

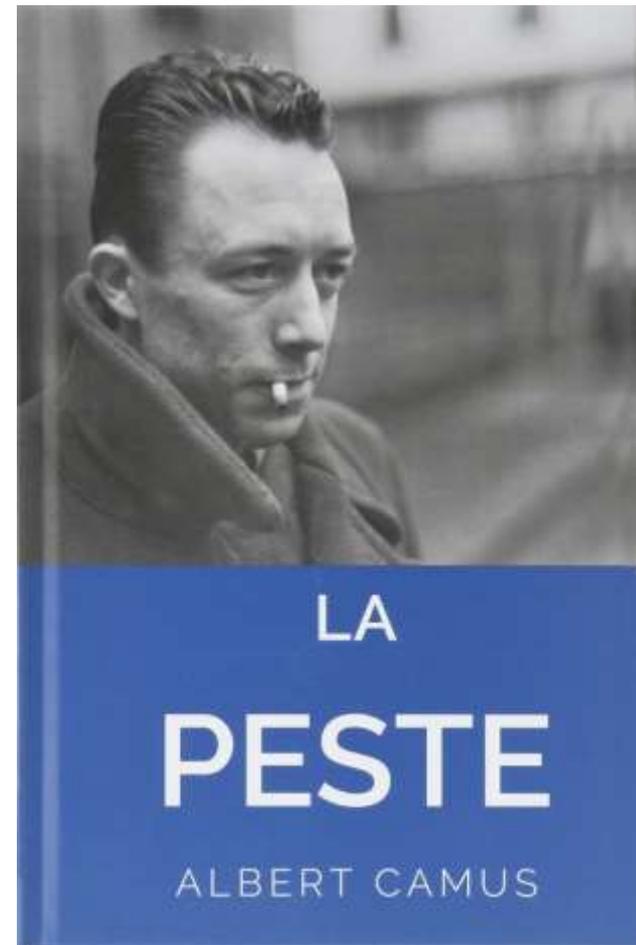
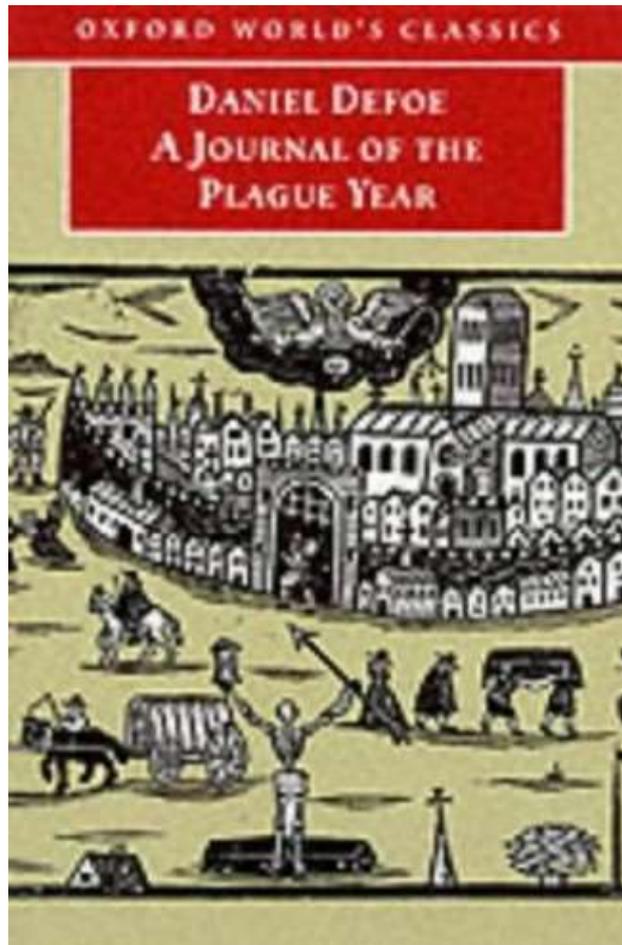
Pandemics in Literature: the Case of *La Peste*

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A Journal of the Plague Year (1722) and *La Peste* (1947)



