



Abrahams-Curiel Department of Foreign Literatures and Linguistics  
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

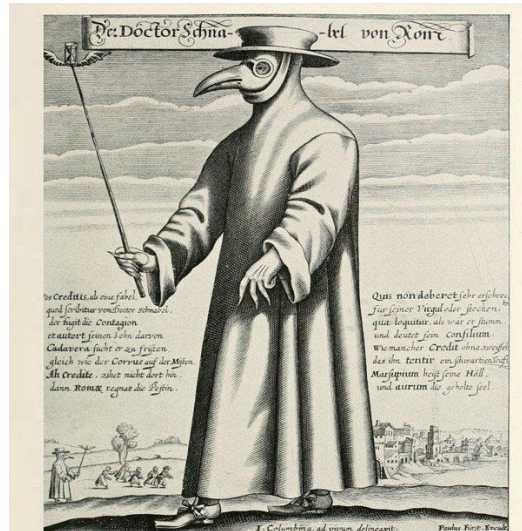
## Plagues & Viruses

[course number in process]

BA advanced seminar (3<sup>rd</sup> year)

Monday and Thursday 14-16 first semester

Professor Efraim Sicher



### Course Description

This course examines the literature that has emerged from epidemics and plagues from Thucydides to the present day. What can these texts teach us about how humans deal with extreme conditions in which the social fabric breaks down and the body is threatened, when familiar networks of love and family are torn asunder? How do people react and what can that teach us about human behavior? How has literature used epidemic disease as a trope for social ills, for a sick society that needs healing? Why have epidemics brought xenophobic attitudes and violence against Others (Jews in the Black Death, Asians in the Yellow Peril)? What value can literature or the humanities have in such times?

This is an advanced seminar taught online with interactive student response based on questions prepared in advance and group reading of texts. Brief excerpts from essays will be distributed in advance via Moodle. Using the technology of Zoom, we will view visual material (art, movies etc.), charts and graphs, and maps. We will also work on the writing of seminar papers in Zoom meetings. The course is taught entirely in English and is open to students with an exemption from English language courses (Advanced 2 and above).

### Aims of the course:

To learn how plagues and extreme conditions affect society and what that says about human behavior.

### **Skills to be acquired in the course**

Interactive response to visual and written texts; critical thinking; academic writing and basic research skills

**Keywords:** Plague; epidemic; disaster; literature; anti-Semitism; dystopia

### **Course requirements**

Active participation in all classes

Preparatory questions for discussion in class 20%

Presentation in class 30% (5-6 pages, to be submitted in writing by March 31)

Seminar paper (15-18 pages double-spaced 12 pt Times New Roman) 50% (to be submitted by March 31)

All submission deadlines final, midnight Israel time. No extensions, exemptions or excuses.  
NO EXAM!

### **Required reading**

Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale"

Boccaccio, *Decameron* (excerpt)

Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*

Mary Shelley, "The Last Man"

Albert Camus, *The Plague*

- It is the student's responsibility to prepare for the class meeting the texts on the required reading list
- Unexcused absences over the limit set by the faculty may result in being unable to submit a seminar paper and complete the course
- Active participation is mandatory in all classes
- It is the student's responsibility to check the course materials and announcements regularly on Moodle and come prepared to the class meeting

### **Seminar paper**

The seminar paper will be written on a topic that focuses on one or more of the required texts in this course. The seminar paper cannot be written on the topic or same texts used in the presentation. You must submit an outline of the paper for the lecturer's approval no later than four weeks before the end of the semester. By the end of semester a draft will be submitted with a preliminary bibliography (primary sources + 3-4 secondary sources). The final version must reach the lecturer by the deadline—it is your responsibility to ensure it has been received.

### **Personal Project (presentation)**

Texts for the personal project will be selected with the approval of the lecturer; they must deal directly with the topic of the course and not be on the required reading list. Only one text may be chosen by each student. Presentations will be given orally in class on the scheduled date (to be announced) and submitted as an academic paper with a bibliography (no more than 10 pages maximum). Failure to present in class or to submit the paper in writing will result in a zero grade for this assignment. You should focus in your presentation on a particular topic or issue and prepare a handout with two or three passages from the text and a few questions for us to think about to be distributed to the class no less than a week before the scheduled presentation.

**Course schedule (by week)**

- 1 Introduction: Disasters from the Bible to Antiquity
- 2 Chaucer, "The Pardoner's Tale"; Bocaccio (introduction),
3. Mary Shelley, "The Last Man"
- 4 Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*
- 5 Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*
- 6 Daniel Defoe, *Journal of the Plague Year*
- 7 Albert Camus, *The Plague*
- 8 Albert Camus, *The Plague*
- 9 Albert Camus, *The Plague*
- 10 Presentations: Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed (I promessi sposi, 1842)*; Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague*
- 11 Presentation: Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice*
- 12 Presentations: Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*; Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*
- 13 Summing up: the day after?

*You are urged to use the lecturer's conference hours for consultation and guidance. All references must be cited according to the MLA style sheet. Any papers suspected of containing work that is not original will be graded zero and forwarded to the university authorities for possible disciplinary action.*

**Conference hours:**

by appointment [sicher@bgu.ac.il](mailto:sicher@bgu.ac.il)

ספרות הדבר  
פרופ' אפרים זיכר  
סמינר, ב.א. שנה ג'  
ימי ב' וה' 14-16, סמסטר א'  
4 נ"ז

מילות מפתח: דבר, מגפה, ספרות

מטרת הקורס: קריאה בספרות עכשווית, הצגת סוגיית הטראומה בספרות ואמנות

מטרת הקורס: קריאה בספרות קלאסית ועכשווית, הצגת סוגיית הטראומה בספרות ואמנות, דיון סוגיות חברה ופרט, תועלת מדעי הרוח והאמנות בזמני משבר.  
תיאור הקורס: בוחן את השפעת מגפות ותופעות אפידמיות על הספרות ומציג שאלות נוקבות לגבי התנהגות בני אדם, מוסר, ומשמעות החיים לאור בידוד ופירוק מסגרות חברתיות. נעקוב אחרי שימוש במטאפורות של הדבקות ושתפרצות של נגיף בתולדות הספרות.

השתתפות חובה  
שאלות לדיון 20%  
רפרט (פרויקט אישי) 30%  
עבודת סמינר: 50%  
אין בחינה.

תלמידי המחלקה לספרויות זרות ולבלשנות חייבים להגיש את העבודות בשפה האנגלית.