

HIST245-IH1  
**Black Death in History & Literature**  
MICA - Fall 2015  
Course Syllabus

*Th 1-3:45 PM*  
*Bunting 460*

**Instructor: Michael Sizer**

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O happy posterity, who will not experience  
such abysmal suffering and will look on our  
testimony as a fable.

-- Petrarch, 1348

Much of a race depends on what it thinks of  
death and how it stands personal anguish and  
sickness.

-- Walt Whitman, 1875



Danse Macabre: 16<sup>th</sup>-century English woodcut

### **Course Description & Goals**

In 1348, the disease that would be called the Black Death swept west from Central Asia to Europe, where it quickly annihilated up to 1/3 of Europe's population in about one year. This was neither the first nor the last occurrence of this dread disease in World history. The effects of the plague on the social fabric of the societies with which it came into contact were considerable, but so were the psychic effects, and the intellectual and artistic worlds felt compelled to attempt to understand what the plague was, as well as its grander philosophical and moral implications. This course will study some of the major intellectual and artistic responses to this plague of 1348, as well as the social, political and economic effects of the disease.

Epidemic disease has played a major role in shaping human history, and historians in recent decades have developed several remarkable theories incorporating humanity into the ecological global context in which we operate. The course will thus also study the role of disease in human history all over the world, using the fourteenth-century Black Death as its major case study,

extending the observations made about human responses to the plague towards analysis of other moments of epidemic disease in history, including contemporary “plagues” such as AIDS and Swine Flu.

### Course Learning Objectives

Requirements in Intellectual history present the history of ideas in their development through and across cultures and historical periods. They focus on major intellectual movements in philosophy, religion, politics, economics, science and mathematics, art and literature, and their social and historical contexts. Intellectual history courses aim to

- Impart specific intellectual values: intellectual integrity and honesty
- Develop respect for the materials of historical inquiry
- Foster a capacity for dialogue with the past.
- Engender an understanding of good scholarly technique and practice.

In addition to these more general objectives, students in this course can expect to:

- Engage in fruitful conversations about lofty ideas with your fellow students.
- Read some foundational texts in Western and World intellectual history and literature.
- Learn to read and interpret primary sources, culminating in an original research paper.
- Appreciate the way that human history has been deeply embedded in and affected by the natural environment, and human life continues to be so.
- Relate to the reality of death in human existence, and to learn how others have responded to it on an individual and collective level.
- Understand the ethics of public health initiatives.

### Course Format, Grading and Assignments

This course will emphasize **class and small group discussion**. Your participation will be evaluated not only based on the quality of your comments in open discussion, but also on alertness, energy, and preparedness. Various organized activities will also provide an opportunity to participate in class ways other than in large- or small-group discussion. **Class participation is crucial to this course, constituting 25% of your grade.**

The **readings** are vital, as they will form the basis of our discussions and activities. The amount of readings varies, but at times is quite heavy. It is important not only that you do the readings thoroughly, but that you **bring them with you to class**, either printed out or on your computer screen (see below for comments on bringing laptops to class), to use as a basis for discussion. **Failure to do so will result in a grade of ‘F’ for your class participation for that day.**

In addition to the larger projects described below, each student will have **2 short (2-3 pp. double-spaced) informal papers** due during the semester. In this paper you will **comment on the readings for that day and raise issues that might be suitable for class discussion, making specific and concrete references to the text**. You may be asked to read or comment on your ideas from the paper in class discussion. The **due date of the paper depends on the first letter of your last name**. These due dates are also indicated in the syllabus below. Each paper is **worth 10% of your grade**.

There will also be 2 formal papers in this class. The second one is your final research paper; the first is a **short (3-5 pages) analysis paper on Boccaccio and Marguerite de Navarre due in Week 7**. More details will be provided later in the semester. This paper **will be worth 15% of your grade**.

For **Week 10** you will be asked to imagine and **fashion a creative/artistic response** to the Black Death. This can be a performance, a poem, music, a visual piece, etc. All pieces must be accompanied by a paragraph of explanation. This project will be **worth 10% of your grade**.

The **most important aspect of your involvement in the class**, as well as your grade, will be your **major research paper**. You must **submit a short topic proposal to me by Week 8** at the latest. The **paper proposal should include at least 1 primary source and 3 secondary sources** (although topic and sources can change between the proposal and the final draft). This **paper proposal is worth 5% of your grade**.

