

Humanities Coronavirus Syllabus

To help us think and teach about contagion, global health, and community in a time of social distancing and fear, we are collecting contributions to this crowd-sourced syllabus, which focuses on literary, historical, philosophical/religious, and cultural aspects of the current health crisis and its history.

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Literature/Primary Sources

Appelfeld, Aharon. *Badenheim 1939*. 1978. [life in the midst of crisis]. [Full text in English \[PDF\]](#).

It is spring 1939. In months Europe will be Hitler's. And Badenheim, a resort town vaguely in the orbit of Vienna, is preparing for its summer season. The vacationers arrive as they always have, a sampling of Jewish middle-class life. To receive them in the town are the pharmacist and his worried wife, the hotelier and his large staff, the pastry shop owner and his irritable baker, Sally and Gertie (two prostitutes), and, mysteriously, the bland inspectors from the "Sanitation Department." Finally, the vacationers, whose numbers have now increased by the forced crowding-in of other Jews hardly on vacation, become de facto prisoners in their familiar resort; their "vacation" begins to take on the lineaments of undefined disaster. - Amazon

Asimov, Isaac. *The Naked Sun*. New York: Doubleday, 1957.

Set in the distant future on the planet Solaria, a world whose inhabitants are obsessively afraid of germs and as such live on remote estates in isolation, only interacting with each other over video calls. When a Solarian is found murdered in isolation, a detective from Earth must travel to Solaria, where he is ostracized due to anti-Earth bias, as Earth is seen as a dirty planet and its inhabitants as plague-bearers.

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake: a Novel*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2003. [Full text](#).

Snowman, known as Jimmy before mankind was overwhelmed by a plague, is struggling to survive in a world where he may be the last human, and mourning the loss of his best friend, Crake, and the beautiful and elusive Oryx whom they both loved. In search of answers, Snowman embarks on a journey—with the help of the green-eyed Children of Crake—through the lush wilderness that was so recently a great city, until powerful corporations took mankind on an uncontrolled genetic engineering ride.- Amazon

Barrett, Andrea. *Ship Fever: Stories*. W. W. Norton, 1996.

The elegant short fictions gathered here about the love of science and the science of love are often set against the backdrop of the nineteenth century. Interweaving historical and fictional characters, they encompass both past and present as they negotiate the complex territory of ambition, failure, achievement, and shattered dreams. In "Ship Fever," the title novella, a young Canadian doctor finds himself at the center of one of history's most tragic epidemics.- abridged from publisher.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Decameron*. Italy (1353). [Full text in English](#).

Collection of novellas by the 14th-century Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375).

The book is structured as a frame story containing 100 tales told by a group of seven young women and three young men sheltering in a secluded villa just outside Florence to escape the Black Death, which was afflicting the city. Boccaccio probably conceived of *The Decameron* after the epidemic of 1348, and completed it by 1353. The various tales of love in *The Decameron* range from the erotic to the tragic. Tales of wit, practical jokes, and life lessons contribute to the mosaic. In addition to its literary value and widespread influence (for example on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*), it provides a document of life at the time. Written in the vernacular of the Florentine language, it is considered a masterpiece of classical early Italian prose -- Wikipedia

Brown, Charles Brockden. *Arthur Mervyn, or, Memoirs of the year 1793 : With related texts*. (First published in 1799) Ed. Barnard, P., & Shapiro, S. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub, 2008. [Full text 1889 edition](#). [yellow fever] Stephen Shapiro and Philip Barnard have kindly made their introduction to the Hackett edition freely available [here](#).

Brown, Charles Brockden. *Ormond, or, The secret witness : With related texts*. (First published in 1799) Ed. Barnard, P., & Shapiro, S. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2009. [Full text 1811 edition](#). Stephen Shapiro and Philip Barnard have kindly made their introduction to the Hackett edition freely available [here](#).

This long novel was written in the late nineteenth century. It tells the story of a young man who goes to Philadelphia just as the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 breaks out. It is a chaotic story that reflects the chaos of those years.

Brooks, Geraldine. *Year of Wonders: a novel of the plague*. Penguin, 2002.

Inspired by a true story...set in 17th century England, of a village that quarantines itself to arrest the spread of the plague - Amazon

Brooks, Max. *World War Z : An oral history of the zombie war* (1st ed.). New York: Crown, 2006. [Full text](#).

Zombie apocalyptic horror novel written by American author Max Brooks. The novel is a collection of individual accounts narrated by an agent of the United Nations Postwar Commission, following the devastating global conflict against the zombie plague. Other passages record a decade-long desperate struggle, as experienced by people of various nationalities. The personal accounts also describe the resulting social, political, religious, and environmental changes. - wikipedia

Burns, Charles. *Black Hole*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2008. [STDs]

Black Hole is a twelve-issue comic book limited series ...The story deals with the aftermath of a sexually transmitted disease that causes grotesque mutations in teenagers. Burns has said that the mutations can be read as a metaphor for adolescence, sexual awakening and the transition into adulthood. - wikipedia

Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. Earthseed. Open Road Media, 2000.

