



**I**t is hard to define: if is reality that suggests stories and characters, or if stories could be used to understand realities. As it often happens, the relation is complex to be analyzed. In some way we could assume a similar approach that underlines the difference between post hoc and propter hoc. And the kingdom of truth –if it is- is complex to be explored. As writes Gilbert K Chesterton in *The club of Queer Trades* “Truth must necessarily be stranger than fiction, for fiction is the creation of the human mind and therefore congenial to it.”

Let’s try to use stories as well as history to approach this end of the year: for two different reason. The first is fictional: we want to remember that in 1993 the film *Philadelphia* was released. Now, 20 years after, -already 20!- we can guess that a relevant part of the landscape is changed: research, science and interventions were able to set up efficient answers to the question posed by HIV. Indubitably, the answers that have been issued are manly form the science. Unfortunately policies, attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and prejudice stand still against a world fully committed against HIV/AIDS. Some examples? Omophobia, legislation about recreational drugs, women conditions and genders disparities. Stories are important

because they are narratives of the emotion and the flavor of the needed engagement in fighting against AIDS. Looking to Philadelphia, we measure and recognize how far we are from the dark and early days of the epidemic. But it is not enough.

Despite the progress we made, the obstacle we are now facing are more hard to overcome, because they are rooted in society and in economy. This is the reason why, together to the analysis of stories that are at the same time shape and construction of health and collective dimension of disease, we need to look at the history of these years in order to make clear that there are persisting as well as emerging challenges that must be addressed. The best way to do this is through the experience of privileged witness of how HIV/AIDS was able to illustrate the "new global vulnerability" we are still living in. The quote is from a key person in the history of HIV/AIDS, Jonathan Mann the scientist and advocate for civil rights who died on Wednesday, September 2, 1998 in the crash of an airplane bound from New York to Geneva, where he was to attend a World Health Organization conference. He was 51. In a visionary preface to "The Coming Plague. Newly Emerging Diseases in a World out of Balance" written by the Pulitzer prize winning Laurie Garrett, Mann writes "We always want to believe that history happened only to "them", "in the past", and that somehow we are outside history, rather than enmeshed within it. Many aspects of history are unanticipated and unforeseen, predictable only in retrospect: the fall of the Berlin Wall is single recent example. Yet in one vital area, the emergence and spread of a new infectious disease, we can already predict the future – and it is threatening and dangerous to us all" (1).

The feeling of momentum and of history inspired any action of Mann, who was the first man to manage the first project on AIDS, in Zaire. It was in January 1984. In the best seller book by Laurie Garret we can have the encyclopedic impressive history of these days. In march 1984 Peter Piot joined Mann in Kinshasa. The personal perspective and the witnessed history of AIDS – through a life in pursuit of deadly viruses- is narrated by Peter Piot in his intense book "No Time to Lose".

In this issue of our journal we have the privilege to publish a long interview to Peter Piot, that is the director of legendary London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, former undersecretary general of the United Nations and former executive director of UNAIDS. As usual, at the end of the year new geographical atlas are published to fix where we are and how the World goes. This is the reason why we use the book of Piot as a cartography of contemporary AIDS.

Happy new year

(1) Laurie Garrett, *The Coming Plague. Newly Emerging Diseases in a World out of Balance*, Penguin Books, London 1994