



INTRODUCTION TO FICTION: WRITING CONTAGION

INSTRUCTOR: Kym Weed

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OFFICE LOCATION: Greenlaw 322 or the HHIVE Lab (GL 524)

OFFICE HOURS: Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-11:00 a.m. in GL 322 and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Beginning with the Black Death in the 14th century and culminating in contemporary accounts of epidemic, both experienced and imagined, this course will examine the ways in which contagious disease has been represented in fiction from the Middle Ages to the present day. Like the germs themselves, stories about contagious disease spread and mutate in various forms of fiction. Why are we compelled to respond to and prepare for epidemics through fiction?

This course will use contagion as a organizing theme to explore a wide range of fictional genres, including novels, short stories, graphic novels, and film, from a broad range of cultures and historical periods. While we track the evolution of contagious narratives over time, we will also track differences in fictional genres and styles.

Through our study of fiction, we will attempt to answer some of the following questions:

- What role does contagious disease play in fiction?
- How have conceptualizations and representations of contagion changed over time?
- How has contagion been used a literary device or metaphor and to what ends?
- Does genre influence how an author writes about contagion?
- How do narratives of contagion constitute a vision of what society is and may become?

COURSE GOALS

1. Survey a broad range of fictional modes and genres
2. Examine different forms of fiction and relate apparently disparate works to one another
3. Understand the relationship between contagious disease and literary and cultural production
4. Detect the cultural assumptions underlying writing from a different time or society, and in the process become more aware of one's own cultural assumptions
5. Engage with classmates in writing and in person
6. Think creatively within and beyond literary studies, making some connections between the literary work and one's own life

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Required Books:

- Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Penguin Classics, 2009)
- Albert Camus, *The Plague* (Vintage, 1991)
- Charles Burns, *Black Hole* (Pantheon Books, 2005)
- Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Anchor Books, 2004)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EVALUATION

Reading Log: 10% -- One of the best ways to improve your writing is to write. Therefore, you will be responsible for recording your reaction to the readings and class discussions each week. You should record your thoughts as soon after class as possible, but you will only be required to turn in your reading log twice (at the midterm exam and final exam). Each weekly entry should be at least 1-2 pages (or at least 300 words) and may focus on the week as a whole or on one individual text. You can keep your log in a separate notebook or digitally. While the log is informal, it should demonstrate a thoughtful response to the course material. Entries may consider questions posed by discussion leaders, use a short passage to practice close reading skills, relate course material to current events, or otherwise continue your course engagement in writing.

Close Reading: 10% -- Literary criticism depends on noticing details in texts and articulating their significance. You will choose a short passage from one of the course texts to write a 3 page close read using the skills you are learning in this class. Your ultimate goal is to interpret the text in some way, not to summarize it. In other words, focus on the how of the text in order to explain the ways that the text produces meaning. Your reading should include a clear argument and thesis statement. Since this assignment is designed to get you to think critically about a text, you may not consult outside sources. *More detailed assignment description to follow.*

Final Project: 20% -- You may choose from one of the three following options for your final project. Regardless of your choice, you will turn in a non-graded proposal and outline in preparation for this assignment. Failure to complete these preliminary assignments will impact your final project grade. *More detailed assignment description to follow.*

Option 1: Drawing inspiration from course texts, create your own short story or short film related to a course topic. Submit a 3-5 page rationale that explains your creative choices, influences, and scholarly conversations that your creative piece engages in.

Option 2: Choose a CDC or other government document, PSA, news article, or other text related to a contagious disease. Borrowing from concepts we have discussed in class, revise or re-write the piece. Submit a 3-5 page rationale that explains your revisions, including scholarly conversations that your revision engages in.

Option 3: Write a 6-8 page scholarly introduction to one of the course texts (or a related text with instructor approval) or a collection of texts. The introduction should be supported by a range of primary and secondary sources. If you choose to introduce a collection of texts, your introduction should also include a rationale for your selections.

Midterm Exam: 15%

Final Exam: 20%

Discussion Leader: 5% -- You will have the opportunity to lead the class in discussion on the day's readings. Discussion leaders are responsible for preparing discussion questions and maintaining class dialogue. *More detailed assignment description to follow.*

Reading Quizzes: 5% -- Occasionally, class will begin with a short quiz about that day's reading(s). Anyone who arrives late will receive a zero on the quiz. If you miss a quiz for a documented reason, that zero will be dropped from your quiz average.

Participation and Attendance: 15% -- Consistent, critically engaged participation is crucial for a successful and productive course. Your participation grade will not be based on always having the “right” answer to instructor or student questions. Rather, we will strive to create a classroom of active learning in which we try out ideas together. For this model to be successful, each student must come to class prepared and willing to communicate with the class. Being prepared includes coming to class having completed the assigned reading. In addition, you will be expected to be prepared with (1) all relevant texts (hard copies or electronic), (2) questions about the texts or other course material, and (3) at least one passage or talking point. You cannot participate if you are not in class; therefore, attendance is required (see **Attendance Policy** under Course Policies).

