

APOCALYPTIC SCENES IN EMMA DONOGHUE'S *THE PULL OF THE STARS*

EMMA DONOGHUE'NUN *THE PULL OF THE STARS* ROMANINDA KIYAMET SAHNELERİ

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ABSTRACT: *The Pull of the Stars* (2020) is a compelling, poignant historical novel by the Irish literary historian and novelist Emma Donoghue. The novel talks about the Spanish flu pandemic which is chronicled in the story through the experiences of an Irish nurse, Julia Power, who works in a maternity/fever ward in a nameless hospital in Dublin. This article provides a concise overview of the deadliest pandemics in history, their death tolls, and their reverberations. In so doing, this article focuses mainly on the repercussions of the Spanish flu pandemic, the shortages of medical and food supplies, and the deteriorating social and security situation in Ireland during that period. In addition, the article displays the parallels between the Spanish flu pandemic and the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, the article ends up by concisely examining Ireland's political environment at that time, which includes the aftermath of the First World War. The novel gives us two war-victim examples Tim and his friend, along with thousands of massacred persons only in Dublin. The article debates that the 1918 pandemic might be an outcome of four years of killing, slaughtering, bombarding, and unburied corpses. This is a natural reaction from nature against humans' actions, crimes, and endless wars.

Keywords: Spanish flu pandemic, coronavirus pandemic, First World War, *The Pull of the Stars*.

ÖZ: *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), İrlandalı edebiyat tarihçisi ve romancı Emma Donoghue tarafından yazılan ilgi çekici, dokunaklı bir tarihi romandır. Romanda 1918 salgınındaki grip, Dublin'deki bir hastanenin doğum/ateşli hastalıklar bölümünde çalışan İrlandalı hemşire Julia Power'ın deneyimleri aracılığıyla anlatılıyor. Bu makale tarihteki en ölümcül salgınlara, bunların ölüm oranlarına ve yansımalarına kısa bir genel bakış sunmaktadır. Bu sayede, esas olarak İspanyol gribi pandemisinin yansımalarına, tıbbi ve gıda sıkıntısına ve o dönemde İrlanda'da kötüleşen sosyal ve güvenlik durumuna odaklanılmaktadır. Ayrıca, makale, İspanyol gribi salgını ile koronavirüs salgını arasındaki paralellikleri de ortaya koymaktadır. Son olarak, bu makale, Birinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası da içeren İrlanda'nın o dönemdeki siyasi ortamını tartışmaktadır. Roman bize sadece Dublin'de katledilen binlerce insanla birlikte Tim ve arkadaşı gibi iki savaş kurbanı örneğini vermiştir. Makalede, 1918 salgınının dört yıl süren öldürme, kıyım, bombardıman ve gömülmemiş cesetlerin bir sonucu olabileceğini tartışılmıştır. Bu salgın, insanların eylemlerine, suçlarına ve bitmek bilmeyen savaşlarına karşı doğanın verdiği doğal bir tepkidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İspanyol gribi pandemisi, koronavirüs pandemisi, Birinci Dünya Savaşı, *The Pull of the Stars*.

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Introduction

The Pull of the Stars is not the first novel for Emma Donoghue that talks about epidemics and viruses, she has another novel *Frog Music* (2014) that addresses the smallpox pandemic caused by the variola virus in San Francisco in 1876. Before smallpox was completely eliminated in 1977, it claimed the lives of approximately 300 million individuals all over the world during the 20th century (Barton & Friedman, 2008). Emma Donoghue did not realize that the publication of her novel *The Pull of the Stars* in 2020 would correspond with the fatal COVID-19 pandemic when she was writing it. Inspired by the 100th anniversary of the Spanish flu, Donoghue started writing *The Pull of the Stars* in 2018, but she published it at a marvelous and uncanny time in 2020 when coronavirus was announced as an international pandemic. In one of her interviews, Donoghue declared that she did not make changes to the story after the outbreak of coronavirus and the mere modification was the term pandemic, she said “that was the only thing I remember changing. The rest did not need to be changed, to echo COVID, the parallels were extraordinary” (URL-1). In the author’s note, Donoghue verified that the Spanish flu claimed the lives of 3-6% of humanity, which is a higher death toll than the First World War, it is to say that it roughly killed up to 50 million people worldwide in 1918 (Ott, et al., 2007). John Barry in his *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (2004) argued that many scientists think that the source of the great influenza was not Spain, but at that time the First World War was going on, and countries restricted discouraging news, that is why many countries did not announce anything related to the plague. Yet, Spain, as Barry (2004, 202) emphasized, was a neutral country and was the first to announce the news of the influenza outbreak publicly, consequently, it was called Spanish flu.

