



Manonmaniam Sundaranar University

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

TIRUNELVELI - 627 012, TAMILNADU

M.A ENGLISH (FIRST SEMESTER)

Literature and Pandemics

(From the Academic Year 2021 - 2022)

Prepared by

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M.A. ENGLISH – I YEAR

LITERATURE AND PANDEMICS

Objectives:

- To expose the students to understand the plight of humanity during pandemics as portrayed in literary texts.
- To initiate the students to various kinds of writing techniques adopted by writers during the Pandemic Period.

Course Outcomes:

C.O. No.	Upon the completion of this course, students will be able to	PSOs Addressed	Cognitive Level
CO 1	Identify and demonstrate the knowledge about contagions.	A, C, D	K1, K2
CO 2	Classify the varied socio-cultural conditions related to pandemics.	B, C	K2, K4
CO 3	Elucidate the significant impact of the pandemics on society.	E, F	K2, K3
CO 4	Examine the major biological crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.	B, D	K3, K4
CO 5	Assess pandemic as a unique narrative device and its role in stimulating a new reading.	E, F, H	K4, K5
CO 6	Envision themselves in the societies more equitably in the aftermath of pandemics with the knowledge gained from how the writer adopted the rhetoric of pandemic indifferent contexts	F, G, H	K3, K6

K1 – Remember, K2 – Understand, K3 – Apply, K4 – Analyse, K5 – Evaluate, K6 - Create



Unit I – POETRY

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Thomas Nashe | - The Litany in the time of Plague |
| Christina Rossetti | - The Plague |
| Thom Gunn | - The Lament |
| Vikram Seth | - Soon: A Poem on AIDS |

Unit II – PROSE

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|-----------------------|--|
| Giovanni Boccaccio | - “An Introduction” Extract from <i>The Decameron</i> |
| Molly Caldwell Crosby | - “City of Corpses”: An Extract from <i>The American Plague: The Untold Story of Yellow Fever, The Epidemic That Shaped Our History</i> |
| Steven Johnson | - The Night Soil Men: An Extract from <i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London’s Most Terrifying Epidemic – and How it Changed Science, Cities and the Modern World</i> |

Unit III – SHORT STORIES

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Edgar Allen Poe | - The Masque of the Red Death |
| Greg Egan | - The Moral Virologist |
| UNICEF | - “My Hero is You”: A fictional book developed by and for children aims to help families understand and cope with COVID-19. |

Unit IV – FICTION

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| Albert Camus | - The Plague |
| Jose Saramago | - Blindness |

Unit V – SCREENPLAY

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| Steven Soderbergh | - Contagion |
| Francis Lawrence | - I am Legend |



LITERATURE AND PANDEMICS

UNIT I – POETRY

A LITANY IN TIME OF PLAGUE

-THOMAS NASHE

AUTHOR

Thomas Nashe was born in Lowestoft in 1567. He was known as pamphleteer, poet, dramatist, and author of *The Unfortunate Traveller; or, The Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594), the first picaresque novel in English. Nashe was educated at St. John's College, University of Cambridge. After graduating in 1586, he became one of the "University Wits", a circle of writers who came to London in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and wrote for the stage and the press. In 1589 his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* was published. The preface attacked contemporary writers who plagiarized from classical authors, and it praised Spenser and Greene. *The Anatomie of Absurditie*, also published in 1589, satirized contemporary literature, especially romances. Using the pen name 'Pasquil', Nashe may have written several satiric pamphlets, of which *An Almond for a Parrat* (1590) is the only one attributed to him with conviction. The last work known to have been written by the poet was called *Nashes Lenten Stuffe* and was published in 1599. He is thought to have died around 1601 when he would have been about 34 years of age. Various causes of death have been given including plague, which was rife at the time, and food poisoning.

A Litany in Time of Plague was written by Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). The poem was published in 1600, shortly before Nashe's death. The poem lyric originally came from A Pleasant Comedy, Called Summer's Last Will and Testament, which was performed for the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1592. The 16th century was a time of many plagues, so the sentiments of the poem would likely have been widely held in the population. Some critics have suggested that the inevitability, & the social indifference, of death in the poem could be seen as a plague itself. The word Litany is synonymous with the word prayer, so the poem is like a prayer. Warns the rich that no amount of money will necessarily keep a person healthy, or keep them from death. The first mention of the plague, referencing a disease that had struck fear all over Europe for centuries, The Black Death. The plague would be relevant to the period and the poem's readers.



Anaphora becomes evident at the end of this verse in the last two lines of every verse. (“I am sick, I must die. Lord, have mercy on us!”).

“A Litany in Time of Plague” opens with the speaker bidding the earth and its “bliss” farewell, as he realizes that everything about life is “uncertain”, except for its end. In this first stanza, Nashe introduces Death, who he personifies throughout the poem and acknowledges that there is no escaping Death with his “darts” and that all of life’s “joys” are futile in the face of that end. Nashe concludes the stanza with the poem’s constant refrain “I am sick, I must die. / Lord, have mercy on us!” This refrain marks the first of the poem’s frequent petitions.

Each stanza introduces a different type of power that pales in comparison to death. In the second stanza, Nashe presents wealth and financial power, and the speaker urges the rich to “trust not in wealth” because no amount of money can save those who have succumbed to the plague. “Physic,” or medicine itself, “must fade” as “all things” are meant to eventually end and die, especially as the plague takes hold of England.

In the third stanza, the speaker shifts to the idea of beauty. Beauty is temporary, the speaker argues, and soon “wrinkles will devour” even the most beautiful person. The speaker also notes that even the most “fair” and powerful of queens have “died young”. To demonstrate the point, the speaker references Helen of Troy, considered to be the most beautiful woman in history, and reasons that even Helen’s beauty has been consumed by “dust” and the passing of time.

The fourth stanza introduces the idea of physical power and “strength” and references the classical figure Hector, the prince of Troy, to represent that strength. However, like Helen, Hector lies in a grave, powerless to stop the worms that “feed” on his flesh. He could not “fight with fate” and prevent his death. Nashe then evokes the image of the earth or ground as a city whose gates are always “open”, beckoning souls to meet their death.

The next stanza transitions to wit and intelligence, a power that Nashe himself relied on throughout his career. In this poem, the speaker characterizes wit as “wanton” and art as “vain in the face of Death, “Hell’s executioner”. No amount of wit or cleverness can help someone dissuade Death, who has “no ears for to hear”, from taking them. In the final stanza, the speaker changes from the list of powers made null by death and instead urges the audience to learn from the examples set forth in the poem. People should “haste” towards and “welcome” death since it



is a necessary step towards eternity in Heaven. With this sudden pious strain, the speaker dismisses the earth as a mere “player’s stage” when compared to eternity. The final stanza and poem once again end with the repetition of the refrain “I am sick, I must die. / Lord, have mercy on us!”

ANALYSIS

The perception of a diseased body is largely determined by the socio-cultural explanations of disease. It is pertinent to say that identifying anatomical disorder in the body and its remedy may not necessarily, depending on the sanctioned medical knowledge of a given time, confine to the somatic symptoms; rather the somatic symptoms of a disease at a given time can also be comprehended by taking recourse to ideas beyond and outside the ailing body. The diseased or ailing body is a reflection of something else that resurfaces the dichotomies and interrelationships of body and soul, somatic and spiritual. Disease in the form of pandemic or epidemic, a bodily misfortune, is subject to socio-culturally constructed explanations across ages. On the part of the state, management of a pandemic/epidemic involves discursive formations of medical knowledge on the nature of the disease, the ways of infections, the somatic symptoms, the precautionary measures, the remedy, and significantly the rationale of death. A look into the history of pandemics or epidemics brings to the fore narratives of legitimising both the measures of containing the disease and justifying the failure of mitigating the havoc caused by the disease as well. Therefore, explanations and narratives of a pandemic/epidemic disease, hinged upon the ideological interventions of the state, rationalise and legitimise measures of withstanding the disease with a tacit motive of containing fear, anxiety, and dissent of the mass. It is not erroneous to assert that an ailing body becomes a site of dominant discourses of a given time, and any society’s understanding and explanation of a disease is constituted by the power dynamics and beliefs.

Early modern England of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, an era of pre-medicalization of the human body, witnesses plague-ravaged years between 1520 and 1625. Though canonical literature of the era limns a flimsy picture of the plague experience, lesser-known text like Thomas Nashes’ poem “A Litany in Time of Plague” (1600) enunciate the medical context of the plague – in what ways a plague-infected body is perceived and located within the socio-cultural and political fabric. Devoid of the consolidation and institutionalised specialization of medical knowledge, early modern England perceives the plague-ridden body as



a site of God's rage caused by human sins. The plague as a manifestation of vengeful God's rage on sinful human souls becomes a dominant narrative of rationalising the large-scale decimation of human lives, and the plague as a disease is caught in a deep chasm of body and soul, science and faith. As result the ailing body is disembodied of the somatic symptoms of the disease, rather the symptoms are embedded with spiritual and scriptural inscriptions. In the medical gaze of the Renaissance context, the symptoms of an ailing body are not confined to the body itself, instead, the symptoms are disembodied and relocated within the domain of soul and spiritual interventions.

Nashe's text testifies to the understanding and management of the sick body during Renaissance England. Written as a fervent plea to God, Nashe's poem "A Litany in Time of Plague" elucidates the necessity to perceive the epidemic through the lens of faith and divinity is a justification of the epidemic as ways of God to man during a time when the remedy of disease resides in a fuzzy zone between medicine and faith, science and religion. Nashe's "A Litany in Time of Plague" explores how the plague-ridden body becomes a site of complex intertexture of medical, religious and social discursive formations in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England.

Recounting the experience of the 1592 London plague, Nashe's "A Litany in Time of Plague" situates the perishable body against the perennial soul. This six-stanza poem, originally part of Nashe's play *Summer's Last Will and Testament* and later on widely anthologised, depicts the predicament of English society in the face of the bubonic plague. Though suffers from plague-like fever and eventually dies in 1603, Nashe in his poem avoids graphic descriptions of the physical sufferings of sores, blisters, swelling lymph nodes and fever of the plague, however, his poem testifies to the ways the English society of the late sixteenth century perceives and explains the epidemic. Resonating Shakespearean sonnet tradition's dominant ideas of mutability and impermanence of beauty, wealth and life, the poem limns the dismal and docile resignation to God in the onslaught of the plague.

In voicing the agony of an ailing body the persona of the poem, in close proximity of death, expresses with dreadful conviction 'I am sick, I must die', and with resignation seeks the mercy of God 'Lord, have mercy on us'. The half-dozen stanzas of the poem ends with the unrhymed couplet reiterating the havoc ushered by the epidemic and the inevitability of death. The last line of each stanza affirms the mercy of God as the last and only resort. Worldliness and



'life's lustful joys' are 'but mere toys' in the face of the epidemic, and it is God's mercy that can only ensure the transcendence of bodily misfortune. The phrase 'Lord, have mercy on us', the ending line of all the six stanzas of the poem, encapsulates deeper implications of the Renaissance discourse of plague. Devoid of a body of officially sanctioned knowledge on diagnosis and cure of the somatic morbidity caused by the epidemic, significant indeed to know that Renaissance England takes recourse to practices like isolation and social distancing. These practices are essentially fraught with the revival of classical Galenic models of medical prescriptions.

The phrase 'Lord, have mercy on us', constituting the last line of all the six stanzas, typifies Nashe's awareness of the sixteenth century understanding and management of the epidemic. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Queen Elizabeth I suffers from smallpox in 1562, and in 1563 when the plague revisits England the Queen constitutes a forum to streamline activities and movements of the mass during the pandemic. It is in this context the penultimate line of each stanza 'I am sick, I must die' – carries loaded implications in comprehending the plague discourse of early modern England. On the one hand, it reaffirms the inevitability of death in the face of the 'medically incurable' epidemic, and on the other hand in resurfacing the impermanence of beauty, health and otherworldliness, it tacitly posits the ailing body against the perennial soul, the mutable world against the everlasting heaven.

Since whatever is worldly/bodily is subject to decay and death, the epidemic is seen as a means of emancipating the soul from the corporeal incarceration to transport it to the eternal and imperishable heaven: "Heaven is our heritage,/Earth but a player's stage;" (Nashe, 1986, p. 156). The unflinching conviction in the assertion 'I am sick, I must die' leads to the sober resignation 'Heaven is our heritage' – within this framework of explanation, the epidemic is not comprehended in its bodily manifestations. The religiously-charged understanding of the plague transforms the ailing body into a transit point for the soul to exit the world and take refuge in heaven. In mapping, the trajectory of the plague discourse of early modern England, Nashe's poem delineates the locationality of the plague-ridden body in an era before the medicalization of the human body.

The ending unrhymed couplet of all the six stanzas of the poem brings to the fore the attempts to rationalize the epidemic-caused death in the pre-medicalization era of the human body through the rhetoric of embedding the somatic within the network of religious



connotations. Evoking the situation of lack of pathological interpretation of the epidemic, the expression “I am sick, I must die” hints at the deeper issue concerning the confusion over the construction of a socio-culturally accepted explanation of the disease. The last line “Lord, have mercy on us” is a tacit indication of the process of fostering the plague discourse that envisages relocating the bodily manifestation of the disease in the realm of faith and religion. The disease’s bodily manifestation is relegated to the periphery for covering up the absence of clinical cure of the disease, and in this connection Nashe’s “A Litany in a Time of Plague” will remain powerful documents of plague discourse of early modern England.

THE PLAGUE

- CHRISTINA GEORGINA

AUTHOR

Christina Georgina Rossetti (5 December 1830 – 29 December 1894) was an English writer of romantic, devotional and children's poems, including “Goblin Market” and “Remember”. She also wrote the words of two Christmas carols well known in Britain: “In the Bleak Midwinter”, later set by Gustav Holst, Katherine Kennicott Davis, and Harold Darke, and “Love Came Down at Christmas”, also set by Darke and other composers. She was a sister of the artist and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti and features in several of his paintings

Listen, the last stroke of death’s noon has struck—

The plague is come, ’ a gnashing Madman said,
And laid him down straightway upon his bed.

His writhed hands did at the linen pluck;

Then all is over. With a careless chuck

Among his fellows he is cast. How sped

His spirit matters little: many dead

Make men hard-hearted.— ‘Place him on the truck.

Go forth into the burial-ground and find

Room at so much a pitful for so many.

One thing is to be done; one thing is clear:

Keep thou back from the hot unwholesome wind,

That it infect not thee.’ Say, is there any

Who mourneth for the multitude dead here?



THE LAMENT

- THOM GUNN

AUTHOR

Thomson William "Thom" Gunn (August 29, 1929 – April 25, 2004) was an British-born poet who resided in San Francisco for much of his life, published over thirty books of poetry and two collections of essays; he also edited four collections of poetry. He was praised for his early verses in England, where he was associated with The Movement, and his later poetry in America, even after moving towards a looser, free-verse style. After relocating from England to San Francisco, Gunn wrote about gay-related topics—particularly in his most famous work, *The Man With Night Sweats* in 1992—as well as drug use, sex and his bohemian lifestyle. He won major literary awards; his best poems were said to have a compact philosophical elegance. His many honors and awards included the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize, the Levinson Prize, the W.H. Smith Award, the Sara Teasdale Prize, the Forward Prize, the Rockefeller Award and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Award. He received fellowships from the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. Gunn died of heart failure at his home in San Francisco in 2004.

SUMMARY

“Lament” is a descriptive and narrative poem. It traces the stages of AIDS upon a nameless victim, recording the mental and physical changes in that person. The poem is written in a loose iambic pentameter, and uses rhyming couplets. The couplets do not call attention to themselves, since they are rarely end-stopped. Only by rereading the poem can one become aware of its hidden craft.

The first line announces the subject: “Your dying was a difficult enterprise.” In the early stages, the sufferer is primarily concerned with “petty things.” There is little change in the character of the infected one. He retains “hope” and is “courteous still.” The pain soon brings “nightmare” and an unaccustomed “outrage” to the afflicted one. The “outrage” comes from being excluded from the rituals of ordinary life. He cannot feel “summer on the skin.” Instead, he is imprisoned in the “Canada of a hospital room.” Gunn has described the change in images of distance that perfectly capture the nature of the alteration.



The “distance” that the disease brings becomes more apparent as he becomes “thin”; however, while his body is decaying, his mind remains active and alert. He writes messages to his friends and is reconciled with his “grey father” after four years of alienation. Gunn then attempts to define the character of the victim, to sum up his essence. He describes him as he was in the past when he displayed wit and humor. “I was so tickled by your mind’s light touch/ I couldn’t sleep, you made me laugh too much.” The images of “lightness” and “laughter” that define the person’s essence are effective contrasts with his later state.

The AIDS sufferer must now confront death. He does this simply but heroically, “equably, without complaint,/ unwhimpering.” He also retains a “lack of self-love” that kept him from worldly success but endeared him to his friends. He does not accept the death that has come upon him. As a result, there is something “uncompleted” about him.

The final stage is the collapse of the body; machines take over, and he drowns in his own “fluids.” The death is rendered memorably and simply by Gunn: “And so you slept, and died, your skin gone grey,/ Achieving your completeness, in a way.” “Completeness” is defined as enduring the inevitable death; it is, therefore, an accomplishment and not a defeat. In the last section of the poem, the speaker assesses his feelings about the person and the event. He speaks about the body of the victim, who did not feel that it was attractive, which finally betrayed him. Gunn describes the AIDS virus as a “guest,” a metaphor which suggests an intimate relation between the victim and the disease.

The last line of the poem completes the “enterprise” of the first line. The AIDS victim has completed “This difficult, tedious, painful enterprise.” Dying is an “enterprise,” an adventurous activity. Gunn brings together the stages of the disease in three contrasting adjectives: “difficult, tedious, painful.” Together they sum up the experience.