COURSE SCHEDULE

**Readings and assignments may be revised based on course progress and student interests.*

Date	Tuesday	Date	Thursday
Tues 8/23	<p>Topic: Introduction & Key Terms</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus • Pernick, Martin – “Contagion and Culture” (2002) – Sakai 	Thurs 8/25	<p>Topic: Medieval Plague</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giovanni Boccaccio – from <i>The Decameron</i> (1351) – Sakai • Discussion Leader assignment sheet <p>*Sign up for Discussion Leader date on Sakai sign up.</p>
Tues 8/30	<p>Topic: Early Modern Quarantine</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defoe, Daniel – from <i>The Journal of the Plague Year</i> (1722) – Sakai <p>*Introductory Letter due – Bring hard copy to class</p>	Thurs 9/1	<p>Topic: Contagion before Germs Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poe, Edgar Allan – “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842) – Sakai • Hawthorne, Nathaniel – “Lady Eleanore’s Mantle” (1851) - Sakai
Tues 9/6	<p>Topic: Disease as Narrative Frame</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brontë, Emily – <i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847), Vol 1, Ch 1-9 (pg. 1-91) 	Thurs 9/8	<p>Topic: Illness as Power Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brontë, Emily – <i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847), Vol 1, Ch 10-14 (pg. 92-156)
Tues 9/13	<p>Topic: Patriarchy as Disease Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brontë, Emily – <i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847), Vol 2, Ch 1-10 (pg. 159-259) • Close Reading assignment sheet 	Thurs 9/15	<p>Topic: Hauntings Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brontë, Emily – <i>Wuthering Heights</i> (1847), Vol 2, Ch 11-20 (pg. 260-344)

Tues 9/20	<p>Topic: Environment & Social Norms</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> James, Henry – “Daisy Miller” (1879) – Sakai Wharton, Edith – “Roman Fever” (1934) – Sakai <p>*Choose close reading passage and bring two copies to class.</p>	Thurs 9/22	<p>Topic: Draft Workshop</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bausch, Richard and R. V. Cassill – “Writing about Fiction” (2015) – Sakai <p>*Close Reading Workshop – Post draft to Sakai Forums and bring laptop to class</p>
Tues 9/27	<p>Topic: Microbe Fictions Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wells, H. G. – “The Stolen Bacillus” (1895) – Sakai Palmer, John McAuley – “The Inoculation of Mr. Skads” (1904) – Sakai 	Thurs 9/29	<p>Topic: Individual vs. Collective Health</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camus, Albert – <i>The Plague</i> (1947), pg. 1-99 <p>*Close Reading due to Sakai Assignments</p>
Tues 10/4	<p>Topic: Character Transformations Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camus, Albert – <i>The Plague</i> (1947), pg. 100-201 	Thurs 10/6	<p>Topic: Contagion as Allegory Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Camus, Albert – <i>The Plague</i> (1947), pg. 202-308
Tues 10/11	<p>Topic: Midterm Exam Review</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Project assignment sheet <p>*Review notes and bring list of keywords to class.</p>	Thurs 10/13	<p>Topic: Outbreak Narrative Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peterson, Wolfgang, dir. – <i>Outbreak</i> (1995) – Available in MRC Mukherjee, Siddhartha – “The Race for a Zika Vaccine” (2016)
Tues 10/18	<p>Midterm Exam</p> <p>*Reading Log due – Bring hard copy to exam</p>	Thurs 10/20	<p>No Class – Fall Break</p>
Tues 10/25	<p>Topic: Graphic Contagion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burns, Charles – <i>Black Hole</i> (2005), “Biology 101” through “Window Pane” <p>*Final Project Mini Workshop – Come ready to talk about your project ideas</p>	Thurs 10/27	<p>Topic: Ignoring an Outbreak Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burns, Charles – <i>Black Hole</i> (2005), “Under Open Skies” through “The End” <p>*Final Project Proposal due to Sakai Assignments</p>

Tues 11/1	<p>Topic: Speculative Contagion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atwood, Margaret – <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (2003), Parts 1-4 (pg. 1-92) 	Thurs 11/3	<p>Topic: Language after the Apocalypse Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atwood, Margaret – <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (2003), Parts 5-7 (pg. 93-169)
Tues 11/8	<p>Topic: Time & Temporality Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atwood, Margaret – <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (2003), Parts 8-11 (pg. 170-280) 	Thurs 11/10	<p>Topic: Posthumanism(s) Student Lead Discussion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atwood, Margaret – <i>Oryx and Crake</i> (2003), Parts 12-15 (pg. 281-376)
Tues 11/15	<p>Topic: Communication</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Butler, Octavia – “Speech Sounds” (1983) – Sakai 	Thurs 11/17	<p>Topic: Disease Stigma</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sontag, Susan – “The Way We Live Now” (1986) & from <i>Illness as Metaphor & AIDS and Its Metaphors</i> (1978, 1989) – Sakai
Tues 11/22	<p>Topic: Disability & Contagion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saramago, José – from <i>Blindness</i> (1995), pg. 1-85 – Sakai <p>*Final Project Outline due to Sakai Assignments</p>	Thurs 11/24	<p>No Class - Thanksgiving</p>
Tues 11/29	<p>Topic: Apocalyptic Contagion</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brooks, Max – from <i>World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War</i> (2006) – Sakai • Forster, Marc, dir. - <i>World War Z</i> • CDC – “Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic” (2015) – Sakai 	Thurs 12/1	<p>*Final Project Workshop – Post draft to Sakai Forums</p>
Tues 12/6	<p>Topic: Final Exam Review & Course Evaluations</p> <p>*Final Project due to Sakai Assignments</p>		
		Thurs 12/15	<p>Final Exam – 8:00AM in GL 302</p> <p>*Reading Log due – Bring hard copy to exam</p>