The Spanish flu is also known as the 1918 flu pandemic, the great influenza, and many other names, among these “dozen names: the great flu, khaki flu, blue flu, black flu, the grippe, or the grip ... The malady, some called it euphemistically” (Donoghue, 2021: 5). The story is set in a hospital in Dublin concentrated over three days in 1918. It gives us meticulous birth information and women’s suffering in childbearing. The title of the novel, *The Pull of the Stars*, comes from the meaning of influenza, in the Italian language, influenza means the sway of the stars, “That’s what influenza means, she said. Influenza delle stelle-the influence of the stars. Medieval Italians thought the illness proved that the heavens were governing their fates, that people were quite literally starcrossed” (Donoghue, 2021: 147). People in the Middle Ages believed that the stars and the sky controlled their lives, and those who were star-crossed could not be merry because of their fate and bad luck. However, Julia does not believe in the drag and push of the stars, she had “never believed the future was inscribed for each of us the day we were born. If anything was written in the stars, it was we who joined those dots, and our lives were the writing” (Donoghue, 2021: 244). Julia

thinks that we draw our future in our hands; therefore, she does not submit to influenza and tries to treat and save the lives of her patients.

The chapters are alarmingly dubbed red, brown, blue, and black in reference to the obvious development of the respiratory distress caused by influenza on the skin, “it’s like a secret code, Bridie Sweeney said with pleasure. Red to brown to blue to black (Donoghue, 2021: 48). The novel is divided into four parts, the first one is red which simulates the flushness on the face like the one when a person gets cold or freezes, this redness metamorphoses into brown if the person is infected with influenza, then if the infected patient becomes bluish then it means the situation is dangerous. The last part of the novel is black which is a symbol of death, if a patient’s color becomes black, this shows that it is the end for him/her just like the last part of the novel which is the end of it.

This article glances at the most fatal plagues in recorded history, their fatalities, and their aftermaths. However, the article primarily concentrates on the shattering Spanish flu pandemic, the insufficient numbers of doctors, nurses, medical professionals, and other healthcare workers, the shortages of food and medical supplies, and the declining status of Ireland’s social and security conditions at that time. This article also discusses whether there is a parallel between the Spanish flu pandemic and the coronavirus pandemic in relation to the readiness of governments and hospitals to confront pandemics, the preparedness of health human resources, the precautions, the methods and means of treating them, and the speed of vaccine discovery against the viruses.

The article debates how history is repeating itself, and raises the question: Did nations learn examples from the previous pandemics to prevent more tragedies and save people’s lives? How did states inform people of health information and precautions and which mechanisms did they use to reduce the spread of viruses in the Spanish flu pandemic and coronavirus pandemic? The article also provides a comparison between the two previous pandemics, the similarities and the disparities. As a natural result of pandemics, the article confers the topic of death and some terrifying stories related to death and the pandemic’s spillover effects. Nevertheless, this article throws light on how the narrative alleviates the depressing environment, dying, stillbirths, influenza cases, destitution, detention, conflict, unrest, protests in the story, and other doom-laden subjects.

Furthermore, since the Spanish flu pandemic commenced four years after the First World War, this article argues that the Spanish flu pandemic was a side effect and an offshoot of the war. Finally, there is a manifestation of the war’s aftermaths and horrors in Ireland and the whole world; Tim, Julia’s brother, is given as an example of a war victim who suffers from shell shock, war neurosis, taciturnity, and other psychological disorders.