SOON: A POEM ON AIDS

- VIKRAM SETH

AUTHOR

Vikram Seth is an Indian novelist and poet. Seth was born on 20 June 1952 in Calcutta. His father, Prem Nath Seth, was an executive of Bata Shoes and his mother, Leila Seth, a barrister by training, became the first female judge of the Delhi High Court and first woman to become Chief Justice of a state High Court in India. Seth was educated at the all-boys’ private



boarding school The Doon School in Dehradun, where he was editor-in-chief of *The Doon School Weekly*. At Doon, he was influenced by his teacher, the mountaineer Gurdial Singh, who taught him geography and, according to Leila Seth, “guided Vikram in many ways...encouraged him to appreciate Western classical music and instilled in him a love of adventure and daring.” Singh later described Seth as an “indefatigable worker, and he maintains without difficulty his distinguished level in studies... he has put in enormous amount of energy in other spheres of school life, in dramatics, in debating, in first aid, in music, and in editing the Doon School Weekly.” After graduating from Doon, Seth went to Tonbridge School, England, to complete his A-levels. Later he read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He then pursued a Ph.D. in Economics at Stanford University though never completed it. He has written several novels and poetry books. He has received several awards such as Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, WH Smith Literary Award and Crossword Book Award. Seth’s collections of poetry such as *Mappings* and *Beastly Tales* are notable contributions to the Indian English language poetry canon.

SUMMARY

‘Soon’ by Vikram Seth is a seven stanza poem that is made up of sets of four lines, known as quatrains. These quatrains follow a loose pattern of ABAB CDCD, but a number of the rhymes are half, or slant. These kinds of rhymes are seen through the repetition of assonance or consonance. This means that either a vowel or consonant sound is reused within one line or multiple lines of verse. For example, “blood” and “food” in the first stanza and “sweat” and “treat” in the second. These words are not perfect rhymes, but their endings are the same (due to consonance), making them half-rhymes. The tone in this poem is transitory. At first, it is solemn but resigned, by the end though it is much more desperate and frightened as the speaker’s emotions come to the forefront. In regards to the mood, it is more consistent throughout. The sympathy the reader feels for the speaker at first is real, but with more details that sympathy turns into empathy.

The poem begins with the speaker making a shocking admission. He states, without hesitation, that he is going to die soon. He only hints at what’s wrong with him, but with a few context clues, such as the references to love in the third stanza, a reader can assume he is discussing HIV/AIDS. The speaker is entering the final days of his life and knows without a doubt there is no possibility that he is going to be saved. He does not hope for a miracle cure or



that somehow he's going to make it through. The courage he has been exhibiting falls away in the last lines as he pleads with his lover to stay by his side until he's dead and continue to love him after he's gone. The poem ends with the speaker asking that someone save his life.

ANALYSIS

In the first stanza of the poem the speaker makes a shocking admission, he knows that he is going to die soon. This immediately sets expectations about what the tone is going to be and might make one guess about where the poem is going to end. The speaker hints at what's wrong with him in the rest of the stanza. He refers to the illness as being in his blood and doing its best to sap all his cells "for food". Over the following stanzas, it becomes clear that the speaker has contracted AIDS and is in the final phases of the disease.

Through alliteration, Seth evokes the misery of this speaker's nights. The repetition of the "s" sound mimics the sound of water, or in this case, sweat sliding across the speaker's skin. He can't sleep during the night, and then during the day, any pleasure he might take is broken with pain. Through these lines, the reader is left with no doubt that the disease is his constant companion. He doesn't ever get a reprieve from it. The situation is made even worse with the information provided in lines three and four. There is nothing that a "hand or drug" can do to improve his situation. As he stated in the first lines, he knows he's going to die and there is nothing he can do about it.

It is in the third stanza of 'Soon' that the reader should come to the conclusion that it is AIDS that is bringing on the speaker's death. He speaks about it as the "first cause / That bred grief in its seeds". He contracts HIV/AIDS through sexual intercourse and he is very aware of the irony that something as beautiful as love could bring him to such a state. In an effort to speak to the power of the disease he describes how it gained a foothold in his body and made its own laws. It is up to the illness to decide how he lives, and for how long. It fixed itself inside him and is now breeding without limitations.

In the fourth stanza of 'Soon', he speaks about his lover. He is there with him, but kindly, the lover does not give him false hope as others might. This is something that he's very glad of. The speaker knows it would only make things worse for both of them if they put faith in a miracle occurring or a magic cure surfacing.



The speaker's lover is fully aware of the situation they are in and knows that his partner is too. He states that his lover knows "what [he] has read," therefore, there is no use in bringing "lies" to his bedside. The truth of the disease is clear for everyone to see, even those who love the speaker the most. With a shocking bluntness, the speaker informs the reader that he knows that his lover sees him as dead. It isn't something he states explicitly to his dying partner, but the speaker can read "it in his eyes".

The sixth and seventh stanzas of 'Soon' appear to be directed to the lover. The speaker asks a number of emotional, rhetorical questions. This is the first time, through the broken up syntax, that uncontrolled emotion is showing through. He wonders how he's supposed to continue on in this state with "These hands that shake and waste". The use of the "em" dashes at the ends of lines one and three denote the break in his thought process, he is at a loss for words and/or is overcome with emotion.

In the last line the mask of strength, he wore in the previous lines crumbles. He asks his lover to stay by his side, even though he knows that death is surely on its way. The speaker is in a cold, "steel ward bed" from which there is no escape. He is near the end of his life and all he can ask for is that his lover holds him, and love him after he has died. The final line is striking in its honesty and the speaker asks someone, anyone, to keep him from dying.

UNIT II – PROSE

AN INTRODUCTION" EXTRACT FROM *THE DECAMERON*

- GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

AUTHOR

Giovanni Boccaccio (16 June 1313 – 21 December 1375) was an Italian writer, poet, correspondent of Petrarch, and an important Renaissance humanist. Born in the town of Certaldo, he became so well known as a writer that he was sometimes simply known as "the Certaldese" and one of the most important figures in the European literary panorama of the fourteenth century. Some scholars (including Vittore Branca) define him as the greatest European prose writer of his time, a versatile writer who amalgamated different literary trends and genres, making them converge in original works, thanks to a creative activity exercised under the banner of experimentalism. His most notable works are *The Decameron*, a collection of short stories which in the following centuries was a determining element for the Italian literary



tradition, especially after Pietro Bembo elevated the Boccaccian style to a model of Italian prose in the sixteenth century, and *On Famous Women*. He wrote his imaginative literature mostly in Tuscan vernacular, as well as other works in Latin, and is particularly noted for his realistic dialogue which differed from that of his contemporaries, medieval writers who usually followed formulaic models for character and plot. The influence of Boccaccio's works was not limited to the Italian cultural scene but extended to the rest of Europe, exerting influence on authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, a key figure in English literature, or later on Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega and the Spanish classical theater.

Financial wealth is a major determinant of social class, but within a class, gender dynamics often govern social roles due to gender norms. During the medieval times, many women held little to no power. In *The Decameron*, most women held a lower social standing than men. Men were allowed to work and own any property, while “women were not allowed to have a significant role in society, other than that of a wife and mother. Though they may not hold a significant social status, the women in these stories hold greater power within gendered relationships between man and woman). In *The Decameron*, the female characters are portrayed as smarter and wittier than the men, such as the story of Monna Sismonda, from day seven, story eight. In this narrative, the main female lead, Monna Sismonda, outwits her husband and his scheme divulge her affair by primitively assigning her servant to pose as her in bed, which leads to her brother's distrust validity of her husband's claims (Boccaccio 528-535). As a female, Sismonda was defined to be a mother and a caregiver.

Women were not seen as smart or cunning, so having Monna Sismonda being able to trick the men of her life, Boccaccio is able to emphasize those class standards cannot truly confine the individual. On a similar note, Boccaccio also uses Monna Sismond's story to display the ingenuity and craftiness of women. Monna Sismond's smarts allowed her to avoid being caught having an affair and to steer clear of any trouble thereafter (Boccaccio 528). Another example from *The Decameron* is the story of Madonna Agnesa and Brother Rinaldo. Rinaldo, a priest, aims to Liu 2 charm his neighbour's wife through a convoluted plan of befriending several other characters in order to finally meet her (Boccaccio 561-562). The audience is led to believe that Madonna is not only oblivious to Rinaldo's machinations but also unwittingly playing into them as well. She reveals her cunning expertise when she explained to the friar and her husband; as she predicted and outmanoeuvred him in his own ploy. As such, Boccaccio's tales—proven by



Madonna and Monna Sismonda's stories—depict the amount of wit and intelligence that women have over the men of the book.

Marxian Class Theory, as mentioned earlier, explains how the class is predetermined by the amount of property and ownership one has. Women, given the time period, rarely held social or political power, and had their lives governed by the patriarch of their family. In turn, they were required to build resiliency and cunning in order to look out for their own best interests. Scene as lower than men, women would use their assets, such as their sexual prowess and their wit, in order to get what they need or want. Especially with men, the female characters would provoke a sense of coquetry in men to entice them. Take for example, the case of Monna Sismonda, from day seven story eight: she was able to use her beauty and charm to deceive not only her husband, but also her brothers that were incapable of committing acts of adultery, which in turn, allowed her to gain control of the situation, putting herself at or slightly above the status of the other male characters during that time.

Though confined to her social class, Monna Sismonda breaks her barriers and acts out of her class interest to get what she desires: love. There are many stories in *The Decameron* where the main characters plot schemes in order to achieve their happiness. Being stuck in either the “bourgeois” class or “proletariat” class, many characters must act out of their class interest in order to get what they Liu 3 desire—typically love and passion. Boccaccio truly shows that attraction and lust are not confined to one's social class. The Marxian classes only contain society into two groups, leaving little to no room to move up in class. Many characters attempt to break from the standard they are restricted in, in order to fully get what they desire. The presence of Marx's social hierarchy plays a large role in the behavior of characters in *The Decameron*. Whether it is through intelligence or cunning, the protagonists in each story manage to escape the thresholds of their social class, breaking multiple barriers.

AMERICAN PLAGUE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF YELLOW FEVER, THE EPIDEMIC

THAT SHAPED OUR HISTORY

- MOLLY CALDWELL CROSBY

AUTHOR

Molly Caldwell Crosby is the national bestselling author of *Asleep: The Forgotten Epidemic That Remains One of Medicine's Greatest Mysteries* and *The American Plague: The*



Untold Story of Yellow Fever, the Epidemic That Shaped Our History, which has been nominated for several awards. Crosby holds a master's degree in nonfiction and science writing from Johns Hopkins University and previously worked for *National Geographic* magazine, as well as a freelance journalist. She lives in Memphis with her husband, Andrew Crosby, and their two daughters. Her writing has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Health*, and *USA Today*, among others.

Crosby was nominated for the Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers Award, Borders Original Voices Award, and the Southern Independent Booksellers Award in 2006. In 2008, she received the Cynthia Pitcock History Award from St. Mary's School in Memphis, and in 2011, she was given the Germantown Arts Alliance medal for literary arts. She has served as a visiting professor in the Master of Arts program at the University of Memphis and has appeared on C-SPAN Book TV, PBS, The Diane Rehm Show, NPR's *Morning Edition*, John Seigenthaler's *A Word on Words*, and Bloomberg radio, as well as giving book talks at the U.S. Department of Interior, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, the University of Tennessee Medical School, the University of Memphis, and Teach for America.

Molly Caldwell Crosby, a journalist, is a gifted writer: her prose is vivid and captivating. Unfortunately, the story that she relates— focused mainly on how yellow fever nearly obliterated Memphis in 1878 and on how Walter Reed later established that mosquitoes transmitted the disease— has in fact been told repeatedly, and many parts of it have been told too often. Caldwell Crosby has a knack for finding sources of the details that draw in readers; she uses Department of Agriculture records to describe the weather on particular days, for example, and Memphis newspaper advertisements to depict the city's latest fashions. Many historians would do well to emulate her often-creative approach to finding embellishments such as these to set the stage for their works. For the sweep of events, however, Caldwell Crosby relies heavily on secondary sources. Some of these are careful histories; most are not. Her uncritical acceptance of these works leads her to repeat stories that, though oft-told, would be better relegated to myth. The destruction of the Maine did not spark the Spanish-American War; the U.S. government had approached the European powers with its intention to declare war on Spain months before the ship sailed for Havana's harbor. Despite pervasive fears, the U.S. Army in Cuba did not suffer much yellow fever during the war or afterward. It was typhoid that accounted for most of the horrendous wartime losses to disease; malaria, which incapacitated tens of thousands of troops, accounted for much of the rest. And these two examples are drawn from just chapter 9. The book ends up echoing the errors, exaggerations, and self-serving statements of a century's memoir



writers, glamorizers, and amateur historians. The book also repeats a pernicious theme common to the recent spate of yellow fever books targeting a mass audience. Although acknowledging the factors that lead contemporary public health experts to believe that the likelihood of a major urban epidemic of yellow fever in the United States is quite small—air conditioning, insect repellent, and knowledge of how the disease is transmitted—the book ends on an alarmist note. The *Aedes aegypti* thrives in large swaths of the United States, and few people are vaccinated; globalization has brought the distant jungle strongholds of the disease nearby, and terrorists just might use yellow fever as a weapon. A massive epidemic could happen at any time. The many very real implications of the history of yellow fever for today, from how a single disaster can dramatically reshape a city to how disease and public health reflect asymmetries in international power, if mentioned at all, are lost in the sensationalism. *The American Plague* is beautifully written, but by neglecting to problematize the story of yellow fever, it fails to reveal the many complex ways that the disease shaped history.

THE NIGHT SOIL MEN: THE GHOST MAP

- STEVEN JOHNSON

AUTHOR

Steven Johnson was born on June 6, 1968. He is an American popular science author and media theorist. And he is the best-selling author of four books on the intersection of science, technology and personal experience. His writings have influenced everything from the way political campaigns use the Internet, to cutting-edge ideas in urban planning, to the battle against 21st-century terrorism. His latest work, the national bestseller *Everything Bad Is Good For You*, was one of the most talked about books of 2005. Steven argues that the popular culture we love to hate—TV, movies, video games—are getting better and are making us (and our children) smarter. In addition to his books, Steven is a contributing editor for *Wired* magazine and a monthly columnist for *Discover* magazine. He is a Distinguished Writer In Residence at the New York University Department of Journalism. He lectures widely on technological, scientific, and cultural issues, both to corporate and education institutions.

His *Where Good Ideas Come From* was a finalist for the 800CEOREad award for best business book of 2010, and was ranked as one of the year's best books by *The Economist*. His book *The Ghost Map* was one of the ten best nonfiction books of 2006 according



to *Entertainment Weekly*, and was runner up for the National Academies Communication Award in 2006. His books have been translated into more than a dozen languages. He was the 2009 Hearst new media professional-in-residence at Columbia Journalism School, and served for several years as a distinguished writer in residence at New York University's Journalism School. He won a Newhouse School Mirror Award for his 2009 *TIME* magazine cover article “How Twitter Will Change the Way We Live”. He has appeared on television programs such as *The Colbert Report*, *The Charlie Rose Show*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*.

In 1854, London was full of scavengers: working-class people who survived by going through trash. At night, “toshers” could be seen waving lanterns on the banks of the Thames, searching for anything they might be able to use. Meanwhile, “pure-finders” made their living collecting dog excrement, while bone-pickers picked the meat off of thrown-away carcasses. In short, “the scavengers lived in a world of excrement and death.” In London, the richest city in the world, an entire class of poor scavengers had emerged. There was a vast underground market for refuse, for which there were full-time merchants and expert appraisers. In a way, the scavengers of 19th century London were some of the most important people in the city: they performed the crucial civic function of getting rid of trash (and, in fact, recycling it). Few people realize that recycling is an ancient practice—even the ancient Greeks had composting pits. In the Middle Ages, farmers recycled waste of all kinds to nourish their soil. In nature, waste recycling is “a crucial attribute of diverse ecosystems.” Microbes do most of nature’s recycling work, decomposing waste into its molecular components. It’s likely that, if the bacteria responsible for natural recycling disappeared overnight, “all life on the planet would be extinguished.” But although microbes can play a vital role in preserving life, they played the opposite role in 1854: indeed, they threatened to wipe out London’s human population.

Like every socioeconomic class, London’s scavengers had their own system of rank and privilege. City landlords paid “night-soil men”—i.e., people who harvested excrement—a good wage. As London grew (eventually becoming the biggest city in Europe), night-soil men began earning higher wages, since it took hours for them to travel to the edges of the city to dump the excrement. In the middle of the 19th century, the modern water closet (i.e., toilet) was patented; as a result, the average Londoner used more water than ever before. London’s plumbing system wasn’t equipped to deal with the additional water and excrement, meaning that sewers often



overflowed. Altogether, the practices of night-soil men, the popularization of the W.C., and population growth meant that London was filthier than ever before.

As London grew bigger, the city experienced “a surge in corpses.” Often, the dead bodies of the poor were buried in mass graves—a sight that inspired the author Charles Dickens to write that, in London, “civilization and barbarism walked this boastful island together.” Dickens’s point was that the growth of civilization hinged upon filth and misery. Around the same time, the political philosopher Karl Marx was living in London; Marx’s impressions of the city’s decay inspired his theory of Communism. At the time, Londoners believed that dead bodies and bad smells spread disease—a belief that turned out to be completely false. In Soho Field, for example, there had once been a mass burial of plague victims. For years after the burial, few dared live in Soho; however, beginning in the late 18th century, Soho suddenly became one of the “hippest” parts of London, and a magnet for artists, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals. By the 1850s, Soho was also one of London’s most densely populated neighborhoods. Soho’s streets were narrow and cramped—indeed, they’d been designed this way, by urban planners who’d intended for Soho to be a working-class neighborhood. During an outbreak of the disease in 1843, wealthy Londoners claimed that the disease was killing a disproportionate number of poor people because the poor were immoral or debauched—but in reality, the disease spread more rapidly through the dense, cramped neighborhoods where the poor lived.

In the 1840s, a London police officer named Thomas Lewis was living on Broad Street, near the heart of Soho, with his wife, Sarah Lewis, and his young, sickly child. The child died after ten months; then, in 1854, Sarah gave birth to a baby girl. On August 28, 1854, around six a.m., baby Lewis began vomiting and excreting. Sarah took her baby’s soiled diapers and threw them in the cesspool in her basement.