The topics available for the final project will be:

A) study the **history of an epidemic or major infectious disease** (AIDS, small pox, syphilis, cholera, typhoid, influenza, bird flu, swine flu, ebola, etc.) and **the cultural and social response to it** (this can be a specific outbreak or a more general history), or

B) study a **plague or disease text or artistic response** not covered here, or

C) study a more specific **aspect of the 1348 Black Death in more detail** than is covered in class.

More particulars of the paper will be explained in a separate handout, but here are the basics: it will be a **formal research paper (7-10 pages)**, with footnotes and bibliography, as well as original research (handouts directing you on proper procedures will be handed out during the semester).

The paper will be graded according to originality and clarity of argument, use of evidence, quality of research, and writing (including footnote and bibliography format). The paper will be evaluated according to creativity, clarity of presentation, engagement with the material, originality, and effectiveness of expression in the written form. **The paper is worth 25% of your final course grade**.

### Late Assignment Policy

**Computer submissions of paper assignments are not allowed.** The short assignments will be marked down a grade for each day late (A to A-, B- to C+, etc.) The final paper will not be accepted after the last day of class - **NO EXCEPTIONS!**

### Attendance Policy

There are only 15 meetings in the semester and so we have to make the most of them. Any unexcused absence beyond 1 will result in a decrease of two grades from class participation (A to B+, B- to C, etc.). 2 late arrivals (> 10 minutes) equals 1 absence.

### Classroom Laptop/Cellphone Policy

Because students in previous classes have abused the privilege of having laptops in class, I am going to set limits on their use in our class. **An open laptop is not permitted in class, unless you receive special permission from me to take notes on it or for some other purpose. Cellphones must be stowed away and turned off for the duration of the class.**

#### **Classroom: Health and Safety Guidelines**

##### **Health and Safety**

It is the responsibility of faculty and students to practice health and safety guidelines relevant to their individual activities, processes, and to review MICA's Emergency Action Plan and attend EHS training. It is each faculty member's responsibility to coordinate with the EHS Office to ensure that all risks associated with their class activities are identified and to assure that their respective classroom procedures mirror the EHS and Academic Department guidelines. Each of these policies and procedures must be followed by all students and faculty. Most importantly, faculty are to act in accordance with all safety compliance, state and federal, as employees of this college and are expected to act as examples of how to create art in a way to minimize risk, and reduce harm to themselves and the environment. Faculty must identify, within each art making process, and require personal protection equipment use, by each student for each class, when applicable. Students are required to purchase personal protection equipment appropriate to their major. Those students who do not have the proper personal protection equipment will not be permitted to attend class until safe measures and personal protection is in place.

#### **Classroom: ADA Compliance**

##### **Learning Resource Center ADA Compliance Statement**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Learning Resource Center at 410-225-2416, in Bunting 458, to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: <http://www.mica.edu/LRC>

##### **Plagiarism**

Each discipline within the arts has specific and appropriate means for students to cite or acknowledge sources and the ideas and material of others used in their own work. Students have the responsibility to become familiar with such processes and to carefully follow their use in developing original work.

##### **Policy**

MICA will not tolerate plagiarism, which is defined as claiming authorship of, or using someone else's ideas or work without proper acknowledgment. Without proper attribution, a student may NOT replicate another's work, paraphrase another's ideas, or appropriate images in a manner that violates the specific rules against plagiarism in the student's department. In addition, students may not submit the same work for credit in more than one course without the explicit approval of the all of the instructors of the courses involved.

##### **Consequences**

When an instructor has evidence that a student has plagiarized work submitted for course credit, the instructor will confront the student and impose penalties that may include failing the course. In the case of a serious violation or repeated

infractions from the same student, the instructor will report the infractions to the department chair. Depending on the circumstances of the case, the department chair may then report the student to the Office of Academic Affairs, which may choose to impose further penalties, including suspension or expulsion.

**H1N1 Pandemic Information:** *From the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS)*

**What to do if I get sick?**

*If you are sick consider the following:*

- *Limit contact with other people as much as possible. DO NOT GO TO CLASS! Seek medical attention at Mount Royal Medial Assoc. (410) 225-8855 but please call ahead*
- *Students who are sick should self-isolate for at least 24 hours after any fever is gone.*
- *Make sure to get plenty of rest and drink clear fluids to keep from being dehydrated*
- *Avoid normal activities including work, school, travel, shopping, social events, and public gatherings*