Parable of the Sower is the Butlerian odyssey of one woman who is twice as feeling in a world that has become doubly dehumanized. The time is 2025. The place is California, where small walled communities must protect themselves from hordes of desperate scavengers and roaming bands of people addicted to a drug that activates an orgasmic desire to burn, rape, and murder. When one small community is overrun, Lauren Olamina, an 18 year old black woman with the hereditary trait of "hyperempathy" —which causes her to feel others' pain as her own—sets off on foot along the dangerous coastal highways, moving north into the unknown. - jacket description

Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. [1947] Trans. from the French by Stuart Gilbert, 1948. [Full text in English](#).

Story of a plague epidemic in Algeria and how it affects a range of people. Thought to be based on a cholera epidemic in the town of Oran.

Cortázar, Julio. *The Winners*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

The passengers of a threadbare "luxury" cruise are confined to a small area of the ship and told that disease is spreading among the crew. The novel explores how they pass their time in an uncertain quarantine. - @thedenature

Cortázar, Julio. *Final Exam*. New Directions Publishing, 2000. A group of young people prepare for the state exam of undefined disciplines amidst strange fog caused by fungus or disease that occupies parts of the city.

Crichton, Michael. *The Andromeda Strain*. Knopf, 1969. (Also see movie version)

A military space probe, sent to collect extraterrestrial organisms from the upper atmosphere, is knocked out of orbit and falls to Earth. Twelve miles from the crash site, an inexplicable and deadly phenomenon terrorizes the residents of a sleepy desert town in Arizona, leaving only two survivors: an elderly addict and a newborn infant. Four of the nation's most elite biophysicists are summoned to a clandestine underground laboratory located five stories beneath the desert and fitted with an automated atomic self-destruction mechanism for cases of irremediable contamination. Under conditions of total news blackout and the utmost urgency, the scientists race to understand and contain the crisis. - publisher

Cronin, Justin. *The Passage*. Ballantine Books, 2010.

A group of scientists isolate a virus from bats in a tropical rainforest, and return to a military laboratory to attempt to weaponize the organism. The test subjects, a group of death row inmates, eventually escape, spreading the disease and creating a new species of vampiric humans. The middle section of

the book recounts the fall of society in the U.S. The last half of the book portrays a small colony of survivors almost a century later, struggling to understand the civilization that preceded them. Cronin's book is referenced in passing (pun intended!)--it makes a cameo in an airport bookstore--in *Station Eleven*, and Emily St. John Mandel cites this novel as having inspired her own . Intense, chilling, and extremely well-written, with sections of violence that are not for the squeamish.

Czerwiec, M.K. *Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371*. Penn State University Press, 2017.

In 1994, at the height of the AIDS epidemic in the United States, MK Czerwiec took her first nursing job, at Illinois Masonic Medical Center in Chicago, as part of the caregiving staff of HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371. *Taking Turns* pulls back the curtain on life in the ward. A shining example of excellence in the treatment and care of patients, Unit 371 was a community for thousands of patients and families affected by HIV and AIDS and the people who cared for them. This graphic novel combines Czerwiec's memories with the oral histories of patients, family members, and staff. It depicts life and death in the ward, the ways the unit affected and informed those who passed through it, and how many look back on their time there today. Czerwiec joined Unit 371 at a pivotal time in the history of AIDS: deaths from the syndrome in the Midwest peaked in 1995 and then dropped drastically in the following years, with the release of antiretroviral protease inhibitors. This positive turn of events led to a decline in patient populations and, ultimately, to the closure of Unit 371. Czerwiec's restrained, inviting drawing style and carefully considered narrative examine individual, institutional, and community responses to the AIDS epidemic—as well as the role that art can play in the grieving process. - Amazon

Cutter, Nick. *The Troop*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

[Horror/thriller novel; Amazon reviews describe it as gory; includes animal torture.] Once a year, Scoutmaster Tim Riggs leads a troop of boys into the Canadian wilderness for a weekend camping trip—a tradition as comforting and reliable as a good ghost story around a roaring bonfire. But when an unexpected intruder stumbles upon their campsite—shockingly thin, disturbingly pale, and voraciously hungry—Tim and the boys are exposed to something far more frightening than any tale of terror. The human carrier of a bioengineered nightmare. A horror that spreads faster than fear. A harrowing struggle for survival with no escape from the elements, the infected . . . or one another. - publisher

Defoe, Daniel. *A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations or Memorials of the Most Remarkable Occurrences, as Well Publick as Private, Which Happened in London during the Last Great Visitation in 1665*. Oxford English Novels. London, New York [etc.]: Oxford UP, [1722] 1969. [Full text](#). Teachable excerpts gathered by Will Deringer available [here](#).

Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* is a work of what we would now call "creative nonfiction." In it, Defoe narrates his observations of "normal" life in the city of London as the bubonic plague of 1665 passed through it. The stories he tells are all, presumably, true, yet the degree to which they were directly witnessed and faithfully reported remains to the reader to evaluate. Defoe's style, anecdotal and meditative, anticipates the *flaneur* tradition of the centuries to come (best recognized in works like those of W.G. Sebald and Teju Cole). Defoe's framing foregrounds the profound, fraying consequences of fear in pre-Enlightenment English society, and invites reflection on the germ-like power of rumor in a civic community on the brink of consolidation through print technology. - Ana Schwartz

Feinberg, David B. *Eighty-Sixed*. Grove Press, 1989. [AIDS]

---. *Spontaneous Combustion*. Penguin, 1992. [AIDS]

Forster, E. M. "The Machine Stops." 1909. [Full text](#).

In the future, humans believing the world's surface is uninhabitable live in isolated subterranean cells connected by the "Machine," an internet-like device which facilitates audio and visual connection but also enables surveillance and the enforcement of state ideology.

García Márquez, Gabriel. *Love in the Time of Cholera*. [1985] Everyman's Library, 1997.

In their youth, Florentino Ariza and Fermina Daza fall passionately in love. When Fermina eventually chooses to marry a wealthy, well-born doctor, Florentino is devastated, but he is a romantic. As he rises in his business career he wastes away the years in 622 affairs--yet he reserves his heart for Fermina. Her husband dies at last, and Florentino purposefully attends the funeral. Fifty years, nine months, and four days after he first declared his love for Fermina, he will do so again. - From the publisher. Nadia Celis adds: The background to the love story is the Cholera epidemics that devastated Cartagena de Indias in 1849, taking the lives of a third of the city's population, and subsequently spreading along the Colombian Caribbean.

Ghosh, Amitav. *The Calcutta Chromosome : a Novel of Fevers, Delirium, and Discovery*. Bangalore: Ravi Dayal Publisher; Distributed by Orient Longman Ltd., 1996.

This novel has been described as "a kind of mystery thriller" (India Today). It brings together three searches: the first is that of an Egyptian clerk, Antar, working alone in a New York apartment in the early years of the twenty-first century to trace the adventures of L. Murugan, who disappeared in Calcutta in 1995; the second pertains to Murugan's obsession with the missing links in the history of malaria research; the third search is that of Urmila Roy, a journalist in Calcutta in 1995 who is researching the works of Phulboni, a writer who produced a strange cycle of "Lakhan stories" that he wrote in the 1930s but suppressed thereafter. -Amitav Ghosh home page

Giono, Jean. *The Horseman on the Roof: A Novel*. North Point Press, [1951] 2014. [cholera]

Adventure novel tells the story of Angelo Pardi, a young Italian carbonaro colonel of hussars, caught up in the 1832 cholera epidemic in Provence. - wikipedia

Hambly, Barbara. *Fever Season*. New York: Bantam Books, 1998.

The summer of 1833 has been one of brazen heat and brutal pestilence, as the city is stalked by Bronze John—the popular name for the deadly yellow fever epidemic that tests the healing skills of doctor and voodoo alike. Even as Benjamin January tends the dying at Charity Hospital during the steaming nights, he continues his work as a music teacher during the day. When he is asked to pass a message from a runaway slave to the servant of one of his students, January finds himself swept into a tempest of lies, greed, and murder that rivals the storms battering New Orleans. And to find the truth he must risk his freedom...and his very life. - publisher

Harriott, Thomas. *A Briefe and True Report of the Newfound Land of Virginia*. (London, 1588.) [Full text](#).

Contains an account of Native populations succumbing to an infectious disease (possibly typhoid or malaria) while the English survived. He reports that the Algonkian people, upon observing that entire communities would fall ill after the English visited, believed that the English used magical powers to shoot them with "invisible bullets."

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Minister's Black Veil." [mask wearing] [Full text](#).

---. "Lady's Eleonor Mantle." *The United States Democratic Review* (Dec. 1838, Vol 2. Issue 12).

A mantle, a dying woman, and an epidemic of smallpox in the 1720s in Boston. Gothic galore. - Cécile Roudeau

Haynes, Todd. *Safe in Far from Heaven, Safe, and Superstar: Three Screenplays*, Grove/Atlantic, Inc., [1995] 2007. [social distancing, race, social anxiety]

Safe...is the disturbing, elusive story of an affluent suburban housewife whose life is shattered by a mysterious illness. - Amazon.

Herrera, Yuri. *The Transmigration of Bodies*. Los Angeles: And Other Stories, 2016.

A fixer has to deliver a body that has ended in the wrong hands in a city under the siege of an epidemic.

Hesse, Hermann. *Narcissus and Goldmund*.

In this novel, set in medieval Germany, Goldmund goes to live in the forest during the Black Death with friends Robert and Helene. "Death was no longer a warrior, a hangman or a rigid father, death was now also like a mother or a beloved one, its call was a call of love, its touch a shudder of love." (The

section about the Black Death is only a few chapters of the novel, which follows Goldmund's journeying throughout his life.) - Jenna (please fill in your last name if you see this)

Ibsen, Henrik. *Ghosts*. [1881] Translated, with an Introduction, by William Archer. Project Gutenberg, 2009. [STDs] [Full text in English](#).