UNIT III – SHORT STORIES

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

- EDGAR ALLEN POE

AUTHOR

Edgar Allan Poe (January 19, 1809 – October 7, 1849) was an American writer, poet, editor, and literary critic. Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. He is widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the



United States, and of American literature. Poe was one of the country's earliest practitioners of the short story, and considered to be the inventor of the detective fiction genre, as well as a significant contributor to the emerging genre of science fiction. Poe is the first well-known American writer to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career. Poe and his works influenced literature around the world, as well as specialized fields such as cosmology and cryptography. He and his work appear throughout popular culture in literature, music, films, and television. A number of his homes are dedicated museums. The Mystery Writers of America present an annual award known as the Edgar Award for distinguished work in the mystery genre.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story opens with the account of the plague in a fictional country. A disease named Red Death plagues the whole country. The victims of the disease quickly die in a horrible state. Even though the disease is quickly spreading in the country, Prince Prospero does not appear to be worried about it. He orders to lock the gates of the palace so no disease could enter the palace, and ignores that his people are dying of the disease.

After some months, Prince Prospero throws a masquerade party along with some other wealthy aristocrats. For the party, he decorates the seven rooms of his palace in seven different colours. He decorates the easternmost room in blue with blue windows. The other room is decorated in purple colour with purple windows. Moving towards the westward, the rooms are decorated in the colour order are green, orange, white, and violet.

The seventh room is painted in black with red windows. In this room, there is an ebony clock. The clock rings each, and the sound of the clock is so loud and distracting that everyone stops talking; even the orchestra stops playing. They appear to be so beautiful and filled with dreams when the clock is not ringing. Most of the guests avoid going into the black-and-red room as it contains the clock and has an ominous atmosphere.

A new guest appears at midnight. He is dressed more chillingly and darkly than the other. His mask appears to be the face of the corpse and wears a garment resembling the funeral shroud. His face has spots of blood that suggests that he has been a victim of the Red Death. The sight of the new guest makes Prospero angry. He is amused about how someone can join the party with such low humour and levity. However, the other guests are so afraid of the masked



man and cannot prevent him from going into the rooms. Prosper, eventually, catches the guest in the black-and-red room. Prosper dies as soon as he meets/confronts the figure. When other people at the party go inside the room to attack the masked man, they find that there is nobody in the costume. Everyone at the party dies and the Red Death has crept into the castle. There is a victory of “Darkness and Decay and the Red Death.”

ANALYSIS

Prince Prospero is the central character of the story and the prince of the country where the story is set. Prince Prospero symbolizes prosperity or wealth, as reflected in his name “Prospero”, which resembles the word “prosperity”, and in his ability to build a luxurious castle and support one thousand of his friends and hundreds of servants there. The Red Death is described both as a terrible plague that is ravaging the country, as well as a genderless figure that brings the plague and appears mysteriously at Prince Prospero’s ball. The Red Death symbolizes death, as reflected in its name, its lack of tangible form, its unexpected arrival, and its action of inflicting pain and fear on everyone without exception.

The revellers are Prince Prospero’s friends, servants and entertainers who take part in Prince Prospero’s party. The revellers symbolize human feelings, as reflected in their attitudes toward major characters and events. Their act of hiding in the abbey to escape the plague reflects the desire for security, their revelry reflects the desire for pleasure, and their fear of the clock’s chimes and the mysterious figure in the ball reflects human’s ever-present fear.

The chambers are the rooms that form the imperial suite in Prince Prospero’s castle. There are seven chambers arranged from the East to the West, namely the blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, and black chambers. The chambers symbolize life progression, as reflected in the colours of the chambers, which represent each stage of life, namely birth, toddler, childhood, teen years, middle years, senior years, and death. It is also reflected in the location of the chambers, which is parallel with the sun’s movement, so the East marks the beginning and the West marks the end of one’s life.

The clock is an object located in the black chamber, which chimes loudly every hour. The clock symbolizes human’s limited time, as reflected in its repetition every hour, which reflects the reminder about human’s limited time, the revellers’ disconcert at its hourly chime, which reflects human’s reluctance to be reminded of their approaching death, as well as its appearance



during important moments, such as the Red Death's appearance at the clock's twelve chimes at midnight and the clock's breakdown along with the revellers' death, which reflect the end of human's time.

The story "The Masque of the Red Death", consists of the allegory of human life and death and the allegory of humans' powerlessness to evade death. The allegory of human life and death is presented in two levels of meaning, literal and allegorical. At the literal level of the story, the characters move from the first chamber to the last chamber, which corresponds with the allegorical level, in which humans make a journey from birth to death. On the literal level, the revellers avoid the black chamber, which corresponds with the allegorical level, in which humans avoid any discussion or thought related to death. In the literal level, the revellers are disconcerted at the clock's chimes, which correspond with the allegorical level, in which humans do not like to be reminded of their limited remaining lifetime. In the literal level, the clock's hourly chimes can be heard from every chamber, which corresponds with the allegorical level, in which humans are constantly reminded of their limited time in every stage of life. In the literal level, Prince Prospero and the revellers still approach the black chamber despite their disconcert and fear, which corresponds with the allegorical level, in which humans inevitably approach death despite their disconcert and fear.

The allegory of humans' powerlessness to evade death is presented in two levels of meaning, literal and allegorical. In the literal level of the story, Prince Prospero and the revellers try to escape the Red Death using their resources and advantages, which corresponds with the allegorical level, in which humans often try to avoid death or the natural progress of life through wealth, technology, science, and soon. In the literal level, Prince Prospero and the revelers still cannot defeat the Red Death despite their advantage in various aspects, which corresponds with the allegorical level, in which nobody can escape death, no matter how rich, powerful, beautiful, or intelligent he or she is.

The symbols and allegory can be considered as the prominent literary devices in this story. Even so, they are inseparable from the other elements of the story, such as characters, setting, plot, and conflict. The theme can be revealed from detailed examination of the elements of the story, namely the characters, setting, plot, and conflict, which are contained in the literary devices of the story, namely the symbols and allegory, as well as the interaction between those elements and the literary devices.



The symbols in this story are strongly related to the elements of characters and setting. The characters, namely Prince Prospero, the Red Death figure, and the revellers, are embedded in three of the symbols. The setting, namely a castellated abbey that contains seven chambers with a clock in one of the chambers, is also embedded in two of the symbols. The allegory in this story is strongly related to the elements of plot and conflict. The events in the plot are embedded in the allegory: the characters' attempt to isolate themselves reveals human's effort to avoid and fight against death, the characters' behaviours at the ball reveal human's fear of death, while Red Death's appearance and the characters' defeat reveal human's powerlessness in front of death. This conflict is embedded in the allegory: the conflict between Prince Prospero and the Red Death reveals the conflict between human arrogance and death.

Together, the symbols and allegory reveal the theme of the story. The symbols provide the main concepts for the theme, namely the concepts of death, life, time, humans, and wealth. From those concepts, Death is chosen as the most dominant concept. The allegory assigns the nature or quality to the concept above. Death can be described in many ways, but the biggest emphasis is on the inevitable and indiscriminate nature of death. Inevitable means that cannot be avoided or evaded, it has shown from the concept of death that death comes unexpectedly without warning and nobody can escape death. This conclusion emerges from the evidence that although Prince Prospero isolates themselves and his thousand friends in his castle, which has a strong and lofty girdled wall they still cannot avoid themselves from the Red Death. Meanwhile, indiscriminate means without exception, it is shown from the concept of death that death comes to everyone, no matter how rich they, how powerful they are or how poor and how weak they are. This conclusion emerges from the evidence that no matter how rich Prince Prospero is, how many friends he has, how secure and beautiful the castle is, how good and delicious the food and drink are, or how attractive the entertainment is, none of the characters in the story can escape the Red Death as same as the poor peasant alike, that they are all ending with the death. From the pieces of evidence above, it can be concluded that no human has the power to escape death. When the day comes, death occurs to us regardless of who or what we are.



THEMES

DEATH AS NATURAL AND INEVITABLE

In the short story “The Masque of the Red Death,” the image of the Red Death is used to cast horror in the story and shows death as a villain. However, death is also shown as a natural and inevitable part of life. The Red Death is connected to life by blood as blood is the vital component of the body and the Avatar of the disease. It is impossible for life to exist without blood.

The connection between life and death is emphasized by the arrival of death at midnight. Since midnight ends the previous day, it also starts the new day. Death is also the end of physical life and the beginning of spiritual life after death. Death not only has “illimitable dominion,” it is natural as well, and nobody can avoid it no matter how much one tries to avoid it.

THE RED DEATH AS A MORAL DECAY

The privileged class of people is shown in the story in the character of Prince Prospero and his friends. Such people try to avoid plague/death by using money. However, the true nature of the disease is not mentioned in the story. Blood is mentioned, and the “Avatar and seal” of the Red Death. This statement carries a dual meaning. The blood can be taken in a literal sense of it can be a reference to the bloodlines.

In the short story, the abandonment of the poor common people and living a hedonistic lifestyle makes the nobility immoral. The ending of the story can be taken as a sort of divine judgment. And the gruesome demise of Prospero and his friends can be attributed to their arrogance.

MORTALITY

As shown by the title, the short story “The Masque of the Red Death” is about death. Everywhere in the story, we see that there is death. The story opens with the description of the Red Death and closes with the dominance of death. The story is filled with images and symbols of death, which consistently reminds the characters and reads that death cannot be avoided. The characters struggle to avoid death by ignoring and escaping. They preferred to focus on living life to its fullest. However, it is not possible to avoid mortality. They are reminded of the death when the Red Death crashes the party.



THE MORAL VIROLOGIST

- GREG EGAN

AUTHOR

Greg Egan (born 20 August 1961) is an Australian science fiction writer and amateur mathematician, best known for his works of hard science fiction. Egan holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics from the University of Western Australia. He published his first work in 1983. He specialises in hard science fiction stories with mathematical and quantum ontology themes, including the nature of consciousness. Other themes include genetics, simulated reality, posthumanism, mind uploading, sexuality, artificial intelligence, and the superiority of rational naturalism to religion. He often deals with complex technical material, like new physics and epistemology. He is a Hugo Award winner (with eight other works shortlisted for the Hugos) and has also won the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for Best Science Fiction Novel. His early stories feature strong elements of supernatural horror. Egan's short stories have been published in a variety of genre magazines, including regular appearances in *Interzone* and *Asimov's Science Fiction*. Egan has won multiple awards including the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, the Hugo Award, and the Locus Award.

Out on the street, in the dazzling sunshine of a warm Atlanta morning, a dozen young children were playing. Chasing, wrestling, and hugging each other, laughing and yelling, crazy and jubilant for no other reason than being alive on such a day. Inside the gleaming white building, though, behind double-glazed windows, the air was slightly chilly — the way John Shawcross preferred it — and nothing could be heard but the air conditioning, and a faint electrical hum.

The schematic of the protein molecule trembled very slightly. Shawcross grinned, already certain of success. As the pH displayed in the screen's top left crossed the critical value — the point at which, according to his calculations, the energy of conformation B should drop below that of conformation A — the protein suddenly convulsed and turned completely inside-out. It was exactly as he had predicted, and his binding studies had added strong support, but to *see* the transformation, (however complex the algorithms that had led from reality to screen), was naturally the most satisfying proof.



He replayed the event, backwards and forwards several times, utterly captivated. This marvellous device would easily be worth the eight hundred thousand he'd paid for it. The salesperson had provided several impressive demonstrations, of course, but this was the first time Shawcross had used the machine for his own work. Images of proteins *in solution!* Normal X-ray diffraction could only work with crystalline samples, in which a molecule's configuration often bore little resemblance to its aqueous, biologically relevant, form. An ultrasonically stimulated semi-ordered liquid phase was the key, not to mention some major breakthroughs in computing; Shawcross couldn't follow all the details, but that was no impediment to using the machine. He charitably wished upon the inventor Nobel Prizes in chemistry, physics and medicine, viewed the stunning results of his experiment once again, then stretched, rose to his feet, and went out in search of lunch.

On his way to the delicatessen, he passed *that* bookshop, as always. A lurid new poster in the window caught his eye, a naked young man stretched out on a bed in a state of postcoital languor, one corner of the sheet only just concealing his groin. Emblazoned across the top of the poster, in imitation of a glowing red neon sign, was the book's title: *A Hot Night's Safe Sex*. Shawcross shook his head in anger and disbelief. What was wrong with people? Hadn't they read his advertisement? Were they blind? Stupid? Arrogant? Safety lay *only* in the obedience of God's laws.

After eating, he called in at a newsagent that carried several foreign papers. The previous Saturday's editions had arrived, and his advertisement was in all of them, where necessary translated into the appropriate languages. Half a page in a major newspaper was not cheap anywhere in the world, but then, money had never been a problem.

ADULTERERS! SODOMITES!
REPENT AND BE SAVED!
ABANDON YOUR WICKEDNESS *NOW*
OR DIE AND BURN FOREVER!

He couldn't have put it more plainly, could he? Nobody could claim that they hadn't been warned.

In 1981, Matthew Shawcross bought a tiny, run-down cable TV station in the Bible belt, which until then had split its air time between scratchy black-and-white film clips of fifties gospel singers, and local novelty acts such as snake handlers (protected by their faith, not to mention the removal of their pets' venom glands) and epileptic children (encouraged by their



parents' prayers, and a carefully timed withdrawal of medication, to let the spirit move them). Matthew Shawcross dragged the station into the nineteen eighties, spending a fortune on a thirty-second computer-animated station ID (a fleet of pirouetting, crenelated spaceships firing crucifix-shaped missiles into a relief map of the USA, chiselling out the station logo of Liberty, holding up, not a torch, but a cross), showing the latest, slickest gospel rock video clips, "Christian" soap operas and "Christian" game shows, and, above all, identifying issues — communism, depravity, godlessness in schools — which could serve as the themes for telethons to raise funds to expand the station, so that future telethons might be even more successful.

Ten years later, he owned one of the country's biggest cable TV networks.

John Shawcross was at college, on the verge of taking up paleontology, when AIDS first began to make the news in a big way. As the epidemic snowballed, and the spiritual celebrities he most admired (his father included) began proclaiming the disease to be God's will, he found himself increasingly obsessed by it. In an age where the word *miracle* belonged to medicine and science, here was a plague, straight out of the Old Testament, destroying the wicked and sparing the righteous (give or take some haemophiliacs and transfusion recipients), proving to Shawcross beyond any doubt that sinners could be punished in this life, as well as in the next. This was, he decided, valuable in at least two ways: not only would sinners to whom damnation had seemed a remote and unproven threat now have a powerful, worldly reason to reform, but the righteous would be strengthened in their resolve by this unarguable sign of heavenly support and approval.

In short, the mere existence of AIDS made John Shawcross feel *good*, and he gradually became convinced that some kind of personal involvement with HIV, the AIDS virus, would make him feel even better. He lay awake at night, pondering God's mysterious ways, and wondering how he could get in on the act. AIDS research would be aimed at a cure, so how could he possibly justify involving himself with *that*?

Then, in the early hours of one cold morning, he was woken by sounds from the room next to his. Giggling, grunting, and the squeaking of bed springs. He wrapped his pillow around his ears and tried to go back to sleep, but the sounds could not be ignored — nor could the effect they wrought on his own fallible flesh. He masturbated for a while, on the pretext of trying to manually crush his unwanted erection, but stopped short of orgasm, and lay, shivering, in a state of heightened moral perception. It was a different woman every week; he'd seen them leaving in the morning. He'd tried to counsel his fellow student, but had been mocked for his troubles.



Shawcross didn't blame the poor young man; was it any wonder people laughed at the truth, when every movie, every book, every magazine, every rock song, still sanctioned promiscuity and perversion, making them out to be normal and good? The fear of AIDS might have saved millions of sinners, but millions more still ignored it, absurdly convinced that *their* chosen partners could never be infected, or trusting in *condoms* to frustrate the will of God!

The trouble was, vast segments of the population *had*, in spite of their wantonness, remained uninfected, and the use of condoms, according to the studies he'd read, *did* seem to reduce the risk of transmission. These facts disturbed Shawcross a great deal. Why would an omnipotent God create an imperfect tool? Was it a matter of divine mercy? That was possible, he conceded, but it struck him as rather distasteful: sexual Russian roulette was hardly a fitting image of the Lord's capacity for forgiveness.

Or — Shawcross tingled all over as the possibility crystallised in his brain — might AIDS be no more than a mere prophetic shadow, hinting at a future plague a thousand times more terrible? A warning to the wicked to change their ways while they still had time? *An example to the righteous as to how they might do His will?*

Shawcross broke into a sweat. The sinners next door moaned as if already in Hell, the thin dividing wall vibrated, the wind rose up to shake the dark trees and rattle his window. What was this wild idea in his head? A true message from God, or the product of his own imperfect understanding? He needed guidance! He switched on his reading lamp and picked up his Bible from the bedside table. With his eyes closed, he opened the book at random.

He recognised the passage at the very first glance. He ought to have; he'd read it and reread it a hundred times, and knew it almost by heart. *The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.*

At first, he tried to deny his destiny: He was unworthy! A sinner himself! An ignorant child! But everyone was unworthy, everyone was a sinner, everyone was an ignorant child in God's eyes. It was pride, not humility, that spoke against God's choice of him.

By morning, not a trace of doubt remained.

Dropping paleontology was a great relief; defending Creationism with any conviction required a certain, very special, way of thinking, and he had never been quite sure that he could master it. Biochemistry, on the other hand, he mastered with ease (confirmation, if any was needed, that he'd made the right decision). He topped his classes every year, and went on to do a



PhD in Molecular Biology at Harvard, then postdoctoral work at the NIH, and fellowships in Canada and France. He lived for his work, pushing himself mercilessly, but always taking care not to be too conspicuous in his achievements. He published very little, usually as a modest third or fourth co-author, and when at last he flew home from France, nobody in his field knew, or would have much cared, that John Shawcross had returned, ready to begin his real work.

Shawcross worked alone in the gleaming white building that served as both laboratory and home. He couldn't risk taking on employees, no matter how closely their beliefs might have matched his own. He hadn't even let his *parents* in on the secret; he told them he was engaged in theoretical molecular genetics, which was a lie of omission only — and he had no need to beg his father for money week by week, since for tax reasons, twenty-five percent of the Shawcross empire's massive profit was routinely paid into accounts in his name.

