema and Ghosh also fall in love while taking care of the twins who have been left behind by their father. The two children choose the same career path as their parents who were also medical doctors. The characters follow the path of love and medicine and remain true to it for the rest of their lives.

Doctors work hard to achieve medical excellence and save lives. According to Al Haqwi and Taha, exposure to a large volume and variety of clinical experiences, learning in authentic clinical settings, self-directed learning, and the provision of a supportive environment are factors that influence the development of clinical competence (1). “The Gurage were southerners with a well-deserved reputation for being hardworking and willing to take on what the locals wouldn't (Verghese 98). Ghosh becomes the hospital surgeon by default after Thomas leaves but his success is due to the hard work he puts in learning the science. Shiva does not attend medical school, but through the guidance of Hema and Ghosh and considerable time spent with fistula patients, he becomes a world authority in treating vaginal fistulas. Doctor Thomas becomes a profound liver surgeon, despite his nervous breakdown after losing the love of his life, Sister Praise. All the practitioners are dedicated and worked hard to become better doctors and surgeons.

Doctors have to remain faithful to their duty to save lives despite struggles in their personal lives. Hard work is central to achieving its goals and actualizing their dreams. *Cutting for Stone* is about medical practice, family discordance, and connection amidst economic struggle and political unrest. The relationship between private life and medical practice is intertwined and highly dependent. Verghese depicts the life of doctors as a climb up a mountain



This book is very helpful for my life in the quartz. In New York, countless doctors and ordinary individuals are suffering from mountain climbing. Especially those great doctors are saving lives every day; many of them are facing various pressures. For example, some hospitals still lack personal protective equipment, and they are always facing the risk of contracting coronavirus. I think their experience shows that the fear of coronavirus is a reality rather than a fantasy. But in this global panic, we must also understand that everyone must learn to face all kinds of fears. I have also seen many news reports on the medical staff. Their dedication to this disaster has made me very respectful. As I read in this book, they are able to insist on being a doctor and deal with the relationship while being a father, mother, or child. I stayed at home during the transmission of the coronavirus and occasionally drove to Jones Beach to relax by walking. And I often cook at home and exercise to keep myself healthy.



USNS Comfort entered New York Harbor at the height of the plague to treat coronavirus patients. As in *Cutting for stone*, the military doctors on board were also experiencing great difficulties. The original design on the USNS Comfort was for military use and not a pandemic. The medics must transform the cabin to prevent further spread and protect themselves. These doctors are respectable. As doctors of the US Navy, they didn't have to come to New York. I respect them very much.

The story *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka is an ideal reflection of the current situation associated with lockdowns and incessant curfews around the world. It is attributable to the presence of an unprecedented disease in the form of Covid-19, popularly known as the coronavirus. The main character of the book is Gregor Samsa and “the story of Gregor Samsa introduces a life-changing occurrence where he wakes up to find himself transformed into an insect” (Kafka). The plot conjures the thoughts about life being either a tragedy or a comedy. The changes that render Samsa a helpless insect are reflections of life during the coronavirus, mainly because of the realization that a disease has the potential to change everything that we know and even threaten the existence of the human race. The aspect of uncertainty is evident in the story and mirrors the current occurrence where most people are suffering in isolation in a manner similar to the life of the bug that has taken over Samsa's life. In this case, the most affected are populations that rely on daily wages as their earnings, and means of sustenance have suddenly stopped.

Like Samsa, people are transforming in various ways. The experience from two months of staying home has made great changes to my body, mainly because of regular dietary and homemade foods. In comparison to the time before the coronavirus pandemic, I was depending on fast foods and eating irregularly due to the apparent lack of time and the need to keep in sync

with the fast-paced world. The concept of taking a few hours off and preparing a healthy meal was luxurious to me that I did not have the chance to do. However, staying home forces me to adapt to the life of spending almost all my time indoors.

Beyond diets and exercises, having too much free time has changed my daily routines. I decide to take on physical activities. Creativity in the utilization of confined spaces has led to the development of a regular exercise schedule. With the fear of problems such as risks of weight gaining and the subsequent conditions that include obesity, I engage in enough physical activities to expend the unspent energy from living an almost sedentary life. Some people are keen to justify the situation by asserting that space limitations and isolation are the factors impeding physical activities.