Helen Alving is about to dedicate an orphanage she has built in memory of her late husband, Captain Alving. She reveals to Pastor Manders that her marriage was secretly miserable because her husband was unfaithful. She has built the orphanage to deplete her husband's wealth so that their son Oswald will not inherit anything from him. In the course of the play, she discovers that her son Oswald (whom she had sent away to avoid his being corrupted by his father) is suffering from syphilis that she believes he inherited from his father. She also discovers that Oswald has fallen in love with her maid Regina Engstrand, who is revealed to be the illegitimate daughter of Captain Alving and is therefore Oswald's half-sister. When Regina and Oswald's sibling relationship is exposed, Regina departs, leaving Oswald in anguish. He asks his mother to help him avoid the late stages of syphilis with a fatal morphine overdose. She agrees, but only if it becomes necessary. The play concludes with Mrs. Alving having to confront the decision of whether or not to euthanize her son in accordance with his wishes. -wikipedia

James, Henry. *Daisy Miller*. Harper and Brothers, 1879.

Daisy dies of "Roman Fever" - Kim Adams

Jemisin, N.K. *The Fifth Season (Broken Earth #1)*. Orbit, 2015.

An on-the-ground account of a planetary disaster in a fantasy landscape. In addition to being a Hugo Award-winning text (the first of three in a row for Jemisin, itself a first for any author, much less a woman of color), it is also being held up as an example of the blossoming "hopepunk" subgenre, a dedication to hope despite impossible odds. - A. David Lewis

Jonson, Ben. "On his First Son." [Full text](#).

Killian, Kevin. *Argento Series*. San Francisco: Krupskaya, 2001.

Killian writes AIDS through the prism of the films of Dario Argento. - Jenny Davidson

King, Stephen. [The Stand](#). New York: Doubleday, 1978.

One man escapes from a biological weapon facility after an accident, carrying with him the deadly virus known as Captain Tripps, a rapidly mutating flu that - in the ensuing weeks - wipes out most of the world's population. In the aftermath, survivors choose between following an elderly black woman to Boulder or the dark man, Randall Flagg, who has set up his command post in Las Vegas. The two factions prepare for a confrontation between the forces of good and evil. - Stephen King

Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*. 1st ed. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993. [HIV/AIDS]

Lam, Vincent. *Bloodletting & Miraculous Cures: Stories*. Anchor Canada, 2009. [SARS]

An astonishing literary debut centred around four students as they apply to medical school, qualify as doctors and face the realities of working in medicine, from a powerful voice in fiction. - publisher. It tracks these students as they are exposed to and experience SARS.

Larson, Jonathan. *Rent*. New York: Rob Weisbach Books, 1996. [HIV/AIDS]

Leveen, Lois. *Juliet's Nurse*. Simon & Schuster, 2014. Imagining the fourteen years leading up to the events in "Romeo and Juliet" from the perspective of one of Shakespeare's most comic, tragic, bawdy, and memorable characters, this novel explores life in Verona in the wake of the plague, as survivors come to terms with what it means to live when so many have died.

Liank, Yan. *Dream of Ding Village*. Melbourne: Text Publishing Company, 2010. [HIV/AIDS]

As the book opens, Ding Village's town directors, looking for a way to lift their village from poverty, decide to open a dozen blood-plasma collection stations. The directors hope to drain the townspeople of their blood and sell it to villages near and far. The novel focuses on one family, destroyed when one son rises to the top of the Party as he exploits the situation, while another is infected and dies. Based on a real-life blood-selling scandal in eastern China, the novel is the result of three years of undercover

work by Lianke, who once worked as an assistant to a well-known Beijing anthropologist in an effort to study a small village decimated by HIV/AIDS as a result of unregulated blood selling. The result is a passionate and steely critique of the rate at which China is developing—and what happens to those who get in the way. - publisher

London, Jack. *The Scarlet Plague*. 1912. [Full text](#).

Plague wipes out most of humanity, but one English professor survives to reboot culture as best he can.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *Evangeline*. 1847.

Ma, Ling. *Severance*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018.

Candace barely notices when a plague of biblical proportions sweeps New York. Then Shen Fever spreads. Families flee. Companies cease operations. The subways screech to a halt. Her bosses enlist her as part of a dwindling skeleton crew with a big end-date payoff. Soon entirely alone, still unfevered, she photographs the eerie, abandoned city as the anonymous blogger NY Ghost.... - Amazon

MacDonald, Betty. *The Plague and I*. Harper Collins, 1948. [tuberculosis]

“Getting tuberculosis in the middle of your life is like starting downtown to do a lot of urgent errands and being hit by a bus. When you regain consciousness you remember nothing about the urgent errands. You can’t even remember where you were going.” Thus begins Betty MacDonald’s memoir of her year in a sanatorium just outside Seattle battling the “White Plague.” MacDonald uses her offbeat humor to make the most of her time in the TB sanatorium—making all of us laugh in the process. - publisher