His lab was filled with shiny grey boxes, from which ribbon cables snaked to PCs; the latest generation, fully automated, synthesisers and sequencers of DNA, RNA, and proteins (all available off the shelf, to anyone with the money to buy them). Half a dozen robot arms did all the grunt work: pipetting and diluting reagents, labelling tubes, loading and unloading centrifuges.

At first Shawcross spent most of his time working with computers, searching databases for the sequence and structure information that would provide him with starting points, later buying time on a supercomputer to predict the shapes and interactions of molecules as yet unknown.

When aqueous X-ray diffraction became possible, his work sped up by a factor of ten; to synthesise and observe the actual proteins and nucleic acids was now both faster, and more reliable, than the hideously complex process (even with the best short-cuts, approximations and tricks) of solving Schrödinger's equation for a molecule consisting of hundreds of thousands of atoms.

Base by base, gene by gene, the Shawcross virus grew.

As the woman removed the last of her clothes, Shawcross, sitting naked on the motel room's plastic bucket chair, said, "You must have had sexual intercourse with hundreds of men."

"Thousands. Don't you want to come closer, honey? Can you see okay from there?"

"I can see fine."



She lay back, still for a moment with her hands cupping her breasts, then she closed her eyes and began to slide her palms across her torso.

This was the two hundredth occasion on which Shawcross had paid a woman to tempt him. When he had begun the desensitising process five years before, he had found it almost unbearable. Tonight he knew he would sit calmly and watch the woman achieve, or skilfully imitate, orgasm, without experiencing even a flicker of lust himself.

“You take precautions, I suppose.”

She smiled, but kept her eyes closed. “Damn right I do. If a man won’t wear a condom, he can take his business elsewhere. And *I* put it on, he doesn’t do it himself. When I put it on, it stays on. Why, have you changed your mind?”

“No. Just curious.”

Shawcross always paid in full, in advance, for the act he did not perform, and always explained to the woman, very clearly at the start, that at any time he might weaken, he might make the decision to rise from the chair and join her. No mere circumstantial impediment could take any credit for his inaction; nothing but his own free will stood between him and mortal sin.

Tonight, he wondered why he continued. The “temptation” had become a formal ritual, with no doubt whatsoever as to the outcome.

No doubt? Surely that was pride speaking, his wildest and most persistent enemy. *Every* man and woman forever trod the edge of a precipice over the inferno, at risk more than ever of falling to those hungry flames when he or she least believed it possible.

Shawcross stood and walked over to the woman. Without hesitation, he placed one hand on her ankle. She opened her eyes and sat up, regarding him with amusement, then took hold of his wrist and began to drag his hand along her leg, pressing it hard against the warm, smooth skin.

Just above the knee, he began to panic — but it wasn’t until his fingers struck moisture that he pulled free with a strangled mewling sound, and staggered back to the chair, breathless and shaking.

That was more like it.



The Shawcross virus was to be a masterful piece of biological clockwork (the likes of which William Paley could never have imagined — and which no godless evolutionist would dare attribute to the “blind watchmaker” of chance). Its single strand of RNA would describe, not one, but *four* potential organisms.

Shawcross virus A, SVA, the “anonymous” form, would be highly infectious, but utterly benign. It would reproduce within a variety of host cells in the skin and mucous membranes, without causing the least disruption to normal cellular functions. Its protein coat had been designed so that every exposed site mimicked some portion of a *naturally occurring* human protein; the immune system, being necessarily blind to these substances (to avoid attacking the body itself), would be equally blind to the invader.

Small numbers of SVA would make their way into the blood stream, infecting T-lymphocytes, and triggering stage two of the virus’s genetic program. A system of enzymes would make RNA copies of hundreds of genes from every chromosome of the host cell’s DNA, and these copies would then be incorporated into the virus itself. So, the next generation of the virus would carry with it, in effect, *a genetic fingerprint* of the host in which it had come into being.

Shawcross called this second form SVC, the C standing for “customised” (since every individual’s unique genetic profile would give rise to a unique strain of SVC), or “celibate” (because in a celibate person, only SVA and SVC would be present).

SVC would be able to survive only in blood, semen and vaginal fluids. Like SVA, it would be immunologically invisible, but with an added twist: its choice of camouflage would vary wildly from person to person, so that even if its disguise was imperfect, and antibodies to a dozen (or a hundred, or a thousand) *particular* strains could be produced, universal vaccination would remain impossible.

Like SVA, it would not alter the function of its hosts — with one minor exception. When infecting cells in the vaginal mucous membrane, the prostate, or the seminiferous epithelium, it would cause the manufacture and secretion from these cells of several dozen enzymes specifically designed to degrade varieties of rubber. The holes created by a brief exposure would be invisibly small — but from a viral point of view, they’d be enormous.



Upon re-infecting T cells, SVC would be capable of making an “informed decision” as to what the next generation would be. Like SVA, it would create a genetic fingerprint of its host cell. It would then compare this with its stored, ancestral copy. If the two fingerprints were identical — proving that the customised strain had remained within the body in which it had begun — its daughters would be, simply, more SVC.

However, if the fingerprints failed to match, implying that the strain had now crossed into another person’s body, (*and* if gender-specific markers showed that the two hosts were *not* of the same sex), the daughter virus would be a third variety, SVM, containing both fingerprints. The M stood for “monogamous”, or “marriage certificate.” Shawcross, a great romantic, found it almost unbearably sweet to think of two people’s love for each other being expressed in this way, deep down at the subcellular level, and of man and wife, by the very act of making love, signing a contract of faithfulness until death, literally in their own blood.

SVM would be, externally, much like SVC. Of course, when it infected a T cell it would check the host’s fingerprint against *both* stored copies, and if *either* one matched, all would be well, and more SVM would be produced.

Shawcross called the fourth form of the virus SVD. It could arise in two ways; from SVC directly, when the gender markers implied that a homosexual act had taken place, or from SVM, when the detection of a third genetic fingerprint suggested that the molecular marriage contract had been violated.

SVD forced its host cells to secrete enzymes that catalysed the disintegration of vital structural proteins in blood vessel walls. Sufferers from an SVD infection would undergo massive haemorrhaging all over their body. Shawcross had found that mice died within two or three minutes of an injection of pre-infected lymphocytes, and rabbits within five or six minutes; the timing varied slightly, depending on the choice of injection site.

SVD was designed so that its protein coat would degrade in air, or in solutions outside a narrow range of temperature and pH, and its RNA alone was non-infectious. Catching SVD from a dying victim would be almost impossible. Because of the swiftness of death, an adulterer would have no time to infect their innocent spouse; the widow or widower would, of course, be sentenced to celibacy for the rest of their life, but Shawcross did not think this too harsh: it took



two people to make a marriage, he reasoned, and some small share of the blame could always be apportioned to the other partner.

Even assuming that the virus fulfilled its design goals precisely, Shawcross acknowledged a number of complications:

Blood transfusions would become impractical until a foolproof method of killing the virus *in vitro* was found. Five years ago this would have been tragic, but Shawcross was encouraged by the latest work in synthetic and cultured blood components, and had no doubt that his epidemic would cause more funds and manpower to be diverted into the area. Transplants were less easily dealt with, but Shawcross thought them somewhat frivolous anyway, an expensive and rarely justifiable use of scarce resources.

Doctors, nurses, dentists, paramedics, police, undertakers ... well, in fact *everyone*, would have to take extreme precautions to avoid exposure to other people's blood. Shawcross was impressed, though of course not surprised, at God's foresight here: the rarer and less deadly AIDS virus had gone before, encouraging practices verging on the paranoid in dozens of professions, multiplying rubber glove sales by orders of magnitude. Now the overkill would all be justified, since *everyone* would be infected with, at the very least, SVC.

Rape of virgin by virgin would become a sort of biological shot-gun wedding; any other kind would be murder and suicide. The death of the victim would be tragic, of course, but the near-certain death of the rapist would surely be an overwhelming deterrent. Shawcross decided that the crime would virtually disappear.

Homosexual incest between identical twins would escape punishment, since the virus could have no way of telling one from the other. This omission irritated Shawcross, especially since he was unable to find any published statistics that would allow him to judge the prevalence of such abominable behaviour. In the end he decided that this minor flaw would constitute a necessary, token remnant — a kind of moral fossil — of man's inalienable potential to consciously choose evil.

It was in the northern summer of 2000 that the virus was completed, and tested as well as it could be in tissue culture experiments and on laboratory animals. Apart from establishing the fatality of SVD (created by test-tube simulations of human sins of the flesh), rats, mice and rabbits were of little value, because so much of the virus's behaviour was tied up in its



interaction with the human genome. In cultured human cell lines, though, the clockwork all seemed to unwind, exactly as far, and never further, than appropriate to the circumstances; generation after generation of SVA, SVC and SVM remained stable and benign. Of course more experiments could have been done, more time put aside to ponder the consequences, but that would have been the case regardless.

It was time to act. The latest drugs meant that AIDS was now rarely fatal — at least, not to those who could afford the treatment. The third millennium was fast approaching, a symbolic opportunity not to be ignored. Shawcross was doing God’s work; what need did he have for quality control? True, he was an imperfect human instrument in God’s hands, and at every stage of the task he had blundered and failed a dozen times before achieving perfection, but that was in the laboratory, where mistakes could be discovered and rectified easily. Surely God would never permit anything less than an infallible virus, His will made RNA, out into the world.

So Shawcross visited a travel agent, then infected himself with SVA.

Shawcross went west, crossing the Pacific at once, saving his own continent for last. He stuck to large population centres: Tokyo, Beijing, Seoul, Bangkok, Manila, Sydney, New Delhi, Cairo. SVA could survive indefinitely, dormant but potentially infectious, on any surface that wasn’t intentionally sterilised. The seats in a jet, the furniture in a hotel room, aren’t autoclaved too often.

Shawcross didn’t visit prostitutes; it was SVA that he wanted to spread, and SVA was not a venereal disease. Instead, he simply played the tourist, sight-seeing, shopping, catching public transport, swimming in hotel pools. He relaxed at a frantic pace, adopting a schedule of remorseless recreation that, he soon felt, only divine intervention sustained.

Not surprisingly, by the time he reached London he was a wreck, a suntanned zombie in a fading floral shirt, with eyes as glazed as the multicoated lens of his obligatory (if filmless) camera. Tiredness, jet lag, and endless changes of cuisine and surroundings (paradoxically made worse by an underlying, glutinous monotony to be found in food and cities alike), had all worked together to slowly drag him down into a muddy, dreamlike state of mind. He dreamt of airports and hotels and jets, and woke in the same places, unable to distinguish between memories and dreams.



His faith held out through it all, of course, invulnerably axiomatic, but he worried nonetheless. High altitude jet travel meant extra exposure to cosmic rays; could he be certain that the virus's mechanisms for self checking and mutation repair were fail-safe? God would be watching over all the trillions of replications, but still, he would feel better when he was home again, and could test the strain he'd been carrying for any evidence of defects.

Exhausted, he stayed in his hotel room for days, when he should have been out jostling Londoners, not to mention the crowds of international tourists making the best of the end of summer. News of his plague was only now beginning to grow beyond isolated items about mystery deaths; health authorities were investigating, but had had little time to assemble all the data, and were naturally reluctant to make premature announcements. It was too late, anyway; even if Shawcross had been found and quarantined at once, and all national frontiers sealed, people he had infected so far would already have taken SVA to every corner of the globe.

He missed his flight to Dublin. He missed his flight to Ontario. He ate and slept, and dreamt of eating, sleeping and dreaming. *The Times* arrived each morning on his breakfast tray, each day devoting more and more space to proof of his success, but still lacking the special kind of headline he longed for: a black and white acknowledgement of the plague's divine purpose. Experts began declaring that all the signs pointed to a biological weapon run amok, with Libya and Iraq the prime suspects; sources in Israeli intelligence had confirmed that both countries had greatly expanded their research programs in recent years. If any epidemiologist had realised that only adulterers and homosexuals were dying, the idea had not yet filtered through to the press.

Eventually, Shawcross checked out of the hotel. There was no need for him to travel through Canada, the States, or Central and South America; all the news showed that other travellers had long since done his job for him. He booked a flight home, but had nine hours to kill.

"I will do no such thing! Now take your money and get out."

"But —"

"*Straight sex*, it says in the foyer. Can't you read?"

"I don't want sex. I won't touch you. You don't understand. I want you to touch *yourself*."

I only want to be *tempted* —"



“Well, walk down the street with both eyes open, that should be temptation enough.” The woman glared at him, but Shawcross didn’t budge. There was an important principle at stake. “I’ve *paid* you!” he whined.

She dropped the notes on his lap. “And now you have your money back. Good night.”

He climbed to his feet. “God’s going to punish you. You’re going to die a horrible death, blood leaking out of all your veins — ”

“There’ll be blood leaking out of *you* if I have to call the lads to assist you off the premises.”

“Haven’t you read about the plague? Don’t you realise what it is, what it means? It’s God’s punishment for fornicators — ”

“Oh, get out, you blaspheming lunatic.”

“*Blaspheming?*” Shawcross was stunned. “You don’t know who you’re talking to! I’m God’s chosen instrument!”

She scowled at him. “You’re the devil’s own asshole, that’s what you are. Now clear off.”

As Shawcross tried to stare her down, a peculiar dizziness took hold of him. *She was going to die, and he would be responsible.* For several seconds, this simple realisation sat unchallenged in his brain, naked, awful, obscene in its clarity. He waited for the usual chorus of abstractions and rationalisations to rise up and conceal it.

And waited.

Finally he knew that he couldn’t leave the room without doing his best to save her life.

“Listen to me! Take this money and let me talk, that’s all. Let me talk for five minutes, then I’ll go.”

“Talk about what?”

“The plague. *Listen!* I know more about the plague than anyone else on the planet.” The woman mimed disbelief and impatience. “It’s true! I’m an expert virologist, I work for, ah, I work for the Centres for Disease Control, in Atlanta, Georgia. Everything I’m going to tell you will be made public in a couple of days, but I’m telling you *now*, because you’re at risk from this job, and in a couple of days it might be too late.”



He explained, in the simplest language he could manage, the four stages of the virus, the concept of a stored host fingerprint, the fatal consequences if a third person's SVM ever entered her blood. She sat through it all in silence.

"Do you understand what I've said?"

"Sure I do. That doesn't mean I believe it."

He leapt to his feet and shook her. "I'm deadly serious! I'm telling you the absolute truth! God is punishing adulterers! AIDS was just a warning; this time *no* sinner will escape! *No one!*"

She removed his hands. "Your God and my God don't have a lot in common."

"*Your God!*" he spat.

"Oh, and aren't I entitled to one? Excuse me. I thought they'd put it in some United Nations Charter: Everyone's issued with their own God at birth, though if you break Him or lose Him along the way there's no free replacement."

"Now who's blaspheming?"

She shrugged. "Well, my God's still functioning, but yours sounds a bit of a disaster. Mine might not cure all the problems in the world, but at least he doesn't bend over backwards to make them worse."

Shawcross was indignant. "A few people will die. A few sinners, it can't be helped. But think of what the world will be like when *the message finally gets through!* No unfaithfulness, no rape; every marriage lasting until death — "

She grimaced with distaste. "For all the wrong reasons."

"No! It might start out that way. People are weak, they need a reason, a selfish reason, to be good. But given time it will grow to be more than that; a habit, then a tradition, then part of human nature. The virus won't matter any more. People will have *changed.*"

"Well, maybe; if monogamy is inheritable, I suppose natural selection would eventually — "

Shawcross stared at her, wondering if he was losing his mind, then screamed, "*Stop it!* There is *no such thing* as 'natural selection'!" He'd never been lectured on Darwinism in any brothel back home, but then what could he expect in a country run by godless socialists? He calmed down slightly, and added, "I *meant* a change in the spiritual values of the world culture."

The woman shrugged, unmoved by the outburst. "I know you don't give a damn what I think, but I'm going to tell you anyway. *You* are the saddest, most screwed-up man I've set eyes on all week. So, you've chosen a particular moral code to live by; that's your right, and good



luck to you. But you have no real *faith* in what you're doing; you're so uncertain of your choice that you need God to pour down fire and brimstone on everyone who's chosen differently, just to prove to you that you're right. God fails to oblige, so you hunt through the natural disasters — earthquakes, floods, famines, epidemics — winnowing out examples of the 'punishment of sinners.' You think you're proving that God's on your side? All you're proving is your own insecurity."

She glanced at her watch. "Well, your five minutes are long gone, and I never talk theology for free. I've got one last question though, if you don't mind, since you're likely to be the last 'expert virologist' I run into for a while."

"Ask." She was going to die. He'd done his best to save her, and he'd failed. Well, hundreds of thousands would die with her. He had no choice but to accept that; his faith would keep him sane.

"This virus that your God's designed is only supposed to harm adulterers and gays? Right?"

"Yes. Haven't you listened? That's the whole point! The mechanism is ingenious, the DNA fingerprint — "

She spoke very slowly, opening her mouth extra wide, as if addressing a deaf or demented person. "Suppose some sweet, monogamous, married couple have sex. Suppose the woman becomes pregnant. The child won't have exactly the same set of genes as either parent. So what happens to it? What happens to the baby?"

Shawcross just stared at her. *What happens to the baby?* His mind was blank. He was tired, he was homesick ... all the pressure, all the worries ... he'd been through an *ordeal* — how could she expect him to think straight, how could she expect him to explain every tiny detail? *What happens to the baby?* What happens to the innocent, newly made child? He struggled to concentrate, to organise his thoughts, but the absolute horror of what she was suggesting tugged at his attention, like a tiny, cold, insistent hand, dragging him, inch by inch, towards madness.

Suddenly, he burst into laughter; he almost wept with relief. He shook his head at the stupid whore, and said, "You can't trick me like that! I thought of *babies* back in '94! At little Joel's christening — he's my cousin's boy." He grinned and shook his head again, giddy with



happiness. “I fixed the problem: I added genes to SVC and SVM, for surface receptors to half a dozen foetal blood proteins; if any of the receptors are activated, the next generation of the virus is *pure SVA*. It’s even safe to breast feed, for about a month, because the foetal proteins take a while to be replaced.”

“For about a month,” echoed the woman. Then, “What do you mean, you *added* genes ... ?”

Shawcross was already bolting from the room.