The Spanish Flu Pandemic and its Parallel with the Coronavirus Pandemic

History traces a design. There is almost an epidemic every century and the number of fatalities rises concurrently. In the 18th century, there was the great plague of Marseille in West Europe, France, additionally recognized as the plague of Provence. Ermus (2023) stated that the great plague was a disaster and caused more than 126 thousand deaths. The plague diffused in Marseille between the years 1720 and 1723, wiping out 30 percent of the city (Devaux, 2012). In the 19th century, the first cholera pandemic (1817–1824) spread in many Asian countries, consequently it was also called the Asiatic cholera. It is believed that it started in India during the British colonization of South Asia and then to the Middle East and Africa as Sonia Shah asserted in her *Pandemic Tracking Contagions, from Cholera to Coronaviruses and Beyond* (2016). Shah also reported that “cholera kill[ed] people fast” (2016: 6). Moreover, Theodore Preston (2020) recorded that over the course of six years, hundreds of thousands of people had perished on account of the Asiatic cholera. In the 20th century, there was the Spanish flu pandemic, one of the vilest ever and the one that Emma Donoghue covers in *The Pull of the Stars*. The last pandemic in the 21st century is the contemporaneous coronavirus COVID-19, which started in Wuhan, China, and still kills people nowadays. According to Worldometer (the last update: March 18, 2024), the worldwide coronavirus cases are 700 million and the death toll is about 7 million (URL-2). These pandemics seem to be repetitive; however, every single pandemic is distinct in its own way. Even though pandemics have analogies, each pandemic is unique in terms of its source, effects, causes, and consequences. This demonstrates that balance and haphazardness coexist in nature.

The devastating Spanish flu exploded everywhere in 1918 and “the plague was general all over Ireland” (Donoghue, 2021: 5). Julia resembled Dublin like a mouth without teeth because it was almost empty of its inhabitants: “Dublin was a great mouth holed with missing teeth” (Donoghue, 2021: 7). Later on, Nurse Power corrected herself and said that not only Dublin or Ireland but the whole world was like a machine that stopped working, this “flu was clogging the whole works of the hospital. Not just the hospital, I reminded myself-the whole of Dublin. The whole country.... the whole world was a machine grinding to a halt” (Donoghue, 2021: 11-12). Scientists and doctors could not distinguish the influenza virus at that time because their microscopes were not well-developed, Dr. Kathleen Lynn clarified that “this weird flu. I’ve seen it start with thirst, restlessness, sleeplessness, clumsiness, a touch of mania-then, afterwards, a blurring or dulling of one or more senses...but alas, none of this shows up under the microscope” (Donoghue, 2021: 142). The influenza virus was not identified until the electron microscope was invented in 1933, and the first influenza vaccine became available in 1938. When Julia asked Dr. Lynn

“aren’t they any closer to a vaccine, then?” (Donoghue, 2021: 147), Dr. Lynn told her that they were still far from that and nobody had even separated the microbe on a slide of tissue yet, and they had to wait until medical device manufacturers invent a stronger microscope with more accuracy.

The story starts when Julia is going from home to the hospital cycling half the way to reduce contact with people and avoid crowded transportation then riding the tramway in the second half of the way to the hospital. Nurse Power is working in an understaffed hospital in Dublin in a maternity ward. However, the expectant mothers who were infected with the influenza were isolated together in the maternity/fever, a makeshift ward that was created during the plague, where Julia is working and almost in charge because of the doctors’ lack. Otto and others (2007) mentioned that some hospitals during the great influenza did not receive normal patients, they only looked after the patients infected with influenza, they also mentioned that normal patients were separated in different areas, furthermore, hospitals were facing challenges in finding healthy nurses to look after those normal patients.

The narrator tells us that the Spanish flu pandemic scythed the lives of people regardless of age, infants, children, young, and the elderly, this “new flu was an uncanny plague, scything down swaths of men and women in the full bloom of their youth” (Donoghue, 2021: 39). Mary O’Rahilly, an infected pregnant woman in the maternity/fever ward, tells Julia and Bridie that they found an entire family lifeless on the same bed, and “people are afraid to go near each other, it can pounce so fast! The other day, the peelers smashed down a door in the tenement behind ours and found a whole family expired on the one mattress” (Donoghue, 2021: 64). Dr. Lynn tells Julia that the mortuary is full of corpses, “I’d never seen it so eerily full of coffins” (Donoghue, 2021: 139); however, when Julia asks if there are so many, Dr. Lynn “murmured, this is nothing. Out at the cemetery there are hundreds of caskets piled up, waiting their turn. Hazardous to the living, I call it. The Germans -an eminently practical race - cremate their dead” (Donoghue, 2021: 139). Dr. Lynn believes that these carcasses are dangerous to the living humans, therefore, she suggests following the German way of cremating the dead instead of burying them, truly it is a startling thought yet it is easier and faster.