Makkai, Rebekah. *The Great Believers*. New York: Viking, 2018. [AIDS]

Yale, a development director for an art gallery in Chicago, has a flourishing career, but his friends are dying of AIDS. Soon the only person he has left is Fiona. Thirty years later, Fiona is in Paris tracking down her estranged daughter who disappeared into a cult. While staying with an old friend, a famous photographer who documented the Chicago crisis, she finds herself finally grappling with the devastating ways AIDS affected her life and her relationship with her daughter. The two intertwining stories take us through the heartbreak of the eighties and the chaos of the modern world, as both Yale and Fiona struggle to find goodness in the midst of disaster. - abridged from publisher

Mandel, Emily St. John. *Station Eleven*. New York: Vintage Books, 2014.

“Kirsten Raymonde will never forget the night Arthur Leander, the famous Hollywood actor, had a heart attack on stage during a production of *King Lear*. That was the night when a devastating flu pandemic arrived in the city, and within weeks, civilization as we know it came to an end. Twenty years later, Kirsten moves between the settlements of the altered world with a small troupe of actors and musicians. They call themselves The Traveling Symphony, and they have dedicated themselves to keeping the remnants of art and humanity alive. But when they arrive in St. Deborah by the Water, they encounter a violent prophet who will threaten the tiny band’s existence. And as the story takes off, moving back and forth in time, and vividly depicting life before and after the pandemic, the strange twist of fate that connects them all will be revealed.” (from Amazon)

Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice: A New Translation, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*. 1st ed. Norton Critical Edition. New York: WWNorton, 1994. [cholera]

Man decides to stay in Venice on vacation to watch a young boy with whom he is obsessed during a cholera pandemic.

---. *The Magic Mountain*. 1924. Vintage Edition, 1996. Trans. John E. Woods.

In this dizzyingly rich novel of ideas, Mann uses a sanatorium in the Swiss Alps—a community devoted exclusively to sickness—as a microcosm for Europe, which in the years before 1914 was already exhibiting the first symptoms of its own terminal irrationality. The Magic Mountain is a monumental work of erudition and irony, sexual tension and intellectual ferment, a book that pulses with life in the midst of death. - publisher.

Manzoni, Alessandro. *The Betrothed (I promessi sposi)*. D. Appleton, 1900.

Detailed description of 17th-century Italian cities stricken by plague, at the climax of a long tale of lovers kept apart by fate. - Jesse Raber

Maugham, W. Somerset. *The Painted Veil*. 1925.

A recently married couple, a callow young woman and her bacteriologist/physician husband, are stationed in mainland China during a cholera outbreak. A heart-breaking look at love, relationships, self-knowledge, and sacrifice. The title is derived from a Percy Bysshe Shelley sonnet that begins with the line, "Lift not the painted veil which those who live / Call Life."

Maxwell, William. *They Came Like Swallows*. Vintage, 2009. [influenza] [Google preview](#).

To eight-year old Bunny Morison, his mother is an angelic comforter in whose absence nothing is real or alive. To his older brother, Robert, his mother is someone he must protect, especially since the deadly, influenza epidemic of 1918 is ravaging their small Midwestern town. To James Morison, his wife, Elizabeth, is the center of a life that would disintegrate all too suddenly were she to disappear. - publisher

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. Vintage: 2006.

The world has ended, maybe by nuclear holocaust, but the main characters do not know. The novel is about scarcity and suffering and the hope for survival. It also addresses religion, in the sense of what God exists in the midst of suffering.

Moraga, Cherríe. *Heroes and Saints*. West End Press, 1994. [AIDS]

This searing play takes place in California's central valley where Mexican immigrants are employed at survival wages to work in fields poisoned by pesticides. One of the main characters, Cerezita, has only half a body, and often occupies center stage encased in an altar-like contraption where only her head shows. She seeks and finds intellectual companionship in the local priest who is struggling to find an appropriate way to minister to a parish divided among disillusioned cynics turned alcoholic, pious women who want nothing to do with politics, and the angry young, including one young homosexual who feels driven to leave a loving but uncomprehending family, and reveals to the priest that he has AIDS. The play culminates in a protest in which Cerezita and the priest are shot down and the young man with AIDS cries out for the community to burn the fields.- abridged from Marilyn McEntyre, [LITMED: Literature and Arts Database](#).

Morrison, Toni. *A Mercy*. 1st ed., Knopf, 2008.

Florens, a slave, lives and works on Jacob Vaark's rural New York farm. Lina, a Native American and fellow laborer on the Vaark farm, relates in a parallel narrative how she became one of a handful of survivors of a smallpox plague that destroyed her tribe. Vaark's wife Rebekka describes leaving England on a ship for the new world to be married to a man she has never seen. Vaark, himself an orphan and poorhouse survivor, describes his journeys from New York to Maryland and Virginia, commenting on the role of religion in the culture of the different colonies, along with their attitudes toward slavery. When smallpox threatens Rebekka's life, Florens, now 16, is sent to find a black freedman who has some knowledge of herbal medicines. Her journey is dangerous, ultimately proving to be the turning point in her life. - wikipedia

Mpe, Phaswane. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow: A Novel of Postapartheid South Africa*. Modern African Writing. Ohio University Press, 2011. [Project Muse full text](#).