He ran, aimlessly, until he was breathless and stumbling, then he limped through the streets, clutching his head, ignoring the stares and insults of passersby. A month wasn’t long enough, he’d *known* that all along, but somehow he’d forgotten just what it was he’d intended to *do* about it. There’d been too many details, too many complications.

Already, children would be dying.

He came to a halt in a deserted side street, behind a row of tawdry nightclubs, and slumped to the ground. He sat against a cold brick wall, shivering and hugging himself. Muffled music reached him, thin and distorted.

Where had he gone wrong? Hadn’t he taken his revelation of God’s purpose in creating AIDS to its logical conclusion? Hadn’t he devoted his whole life to perfecting a biological machine able to discern good from evil? If something so hideously complex, so painstakingly contrived as his virus, still couldn’t do the job ...

Waves of blackness moved across his vision.

What if he’d been wrong, from the start?

What if none of his work had been God’s will, after all?

Shawcross contemplated this idea with a shell-shocked kind of tranquillity. It was too late to halt the spread of the virus, but he could go to the authorities and arm them with the details that would otherwise take them years to discover. Once they knew about the foetal protein receptors, a protective drug exploiting that knowledge might be possible in a matter of months.

Such a drug would enable breast feeding, blood transfusions and organ transplants. It would also allow adulterers to copulate, and homosexuals to practise their abominations. It would be utterly morally neutral, the negation of everything he’d lived for. He stared up at the



blank sky, with a growing sense of panic. Could he do that? Tear himself down and start again? He had to! *Children were dying*. Somehow, he had to find the courage.

Then, it happened. Grace was restored. His faith flooded back like a tide of light, banishing his preposterous doubts. How could he have contemplated surrender, when the *real* solution was so obvious, so simple?

He staggered to his feet, then broke into a run again, reciting to himself, over and over, to be sure he'd get it right this time: "ADULTERERS! SODOMITES! MOTHERS BREAST FEEDING INFANTS OVER THE AGE OF FOUR WEEKS! REPENT AND BE SAVED ..."

MY HERO IS YOU

- UNICEF

"My Hero is You" is a book written for children around the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My Hero is You" should be read by a parent, caregiver or teacher alongside a child or a small group of children. It is not encouraged for children to read this book independently without the support of a parent, caregiver or teacher. The supplementary guide called "Actions for Heroes" (to be published later) offers support for addressing topics related to COVID-19, helping children manage feelings and emotions, as well as supplementary activities for children to do based on the book

This book was a project developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings (IASC MHPSS RG). The project was supported by global, regional and country based experts from Member Agencies of the IASC MHPSS RG, in addition to parents, caregivers, teachers, and children in 104 countries. A global survey was distributed in Arabic, English, Italian, French and Spanish to assess children's mental health and psychosocial needs during the COVID-19 outbreak. A framework of topics to be addressed through the story was developed using the survey results. The book was shared through storytelling to children in several countries affected by COVID-19. Feedback from children, parents and caregivers was then used to review and update the story.

Over 1,700 children, parents, caregivers and teachers from around the world took the time to share with us how they were coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. A big thank you to these children, their parents, caregivers and teachers for completing our surveys and influencing



this story. Parents and children from Indonesia also took part in the survey. This is a story developed for and by children around the world.

UNICEF is a member agency of IASC MHPSS RG. In Indonesia, UNICEF Indonesia team worked on the translation, engaging experts and practitioners working with children (child psychologists, child protection specialists, social workers) who themselves are parents. Some engaged their children when reviewing the translations.

UNIT IV – FICTION

THE PLAGUE

- ALBERT CAMUS

AUTHOR

Albert Camus (7 November 1913 – 4 January 1960) was an Algerian-born French philosopher, author, dramatist and journalist. He was awarded the 1957 Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44, the second-youngest recipient in history. His works include *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Fall*, and *The Rebel*. Camus was born in French Algeria to *Pieds Noirs* parents. He spent his childhood in a poor neighbourhood and later studied philosophy at the University of Algiers. He was in Paris when the Germans invaded France during World War II in 1940. Camus tried to flee but finally joined the French Resistance where he served as editor-in-chief at *Combat*, an outlawed newspaper.

After the war, he was a celebrity figure and gave many lectures around the world. He married twice but had many extramarital affairs. Camus was politically active; he was part of the left that opposed the Soviet Union because of its totalitarianism. Camus was a moralist and leaned towards anarcho-syndicalism. He was part of many organisations seeking European integration. During the Algerian War (1954–1962), he kept a neutral stance, advocating for a multicultural and pluralistic Algeria, a position that caused controversy and was rejected by most parties. Philosophically, Camus's views contributed to the rise of the philosophy known as absurdism. Some consider Camus's work to show him to be an existentialist, even though he himself firmly rejected the term throughout his lifetime.



PLOT SUMMARY

The Plague concerns an outbreak of bubonic plague in the French-Algerian port city of Oran, sometime in the 1940s. The first-person narrator is unnamed but mostly follows Dr. Bernard Rieux. Rieux notices the sudden appearance of dying rats around town, and soon thousands of rats are coming out into the open to die. The public grows panicked, and the government finally arranges a daily cremation of rat bodies. Soon after the rat epidemic disappears, M. Michel, the concierge for Dr. Rieux's office building, comes down with a strange fever and dies. More cases appear, and Dr. Rieux and his colleague Dr. Castel believe the disease is bubonic plague. They urge the government to take action, but the authorities drag their feet until the death toll rises so high that the plague is impossible to deny. Finally, they close the gates and quarantine Oran.

The townspeople react to their sudden isolation with feelings of exile and longing for absent loved ones, with each individual assuming that their suffering is unique. Father Paneloux, a Jesuit priest, delivers a sermon declaring that the plague is a divine punishment for Oran's sins. Raymond Rambert, a foreign journalist, tries to escape Oran and rejoin his wife in Paris, but he is held up by the bureaucracy and the unreliability of the criminal underground. He is aided in his attempts by Cottard, a man who committed an unknown crime in the past and has since then lived in constant paranoia. Cottard is the only citizen to welcome the plague, as it reduces the rest of the public to his level of fear and loneliness, and he builds up a small fortune smuggling. Meanwhile Rieux struggles ceaselessly against the plague and is joined by Jean Tarrou, another visitor to Oran, and Joseph Grand, an older municipal clerk who longs for his ex-wife and struggles daily over the first sentence of a book he is trying to write.

Tarrou organizes an anti-plague sanitation league, and many volunteers join to help. Rambert finalizes his escape plan, but when he learns that Dr. Rieux is also separated from his wife (who is ill in a sanatorium) he decides to stay and fight the plague. After several months the public loses the selfishness in their suffering and recognizes the plague as a collective disaster. Everyone grows weary and depressed, and the death toll is so high that the authorities have to cremate the bodies. The young son of M. Othon, the strict local magistrate, comes down with the plague and Rieux and his companions – among them Father Paneloux – watch him suffer and die. Paneloux is shaken by the child's death and he delivers a second sermon, this time declaring



that the horrors of plague leave only the choice to believe everything (about Christianity) or deny everything. Paneloux falls ill and dies soon afterwards, though he does not have the symptoms of the plague.

Tarrou explains to Rieux how he has spent his life opposing the death penalty and “fighting the plague” in its many forms. The two men take a brief break to go swimming and then they go back to work. Grand falls ill with the plague, but then he makes a miraculous recovery. Other patients recover as well, and soon the epidemic is on the retreat, but then Tarrou falls ill. After a long struggle against the disease he dies. The townspeople slowly regain their hope and begin to celebrate. Only Cottard is upset by the end of the plague, and on the day the town’s gates reopen, he goes mad and starts randomly firing a gun into the street until he is arrested. Grand writes a letter to his ex-wife and resumes work on his book. Rambert’s wife joins him in Oran, but Dr. Rieux learns that his wife has died at the sanatorium. The townspeople quickly return to their normal lives, trying to pretend nothing has changed. Dr. Rieux reveals himself as the narrator of the chronicle, which he wrote as a testament to the victims of the plague and the struggles of the workers. He knows the victory over the plague is only temporary, as the bacillus microbe can lie dormant for years.

ANALYSIS

In many literary works, a character’s physical disease or illness also metaphorically references various universal characteristics of the human condition—death, religion, politics and relationships—as they are interwoven amidst healthy and unhealthy bodies. In the case of Albert Camus’ *The Plague*, the epidemic of bubonic plague in the Algerian port city of Oran is considered an allegory for the German occupation of France from 1940 to 1944. The highly infectious disease disrupts citizens’ lives in real-time, with consequences that further manifest throughout the world to varying degrees and in varying timeframes thereafter. This paper attempts to explore Camus’s metaphoric connotations of “the plague” within these social, cultural and historical narratives. In *The Plague*, society is struck by disease as a result of war, and the people fighting in the battlefield-like space/environment of illness are compared to those who were part of the collective infection of the so-called Black Death in the fourteenth century. All of the characters become infected and feel powerless and destined for death, even while diligently combating the general pandemic and their individual ailments, realizing that all human beings eventually die. No matter when and how the pestilence occurs in the city of Oran in



Camus's *The Plague*, the intersections between healthy and diseased bodies must be reconsidered and readjusted.

Just as sudden, natural calamities often catch people off guard, so, too, does a patient diagnosed with a fatal malady find the situation unthinkable and unacceptable, because to confront the truth of getting a disease likely also means confronting one's mortality. For the residents of Oran of *The Plague*, the outbreak is an "unwelcome visitant, bound to take its leave one day as unexpectedly as it had come" (98). Sontag has said that "as death is now an offensively meaningless event so that disease widely considered a synonym for death is experienced as something to hide" (8). Our ultimate disposition—death—thus becomes our deepest dread. Still, to come to terms with death is imperative for those who are ill, like cancer patients who must accommodate hearing both the truth and lies from others: "all this lying to and by cancer patients is a measure of how much harder it has become in advanced industrial societies to come to terms with death (Sontag 8)". In *Illness as Metaphor*, Sontag also points out that a disease sometimes will be compared to a death sentence, because "it is felt to be obscene—in the original meaning of that word: ill-omened, abominable, repugnant to the senses" (9).

The Nobel Prize winner and French novelist Albert Camus in his novel, *The Plague* delineates the plague, already well known over the course of human history. The absurdity of unexplained and sudden tsunami of death symbolizes all of the other similarly dark and incomprehensible aspects of life. People are caught off guard, with virtually no time to respond. The epidemic thus is used to articulate and test human attitudes toward disease and death, and to create out of violent destruction a collective vigilance in thereafter handling emergent events.

"In the past, such grandiloquent fantasies were regularly attached to the epidemic diseases, diseases that were a collective calamity" (Sontag 58); here, Sontag also points out one kind of narrative: "the diseases most often used as metaphors for evil were syphilis, tuberculosis, and cancer—all diseases imagined to be, pre-eminently, the diseases of individuals" (58–59). One of the reasons that disease can be used as a metaphor for disaster is that it not only is a profoundly negative experience that weakens and restricts the individual, but it also introduces divisiveness within the affected groups, especially those who educate the sick on how to face loneliness and death. An example is Dr. Rieux in *The Plague*, whose demeanour seems indifferent but who worries grievously in his heart: "Rieux had nothing to look forward to but a long sequence of such scenes, renewed again and again" (95). The people of Oran cannot help



but consider the plague as “abstraction, [that] was monotonous; perhaps only one factor changed” (Camus 95). When disease comes to represent a fear of disaster on the part of the majority of people in Oran, they want to hide, suggesting that the epidemic as a metaphor for calamity and fear has never fully disappeared from human consciousness. The unique tasks associated with the treatment of disease, however, become uniquely terrifying, as noted by the narrator in *The Plague*:

What is more exceptional in our town is the difficulty one may experience there in dying. “Difficulty,” perhaps, is not the right word; “discomfort” would come nearer. Being ill is never agreeable, but there are towns that stand by you, so to speak, when you are sick; in which you can, after a fashion, let yourself go. (12)

The readers are educated by stories or influenced by the ideology a novelist weaves between the lines of text, and that reality can be fully expressed through language, readers are mostly aware of the nuances between characters in novels as opposed to ordinary people in real life. The disease narrative describes the life of the illness, affirming the victims’ hopelessness and helplessness in reality, just as social, cultural and political realities are simultaneously represented symbolically by novelists. For instance, in *The Plague*, unscrupulous politicians exploit people for personal gain during the height of the illness, but people’s first reaction “was to abuse the authorities” (82). Although ordinary people bravely sought to defend themselves, they ultimately realize they are helpless and utterly at the mercy of others. At that point, the characters are forced to re-examine the meaning of their own individual existence and that of groups, and ask, which is more important? On the other hand, diseases are interpreted as being under the control of the prevailing social power discourse, which often labels those suffering from infectious diseases as evil and sinful, further isolating the sick from the critical framework of the dominant cultural force:

Nobody as yet had really acknowledged to himself what the disease connoted. Most people were chiefly aware of what ruffled the normal tenor of their lives or affected their interests. They were worried and irritated—but these are not feelings with which to confront plague. (Camus 82)

Camus’s *The Plague* chronicles the ravages of disease in the Algerian port city of Oran. The residents are slow to recognize that they face mortal danger: “The word ‘plague’ had just been



uttered for the first time... yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise” (*The Plague* 43). According to Patrick Henry’s *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France During the Holocaust*, Camus calls *The Plague* a “chronicle” rather than a novel because it literally tells the story of a pandemic disease taking place in the 1940s in France (setting in 1948, three years after the end of World War II), that contributes “physical, social, and metaphysical significance” (114). Henry calls it an “allegorical portrayal of the human condition, stressed in a series of explicit statements carefully placed throughout the text” (Henry, 114), and that “at each of these levels, Camus succeeds in depicting the themes of separation, exile, and isolation as central” (114). He also delineates the concept of “imprisonment” in this allegorical narrative (Henry, 114).

The residents of Oran find themselves living like captives (or exiles) as they suffer the most severe physical pain, eventually merely existing along with their useless memories of the remote past, memories that are steeped in regret and provoke regret over unfinished business. They hopelessly anticipate the end of the pestilence, hoping to make up for those regrets in the near future: “Nevertheless, many continued hoping that the epidemic would soon die out and they and their families are spared” (98). For some, the sense of isolation becomes a feeling of full-blown expatriation. The narrator of *The Plague*, sighing, says that “thus the first thing that plague brought to our town was exile” (76) and “it was undoubtedly the feeling of exile—that sensation of a void within which never left us, that irrational longing to hark back to the past or else to speed up the march of time, and those keen shafts of memory that stung like fire” (76). The epidemic becomes a prison that imposes limitations and restraints, causing all those affected to yearn to relive their memories or to move ahead to a time when the epidemic was behind them and new memories could be created.

The first narrative point of view comes from a hospital physician, Dr. Bernard Rieux, who is described by Tarrou as about thirty-five years old and of moderate height, with broad shoulders, dark skin, and close-cropped, black hair (37). As the narrator, Dr. Rieux cannot take into account the various points of view; his prestigious position does not confer upon him the narrative gifts of omniscience and omnipotence. Still, he is the first to treat the first victim and to describe the outbreak as a plague. The danger he faces at the beginning of the novel seems unreal to him, and he feels uneasy about warning the authorities because he does not yet recognize the gravity of the situation. Soon, however, it seems likely that the epidemic could kill half the



town's population within a couple of months. Dr. Rieux then focuses on relieving human suffering solely in fulfilment of his obligation as a medical professional; he never obtains a belief in God or views medical treatments as having religious connotations like Father Paneloux, "a learned and militant Jesuit" priest in Oran (*The Plague*, 24). Paneloux believes that even the most terrible suffering works ultimately for good (from Romans 8:28) because the whip of God always makes arrogant and blind people fall at His feet: "the scourge of God has humbled the proud of heart and laid low those who hardened themselves against Him" (99). In short, all humankind would do well to give in to their miseries. Even though Dr. Rieux as a narrator (Note 10) cannot explain all the phenomena occurring around him, he is a practical and direct man who declares the objective truth of what he observes and how events intimately affect the entire population, with "thousands of eyewitnesses who can appraise in their hearts the truth of what he writes (*The Plague*, 13)."

In times of calamity, survival, deformity, disability, illness and death provoke the majority of people to recognize the oppression and threats they have long faced and the atmosphere of exile they live in, leading most to turn to religion. In Camus's *The Plague*, people are infected with physical and psychological diseases because they have great fear and self-righteous ignorance of the things in the world. Camus here juxtaposes the absurdity of war with the helplessness of being enslaved by disease, one that torments individuals until it grows into a collective infection. The residents in Oran initially go on with their lives, as usual, ignoring the gnawing reality that "no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences" (Camus 44). By extension, the larger implication is that the plague is never far from the lives of any human being. Camus, who was part of the Nazi resistance in the Second World War, uses the disease and plague as metaphors for war, referring to the ultimate repetitiveness and preposterousness of history—to resist disasters or illnesses further underscores their absurdity.

Over time, the residents of Oran learn how to ignore the terrifying physical and psychological confines of their existence. From the religious point of view, the characters are able to overcome their fear of death (especially such a torturous death) when the epidemic is at its zenith: "At the height of the epidemic, we saw only one case in which natural emotions overcame the fear of death in a particularly painful form" (Camus 75). All people must confront the end of their life on earth, but many continue to question why God allows innocent people to be tortured by suffering unto death. In this way, Father Paneloux's attitude can be seen as



reflecting the message of the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament (Note 11). Disasters are a form of God's wrath toward those who are disobedient, but good people suffer, too: "The just man need have no fear, but the evildoer has good cause to tremble" (Camus 100). In the face of the plague, people of all ages, men and women, rich and poor, are vulnerable. A virtuous life provides no protection. Rieux seems to realize the cruelty inherent in a natural order that seems to be controlled by the constant threat of death: In short, they were waiting for the turn of events. With regard to religion - like too many other problems - plague had induced in them a curious frame of mind, as remote from indifference as from fervour; the best name to give it, perhaps, might be "objectivity." (Camus 98)

Jean Tarrou, Rieux's best friend and one of the epidemic's last victims, keeps a diary with his observations of life in Oran, and the narrator Rieux incorporates Tarrou's notes into his narrative: "in those chaotic times he [Tarrou] set himself to recording the history of what the normal historian passes over" (Camus 30). Tarrou opposes the death penalty even though his father is a lawyer, an attitude representative of most of the residents in Oran at the time: "Tarrou had to admit he had no inside knowledge on the matter; his personal theory was that after the upheaval caused by the epidemic, there would be some delay in getting these services underway again (Camus 280)." Before the epidemic subsided, Tarrou organized a volunteer team against it, and he puts up a heroic struggle as he awaits his own death at the end of the chronicle. Malaise turns into stark terror and hopelessness, and becoming accustomed to the looming despair is worse than the experience of despair itself. The disease causes people to renew their attention to the struggle between healthy and abnormal, sickly bodies.