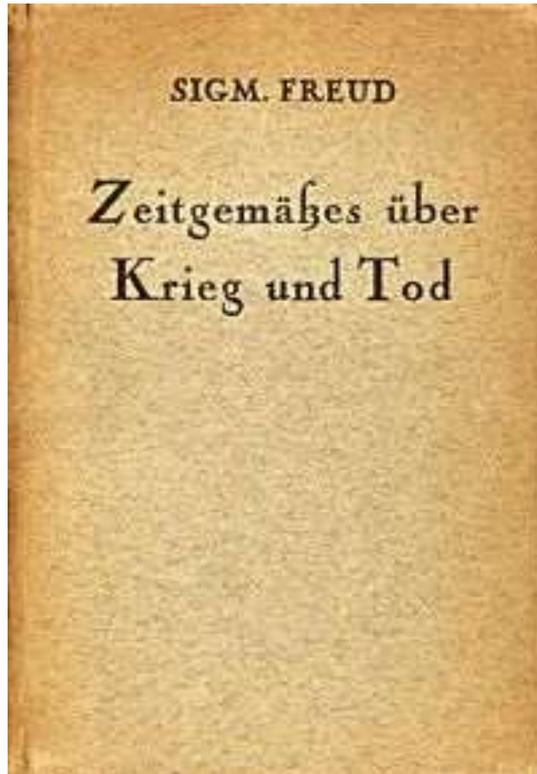
‘From its arrival in Pisa in 1348 to the last great outbreak in Marseilles in 1720, the bacterium killed at least 30 percent of Europe’s population and probably a comparable number along its path from South Asia to the Middle East. That would translate to ninety-nine million deaths in the US alone.’

Lorraine Daston, *Critical Inquiry*.
April 2020

Paneloux's first sermon

- You fondly imagined it was enough to visit God on Sundays, and thus you could make free of your weekdays. You believed some brief formalities, some bendings of the knee, would recompense Him well enough for your criminal indifference. But God is not mocked. These brief encounters could not sate the fierce hunger of His love. He wished to see you longer and more often; that is His manner of loving and, indeed, it is the only manner of loving. And this is why, wearied of waiting for you to come to Him, He loosed on you this visitation; as He has visited all the cities that offended against Him since the dawn of history. Now you are learning your lesson, the lesson that was learned by Cain and his offspring, by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, by Job and Pharaoh, by all that hardened their hearts against Him. And like them you have been beholding mankind and all creation with new eyes, since the gates of this city closed on you and on the pestilence. Now, at last, you know the hour has struck to bend your thoughts to first and last things.

Freud, 'Thoughts for the Times on War and Death' (1915)



- What came into existence beside the dead body of the loved one was not only the doctrine of the soul, the belief in immortality and a powerful source of man's sense of guilt, but also the earliest ethical commandments. The first and most important prohibition made by the awakening conscience was: 'Thou shalt not kill.' It was acquired in relation to dead people who were loved, as a reaction against the satisfaction of the hatred hidden behind the grief for them; and it was gradually extended to strangers who were not loved, and finally even to enemies.

Group Processes (Bion)

pairing or baP

- In this assumption two members of the group would become visibly interested in one another and the group would assume the role of matchmaker. This would arise regardless of the sex of the members. 'The group tolerates this situation, and, although knowing smiles are interchanged, the group seems prepared to allow the pair to continue their exchange indefinitely. There are exceptions, but they are not so numerous as one would imagine, considering the other individuals in the group have a good deal that they would like to say.'

fight-flight or baFF

- 'Preoccupation with fight-flight leads the group to ignore other activities, or, if it cannot do this, to suppress them or run away from them.'

Group processes (Bion)

Dependency or baD

- 'In the dependent group,' flight is confined to the group, flight to the psychiatrist; the impulse of the group is away from the hostile object; of the psychiatrist towards it... The characteristics of this group are immaturity in individual relationships and inefficiency... Except in the leader, fearfulness becomes the supreme virtue of the individual in this kind of group. Participation in this emotional field means a heightened capacity, as soon as any member of the group experiences fear, for instantaneous flight. Such a state of affairs is very disagreeable to the individual, who, after all, retains full consciousness of his desires as a fully grown adult.'

The Work Group or W

- The work group is distinguished from basic assumption formations by the fact that it is held together by a task. This prevents it from being swamped by the emotional currents that overwhelm basic assumption groups.

La Peste

- ‘These ecstatic couples, locked together ... proclaimed in the midst of the tumult of rejoicing, with the proud egoism and injustice of happy people, that the plague was over, the reign of terror ended. Calmly, *they denied in the teeth of evidence that we had ever known a crazy world* in which men were killed off like flies, or that precise savagery, that calculated frenzy of the plague.’