Welcome to Our Hillbrow is an exhilarating and disturbing ride through the chaotic and hyper-real zone of Hillbrow—microcosm of all that is contradictory, alluring, and painful in the postapartheid South African psyche. Everything is there: the shattered dreams of youth, sexuality and its unpredictable costs, AIDS, xenophobia, suicide, the omnipotent violence that often cuts short the promise of young people's lives, and the Africanist understanding of the life continuum that does not end with death but flows on into an ancestral realm. - publisher

Mullen, Thomas. *The Last Town on Earth*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Set in a fictional mill town in Washington state in 1918 founded as a socialist commune, the town's ideals are threatened by both the pro-war actions of the government and the fear of the townspeople about the Spanish flu.

Murphy, Pat. *The City, Not Long After*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

"After a deadly plague sweeps the world, toppling governments in its wake, a few surviving artists who have claimed San Francisco as their home wage an unorthodox war against an invading army intent on bringing the blessings of law and order to a community that has discovered a better way of life." (from Library Journal)

Nashe, Thomas. "A Litany in Time of Plague." 1592. [Full text](#)

Pepys, Samuel. *Diary* (1665-66). [Full Text](#).

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. "Zerviah Hope." Vol. 8. Scribner's, Nov. 1880. [Full text](#).

A story about a yellow fever epidemic in Southern Carolina. Zerviah Hope travels south to nurse the dying. Also features Dr. Marian Dare (no onomastics involved, of course!) - Cécile Roudeau

Poe, Edgar Allan. "King Pest: A Tale Containing an Allegory." Richmond, VA, 1835 [probably cholera, but not explicit] [Full text](#).

———. "The Masque of the Red Death" Philadelphia, 1842. [black death/cholera, but not explicit] [Full text](#).

———. "The Sphinx." [cholera] [Full text](#).

"The **Sphinx**" is a short story about a man who decides to visit a relative living near the Hudson River north of New York City for two weeks during a cholera epidemic that occurred during the summer of 1832.

Porter, Katherine Anne. *Pale Horse, Pale Rider; Three Short Novels*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939. [Spanish flu] [Full text](#)

In "Noon Wine?" a family struggling to live on a farm in Texas is saved by the unexpected arrival of a mysterious stranger—only to have their world upended again by the arrival, nine years later, of a second stranger. The three parts of "Old Mortality" introduce the teenager Miranda and chronicle her journey of self-discovery, as she gradually realizes her family's romantic nostalgia for her absent uncle and late aunt bears little resemblance to the truth. Miranda returns in the title story, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider." She is now working as a drama critic for a newspaper in Denver, where she falls in love with a soldier, Adam, during the influenza epidemic of 1918. When Miranda falls ill, Adam cares for her until she is moved to a hospital. Throughout her ordeal, on everyone's mind is "the war, the war, the WAR to end WAR, war for Democracy, for humanity, a safe world forever and ever." - publisher

Preston, Richard. *The Hot Zone: The Chilling True Story of an Ebola Outbreak*. Random House, 2012.

A highly infectious, deadly virus from the central African rain forest suddenly appears in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. There is no cure. In a few days 90 percent of its victims are dead. A secret military SWAT team of soldiers and scientists is mobilized to stop the outbreak of this exotic "hot" virus. *The Hot Zone* tells this dramatic story, giving a hair-raising account of the appearance of rare and lethal viruses and their "crashes" into the human race. Shocking, frightening, and impossible to ignore, *The Hot Zone* proves that truth really is scarier than fiction. - publisher

Robinson, Kim Stanley. *The Years of Rice and Salt*. New York: Bantam Books, 2002.

An alternate history novel set in a world where the Black Death killed 99% of Europe's population, leading to Islam and Buddhism becoming the dominant religions on Earth.

Roth, Philip. *Nemesis*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010. [polio]

Set in a Newark neighborhood during a terrifying polio outbreak, *Nemesis* is a wrenching examination of the forces of circumstance on our lives. - publisher

Reed, Ishmael. *Mumbo Jumbo*. Doubleday, 1972.

In 1920s America, a plague is spreading fast. From New Orleans to Chicago to New York, the "Jes Grew" epidemic makes people desperate to dance, overturning social norms in the process. Anyone is

vulnerable and when they catch it, they'll bump and grind into a frenzy. Working to combat the Jes Grew infection are the puritanical Atonists, a group bent on cultivating a "Talking Android," an African American who will infiltrate the unruly black communities and help crush the outbreak. But PaPa LaBas, a *houngan* voodoo priest, is determined to keep his ancient culture—including a key spiritual text—alive. Spanning a dizzying host of genres, from cinema to academia to mythology, *Mumbo Jumbo* is a lively ride through a key decade of American history. - publisher

Shiel, Matthew Phipps. *The Purple Cloud*. Penguin UK, 2012.