The plague here clearly refers to German Nazism, the German state between 1933 and 1945. Camus indicates allegorically that everyone recognizes the violent nature of Nazism as an epidemic, but not many people are willing to recognize it clearly, let alone resist it effectively. Once the residents of Oran suffer from the epidemic, they no longer care about the things of the world. After a large proportion of Oran's population is killed by the pestilence, the survivors gradually give up their ability to choose and let any love they retain be replaced by blind attachments or material goods. As their fear of succumbing worsens, they squander their lives absurdly, buying all kinds of luxuries at exorbitant prices, dressing far beyond what is typical for attending plays and movies, and avoiding others outside these venues in order to prevent infection. The shadow of death looms over everyone: judge and porter, priest and apostate, adult



and child. Since death is an equalizer, any superficial inequalities also become equalizers. Disease narratives and their cultural metaphors in contemporary novels like *The Plague* refer to the orderly management of disease or medical treatments derived from the construction of archives and the formation of subjects of different worlds into the veneer of society. Violence and misery caused by natural calamities and maladies push everyone into exile, as brilliantly illustrated by the spread of plague in Camus's chronicle novel.

THEMES

ABSURDISM

The Plague is essentially a philosophical novel, meaning that it forwards a particular worldview through its plot and characterization. Camus is often considered an existentialist, but the philosophy he most identified with and developed was called absurdism. At its most basic, this philosophy holds that the universe is absurd and meaningless – there is no God or cosmic order – and that humans are doomed to suffer and die. Because of this situation, humans have three options in life: to commit suicide, to make a “leap of faith” and choose to believe in a divine entity or order, or to accept the Absurd and create one's own meaning in life. Camus advocated this third choice, as the first option is a kind of cowardice and the second is a psychological lie that Camus even compared to suicide.

In *The Plague*, the besieged town becomes a microcosm of the universe, and the different characters illustrate different ways humans deal with the Absurd – that is, the plague. Cottard first tries to commit suicide (because of his guilt, another kind of plague) and then works with the epidemic, profiting off of others' suffering. Father Paneloux tries to assign order to the plague (as a punishment from God), but when he is faced with the true nature of the Absurd through watching a child die, Paneloux loses his faith and succumbs to disease himself. The protagonists of the novel, Rieux, Rambert, and Tarrou, live and struggle in the way that Camus advocates. They recognize the Absurd (the power of the plague and their own inevitable doom) but still work ceaselessly against it, finding meaning in healing others.



SUFFERING AND DEATH

In the novel *The Plague*, the bubonic plague is a symbol of many things – the harsh, meaningless universe, the human condition, or war – but all of them mean suffering and death. The people of Oran deal with this meaningless suffering in various ways. At first, they try to ignore or downplay it, and then they see it as a personal antagonist separating them from their loved ones. Some see it as divine punishment or a means to profit, and others eventually give up hope and succumb to what seems inevitable. Jacques, the young son of M. Othon, is the most poignant example of suffering and death in the novel. His torturous death is described in detail, and it ultimately leads Father Paneloux to doubt his faith in God. The novel is bleak and often crushing, as suffering and death loom constantly overhead, but it is through this that Camus reminds us of the potential horror of the human condition, and the need to confront it directly.

EXILE AND IMPRISONMENT

The plague simultaneously exiles and imprisons the town of Oran, and its closed gates leave many citizens separated from their loved ones. Rambert and Rieux are both separated by the quarantine from the women they love, and Rambert, a foreigner, is exiled from his own home as well. Camus also describes the townspeople's feelings of exile as the plague progresses: first everyone wants to speed up time and end the plague, or they work ceaselessly (like Rambert) to escape and rejoin their lost loved one, while later many citizens give up hope or live in fantasies of regret and longing. For others like Tarrou, their exile is a separation from an idea, a sense of happiness, or a peace that Tarrou only finds in his last struggle against death.

The closed gates of Oran also lead to a sense of imprisonment within the town itself. Many critics have compared the plague to war, and the quarantine of Oran to the German occupation of France in WWII. There are many examples of this in the novel, such as the martial law imposed on the town, the mass graves, and Camus' own experiences working for the French Resistance against the Nazis. Like an occupied town, the plague makes Oran a microcosm of Camus' absurd universe. The townspeople all suffer the same epidemic and experience similar kinds of exile and imprisonment, but they still distrust each other and feel alone in their suffering. Only those who accept the plague's power and their own state of exile, but still struggle against it – like Rambert, who finally refuses to escape to his wife if he must escape like a coward – are able to find a personal sense of freedom.



Dr. Bernard Rieux

Dr. Bernard Rieux is the narrator of *The Plague*. He is one of the first people in Oran to urge that stringent sanitation measures be taken to fight the rising epidemic. A staunch humanist and atheist, Dr. Rieux has little patience with the authorities' foot-dragging in response to his call for action. His actions and personality imply that he believes in a personal as well as a social code of ethics. When Oran is placed under quarantine, Dr. Rieux continues to doggedly battle the plague despite the signs that his efforts make little or no difference. Although he is separated from his wife, he does not allow his personal distress to distract him from his battle to relieve the collective social suffering wrought on the confused and terrified population of Oran.

Jean Tarrou

Jean Tarrou is the author of the account that Dr. Rieux uses to give greater texture to his chronicle of the plague. Tarrou is vacationing in Oran when the epidemic requires a total quarantine of the city. As an outsider, his observations on Oran society are more objective than those of a citizen of the city. Tarrou's beliefs about personal and social responsibility are remarkably similar to those of Dr. Rieux, but Tarrou is far more philosophical. He does not believe in God, so he does not believe in the illusion of an intrinsic rational and moral meaning in death, suffering, and human existence. For him, human existence gains meaning only when people choose freely to participate in the losing, but noble struggle against death and suffering. Tarrou contributes to the anti-plague effort in accordance with his code of ethics.

Joseph Grand

Joseph Grand is an elderly civil servant in Oran. When he accepted his job as a young man, he was promised the opportunity for promotion, but, over the years, he never actively pursued it. Therefore, he remained in the same job for decades. His marriage also settled into a daily humdrum. Eventually, Grand's wife Jeanne tired of the monotonous routine and left him. Over the years, Grand has tried to write her a letter, but he suffers from an intense anxiety over finding the "right words" to express himself. This anxiety also hinders his literary pursuit. Grand is trying to write a book, but he wants to create the perfect manuscript, so he has never gotten beyond the opening line.



Raymond Rambert

Raymond Rambert is a journalist from Paris. He comes to Oran to research the sanitary conditions in the Arab population, but the sudden, unexpected total quarantine of Oran traps him in the city. He desperately struggles to find some method of escape from Oran to rejoin his wife in Paris.

Cottard

Cottard is suspicious, paranoid, and mercurial. In the past, he committed a crime that he does not name, so he constantly fears arrest and punishment. When Oran falls under total quarantine, Cottard is happy because he no longer feels alone in his state of constant fear. Moreover, the plague occupies the authorities entirely, so he does not fear arrest. He engages in the profitable smuggling trade during the epidemic and eschews all responsibility to help fight the disease.

Father Paneloux

Father Paneloux is a Jesuit priest in Oran. Early during the epidemic, he delivers a sermon to his confused, frightened congregation declaring that the plague is a God-sent punishment for their sins. As the plague rages on, he modifies this stance, seeing the Plague as a supreme test of faith.

M. Othon

M. Othon is a conservative magistrate in Oran. Because he is a judge, Tarrou considers him “public enemy number one.”

Jacques Othon

Jacques is M. Othon’s small son. After he contracts the plague, he is the first to receive some of Dr. Castel’s plague serum.

Dr. Castel

Castel, an elderly doctor, is the first person to utter “plague” in reference to the strange, fatal illness that appears after all the rats in Oran die. He and Dr. Rieux struggle with the authorities’ denial and foot-dragging when they urge that stringent sanitation measures be taken to combat a possible epidemic.



The asthma patient

Dr. Rieux's asthma patient serves as mouthpiece for the changing whims of Oran society during the prolonged epidemic.

Dr. Richard

Dr. Richard is the chairman of the medical association in Oran. When Rieux and Castel suggest that the strange illness is the bubonic plague, Dr. Richard does not want to believe it. He prefers to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude instead of "alarming the public" with immediate, decisive action.

The Prefect

The Prefect drags his feet when Rieux and Castel urge him to enact stringent sanitation measures to combat a possible epidemic of bubonic plague.

M. Michel

M. Michel is the concierge for the building where Rieux works. He is the first victim of the plague.

BLINDNESS

- JOSE SARAMAGO

AUTHOR

Jose Saramago, the eminent and talented Portuguese writer and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature passed away in 2010 and that was an unbridgeable gap in the literary world. He was 87 years old at that time. He died at his home in the Canary Islands where he moved after a great dispute with the Portuguese Government. He had his own identity as a committed writer and a prophetic spokesperson. Hence, he was honoured in his homeland as a major cultural figure and a talented artist and moreover a committed literary genius. Unfortunately, he made enemies in his literary circle because of his identity as a committed communist and a bracket labelled atheist. We read that he was born into poverty in 1922 in a small village outside Lisbon. His parents were landless peasants who later moved to the city where Saramago had the opportunity to attend school. Eventually, he had to drop out due to lack of money and he switched over to another field of study to become a mechanic. It was also a futile attempt. It is through Margaret Jull Costa's voice we get his worldviews and his attachment with humanity in general. That is why the Prime minister of Portugal talked about him saying that 'his



disappearance has left our culture poorer'. The search for identity is also a psychological one. It occurs due to the multiple identities which are synonymous with human life at present. Every now and then, our identities get transformed and altered because of the multicultural, multi-ethnic, multireligious, multilinguistic and multilateral society where we live in. The quick change in our identities is necessitated by our needs to fit in with the evolving circumstances we are in. Although, such adjustments would lead to our identities being side-lined in the course of time resulting in the inevitable conformity to a nasty uniform or homogenous way of life which goes in tandem with the dominant ideology. Even then, identities that are converged under a well-knit group can pave the way for the emergence of a social framework that is vibrant, lively and consolidated to the core.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with an everyday traffic jam in an unnamed modern city. A car stops, and the man inside starts yelling that he has suddenly gone blind. He refuses an ambulance, but a seemingly kind passer-by offers to drive him home in the man's car. He leaves after dropping the blind man off. The blind man's wife arrives home, and he tells her what has happened. She decides to take him to an eye doctor, but they realize the "kind" man has stolen their car, so they must take a taxi. The doctor can find nothing obviously wrong with the blind man's eyes or sight and says he will need to run more tests later.

The car thief pulls the car over, feeling anxious. He gets out of the car for fresh air and finds that he has gone blind. A policeman takes him home, unaware that the thief has just stolen a car. Meanwhile, the doctor who examined the blind man attempts to do more research. That evening, while reading in his library, he realizes he cannot see his hand and has also gone blind. However, he doesn't panic and pretends to sleep next to his wife as normal. In the morning he tells her about his affliction. He begins to worry that the white blindness is contagious. At the same time, a woman wearing dark glasses who had visited the doctor earlier goes blind while in a hotel.

The doctor calls the Ministry of Health and deals with a skeptical clerk who hangs up on him. He finally calls the medical director of his own hospital to debate how they should proceed in the event of an epidemic. The director informs the doctor that a boy has also gone blind after visiting the doctor. After more cases of blindness are reported, the Ministry has an ambulance



fetch the doctor. When it arrives, the doctor's wife escorts him and announces that she has just gone blind.

The Minister of Health declares that anyone who is affected by white blindness or who has come into contact with an afflicted person will be rounded up and isolated until further notice. The doctor and his wife arrive at what was once a mental asylum. He realizes his wife has lied about being blind and encourages her to leave, but she refuses. The blind begin to arrive. At first, they don't understand that they are all connected by visiting the doctor's office, but they soon realize this commonality after discussion. While exploring the empty hospital together, the car thief touches the girl with the dark glasses inappropriately and she kicks him, causing a wound.

The doctor's wife is puzzled as to why she has not gone blind yet and observes how the condition of blindness reduces the inmates to the behavior of animals. A new wave of blind internees arrives, many unwittingly responsible for contaminating each other. Food and supplies are left at the entrance. The car thief's wound worsens, and when he tries to make his way to the gate to ask for help, a soldier shoots him. The internees are responsible for burying the thief's corpse. Soldiers fire again on a group of blind internees who wait too near the entrance for the food resources to be dropped off.

Tensions flare when it becomes apparent that some people are lying to receive a double portion of food. Problems worsen when a final batch of internees arrives, crowding the building beyond capacity. An old man with an eye patch joins the first ward, and the doctor's wife encourages the people in her ward to continue to live in as orderly a way as is possible. The old man with the eye patch tells them news of the outside world and informs them that the blindness continues to spread. Inside the quarantine, conditions worsen. A group from the third ward has armed themselves with a gun and are able to hold the rations hostage in exchange for payment. The soldiers refuse to intervene, so the quarantined group hands over its valuables. The doctor's wife has brought along a pair of sharp scissors and hides them where no one can find them.

As the armed internees continue to hold the food supply hostage, the others grow weak and ill. The armed internees then decide they will accept the sexual services of women in exchange for food, and the women in the wards volunteer to go so that they are not forced. The armed internees brutally assault the first group of women, which includes the doctor's wife and



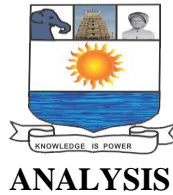
the girl in the dark glasses. One dies. The next night, the doctor's wife uses the scissors to murder the leader of the armed internees as they are assaulting another group of women.

Food rations cease to arrive from the soldiers, but the armed group still has a large supply. The other wards decided to attack the armed internees' ward to get the food. A fight ensues, and people are shot. The doctor's wife reveals to the others in her ward that she can see. At the same time, a woman from another ward sets fire to the barricade to the armed internees' ward and traps them inside, losing her life in the process. The other internees panic and stampede, running outside. They worry about being shot by soldiers but are shocked to find the posts have been abandoned and the gates are open.

Although the blind internees are now free, they are overwhelmed at the prospect of navigating the city while blind. The small group from the first ward decides to stick together. As they wander through the city, they realize everyone outside is blind. They learn that few people live in their homes anymore because people get lost if they leave. Food is scarce, but the doctor's wife discovers a supermarket basement that has been left untouched, fully stocked. She decides not to tell the other hungry people desperately wandering around the supermarket.

The group decides to escort the girl with the dark glasses to the home she lived in with her parents, but it is empty. A neighbor says the government took them. The group decides to continue on to the apartment of the doctor and his wife. When they arrive, they are shocked to find it clean and untouched. As time passes, the girl with the dark glasses and the old man with the eye patch declare their feelings for one another.

The doctor's wife returns to the supermarket's basement for more food, but she is horrified when she realizes many of the blind fell to their death when they discovered the door to the basement. Overwhelmed, she and the doctor stop to catch their breath inside a church. The doctor's wife notices that all the religious figures in the church paintings have had their eyes covered. When someone overhears her describing the phenomenon, the blind flee the church, panicked. Back at their apartment, the group is shocked when they begin to regain their sight one by one, along with everyone else who had been struck blind. The doctor's wife fears she will now lose her sight but finds she can still see.



The common link generated by the identity of blindness leads to many characters in the novel *Blindness* exploring or delving deep into their multiple identities culminating in themselves finding out the hidden unconscious identities inherent in them. The doctor who goes blind is otherwise an individual not willing to come out of his own narrow realm where he is hemmed up with his own profession and its attendant problems. But when he is affected with blindness, the multiple identities in deep slumber within him come out into the open platform such as the ability to cope with the most atrocious situations in life, the metamorphosing into a being in the survival mode, the putting up of existential fight to eke out a living being reduced to the level of a beast, the organisational capacity shown to defend oneself against intractable problems and the courage displayed to take a fight to its eventual conclusion. The contraction of blindness keeps the situation in the space of wide-open nature moving the society towards the direction of coming out with an identity of non-compromising nature when it comes to the resolution of a problem. The identity of a society in a brutal state of affairs is amply demonstrated here with all stakeholders doing things going against the grain of humility and humanity. The heartless human souls obtain the identity of tender ones. The identity born out of institutionalization makes the foot soldiers within it to commit murders without any prick of consciousness. When people become part of a structured framework, they forget the cardinal or basic emotion ruling human society that is compassion, pity, and mercy towards fellow human beings. The novel offers a challenging commentary on the injustices of Portuguese society in particular and capitalist life in general. The meaning of the Portuguese word 'ensaio' is a test, a kind of rehearsal or an experiment. In fact, the Portuguese title for *Blindness* includes this word and it produces multiple meanings and even it represents multiple identities in connection with different characters of the novel. Moreover, *Blindness* is a test or an experiment that guides all of us to a world of anxiety, depression and even chaos. It also poses a question of what would happen if we all become blind.

The inner workings of the characters are presented as the psychologically driven identity crisis experienced by them. The occurrence of blindness is a self-imposed identity to escape from a world that is more blinded in the moral and ethical senses than the actual blindness that the human beings encounter. This blindness of psychological pedigree is deliberately created, intentionally absorbed and wantonly affected to the core. The two types of blindness presented in the novel are two extremes of identity running vertically. The physical blindness is meant to



explore the unexplored and to know the pretentiously inclined and the other blindness is unconsciously implemented in the form of actions and reactions coming from the part of the powerful and the affluent or the opulent. Here, two modes of blindness try to achieve their own social acceptability in their own domains slowly but surely. The identity of blindness sheds light upon a few salient points such as identity as an undefined entity, identity caught up in the whirlpool of various ways of the society, identity as an established framework brimming to maintain order and identity as a force of coercive nature prompting human beings to do things which in their normal circumstances they never think of doing. Even God is presented as a blind man in this novel. Whether God is blind concerning human suffering is a crucial question in the novel. In Saramago's viewpoint, God does not see human beings and their misery.

