



Stories of Plague: Resilience and Mourning

Life and death are never easy, particularly on an epidemic magnitude. In this class, we turn to stories of plagues –from distant past to more recent times—to nurture resilience, to grow our ability to connect and empathize, to put our experiences in larger historical frames, to enlarge our capacity to build societies that are fairer and more just. We ask: How are fear, anxiety, and collective mourning figured in stories of plagues? How does the gothic as a genre and its demonization of the Other work its way into pandemic writing? How may the pandemic imagination connect with or detract from revolutionary sentiments? What does it mean to think across historical moments, across national and bodily borders? Why is it important to construct or offer spaces for collective mourning?

Centering on Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), the course features writers of diverse origins, contrasting early modern representations of plague with those bearing witness to The Great Epidemic of 1918. Course materials include: selected 19th century poems and writing on the plague village Eyam. Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722). Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), William Maxwell, *They Came Like Swallows* (1935), Katherine Porter, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" (1939), Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (1993), Alejandro Morales, *Rag Doll Plagues* (1992), and Ingmar Bergman's film, *The Seventh Seal* (1957).

The course welcomes students in literature, single subject and creative writing concentrations, who may find joy, wisdom and solace in reading and writing alongside existing stories of plague.

ENGLISH 448

MW 1:00 to 2:50 (face to face)

Dr. Chingling Wo

Meets British Lit Requirement.

Graduate students welcome.