Dr. Kathleen Lynn is the only female doctor in the hospital, she is skilled, and diligent in her work, she always tries to understand what the influenza virus is, its causes, and how to treat it. She conducts experiments and tests to understand this virus more, and she ensures that “since the outbreak began, I’ve been seizing any chance to do a p.m. [postmortem] on a flu case, especially a pregnant one” (Donoghue, 2021: 139). When Ita Noonan and her unborn fetus passed away, Dr. Lynn asked Nurse Power to help her in performing an autopsy on Ita’s body. While performing the autopsy they talked about the medical and political situation in Ireland and got to know

each other better, and in between their speech, Dr. Lynn was dictating, “Swelling of the pleura. Purulent material leaking from the alveoli, bronchioles, bronchi. ... Vocal cords eroded. Thyroid three times normal size. Heart dilated. ... Liver swollen, signs of internal bleeding. Kidney inflamed and oozing. Colon ulcerated” (Donoghue, 2021: 145, 146, 147). All these symptoms were caused by the influenza virus. When they finished Dr. Lynn confirmed that “we all do our bit to increase the sum of human knowledge, including Mrs. Noonan” (Donoghue, 2021: 148), everybody contributes in his field and according to his capacity even Ita Noonan by her dead body.

During the Spanish flu, the Irish government used placards, ads, and posters to warn people, communicate with them, and inform them of health information:

The public is urged
to stay out of public places
such as cafés, theatres, cinemas,
and public houses.
See only those persons one needs to see.
Refrain from shaking hands, laughing, or
chatting closely together.
If one must kiss,
do so through a handkerchief.
Sprinkle sulphur in the shoes.
If in doubt, don't stir out. (Donoghue, 2021: 170)

History repeated, the cautions and the alarms that people received one hundred years ago in the Spanish flu, we received them during the coronavirus pandemic 2020. The same precautions, but different mechanisms of informing people. A century ago they used mostly printed advertisements, signs, and banners, while now, in addition to these methods, governments use technology, social media, and internet websites to inform people. People were urged to avoid public places like cafes and cinemas, to reduce contact with others to the necessities only, to evade hand-shaking, and to put sulfate in shoes. Many businesses, shops, and places were closed due to the virus, and the “shackled gates of a school where a fresh-painted notice said closed for foreseeable future by order of board of health” (Donoghue, 2021: 168), even schools were closed until further notice. On a rainy day, drips were leaking into the ward through the open window so Delia Garrett asked Julia to close the window to not get drenched but Julia said: “air is vital, especially for respiratory complaints” (Donoghue, 2021: 54). Yet, when Nurse Power was teaching Bridie the basic nursing rules, she told Bridie that washing hands is significant, especially in times of pandemics and the spread of viruses, also “cleaning one's hands thoroughly could save a life?” (Donoghue, 2021: 50). One of the printed public health directives that

Julia saw on her way home was “spit spreads death” (Donoghue, 2021: 151), this sign encouraged people to pay attention to public hygiene, not to spit in the streets, and to use handkerchiefs and masks, as well as to cover the mouth while sneezing. Thereupon you could see in the tram, “cover up each cough or sneeze...fools and traitors spread disease” (Donoghue, 2021: 4). Another interesting printed public health directive urged to:

Stay clean, warm, and well nourished,

but forbear to

use more than a fair share

of fuel and food.

Early to sleep and keep windows wide,

while taking care to avoid draughts.

Ventilation and sanitation

will be our nation’s salvation. (Donoghue, 2021: 107-108)

Nonetheless, certain scenes, such as the ones above, depict analogous safeguards and events that occurred in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the coronavirus pandemic, we were given many warnings and instructions to avoid the virus, such as washing hands regularly with soap and water or disinfecting them constantly with sanitizers, maintaining social distancing, everyday ventilation, wearing masks, coating mouths with handkerchiefs when coughing, steering clear of physical contact like handshakes and hugs, staying 14 days at home when infected with the coronavirus, etc.