Spreading cloud of gas from the North Pole slowly annihilates humanity. Pandemic-like social responses. - Jesse Raber

Sjón. *Moonstone: The Boy Who Never Was*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016. [1918 influenza]

Máni Steinn is queer in a society in which the idea of homosexuality is beyond the furthest extreme. His city, Reykjavik in 1918, is homogeneous and isolated and seems entirely defenseless against the Spanish flu, which has already torn through Europe, Asia, and North America and is now lapping up on Iceland's shores. And if the flu doesn't do it, there's always the threat that war will spread all the way north. And yet the outside world has also brought Icelanders cinema! And there's nothing like a dark, silent room with a film from Europe flickering on the screen to help you escape from the overwhelming threats--and adventures--of the night, to transport you, to make you feel like everything is going to be alright. For Máni Steinn, the question is whether, at Reykjavik's darkest hour, he should retreat all the way into this imaginary world, or if he should engage with the society that has so soundly rejected him. - publisher

Sophocles. *Oedipus*. FF Plays. London: Faber and Faber, 2008.

St John Mandel, Emily. *Station Eleven*. Picador, 2014. [influenza]

One snowy night in Toronto famous actor Arthur Leander dies on stage whilst performing the role of a lifetime. That same evening a deadly virus touches down in North America. The world will never be the same again. Twenty years later Kirsten, an actress in the Travelling Symphony, performs Shakespeare in the settlements that have grown up since the collapse. But then her newly hopeful world is threatened. - publisher

Saramago, José. *Blindness*. Harcourt Brace & Company, 1998.

A city is hit by an epidemic of "white blindness" which spares no one. Authorities confine the blind to an empty mental hospital, but there the criminal element holds everyone captive, stealing food rations and raping women. There is one eyewitness to this nightmare who guides seven strangers—among them a boy with no mother, a girl with dark glasses, a dog of tears—through the barren streets, and the procession becomes as uncanny as the surroundings are harrowing. A magnificent parable of loss and disorientation, *Blindness* has swept the reading public with its powerful portrayal of our worst appetites and weaknesses—and humanity's ultimately exhilarating spirit. - publisher

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *The Last Man*. London: Henry Colburn, 1826. [Full text](#)

Post-apocalyptic science fiction novel [that...] tells of a future world that has been ravaged by a plague. - wikipedia

Stifter, Adalbert. *Granite*. Leipzig, 1853.

On a walk, the grandfather of the protagonist tells him the story of a family of resin extractors' vain endeavour to escape and the rescue of two children...A resin extractor wanted to escape the oncoming plague and fled into the deep woods. - wikipedia

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. 1897.

The titular character, Count Dracula, symbolizes a parasite on the move who eventually crosses the border into Britain. Published at a time when bacteriology and parasitology were beginning to be widely accepted.

Sue, Eugène. *The Wandering Jew*. Paris, 1844. [cholera]

About descendants trying to make their way back to Paris to claim a fortune while the “wandering jew,” who rarely appears, spreads cholera in his wake, destined to wander until all the whole family is dead. **[NB: antisemitic and anti-Catholic]**

Tāj al-Sirr, Amīr. *Ebola '76*. London: Darf Publishers, 2015.

On a hot, humid August day in 1976, The Democratic Republic of Congo is the setting of the first major Ebola outbreak. Unfortunately, the outbreak is difficult to contain and control due to the squalid living conditions as a result of deep poverty, and the population's ignorance and apathy regarding the virus. These 2 factors help the Ebola strain to fester and spread to an epidemic affecting the city Kinshasa heavily. As luck would have it, an ordinary Sudanese factory worker by the name Lewis, who happened to stop through Kinshasa on his way back to his home, contracted the virus from an escort during an adulterous romp and consequently brought it back to his home in Nzara to subsequently spread like wildfire. The novel goes on and shows Ebola's path of destruction in Nzara through Lewis' social connections and its devastating effect on the town as a whole. - wikipedia

Tiptree, James Jr. "The Screwfly Solution." *Analog Science Fiction and Fact* (June 1977).

A Science fiction short story by Raccoona Sheldon, a pen name for American psychologist [Alice Sheldon](#), who was better known by her other *nom de plume* James Tiptree, Jr. It received the Nebula Award for Best Novelette. Aliens, hoping to depopulate and colonize the Earth, infect humanity with a pandemic disease that turns male sexual desire into an urge to kill women. - Jesse Raber

Voigt, Ellen Bryant. [Kyrie: Poems](#). WW Norton, 1995. [influenza]

Her collection *Kyrie* (1995), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle award, is a book-length sonnet sequence exploring the lives of people affected by the influenza epidemic of 1918–1919. - Poetry Foundation

Vaughn, Brian K., Pia Guerra, Goran Sudžuka, and Paul Chadwick. *Y the Last Man Omnibus*. Vertigo, 2019.