**Reporting Procedures:**

- *Contact the Office of Student Affairs at 410-225-2422 who will assist with plans for self-isolation, arranging for meals, and any other necessary support*
- *Contact any faculty whose class you anticipate missing and inform them of your illness. Work with them to make arrangements for catching up on any missed work. If you have difficulty reaching your faculty or if your illness lingers to the point where you will miss two or more of any one class contact the Office of Student Affairs.*

**Title IX Accommodation**

*Maryland Institute College of Art seeks to provide an environment based on mutual respect that is free of bias, discrimination and harassment. If you have encountered sexual harassment/misconduct/assault we encourage you to report this. Disclosures made to faculty must be reported to the Title IX Coordinator, Title IX Deputy Coordinator, or Title IX Specialist. Disclosures made by students in course assignments are not exempt from mandatory reporting. If you require academic accommodations due to an incident involving sexual harassment or discrimination, please contact Student Affairs at 410.225.2422 or Human Resources at 410.225.2363.*

**Students with Extended Illness or Cause for Legitimate Absence**

*In the case of extended illness or other legitimate absences that may keep the student from attending a class for more than three meetings, students must contact the Student Development Specialist in the Division of Student Affairs so that instructors can be notified. Graduate students must contact the instructor, program director, and the Office of Graduate Studies. Students in art education or professional studies programs must contact the Dean for the Center for Art Education or the Dean of the School for Professional and Continuing Studies, respectively. The appropriate administrator will facilitate a conversation with faculty to determine whether the student can achieve satisfactory academic progress.*

**Readings**

- Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (The excellent Penguin Classics edition is in the bookstore and is recommended for purchase, but other editions are acceptable).

- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350, a Brief History with Documents* (Bedford/St. Martin, 2005).
- Supplementary texts on Moodle class site, online, or handed out in class.

**Course Schedule (Topics and Assignments) - Subject to change if necessary.**

Assignments are listed the day they are due, not the day they are assigned.

**Week 1 - 9/3: Introduction to course**

**Week 2 - 9/10: Ecological & Humankind: the Basics of Disease and History**

Assignments:

- William McNeill, “Microparasitism, Macroparasitism, and the Urban Transmutation” from *The Human Condition: an Ecological and Historical View*, pp. 3-37.
- Jared Diamond, “The Lethal Gift of Livestock” from *Guns, Germs & Steel*, pp. 195-214.
- Susan Sontag, excerpt from *Illness and its Metaphors* (approx. 16 pp.)
- INFORMAL PAPER 1: Students with a last name beginning with the letters A-G have their first informal paper due today.

**Week 3 - 9/17: The Black Death Arrives**

Assignments:

- Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, “Plague,” (pp. 19-72).
- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350, a Brief History with Documents*, Section 3: Medical Responses, 33-66.
- Robert Wolfe, “Dimensions of Healing” from *Original Wisdom: Stories from an Ancient Way of Knowing* (approx. 10 pp.)
- Look at the website describing the archaeological dig at Wharram Percy, a medieval English town abandoned sometime soon after the Plague:  
<http://loki.stockton.edu/~tompkink/wharram/wharram.htm>
- INFORMAL PAPER 1: Students with a last name beginning with the letters H-P have their first informal paper due today.

**Week 4 - 9/24: Boccaccio’s & Other Descriptions of the Plague’s Social Effects**

Assignments:

- Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Preface and Introduction.
- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350, a Brief History with Documents*, Section 4: Societal and Economic Impact, Selections from Petrarch, “Letters on Family Matters”, Agnolo di Tura’s Sienese Chronicle, Jean de Venette, and Ahmad Ibn Ali Al-Maqrizi, pp. 67-74; 80-87.
- INFORMAL PAPER 1: Students with a last name beginning with the letters R-S have their first informal paper due today.

**Week 5 – 10/1: Boccaccio!**

Assignments:

- Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Day 3, Stories 1, 8-10; Day 4 Introduction and Story 1; Day 5 ALL.

### **Week 6 - 10/8: Boccaccio!**

Assignments:

- Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Day 7, Story 9; Day 8, Story 1; Day 10, Stories 4-5, 10; Conclusion.

### **Week 7 - 10/15: Marguerite de Navarre's Response to Boccaccio: the Heptameron**

Assignments:

- Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptameron* (stories TBA)

**\*\*\* 1ST PAPER, ON BOCCACCIO AND M. de NAVARRE, DUE IN CLASS \*\*\***

### **Week 8 - 10/22: Religious Response: Devotion, Mysticism and Fanaticism**

Assignments:

- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350, a Brief History with Documents*, Part 2 Section 5: Religious Mentalities; and Part 2 Section 6: The Psyche of Hysteria (The Flagellants), pp. 94-138.
- Marguerite Porete, "Mirror of Simple Souls" (excerpt); Trial of Margery Kempe (excerpt).
- INFORMAL PAPER 1: Students with a last name beginning with the letters T-Z have their first informal paper due today.