The question of identity has obtained an international dimension rather recently in which the true identity of an individual has come into the domain of a question mark because of the multiple identities so typical of humanity today. The questions who is global? and who is local? are very difficult to deal with or tackle head-on today because all are globalized locals in their identities, genders, customs, traditions, cultural heritages, sexualities, affiliations, and differences.

So, globalized identity can't be erased from the personality of an individual. At the same time, the localized identity gets him to an overdrive wherein protectionism, nationalistic tendencies and aggressive identity politics come to become the mainstays of the society. Here, identity itself does have global and local connotations at the same time. It is global because of the interconnected, interrelated, intertwined, dovetailed and interdependent world in which the people live. As a result of such an intermingled nature of the world, the global identity is a prerequisite for an individual, without which nothing can be taken to its eventual conclusion. The identity is local because through localized identification only, the real alienation felt through globalization can be ironed out adequately and aptly in the life of an individual. The localized assertions are signs of mitigation born out of aggressive and belligerent globalization pursued by global cooperates without taking into consideration the aspirations of the local environment, ecology, culture and ways of life. So, the very contention that certain literary trends can be encircled and bracketed does go against the general formulation regarding the description that literature is a globalized network of local realities finding their spaces in a world of many identities. In fact, identities become pluralistic dimensionalities propping up literature one way or the other. In the fold of literature, identities are storylines having a psychological grounding



related to the author as well as the social, political, economic, moral and ethical realities of a nation. When a nation reduces identity with respect to occidental or oriental scheme of things or religion or racial specifications, then identity instead of a pluralistic thing is driven by the pressing need of mobilizing people on the basis of narrow considerations that would destroy the secular fabric of a nation. If such mobilization is resorted to in the field of literature, it is tantamount to literature inhaling the air of intolerance. In the novel *Blindness*, such an overstretched identity is clearly pronounced to the core wherein globalized identity is so burdensome on the localized realities.

The final chapters of the novel *Blindness* guide the readers to a situation where we find that the characters ended up loitering through an apocalyptic world. The characters ended up feeling blind in their eyes and blind in feelings. Saramago's assessment of humanity is clearly articulated in the final chapters. In *Blindness* residents of an unidentified country additionally invokes a metaphorical identification and they may be struck through a transient epidemic of blindness and restricted to an intellectual or mental asylum, in which some people try to maintain ethical standards inside the face of this social collapse. Here blindness functions as a metaphor and the citizens are supplied as powerless. Metaphorically they're the colonized, oppressed and marginalized class of human beings. *Blindness* is Saramago's harrowing novel. It is originally published in the Portuguese language as *Ensaio Sobre a Cegueira* which means "Essay on Blindness". The emergence of new identities is a drift of the novel. Here society is tormented by blindness and new societies are shaped by using blindness. The term identity does have deep-rooted meaning in the present juncture wherein even all aspects of life in our society are controlled by it. The assertive identity of today spills over into the realm of political, economic, social, religious, ethical and psychological fields of life. The marathon race to establish one's identity brings forth unexpected conflicts and tensions in our society. In the novel *Blindness*, the various characters are representatives of these variegated identities playing out one after another such as individuals struggling to reconcile with their surroundings, the confinement of people in a concentration camp type of situation and their woes in it, the diametrically opposed people trying to find a common thread to survive in this world, the chaotic structure of governance system that is built up parallel to one's identity and the fluctuations in the fortunate riding upon the backs of multiple identities.

In the unconventional *Blindness*, Saramago tries to bring on the idea that human existence is subjected to humiliation, tortures, big insults and it is continually surrounded by way



of lies and fake information. The universal lie has captured and forcefully grabbed the arena of reality and genuineness. It is also seen that men stopped respecting and accepting themselves. It is a feature of the post-truth world and it is also presented as a great post-modern cultural and intellectual shift. Saramago's version of globalization is completely negative and pessimistic. The concepts of blindness and insight are serious concerns of the novelist in the novel *Blindness*. It is through the character, the doctor's wife, the reader is provided with an added perspective of a bleak situation. Hence, she has a genuine identity that shapes the formation of other characters as well. Moreover, it is through the doctor's wife that the other characters discover one another and they search for a renewed identity where hope and optimism move hand in hand. A new understanding and a new lifestyle emerge and a new journey from the harshness of asylum to the world of humanity and empathy begins there.

THEMES

HUMAN NATURE AND MORALITY

Throughout the novel characters are placed in difficult situations where their humanity and ability to act morally is tested. The blindness epidemic creates situations where life and death decisions must be made under almost unbearable circumstances. As the blind people are quarantined and forced to figure out how to live together with limited space and resources, chaos and power struggles ensue. Unequipped to handle the epidemic, the authorities quickly begin to function like a totalitarian government that justifies harsh actions to promote the good of society. And when the authorities fail to maintain control, the "animal" side of human nature emerges as armed thugs first demand payment for food and then require the sexual subjugation of the other wards' women.

It is in the reactions of the characters to these impossible circumstances that morality emerges and, with it, a sort of nobility. The bonds formed among the women who have been raped, for instance, are deeply moving. The doctor's wife's murder of the armed blind man seems completely justified to readers, as does her failure to let anyone except her self-formed family group know about the store of food she discovers. By showing these choices, Saramago invites readers to confront the foundations of their own moral beliefs.



BLINDNESS AND SEEING

Blindness in the novel is an allegory for human failure to perceive the moral choices that exist in a corrupted world. Characters frequently express the thought that when they could see, they were blind to the world around them. As one man remarks, they were “already blind the moment we turned blind.” They had to physically go blind in order to understand the ways in which they never understood how to live life well.

The physical affliction of blindness fundamentally changes how the characters relate to one another. For example, the old man with the eye patch and the girl with the dark glasses fall in love, drawn to each other’s personalities. It’s unlikely they would have fallen in love if they had their sight, given their age difference. Saramago emphasizes this point as the girl recovers her sight and embraces her lover. “Now,” says the narrator, “we shall know what words are really worth.” Accepting his wrinkles, baldness, and eye patch, she says, “I know you.”

Being physically blind also reveals the true nature of the world for the characters. As the doctor tells the old man with the eye patch, “Perhaps only in a world of the blind will things be what they truly are.” In the blindness epidemic, many humans revert to their animal nature, having sex in front of strangers and defecating in corridors. Some become purely evil, like the armed internees who demand sex for food. Still others, like the internees advancing on the armed ward, may act “like archangels,” as if divinely inspired. All aspects of human nature were present before the epidemic, but they were cloaked or subdued by the veneer of civilization.

THE COLLAPSE OF SOCIETY

The novel shows the shocking speed with which society might unravel after a disaster. Its literary antecedent is Albert Camus’ *The Plague*, an allegorical novel in which a modern-day epidemic of the plague ravages a population and shows its victims what it means to truly live. However, *Blindness* is more of a political allegory. As reviewer Craig Nova pointed out, the chaos that develops as a result of the epidemic addresses “almost all the horrors of the 20th century.” He cites concentration camps, the “excesses of capitalism,” bureaucratic aloofness, militarism, and “the endless darkness of the human heart.” As the doctor’s wife tells her husband in Chapter 8, “the whole world is here.”

The characters initially place their faith in the government to take care of them and work to find a cure. But it soon becomes apparent that the government’s response is to literally and



metaphorically distance itself from the victims and shoot those who disobey. The asylum where the victims are quarantined becomes a microcosm of society as it fills to capacity and forces its internees to survive on limited rations in the absence of leadership. The internees, particularly the doctor, discuss the advantages of organizing, but the corruption of the inmates who arm themselves prevents any type of leadership beyond the example of moral courage. The rapid decline into filth, abuse of power, and hunger are stunning. The world outside resembles the world inside the asylum, only it is more difficult to navigate.

Saramago does offer some hope, however, in the group formed by the doctor and his wife, who bond like a family despite their differences. They offer each other emotional and physical support and, in the quiet order of the doctor's apartment, begin to reclaim the dignity they yearn for. As one of the characters in the family group points out, "Two blind people must be able to see more than one."

CHARACTERS

The doctor

The doctor is an ophthalmologist who is stricken blind after treating a patient with "the white sickness." He is one of the first people to be quarantined and, due to his medical expertise and the fact that he and his wife were the first internees, he has a certain authority in the quarantine. Much of this authority, though, comes from the fact that his wife can see and gives him inside information into the goings-on of the quarantine. When they finally leave the quarantine, the group of blind internees travel to his house.

The doctor's wife

The doctor's wife is the only character in the entire novel who does not lose their sight. This phenomenon remains unexplained in the novel. Unable to leave her husband to be interned, she lies to the doctors and claims to be blind. At this point she is interned with the rest of the afflicted. Once inside, she attempts to help the compound organize, but she is increasingly unable to hold back the animality of the compound. When one ward begins withholding food and demanding that the women of other wards sleep with them to be fed, she kills the leader of their ward. Once they escape the compound, she helps her group survive in the city. The doctor's wife is the de facto leader of their small group, although in the end she often serves their disabled needs.



The girl with the dark glasses

The girl with the dark glasses is a former part-time prostitute who is struck blind while with a customer. She is unceremoniously removed from the hotel and taken to the quarantine. Once inside, she joins the small group of people who were contaminated at the doctor's office. When the car thief gropes her on the way to the lavatory, she kicks him – giving him a wound from which he will eventually die. While inside, she also takes care of the boy with the squint, whose mother is nowhere to be found. At the end of the story, she and the old man with the black eye patch become lovers.

The old man with the black eye patch

The old man with the black eye patch is the last person to join the first ward. He brings with him a portable transistor radio that allows the internees to listen to the news. He is also the main architect of the failed attack on the ward of hoodlums hoarding the food rations. Once the group escapes the quarantine, the old man becomes the lover of the girl with the dark glasses.

The dog of tears

The dog of tears is a dog that joins the small group of blind when they leave the quarantine. While he is mostly loyal to the doctor's wife, he helps the whole group by protecting them all from packs of dogs who are becoming more feral by the day. He is called the dog of tears because he becomes attached to the group when he licks the tears off the face of the doctor's wife.

The boy with the squint

The boy with the squint was a patient of the doctor's, which is most likely how he became infected. He is brought to the quarantine without his mother and soon falls in with the group in the first ward. The girl with the dark glasses feeds him and takes care of him like a mother.

The car thief

After the first blind man was struck blind in traffic, a car thief brought him home and, subsequently stole his car. Soon after he went blind, the car thief and the first blind man reencounter one another in the quarantine, where they soon come to blows. They have no time to



resolve their issues, though, since the car thief is the first internee killed by the guards. He is gunned down while trying to ask the guards for medication for his infected leg.

The first blind man

The first man to go blind is struck blind in the middle of traffic, waiting at a stoplight. He is immediately taken home and then to the doctor's office, where he infects all of the other patients. He is one of the principle members of the first ward - the ward with all of the original internees. He is also the first to regain his sight, when the epidemic is finally over.

The first blind man's wife

The wife of the first blind man goes blind soon after helping her husband to the quarantine. They are reunited by pure chance in the quarantine. Once inside, she also joins the first ward with the doctor and the doctor's wife. When the ward of hoodlums begins to demand that the women sleep with them in order to be fed, the first blind man's wife volunteers to go, in solidarity with the others.

The man with the gun

The man with the gun is the leader of the ward of hoodlums that seizes control of the food supply in the quarantine. He and his ward take the rations by force and threaten to shoot anyone who doesn't comply. This ward extorts valuables from the other internees in exchange for food and, when the bracelets and watches run out, they begin to rape the women. He is later stabbed to death by the doctor's wife.

The blind accountant

This man is not one of those afflicted by the "white sickness" -- rather he has been blind since birth. He is the only one in the ward who can read and write braille and who knows how to use a walking stick. Additionally, he is the second in command to the man with the gun in the ward of hoodlums. When the doctor's wife kills the man with the gun, the blind accountant takes the gun and tries to seize control but he is unable to rally support. He dies when one of the rape victims set fire to the ward.



UNIT V – SCREENPLAY

CONTAGION

- STEVEN SODERBERGH

AUTHOR

Steven Andrew Soderbergh (born January 14, 1963) is an American film director, producer, screenwriter, cinematographer, and editor. A pioneer of modern independent cinema, Soderbergh is an acclaimed and prolific filmmaker. Soderbergh's directorial-breakthrough indie drama *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989) lifted him into the public spotlight as a notable presence in the film industry. At 26, Soderbergh became the youngest solo director to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, and the film garnered worldwide commercial success, as well as numerous accolades. His breakthrough led to success in Hollywood, where he directed the crime comedy *Out of Sight* (1998), the biopic *Erin Brockovich* (2000), and the crime drama film *Traffic* (2000). For *Traffic*, he won the Academy Award for Best Director.

He found further popular and critical success with the *Ocean's* trilogy and film franchise (2001–18); *Contagion* (2011); *Magic Mike* (2012); *Side Effects* (2013); *Logan Lucky* (2017); and *Unsane* (2018). His film career spans a multitude of genres, but his specialties are psychological, crime, and heist thrillers. His films have grossed over US\$2.2 billion worldwide and garnered fourteen Oscar nominations, winning five.

SUMMARY

Contagion (2011) is a thriller movie released in 2011 that showed the deadly virus easily transmitted to people worldwide. This film is directed by Steven Soderbergh, an Oscar-winning filmmaker, and starred by some Academic Awards winners such as Matt Damon, Gwyneth Paltrow, Kate Winslet, Marion Cotillard and nominees Jude Law and Laurence Fishburne. This film shows the global citizens and governments faced various global crises due to the deadly outbreak of a fatal disease. The medical personnel were forced to find a cure to control and stop the fast pandemic growth. The massive spread of the deadly virus leads to death, panic, and fear worldwide. *Contagion* (2011) tells us about the start of the unknown virus, which causes the sudden death of Beth Emhoff after returning from Hongkong. Not long after her death, her son also died with the same symptoms. Meanwhile, her husband, Mitch, is quarantined and examined by the medical team. World Health Organization sent an epidemiologist, Dr Leonora, to

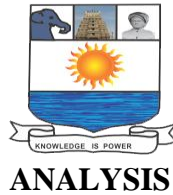


Hongkong to investigate where the virus came from and trace people who had contact with Beth there. Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sent Dr Erin Mears to trace the people who had recently contacted Beth in Minneapolis.

The CDC determined the virus and the origin then tried to formulate the antivirus or the vaccines. The virus' contagion was getting worse; the death number increased, and so did the fear and panic in society. A journalist blogger named Alan Krumwiede spread a rumour that he cured himself with forsythia. That rumour caused panic buying, widespread looting and violence. Besides that, the lockdown was applied, so the people were not allowed to go out from the infected countries. Long story short, the CDC successfully formulated the antivirus and got permission from the government to mass-produce the vaccines, then distributed to the citizens. Then, the life of the people started to return to normal.

The Contagion (2011) showed the panic of the people throughout the United States when the citizens were informed by a journalist blogger named Alan Krumwiede that he had cured himself using forsythia. Because of the rumour she spread, dozens of people queued up to get it. Unfortunately, the scenario of the shortage of the forsythia is worse than the shortage of masks and hand sanitisers. The shortage of forsythia leads the citizens to do widespread loot and violence. They destroyed pharmacies and even burned them down. That chaotic situation was caused by an independent journalist and blogger, AlanKrumwiede, who did not believe in the MEV-1 and insisted it was a biological weapon resulting from a conspiracy between Centre Disease Control and the pharmaceutical industry. He believed that the government was behind this since they declined to perform an autopsy on a Japanese man who fell on the bus. He started to spread his belief toward society; he created rumours that he was infected by the MEV-1 and treated himself with forsythia. Those kinds of rumours were not only appeared in the film but also the reality.

Through Contagion (2011), people can see the worst scenario when the deadly virus spreads worldwide. It can be a precaution for people all over the world to understand the situations they are in. Moreover, the social issues are caused by rumours and misleading information, which leads to panic and fear. Both people must obtain and share information from credible and reliable sources to avoid confusion, fear, panic, and hoaxes. The government must provide reliable information and fight against rumours and hoaxes.



The film *Contagion* is based on a deadly virus, MEV-1, that proliferates and infects people all over the world in a matter of days (Soderbergh, 2011). The construction crew from Beth Emhoff's company AIMM cuts down the trees in a forest in China, thereby destroying the habitat of the bats and compelling them to fly out from there. One of the bats seems to be infected with the virus MEV-1. It grabs a piece of banana and perches above a pigsty. It then drops the banana piece which is assumed to be laden with the virus. A pig eats it and is eventually slaughtered at the market for food. It is brought to a casino in Macau to be prepared for someone's dinner. It is handled by the chef there and he touches the inside of the infected pig's mouth with his bare hands. He then goes out to the dining room, shakes hands with Beth and poses for a picture with Beth holding hands, thus transferring the virus to her and triggering a chain of events. With almost documentary precision, a series of small, perturbing episodes befall, thereby creating an eerie atmosphere for the viewers. Beth returns home to Minneapolis from Macau, seemingly jet-lagged. But it takes a virulent turn, her condition worsens and in two days she dies from a mysterious disease. Her young boy Clark soon follows. More cases break out around the world. Public alarm sets in. Mitch Emhoff, Beth's husband is unable to bury his wife and youngest child because the mortuary refuses to take infected bodies. However, he seems to have developed immunity naturally for the MEV-1 virus and is really worried about his surviving daughter Jory. Dr. Ellis Cheever, the chief of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Rear Admiral Lyle Haggerty assign Epidemic Intelligence Service officer, Dr. Erin Mears, to control the viral outbreak in Minneapolis. It is from here that one comes to know of the disease's incredible ability to multiply, incubate, and kill at a rate faster than most of the previously known diseases. As the number of infected reaches millions, Dr. Hextall by using an attenuated virus develops a potential vaccine. To catalyze the vaccine development, Hextall bypasses the informed consent test subject process and instead injects herself with the experimental vaccine. She then visits her infected father. Luckily, she does not contract MEV-1 and the vaccine is declared a success. Later, one can see that the CDC awards vaccinations by lottery based on birthdates.