Critical analysis of the current situation leads to the realization that love in the time of corona is a rare gesture that must be encouraged by sharing and supporting the less fortunate people in society. The sudden onset of the disease and the fear of the unknown have led to desperation for many who cannot support themselves economically. In case the situation persists, more people will find themselves in similar occurrences; hence, the escalation of the crisis is associated with food shortages and hunger. The ones with sufficient food reserves will, most likely, run out of stocks and end up desperate. While some people hope that the pandemic will ease in the shortest time possible, we are only human and should support one another. Love is present in these trying times; however, it is likely to wane as every person turns toward self-preservation. In the end, only strong people will survive. Anyway, individuals should help one another step closer to the day when the pandemic will be contained.

The novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez *Love in the Time of Cholera* paints a picture of hope and steadfast assumptions that circumstances will eventually work as one desires. The

novel depicts isolation, which can be compared with the world in the time of Covid-19 that “the story ends with Fermina and Florentino being on the ship with the supposed cholera outbreak” (Crace). I agree that Marquez is a writer of love, judging by the characters in the story. The author highlights that people should remain patient during trying moments in their lives. The absurdity of love in this novel does not exclude that one can endure the greatest challenges while focusing and being dedicated to a predetermined objective. In line with the current situation, the lesson is that an individual will always face an obstacle. However, they are temporary hurdles that people can overcome. Overall, bleakness associated with the coronavirus pandemic is a lesson, and with time, individuals will see outcomes of goals that they have set to achieve in life.

Overall, the coronavirus pandemic has brought transformations in everyone's life. Despite lockdowns and depression due to job loss, an individual should perceive these times as temporary and find benefits even in the darkest moments. Life gives a chance to everyone to change his or her thoughts and perceptions about their surroundings. People should appreciate what they have: family, friends, freedom, and nature. The list can be extended, but the absolute truth is that the most precious matters in life are not material objects.



The pain of isolation has transformed my life, and my lifestyle has been forced to change. In my first 20 years of life, cooking by myself was an unimaginable thing. This picture is a photo of my breakfast; spam, eggs, and bread. Although it was very simple, I had to change when facing the pain of hunger. It came very suddenly.

After the great journey of great books, I would imagine if I am a role of one book and how my personality will react to other books I read before. My personality of Jay Gatsby can testify to have quite a tragic life. I am ultra-rich and spend my life in my castle in long island everyday. All I need in my life is to learn the true humanity of life and I want to know if I can get some love. I dreamed of joining the community for which I was a stranger. Fitzgerald has brightly described my state of being doomed to loneliness. I was isolated alive when I peered

longingly at the distant green light next to the Buchanan house (Fitzgerald). I still feel lonely after death: none of the countless “friends,” including my love Daisy, came to take me on my last earthly journey. These facts taught me that each human sooner or later must decide whether to believe in God and be brave or live the life of ignorance and neglect as regarding oneself and others strengthened by unacceptable values.

The same loneliness and feeling of separation I saw in *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka. The closed ones literally abandoned Gregor Samsa as I was by everyone whom I regarded dear for me (Kafka). At the same time, I feel resonating between myself and the hero of *Soul Mountain*. As the Xingjian protagonist was encouraged to live and keep going by mountain Lingshan, the same symbolism of eternal hope I prescribed for the green light (Xingjian). Also, I do not understand all the pain of losing someone and then experiencing a painful reconciliation. This happened to Verghese’s twin brother from *Cutting from Stone* (Verghese). This is what I felt about my beloved one and my mentor. Indeed, life is fulfilled with hard emotional attachments, which makes you either cold or more sensitive.

For sure, I hope for never repeating the fate of *No Exit* heroes. In the afterlife, being locked up like Sartre’s deceased characters with those who betrayed you is undoubtedly the worst possible scenario of spending eternity (Sartre). Despite all, I still do not want to blame or scold society as the girl from *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* does. Nevertheless, still, she fought the prejudices of Egyptian society similarly as I tried to challenge the Americans in their depressing nineteen-thirties (Saadawi). Besides, my main mistake was to let an obsession with a beauty rule over me. The same happened to Gustav von Aschenbach from *Death in Venice*, who was smitten by the youth (Mann). To withstand the pressure of opinions, it is crucial not to be broken and endure everything and to develop professionally and personally at the same time.