If we compare the precautions in 1918 during the Spanish flu pandemic and the precautions during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 we will see immense similarities. Another key point is that there were no treatments for both coronavirus and the Spanish flu when they broke out. During the flu, the medical staff gave the patients hot whiskey, aspirin, and beef tea, these were the only treatments coupled with simple and primitive methods to kill germs. They used dilute disinfectant and “they burn[ed] sulphur in a bucket to make a gas strong enough to kill every last germ” (Donoghue, 2021: 40). Funny yet sad, some people believed that rhubarb, molasses, or wearing red clothes could help against influenza. In this regard, when Delia Garrett’s blood pressure and pulse force were rising Nurse Power and Sister Finnigan did not figure out whether this hypertension was because of the flu or pregnancy; anyway, the narrator told us “whatever the cause, there was no treatment but rest and calm” (Donoghue, 2021: 21). Moreover, when Mrs. Noonan’s situation was deteriorating Dr. Prendergast prescribed whiskey for her, and when the nurse asked him, “Whiskey? ... To reduce fever?” (Donoghue, 2021: 41), the doctor gestured with no, but “for soothing discomfort and anxiety and promoting sleep” (Donoghue, 2021: 42). Following the pattern of ‘an apple a day keeps the doctor away’ a poster

in Dublin advised: “Eat an onion a day to keep illness at bay” (Donoghue, 2021: 39). Obviously, this instruction was a source of mockery of the government by opponents like Dr. Lynn, who considered “recommending onions and eucalyptus oil! Like sending beetles to stop a steamroller” (Donoghue, 2021: 145). Dr. Lynn mocked the Irish government by comparing advising onion to prevent the flu to sending bugs to halt a heavy construction machine. Identically, the circumstance was the same in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no treatment except for some vitamins to strengthen the immune system. Comparatively speaking, the difference between the two cases is that the first influenza vaccine was produced after twenty years while the first coronavirus vaccine was formed after two years.

It is important to realize that there were shortages during both pandemics concerning doctors, health professionals, wheelchairs, medical equipment, and medicine. The maternity/fever ward was a small room with only a capacity of three beds; therefore, whenever a pregnant woman gave birth or died her bed would not remain empty for hours. To particularize, when Ita Noonan passed away with her fetus because of influenza-related febrile convulsions, in a matter of some minutes a new patient, Honor White, turned up immediately, as a result, Nurse Power wondered “what, had I expected Ita Noonan’s bed to stay empty?” (Donoghue, 2021: 124). Further, when Julia asked the male orderly Groyne to bring a wheelchair, he huffed and puffed then “plonked her down on the left-hand cot and said, Shortage of wheelchairs” (Donoghue, 2021: 124). At that time, the church sent two nuns, Sister Finnigan and Sister Luke, and a young girl from their convent, Bridie Sweeney, to the hospital to help, even though “the Church considered it immodest for nuns to serve in lying-in wards, but given the shortage of midwives” (Donoghue, 2021: 19). The extent of the acute lack of medical personnel is demonstrated by the church’s deployment of novices and nuns to assist hospitals. One last point is that in addition to the shortages and the constrained resources and the other many difficulties, female health workers faced other crucial challenges like male chauvinism, sexism, and inaccurate information.

Isolation was one of the methods that people used in almost all the plagues. Devaux noted that during the great plague of Marseille in 1720, France isolated the newcomers and ship passengers. In recent times the municipality of Marseille “announced the archaeological discovery of the last remnants of a ‘lazaretto’ or ‘lazaret’ a place equipped with an infirmary and destined to isolate ship passengers quarantined for health reasons” (Devaux, 2012: 169). Whereas in the Spanish flu pandemic, Nelson and Kaminsky mentioned in their *History Repeated: Applying Lessons From the 1918 Flu Pandemic* that “governments [in the time of the Spanish flu] relied on isolation, disinfection, and essentially personal protection equipment” (2021: 98). In the recent coronavirus pandemic, authorities isolated the

patients in separate rooms at the hospitals, imposed 14 days of quarantine for the infected people, applied a curfew on the weekends and the public holidays, and enforced a limited restriction during the weekdays.

In the novel, death is central, it could come at any time and capture anyone all at once. Julia was looking from the window at the rare passers-by and wondering “how would we ever get back to normal after the pandemic?” (Donoghue, 2021: 204). Julia was surrounded by death, thus she could not imagine normal life would come back again. Relevantly, a woman in the hospital was singing the song ‘Liebestod’ which is a German phrase and Dr. Lynn explained its meaning to Julia, which is “love death” (Donoghue, 2021: 210). In the text, Julia imagined the bone man, a folklore personality who embodied death, stalking her patients and friends, thereby the “bone man was making fools of us all. That was what we kids called death in my part of the country-the bone man, the skeletal rider ... rode from one victim’s house to the next” (Donoghue, 2021: 19). Death is “the great leveler” that makes us all equal and alike, rich or poor, male or female, and young or old. The great leveler is one of many other euphemisms of death that Emma Donoghue uses in *The Pull of the Stars*.