**\*\*\* FINAL PAPER TOPIC DUE TO ME TODAY AT THE LATEST \*\*\***

### **Week 9 - 10/29: Revolt and Discord**

Assignments:

- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350, a Brief History with Documents*, Part 2 Section 4: Societal and Economic Impact, pp. 87-93; and Part 2 Section 6: The Psyche of Hysteria (Jewish Pogroms), pp. 139-159.
- *The Statute of Laborers*, 1351: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/seth/statute-labourers.html>
- Read the Sources on the Peasants' Revolt of 1381: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices/voices\\_reading\\_revolt.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/voices/voices_reading_revolt.shtml)
- INFORMAL PAPER 2: Students with a last name beginning with the letters A-G have their second informal paper due today.

### **Week 10 - 11/5: The Artistic Cult of Death: Villon and the Danse Macabre**

Assignments:

- *The Black Death: The Great Mortality of 1348-1350, a Brief History with Documents*, Part 2 Section 7: The Artistic Response, pp. 160-178.
- François Villon, Misc. Ballades from the *Testament* ("Snows of Yesteryear," "Ballad of Fat Margot," "Ballad of the Hanged," "Epitaph," "Ballad of Good Doctrine," a few of the "Poems in Slang.")
- Cesare Ripa, 1-page excerpt from *Iconologia* (1611).

- CREATIVE ASSIGNMENT: Imagine you are an artist, poet, actor, or troubadour living in Boccaccio's Florence in or around 1348 and create your own Artistic Response to the Plague. This can be in any form (poem, song, play, visual piece, placard, etc.), but must be accompanied by a paragraph of explanation.

### **Week 11 - 11/12: Later Plague Accounts and Stories**

#### Assignments:

- Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, "Smallpox" (pp. 73-87).
- Texts from 1665 London Plague (approx. 20 pp.)
- Edgar Allan Poe, "Masque of the Red Death":  
<http://poestories.com/text.php?file=masque>
- INFORMAL PAPER 2: Students with a last name beginning with the letters H-P have their second informal paper due today.

### **Week 12 - 11/19: Victorian Culture, Disease, and the Body**

#### Assignments:

- Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, "Tuberculosis" and "Cholera," (pp. 89-109).
- Michel Foucault, excerpt on "Panopticism" from *Discipline and Punish* (6 pp.)
- INFORMAL PAPER 2: Students with a last name beginning with the letters R-S have their second informal paper due today.

**\*\*\* NO CLASS 11/26: THANKSGIVING!!! \*\*\***

### **Week 13 – 12/3: Issues in Disease Today; AIDS and Flu**

#### Assignments:

- Aberth, *Plagues in World History*, "Influenza," "AIDS" and "Conclusion" (pp. 111-184).
- Susan Sontag, excerpt from "AIDS and its Metaphors" (8 pp.)
- George Whitmore, "Epilogue" from *Someone Was Here: Profiles in the AIDS Epidemic* (5 pp.)
- INFORMAL PAPER 2: Students with a last name beginning with the letters T-Z have their second informal paper due today.

### **Week 14 - 12/10: The Ebola Crisis in West Africa 2014**

- In class today we will be visited by NPR photographer John Poole, who will show some of his photographs and discuss his visit to West Africa during the Ebola crisis of 2014, and NPR Science Editor and Producer Vikki Valentine, who worked on the crisis and also has studied and written about the 1665 London Plague.

#### Assignments:

- Colin Bucks, "Treating Ebola Patients in Liberia: A Stanford Physician's Story" at <http://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2014/10/treating-ebola-patients-in-liberia--a-stanford-physicians-story.html>
- BBC overview of epidemic: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-28755033>
- Andrew O'Hehir, "Ebola, the 'Heart of Darkness' and the Epidemic of Fear," from Salon.com (Oct. 2014):

[http://www.salon.com/2014/10/04/ebola the heart of darkness and the epidemic of fear/](http://www.salon.com/2014/10/04/ebola_the_heart_of_darkness_and_the_epidemic_of_fear/)

**Week 15 - 12/17: Final Class!**

- Brief presentations of final class projects.

**\*\*\* FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY IN CLASS \*\*\***