Ultimately, the society of mine should not be blamed too much. They were swept by economic depression. Strictness and greediness covered them as did the Black Death in *The Plague* by Camus. As follows from the latter, destiny is sometimes indeed outwardly forced, and not everything depends on us (Camus). The harsh reality can transform people actively, and any minority can become seriously empowered. The *Fire This Time*' heroes inspire every reader to confront all the problems caused by the public and care for yourself personally first (Ward). For sure, the hypocrisy of those who surrounded me was unbelievable. Sometimes it was overwhelmingly hard to imagine going through the same experiences as *Heart of Darkness* Characters. It took me life to realize the line between civilized people and the savage ones, which is not thin but rather absent (Conrad). However, if I want to be happy, I need to preserve love in my heart and not allow the egos of others to modify me adversely. After I spent my life in different people's stories, I just realized the difficulty I am facing every day is not so hard. I may need love to maintain my life.

Poems are another way to show the sensory. When the poet wrote the poems, they put their sensory, feeling, and personality into their works. John Keats is a British poet and he born in October of 1795, living a short life finally succumbing to tuberculosis at the age of 25. I think his background and poem can make us understand his feeling and connect this to the plague nowadays. So I chose *Ode on Melancholy* to reflect my idea on humanism and thought on the coronavirus nowadays.

"No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist

Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;

Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd

By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
 Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul." (Keats)

Keats lists in this paragraph what people should not do when they are depressed, by using no, nor, not a lot. He expressed his belief that people should not seek relief by hurting themselves when they are depressed.

"But when the melancholy fit shall fall
 Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
 And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morningrose,
 Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
 Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
 Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes." (Keats)

In the second quarter, Kates believes that people should be more optimistic when facing difficult situations. People should do things that make them happy to spend their hard time. She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;

"And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
 Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
 Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
 Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung." (Keats)

Finally, Keats believes that although a depressed life is painful, depression is also the only way to lead us to a brighter future. Just like there is no happiness without pain.

When we face the chaos caused by the pandemic, it is important to be optimistic. The past experience of Coates and Baldwin can prove this. Although the situation is very difficult, we still need to maintain an optimistic attitude towards life to maintain hope for the future. Gao's Soul Mountain also tells us that we always take a difficult mountain road in the pursuit of a better life

in the future; mountain roads are difficult to walk and make people tired. Mountain roads are like the suffering we are experiencing now. . We can see the beauty of the top of the mountain after climbing the mountain. We can live a better life after experiencing difficulties.

Coronavirus is a global problem. The earliest virus plague broke out in Wuhan, a city in central China. At the beginning of the plague, even many Chinese people dreamed of being able to avoid the health threat of coronavirus. But now the world is affected by the virus, first Japan and South Korea, and then Italy to Europe; now the virus has arrived in New York. The plague caused a global panic, and at this moment I can understand the mood of the author of *The Plague*. We recently experienced an unprecedented experience, almost all public facilities were closed, and the president declared a national emergency. The biggest panic caused by coronavirus is death. Thousands of people are dying in hospitals in Queens. When China's coronavirus plague broke out in January, fear of the coronavirus even led to racial discrimination against the Chinese. A friend of mine was attacked for no reason just because she was Asian. This reminds me of Coates and Baldwin's description of black race discrimination. During the coronavirus, reading these classic literary works is a great comfort to the soul.

During the plague, living at home without going out changed my lifestyle a lot. This is a huge change for me. For example, I have to cook at home and cannot travel by plane. Dieting and exercise at home during the plague also made my body healthy. Just as Gao climbed mountains in southern China in *Soul Mountain*, it was also a mountain climb during the plague. People have to face various situations, unemployment, illness, or mental stress. Invisible enemies make us panic and lose control. *Cutting for Stone* tells us another story of practicing medicine in Ethiopia. During the pandemic, doctors all over the world were facing various difficulties, shortage of materials, and fear of the plague. *Metamorphosis* is a good reflection of social life

during the plague. Family, friends, and nature are all important. In the early days of the pandemic, I drove to send my grandparents and aunts in Queens with masks and food; because of the plague caused by the plague, they could not buy enough supplies. These books I read during this semester have enabled me to face the threat of coronavirus more calmly today. In my opinion, literature is an effective way for people to understand the world. Authors can express their views on the world and society without hindrance. From racism, colonialism, roaring 20s to the Great Plague, the thoughts of the authors in the past are still worthy of our reference. Reading these famous writers of the 20th century will give me a deep understanding of literature. Perhaps in the future, globalism and pluralism will make global literature. Although during the plague, racists seem to have found their opportunity to promote their ideals. But healthy humanity and diversification are still very important. We can see that major countries are trying to prevent the virus from spreading through cooperative research and development of vaccines and border control. People are still more filled with love than hatred. In the face of the crisis caused by this virus, everyone has to go through a difficult road. These experiences are very painful, but they are precious life experiences.

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