The narrator of *The Pull of the Stars* narrated some horrific stories related to the flu. For instance, a man became a psychopath because of influenza, which made him slew his entire family, Bridie heard some people “talk about one fellow deranged with the flu who up and slaughtered his wife and kids” (Donoghue, 2021: 109). A sufferer committed suicide and another man “went to buy medicine for himself and his family, ... Cut through a park, went by a pond...and the constables found him facedown among the swans” (Donoghue, 2021: 109), he might have drowned himself or tripped accidentally in the pool or even he was fevered and the water seemed attractively chilly to him. Nevertheless, the most dreadful story was about the twelve-year-old girl who strangled herself in the hospital’s bathroom with a plaster, even though she had “no fever, in her case, but a reason for despair ... From hints she let slip, we suspected her father” (Donoghue, 2021: 110).

On the positive side, the narrator reduces fitfully the roughness of the argument by including some humorous and romantic sections. Despite the gloomy atmosphere, death, stillborn babies, people infected with influenza, poverty, war, riots, demonstrations, and protests, the writer made time for love and fun. Julia and Bridie fell in love with each other they spent a night on the hospital’s roof kissing one another:

I let the kiss happen. Never before, never this way. Like a pearly moon in my mouth, huge, overwhelming, the brightness. This was against every rule I’d been reared by. I kissed her back. The old world was changed utterly, dying on its feet, and a new one was struggling to be born. There might only be this one night left, which was why I kissed Bridie Sweeney, held her and kissed her with all I had and all I was. (Donoghue, 2021: 205)

The flu made some patients wet their beds unconsciously, and when Honor White told Nurse Power that she might have wetted her bed, Julia uttered facetiously “don’t worry, it could happen to a bishop” (Donoghue, 2021: 211). In addition to the funny nicknames of some characters like Diehard, Egyptian Mummy, and Runner Beans, there is another tragic-comedy scene in the novel, when Bridie tells Julia that she lives in the motherhouse, Julia jokes that it is funny “that motherhouse is the word for an order’s main premises when there’s not a mother in the place” (Donoghue, 2021: 137), what makes Bridie giggle. In the meanwhile, many pregnant women tell Julia that “she doesn’t love him unless she gives him twelve” (Donoghue, 2021: 24), this, amusingly, alludes that the Irish women were giving birth to a multitude of children to prove their love of their husbands at that time. Incontrovertibly, the romance that develops between Julia and Bridie, the jokes and amusing nicknames, Julia’s accomplishments in saving the lives of some mothers and children-particularly her success in enabling Mary’s birth without the need for a pubiotomy, a dangerous surgical procedure that could result in permanent harm or even death-all lessen the severity and harshness of the material covered in the novel.

In the ultimate analysis, it is vital to rise the question: Did countries take heed of the lessons from past pandemics to avert further disasters and rescue lives? Unfortunately, according to what we have witnessed during the latest coronavirus pandemic, the given numbers, and data, it can be said that despite the health and technological developments in the 21st century, the lessons were not fully heeded, and it could have been better than it was. It is indeed difficult to predict the place and time of the occurrence of pandemics and sicknesses, but measures must be taken to prevent these epidemics in advance before they occur, and other requisite measures must be applied after they occur as well. Building strong public health infrastructures, developing effective and strong vaccination systems, and bolstering medical facilities, diagnostic capacity, and observation mechanisms can help in fighting pandemics. Preparing isolation areas and centers to be used in pandemics, plagues, wars, and dangerous situations when necessary. Improving pandemic preparedness procedures and educating the public and people about pandemic health so that they become technically and psychologically prepared to face any immediate and sudden pandemic. Training healthcare personnel to be capable of confronting epidemics and viruses. Finally, enhancing immunization programmes, sanitation facilities, and hygiene conditions, providing clean water, and facilitating healthy and sound nutritional systems-that prevent feeding on some animals that could transmit viruses to humans-make pandemics less likely.

The Repercussions of the First World War

The Pull of the Stars takes place during the First World War, consequently, the narrative describes the gloominess of Ireland and the whole world in 1918, it is a “war-weary world” (Donoghue, 2021: 237). The

British historian Richard Sean Grayson in his *Dublin's Great Wars: The First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish Revolution* (2018) indicated that out of 35,000 participants in the war “of those Dubliners who served in the British military, 6,568 have been verified as killed or died in service” (40). Humanity was suffering from the effects of WWI, and then the pandemic came to make matters worse so that a “new foe [was] in our midst” (Donoghue, 2021: 10). The old foe was the war while the new one was influenza. Considering the historical correlation between pandemics and conflicts, it is unsurprising to claim that the First World War was a potential resource of the Spanish flu pandemic.