In 2002, the world changes forever. Every man, every boy, every mammal with a Y chromosome everywhere on Earth suddenly collapses and dies. With the loss of nearly half the planet's population, the gears of society grind to a halt, and a world of women are left to pick up the pieces and try to keep civilization from collapsing entirely. The "gendercide," however, is not absolutely complete. For some unknown reason, one young man named Yorick Brown and his pet male monkey, Ampersand, are spared. Overnight, this anonymous twentysomething becomes the most important person on the planet--the key, it is hoped, to unlocking the secret of the mysterious sex-specific plague. - Amazon

Vergheese, Abraham. *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story*. Vintage, 1994 [AIDS]

Nestled in the Smoky Mountains of eastern Tennessee, the town of Johnson City had always seemed exempt from the anxieties of modern American life. But when the local hospital treated its first AIDS patient, a crisis that had once seemed an “urban problem” had arrived in the town to stay. Working in Johnson City was Abraham Vergheese, a young Indian doctor specializing in infectious diseases. Dr. Vergheese became by necessity the local AIDS expert, soon besieged by a shocking number of male and female patients whose stories came to occupy his mind, and even take over his life. - Amazon

Von Reizenstein, Baron Ludwig. *The Mysteries of New Orleans*. JHU Press, [1854-55] 2002. [yellow fever]

Reizenstein crafted a daring occult novel that stages a frontal assault on the ethos of the antebellum South. His plot imagines the coming of a bloody, retributive justice at the hands of Hiram the Freemason—a nightmarish, 200-year-old, proto-Nietzschean superman—for the sin of slavery. Heralded by the birth of a black messiah, the son of a mulatto prostitute and a decadent German aristocrat, this coming revolution is depicted in frankly apocalyptic terms. - publisher

Yoshimura, Akira. *Shipwrecks*. [1992] Translated from Japanese by Mark Ealey. Harvest Books 1996.

Slim novel by a Japanese author. In the 18th century, a coastal village lights fires to lure ships to crash on rocky shoals and plunder their contents. Their latest “catch” contains much more than they bargain for, an infectious cargo that spreads through the village, afflicting the townspeople and wreaking havoc on the community. Written in a terse and spare fashion, a haunting morality tale with a Gothic tone.

Walker, Karen Thompson. *The Dreamers: A Novel*. Random House, 2019.

A campus novel-cum-plague narrative, *The Dreamers* centers around Mei, a first year at a small Southern California college, navigating the panic and social intricacies of quarantine from a disease that makes the victim drift into a permanent state of sleep.

Whitehead, Colson. *Zone One*. Penguin Random House, 2011.

A pandemic has devastated the planet, sorting humanity into two types: the uninfected and the infected, the living and the living dead. After the worst of the plague is over, armed forces stationed in Chinatown's Fort Wonton have successfully reclaimed the island south of Canal Street—aka Zone One. Mark Spitz is a member of one of the three-person civilian sweeper units tasked with clearing lower Manhattan of the remaining feral zombies. *Zone One* unfolds over three surreal days in which Spitz is occupied with the mundane mission of straggler removal, the rigors of Post-Apocalyptic Stress Disorder (PASD), and the impossible task of coming to terms with a fallen world. And then things start to go terribly wrong... - publisher

Wideman, John Edgar. *The Cattle Killing*. Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

In plague-ridden eighteenth-century Philadelphia, a young itinerant black preacher searches for a mysterious, endangered African woman. His struggle to find her and save them both plummets them both into the nightmare of a society violently splitting itself into white and black. Spiraling outward from the core image of a cattle killing--the Xhosa people's ritual destruction of their herd in a vain attempt to resist European domination--the novel expands its narrator's search for meaning and love into the America, Europe and South Africa of yesterday and today. - summary by Jenny Davidson

Wojnarowicz, David. *7 Miles a Second* Fantagraphics Books, 2013. [AIDS]

7 Miles a Second is the story of legendary artist David Wojnarowicz, written during the last years before his AIDS-related death in 1992. Artists James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook unsentimentally depict Wojnarowicz's childhood of hustling on the streets of Manhattan, through his adulthood living with AIDS, and his anger at the indifference of government and health agencies. A primal scream of a graphic novel, *7 Miles a Second* blends the stark reality of Lower East Side street life with a psychedelic delirium that artfully conveys Wojnarowicz's sense of rage, urgency, mortality and a refusal to be silent. - publisher

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- [Pride](#) (2014), Matthew Warchus
- [The Normal Heart](#) (2014), Ryan Murphy
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- [Pride and Prejudice and Zombies](#) (2016), Burr Steers

[Grain \[Buğday\]](#) (2017), Semih Kaplanoğlu
[It Comes At Night](#) (2017), Trey Edward Shults
[Annihilation](#) (2018), Alex Garland
[BPM: Beats per Minute](#) (2018), Robin Campillo

TV/Streaming Series

Pandemic: How to Prevent an Outbreak (Netflix docuseries, [link to 30-day free trial](#))
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