Soderbergh's film is a revealing and eerily haunting examination of the subject and was intended to realistically convey the "intense" and "unnerving" social and scientific reactions to a pandemic. The protagonist is the pandemic whose exponential growth transports the narrative from location to location. *Contagion* confronts reality head-on and is a brief against magical



thinking. Steven Soderbergh wanted to make an “ultra-realistic” film that had focused on public health and scientific response to a pandemic. The “hyperlink style” (often switching back and forth from geographically distant places and persons) of the film, emphasizes the historically new perils of contemporary networked globalization and also the eternal qualities of the human condition (recalling famous literary treatments of epidemics, such as Albert Camus’ *The Plague*).

The movie deals with a variety of themes, including the factors that set off a mass panic, the demise of social order, the scientific procedures for containing and characterizing a novel virus, balancing personal motives with professional ethics and responsibilities, the limitations and consequences of public health responses, and the pervasiveness of interpersonal connections which acts as vectors for the pandemic. In *Contagion*, paranoia reaches its pinnacle. The quotidian social activities like personal and professional meetings; that make economic and social life pleasurable paradoxically becomes the machinery of doom. For instance, in the movie, a teenage boy and girl, trying to spend some intimate time together, are reduced to wriggling side by side in the snow. As the boy, at last, rolls onto the girl for a kiss; he gets pulled off roughly by her father. Mass panic is witnessed in the film when people rush to purchase forsythia when it is said to be a cure for the virus. There is almost a stampede to buy as much as each person can hold, and there is no thought of limiting the amount that each person can buy, thus whipping up a frantic demand for the medicine.

In *Contagion* the physicians are depicted as altruistic and caring, but with typical human flaws. In a hospital scene, a dying Dr. Mears hands over her jacket to a neighbouring patient suffering from rigours. In contrast, Dr. Cheever’s decision to disclose classified information exposes his frailty. When challenged, he states: “I did it because I have loved ones, and I would do it again in a heartbeat.” In a later scene, one can see him inoculating his service staff’s son in lieu of taking the vaccination himself. Then we have Dr Leonora Orantes, a WHO (World Health Organization) Epidemiologist in Geneva, Switzerland. She tracks the disease’s origins in Hong Kong, but unfortunately finds herself held for ransom by Su Feng and taken to his village where his people are under quarantine, to assure that one of the limited vaccine supplies reaches its way to the village. But when she is told that it is a fake vaccine, she rushes to warn the villagers as she has developed a bond with them. It is unknown if she survived the pandemic. In addition to the scientist characters, the movie features a self-serving blogger and conspiracy theorist, Alan Krumwiede. Being a freelance journalist too, Krumwiede complains online that the C.D.C. is ignoring an effective homoeopathic cure and colluding with big pharmaceutical companies on a



pseudo drug cure so as to make a profit with them. He does some ambiguous meetings with a mutual fund manager. His controversial writings ignite scepticism and trigger the panic-stricken people towards a possible (but unverified) miracle cure. He could be a heroic truth-teller or a populist champion, but he could be a rancorous loser too - cloaking his personal chagrin in left-wing tirades. Looting and violence are on the loose and there is widespread fear at the time of the pandemic, the state borders are shut down and the government warns its citizens against social contact. As the film critics state, Krumwiede, spreading panic and distrust, is a stage of the disease. Until the end, his motives remain enigmatic.

The film presents instances of collective behaviour and crowd psychology which can trigger social anarchy and mass hysteria. The chaos, outrage, and vulnerability associated with lack of information, plus the influx of new media such as blogs and citizen journalism, allows conspiracy theorists like Krumwiede to spread misinformation and hysteria, amidst the people. In the case of Dr. Cheever, she must do the juggling act of disclosing complete data of the pandemic disclosure, avoid a panic in society, and acquire ample time to analyse and understand an unknown virus. Lawlessness is exhibited in Chicago when violence and robbery is rife where quarantine is imposed. The film's depiction of panic and scapegoating can be viewed as most analogous to what is happening today. The dialogues are filled with accurate medical facts, making the movie a harbinger for an impending catastrophe. The characters in Contagion makes explicit reference to terms and concepts used in the public health practice of communicable disease control viz. R_0 , quarantine, hygiene, social distancing and so on. The basic reproductive number " R_0 " (also called R-naught of a virus) is prominently referenced in the film's dialogue, which correctly identifies it as the number of new infectionstransmitted by a single infected individual. Early in the MEV-1 epidemic, Dr. Mears details to the local health officials that identifying the R_0 for the infection is crucial for calculating its potential capacity. In a bit complex manner, Mears indicates the constituents of the R_0 for any infection viz. frequency of personal contacts within a population, probability of transmission during contacts, and the incubation period of the virus. "The R_0 of the fictional MEV1 virus was 4, while the R_0 of corona virus is 2.2, according to a recent study of data from the first cases of Covid-19 in Wuhan and investigations conducted by Chinese and American health officials" (NCBI). Contagion also centres on the most ubiquitous and evidence-based approach to diminish the rate of transmission: hand hygiene. The emphasis on this controlled measure occurs alongside the more hyped strategies of vaccine experimentation and new methods of curing. When Dr. Mears reprimands



her support staff in the film (“Stop touching your face!”) and various staffs of the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) are seen scrupulously applying alcohol gels on to their hands, they are conveying valuable public health information to the public - a message as significant as the frightening symptoms of MEV-1. It is really startling to state the MEV-1 virus in Contagion has traits similar to that of the CoViD-19, thereby making the viewers realise how the virus works its way into its host.

The movie implicitly critiques the avarice, egotism, and hypocrisy of isolated acts in contemporary culture and the ramifications they can cause in the context of a pandemic. For instance, the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention recommends social distancing by forcibly isolating the healthy to limit the spread of the disease, which stands in stark opposition to contemporary demands for social networking. Responding to the pandemic presents a paradox, as the lethality and contagiousness of the virus disseminate deep distrust of others, to check the onslaught of the pandemic, one requires to work together with others. The story also highlights examples of political cronyism. For instance, a plane to evacuate Dr. Mears from Minneapolis is instead diverted to evacuate a politician. Similarly, we can witness platitudes and rigid thinking from the part of the authorities. For example, public health officials consider postponing the closing of shopping malls until after the Thanksgiving shopping season. Federal responders try to navigate fifty separate state-level public health policies, and one can see the heroism of Federal bureaucrats being exhibited in the movie. Soderbergh does not employ stereotypical pharmaceutical executives or politicians as villains instead portray bloggers such as Krumwiede in a negative light, thus giving us a picture of how people fish in troubled waters. The portrayal of media needs to be specially mentioned in the movie as it replicates the very same scenario in the times of CoVid 19. In today’s times, the media are often accused of hyperbolizing the risks of an epidemic and contributing to the public’s misconceptions about public health research. The Internet, another means of getting connected universally, becomes a kind of plague too. Media reporting at times can have a boomerang effect, whereby it lowers the trust in scientific evidence, whips up public fear and propagandizes instantaneously fake information; which is capitalized by Alan Krumwiede when he states that Forsythia, a homoeopathic drug, is the medicine for MEV-1. Likewise, when the world was frantically on the lookout for Covid 19 cure, social media propagandized Arsenicum album 30C, a homoeopathic drug, as medicine for Covid 19. Media coverage can directly have an effect on public risk perceptions, and recent studies have proved that media triggered public disquietude may



influence health-related personal measures taken during the time of contagion. This was evident when the media declared Hydroxychloroquine as a cure for Covid infection. However, it does not mean that is media reporting is all bad. International scientific literature has stated that during the recently happened epidemics, the media has played a pivotal role in creating a positive approach to disease perception and immunization campaigns, in particular.

The film prophesies that, at any moment, our advanced civilization could be on the verge of extinction, exacerbated precisely by what is considered as the most advanced species. The movie also shows us something else: the heroic works by scientists and Homeland Security officials. One cannot help noticing that with two exceptions - a French doctor who works for the World Health Organization (Dr. Leonora Orantes) and a renegade epidemiologist in San Francisco (Dr. Ian Sussman) - the heroes are all employees of the federal government and instinctively factual people. No one prays, no one calls on God. Contagion does not have any spiritual dimension - except for its perfervid faith in science and logical reasoning. The movie says that “When there’s real trouble, we’re in the hands of the reality-based community. No one else matters”. When confronted with the unpredictability of aetiology, the randomness of illness, the arbitrariness of infection, one must be content with the realization that we are not rulers of this world. People have apparently become such masters of nature that they have altered its very climate and geologists have nomenclated the epoch after humanity itself. Yet, a sub-microscopic virus can be more devastating than an entire army. The disease is not a metaphor, symbol, or allegory; it is something that simply kills anyone without any consideration. The story is a way of attempting to impart a bit of that consideration that nature ignores. And Contagion does justice in that.

I AM LEGEND

- FRANCIS LAWRENCE

AUTHOR

Francis Lawrence (born March 26, 1971) is an Austrian-born American filmmaker and producer. His father was a theoretical physicist who taught at California State University, Northridge, and his mother is a vice president of technology at a public-relations agency based in his hometown. He moved to Los Angeles at the age of four. Lawrence worked as second assistant camera on the feature *Pump Up the Volume* directed by Allan Moyle prior to earning



his bachelor's degree in film production at Loyola Marymount University Film School. After establishing himself as a director of music videos and commercials, Lawrence made his feature-length directorial debut with the supernatural thriller *Constantine* (2005) and has since directed the postapocalyptic horror film *I Am Legend* (2007), the romantic drama *Water for Elephants* (2011), four of the five films in the *Hunger Games* film series, and the spy thriller *Red Sparrow* (2018).

SUMMARY

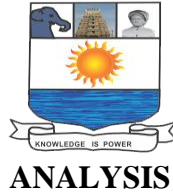
In the novel, the lone survivor of a worldwide pandemic finds himself fighting for his life in post-apocalypse Los Angeles. This survivor is Robert Neville, who is immune to the plague, and the creatures of the night who hunt him are zombie-like vampires, the infected survivors of the plague. By day, Robert Neville scrounges abandoned Los Angeles for the supplies he needs for survival and his research into the plague, including a possible cure. In addition, he hunts inactive vampires and puts stakes through their hearts to kill them. The zombies never appear during the daylight hours. By night, hordes of vampires, led by Neville's neighbour and good friend, Ben Cortman, surround his barricaded home, howling and taunting him, throwing rocks, and trying to find a way in. In addition to barricades, Robert has armed himself with mirrors, garlic, and crucifixes. Through his research into the plague, Neville discovers the bacteria that caused it and some new ways to fight the vampires. Exposing vampires to sunlight kills both the bacteria and the host vampire while wounding a vampire also kills it through exposing the bacteria to the air, which transforms the bacteria into airborne parasites and kills the host. He redoubles his daylight efforts to hunt out vampires in their lairs to kill them. He also discovers that the disease seems to be partly psychological, a mass hysteria caused by a deeply rooted belief in vampires and the way in which they should behave. The plague vampires behave as they do because that's what they believe.

Neville's pre-apocalypse life is told through flashbacks. Readers learn that the plague killed his daughter and turned his wife into a vampire, whom he was forced to kill when she attacked him. Neville copes with his loneliness and despair through periods of binge drinking, delving into music and art, and plague research. One day he finds a wild dog and eventually gains the dogs' trust, only to find that the dog too is infected. The dog dies. Two years later, Neville, having killed most of the vampires, has settled into his lone survival routine. He comes upon a pretty young woman, Ruth, wandering alone in broad daylight. Suspicious yet intrigued,



Neville takes her back to his home and listens to her story. Though she is repulsed by garlic, Neville believes her when she says her reaction is only due to hunger and shock. Her husband was killed by a vampire hunter, and her two children died of the plague. She agrees to let Neville test her blood in the morning. After Neville shares everything he knows about the vampires with her, they make love. In the morning, Ruth allows Neville to take her blood but begs him not to look at it under the microscope. When he does, he finds that the bacteria has mutated into a new form. Ruth knocks him unconscious and leaves a note for him, imploring him to escape while he can. The new mutated vampires have found a way to survive and intend to rebuild society. The new regime sent her to spy on Neville to learn what they can before trying to capture him. Furthermore, Robert was the one who killed her husband; still, Ruth professes her love for Neville. Seven months later, Neville watches the new regime of mutant vampires brutally murder his old neighbor, Ben Cortman, along with six other vampires. Previously, he had believed that the mutants would not harm him. Now, when they break into his home, he shoots them because he believes they mean to kill, not capture, him. Neville is severely wounded during the battle and wakes up in a prison cell.

Ruth visits him. She tells him that there is no hope for him, and he comes to understand that the new mutant vampires view him with fear and loathing, just as he views them. She gives him some pills to make his execution easier. He faces his end alone, the last of his kind. While not praised for its writing style or even its plot, this novel achieves its notoriety through its themes and the motif of “zombie” humans. The novel’s most significant theme remains the nature and construction of legends. Both vampire lore and vampire-fighting lore assume a central place in the novel. Additionally, Neville himself becomes a legend: the last of his kind, the last vampire hunter. A secondary theme of prejudice becomes clear as the new mutant vampires build a society with no room for humanity. Neville reviles the vampires, killing them wholesale as the enemy throughout the novel. In turn, the vampires fear and hate the vampire killer. Both are bent on each other’s destruction as the resolution of their fear of the other. In this way, cultural anxiety achieves catharsis through the creation of an ultimate evil—the zombie—against which humans can fight, as an outward expression of societal inequality or evil. Significantly, humanity does not survive in Matheson’s world.



Film is an expression of art that delivers many kinds of messages and topics, such as heroism. Heroism is a passion with higher purposes and great skill to think about what he/she will do, not just emotional moment. Heroism has been used since the era of Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1841. It is a social value that has been applied since cave paintings, spread in oral tradition and moulded legends, folktales, and myths into poems, epics. Literature also emphasizes the word heroism as to help without any compensation. One of the films that talks about heroism are the Francis Lawrence movie *I am Legend*. It describes the condition in the world that was infected by a virus. People who have been infected with the virus will become a zombie. The genre of this movie is science fiction and put Will Smith as the main actor. This virus turns humans into carnivores zombies that are afraid of the sun. Robert Neville acted by Will Smith tries to search the antivirus to save humans in the world. He has already lost everything, such as losing his family and many tragic situations, to get the antidotes. Finally, he finds the antivirus and goes to mountain areas to build a safe place for others.

The heroism of Robert Neville to risk his own life plays a significant role in *I am Legend*. He gains the nature of heroism after he decided to stay in town. He is also concerned about human salvation. Heroism is an abstract and moral concept that is not easy to explain. Therefore, heroism cannot be easily interpreted, because it involves some aspects. Heroism can be accepted when those actions are already visible and have an impact on the environment. In heroism there are several classifications that determine whether a person is a hero or not; that is having a higher purpose. A higher purpose in life is a way to build character, to have an ethical life and good thinking. A hero must be able to act quickly when he finds a new problem. Heroism also needs physical and moral courage to solve problems, both physically and morally. Heroism is not always apparent because heroism is the condition of someone who wants to help each other by her/his sacrifice. Soul of heroism cannot be bought with anything like the desire to achieve something material or non-material like fame. In summary, heroism is based on better characteristics of things such as moral greatness, skills, action, and the readiness to face the problems physically or non-physically. I argue that the character of heroism is important because it has a great impact on a life. The act requires the willingness of sacrifices to achieve peace.

Neville is a virologist for the military living in New York City with his dog, Sam. Neville's wife and daughter are killed in an accident while evacuating the city due to the outbreak



of the virus. He is a man who has a stronger immune than others so he can live in the midst of savage zombies. Before the virus attack the city, he worked as a military scientist. He spends his days exercising, hunting, driving his car, watching films and mostly making attempts to find a cure for the virus. It shows that Neville is a scientist who is considered important by the government. He affects the safety of people on the virus. In this film, there are some people who have the same immunity as Neville. Anna is a woman who struggles for her life. Anna struggling tries to find help from a little boy, Ethan. They can find Neville from radio calls that were often broadcast during when daytime. In this film, Anna is a person who believes that there are still some people who can survive the virus. She believes that every problem has an escape. He tried to convince Neville about people who are still alive.

I am Legend movie represents the heroism in Neville's act. In the movie, Neville is a man who has a job as a scientist in the military. For the first time, he decides to stay in town to get the antidote for the virus. Neville has a family and he wants to save his family by a helicopter but he loses them because another helicopter crashed their helicopter before he delivered his family, he promises his wife that he wants to stay in town and find the antidote. Heroism rise in Neville when he is conscious that he must find the antidote. The movie reflected in heroism that he decide to stay in town. Philip Zimbardo in *Understanding Heroism* (Zimbardo, 2013), heroism typically involves bravery and gallantry, which combine to become courage. Neville is a great man that he trying continuously searches for the virus. Many ways he did to get how can heal humans from zombie become a human. In this movie, it shows that he did a lot of experiments on many sample zombies and one day he wantsto catch the zombie with a trap in a building. That movie reflected Ron Liebermann's theory that heroism has character development, ethical living, and critical thought. The character development in this movie is when he wants to understand the zombie and virus. It looks like Neville make a lot of experience in his laboratory. In this movie, the creative way looks in a scene when he tries to catch a zombie in a building. He also put some explosives and lights which surround the house to protect him from the zombie. He tries with all knowledge that he knows. Neville fights with evil in his home, it is one of the characteristics of heroism that he tries to save the other survivor in his home.

The movie *I am Legend* tells about a scientist who cannot stop the spread of dangerous viruses that infect humans, but he has immunity. He decided to stay in the city alone only to find the antivirus. He also hopes to help others who may still be in the city. Many experiments were conducted to sacrifice his life Film directed by Lawrence, also shows the characteristic of



heroism shown in the main character, Neville. Heroism occurs to him when he chooses to learn about the virus. This heroic characteristic becomes stronger as his background as a soldier who has discipline, determination, and a strong belief that he can find the antidote to solve the problems. Neville uses his energy and intelligence to hunt zombies as experimental material by making a trap. Besides that, Neville also tries to help other survivors by using radio broadcasts to save other survivors. Heroism emerges because of a higher purpose, it is the basis for character development, ethical living, and critical thought. Finally, the story ends with a victory that Neville finds the antidote.