The First World War launched in 1914 and after four years the Spanish flu pandemic started, therefore, some researchers are of the view that this sickness was a fallout of the war (Byerly, 2005; Humphries, 2013). Many others link plagues and wars and believe that wars result in pandemics (Prinzing, 1917; Thucydides, 1980; Slack, 1992; Bavaro et al., 2005; Byerly, 2005; Humphries, 2013; Goniewicz, et al., 2021). Still, diverse researchers attribute pandemics to issues deriving from mass migration, asylum movements, and refuge activities as a result of wars, coups, and unrest (Demby, et al., 2001; Gberie, 2005; Kabia, 2009; Omoleke et al., 2016, Olivero, et al., 2017; Pigott, 2017). Humphries (2014) assures that the result of the battles of WWI “was the most deadly epidemic in history” (58). While Price-Smith (2020) notices that inter- and intra-countries wars cause and spread the pathogens of contagious diseases among civilians and combatants, thus “war may serve [and functions] as disease amplifier” (2). It is also, according to Harris that “there is a clear connection between the Great War and the spread of the 1918 influenza pandemic” (2020, 2). Further study by Wever and Bergen has noted that “the origin of the influenza pandemic has been inextricably linked with the men who occupied the military camps and trenches during the First World War” (2014: 538).

The Pull of the Stars seeks to draw out this connection by investigating how “the war sickness, on the assumption that it must somehow be a side effect of four years of slaughter, a poison brewed in the trenches or spread by all this hurly-burly and milling about across the globe” (Donoghue, 2021: 5). The narrative also considers that because we human beings killed each other, this plague was an act of revenge from the environment, and “nature was rebelling against us” (Donoghue, 2021: 132). Julia prayed for those innocents who died in the war and the plague because it was not their fault, men were forcibly conscripted to fight in the war by decisions from the politicians, by all means, she could blame the viruses, the stars, the wind that brought the infection, but she could not “blame the dead, because none of them wished this on themselves” (Donoghue, 2021: 257). Julia knew that these soldiers did not want to go to war, the unwillingness to serve in the army was embodied in a song a drunk in the tram was singing:

I don't want to join the bloody army,

I don't want to go to bloody war.

I'd rather stay at home,

Around the streets to roam. (Donoghue, 2021: 169)

On her way from home to the hospital, Julia passed through a war shrine where thousands of names were written dead, lost, or injured, she commented that in the "improvised war shrine ... The names painted on were just a few dozen Irishmen out of the tens of thousands lost so far, out of hundreds of thousands who'd enlisted" (Donoghue, 2021: 3-4). Julia remembered her brother Tim, a 26-year-old veteran, who served in the military during the First World War for 19 months. Tim witnessed traumatic events and was exposed to strong mental shocks in the war that affected him, which led them to send him back home, yet it took fourteen months until he reached home from Egypt, and when he arrived home, he could not speak. Julia affirmed that even though "before the war my brother had been rather more quick-witted and chipper than I. Like Bridie, actually-a real spark to him" (Donoghue, 2021: 156), after the war, he became aloof and speechless. Avcu, a specialized researcher in Irish culture and studies, argued that the "Irish identity, culture, history, politics, and nationality are directly impacted by political, cultural, and international factors. Some criticisms speak to the Irish people's fractured identity and shaky nationality" (2022: 154). According to Avcu, Irish society is easily affected by national and global conditions such as the British interference in Irish matters, the Easter Rising, WWI, and the Spanish flu pandemic, in this light, Tim is a blatant example of this viewpoint.

Currently, Julia and Tim are renting a house together, Tim is communicating with his sister in gestures, body language, and writing intermittently. His face is blank mostly, he is suffering from something called war neurosis and speechlessness. The psychotherapists had admitted that they could not help the speechlessness. Their recommendation was relaxation, nutrition, and a pleasant job. Julia explained to Bridie that this trauma happened to him when his best friend, Liam Caffrey "was shot in the throat last year at the Battle of Jerusalem" (Donoghue, 2021: 251), and when Bridie asked whether Tim was there or not, Julia replied, "as near as you are to me now. Splattered with bits of his friend" (Donoghue, 2021: 251). Julia is still very surprised at how the war was able to strengthen the relationship between them and make it something beyond words.

What is more, Donoghue parallels between going to war and coming back by having been to hell and returning: "But if he's been to hell and back, how could he not be left altered?" (Donoghue, 2021: 210). Dr. Lynn tells Julia that Tim has been to hell and come back thence how could she expect him to come back normal? Tim, undoubtedly, is not the only victim of the First World War in Ireland, Liam Caffrey, Dr. Lynn, and "so many men had been lost in the war, either face down in some foreign field" (Donoghue, 2021: 44).

Tim is only a miniature case of the psychological symptoms and serious effects that people were exposed to during the war.

Another interesting indication, Julia resembles the war with influenza, we catch the viruses from each other, they live among us, we cannot prevent them and we cannot hide from them or isolate ourselves from them.

But wasn't it the whole world's war now? Hadn't we caught it [influenza virus] from each other, as helpless against it as against other infections? No way to keep one's distance; no island to hide on. Like the poor, maybe, the war would always be with us. Across the world, one lasting state of noise and terror under the bone man's reign. (Donoghue, 2021: 169)

We cannot escape from both of them, war and influenza, they are unavoidable, though. In this regard, it seems that Julia has begun to assume and imagine that everyone she sees suffering is a victim of the war, accordingly, when she sees a tall boy in the tram holding his trumpet she presumes that "his father a returned veteran, perhaps? Or a dead one, of course, his bugle sent home in his place" (Donoghue, 2021: 153). Julia thinks that this miserable boy is a son of an old warrior and describes him with adjectives like ghost and phantom. In the final analysis, WWI affected all aspects of life, it caused deficiencies of medical supplies and severe food and nourishment shortages in Dublin to the degree made Nurse Power call the bread "war bread". Greater than that, in a high percentage, the First World War caused a pandemic and a plague that costed humanity a lot.

Conclusion

Morphologically, the word pandemic is from the Greek 'pan' which means all, and *dēmos* which means people, in other words, all people, and that is because pandemics spread everywhere and affect all people. The Spanish flu pandemic was not the first and would not be the last, it is just a form of life as Dr. Lynn described it. Nonetheless, the key point here is that people could take lessons from each pandemic and some researchers claim that several lessons learned over a century ago could still be applied to the contemporaneous COVID-19 pandemic to prevent further tragedies, given the noticeable similarities. Some nations' success in keeping the coronavirus under control shows that it is possible to respond to historical lessons with science and those who are unable to recall the past are doomed to repeat it.

Donoghue's three-day novel gave us a full picture of three major events, the Spanish influenza pandemic, the First World War, and the story of three striking female characters Julia, Dr. Lynn, and Bridie, besides many patients' stories and stories of people we did not see but only heard off. Although Delia Garrett's infant died, she survived. Ita Noonan and her child passed away while Mary O'Rahilly and her child are still alive. Even though Honour White perished, her infant endured. These stories created together a magnificent spectrum of life and death.

Bridie died at almost her half age. Therefore, the author gave her the name of Bridie which consists of six letters, the second half of them is die which was a kind of foreshadowing that she was going to die at her half age. However, her death inspired Julia to adopt the cleft-lip boy instead of ending up in a pipe like the orphaned children at the convent. Dr. Lynn ended up in prison but her enthusiasm, determination, and struggle inspired many activists and revolutionaries. Finally, despite the flu and the acute deficiency of medical materials Julia, with her perseverance and resolution, was able to save the lives of many pregnant women.

The Pull of the Stars showed that the Spanish influenza's impact varied from one to another, some patients suffered for months from the flu and then died, some succumbed to it in hours, and others perished in minutes. This article reviewed a brief history of the plagues in recent centuries and the parallel between the Spanish flu pandemic and the coronavirus pandemic regarding the symptoms, measures taken against the pandemics, and the huge number of fatalities.

The aftermath of the Great War was also discussed in this article, innocent people have been always the first and foremost patsies of wars. It is the politicians who always start wars and mostly they are the first beneficiaries and the first survivors. The novel gave us two war-victim examples Tim and his friend, along with thousands of massacred persons only in Dublin. The article debated that the 1918 pandemic might be an outcome of four years of killing, slaughtering, bombarding, and unburied corpses. A natural reaction from nature against humans' actions, crimes, and endless wars.

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