



FLOR LITR 3319

From the Black Death to Present Days: Threatening the end of the world between chronicles and literature

CAPA FLORENCE PROGRAM

Course Description

This course will start from the analysis of masterpieces of European and American literature dealing with the great pandemics of the past, fictional and non-fictional, as a prime example of how writers, and artists in general, are capable of transforming end-of-the-world events into works of art. A multidisciplinary approach, dealing with social, political, and historical implications will provide further understanding by placing each literary work in a comprehensive cultural context. This reflection on the past will provide students with the tools to observe and analyze the present situation of health crisis as recounted in the words of contemporaries. Students will be prompted to start their own research on how today's intellectuals have processed the experience of this last pandemic, investigating different aspects of their reaction to the crisis within the contemporary cultural context. Thanks to this research, and the reading of past literary pieces, students will be able to develop their own reflections on the meaning given by human beings to health catastrophes throughout history, especially focusing on our deeply human ability to transform even the most catastrophic situation into a great piece of literature.

Course Aims

The aim of the course is to stimulate a deep reflection on the meaning that human beings have always given to natural and health catastrophes, that is any time men had to face their deepest fear—the end of the world, as the threat to their innate thought of an endless progress in life. Through the study of great works of literature that explore the fictional and non-fictional human reaction to this fear, students will then be able draw connections, comparison and contrasts with the most recent situation of global pandemic, developing and expressing a personal reflection in their final paper and oral presentation after conducting an independent research prompted by the instructor.

Requirements and Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course. Students are asked to take careful notes during lectures as the issues addressed in class are to be considered a fundamental didactic base for the whole course. Individual study of notes, readings, handouts etc. is required on a weekly basis. NOTE: it is the students' responsibility to check whether they have all the materials needed for each class.

Capa Students Learning & Developmental Outcomes (SLDOs)

1. **Globalization.** Students are able to recognize, describe, and interpret examples of the impact of the globalization in the urban environment.
2. **Urban Environment.** Students are able to explore and analyse the spaces they inhabit, and reflect on differences and similarities between their home and host environments.
3. **Social Dynamics.** Students are able to understand concepts of and the implications of the realities of power, privilege, and inequality in urban environments.
4. **Diversity.** Students are able to describe, interpret, and respect the differences and similarities within their student community and between their home country and the host country.
5. **Personal and Professional Development:** CAPA students will gain insight into their personal and professional development that occurred during their CAPA learning abroad experience, with emphasis on the skills they acquired that will be of particular interest to future employers and graduate school admissions officers. The development of skills relative to personal and professional development and career preparedness include for this class the following ones:

- 🔊 **Communications:** The ability to receive, interpret, and articulate information and ideas effectively;
- 🔊 **Remote Collaboration:** The ability to utilize IT resources to connect virtually with others and achieve collective goals and objectives;
- 🔊 **Global Perspective:** The skills required to live and work in an interdependent world through forming an understanding of connections between one's own life and those of people across the globe;
- 🔊 **Cultural Awareness:** The understanding of oneself, others and the ability to embrace and appreciate diverse and complex perspectives, values, and beliefs;
- 🔊 **Organization, Time Management and Prioritization Skills:** The ability to achieve identified outcomes by using time, energy and resources in an effective and productive manner;
- 🔊 **Problem Solving:** The ability to find solutions to difficult or complex issues and to manage moments of uncertainty or ambiguity;
- 🔊 **Adaptability:** The ability to adjust oneself readily to different conditions and environments;
- 🔊 **Goal Setting:** The ability to identify, form and implement actions that will achieve pre-determined aims and objectives;

Learning Outcomes specific for the course:

- A. Recognize, describe, and analyze major works from European and American literature, underlining the main themes and motifs that can be useful to their individual research
- B. Conduct an independent research on contemporary literary contributions on the pandemic, drawing analogies and contrasts with the works previously read, analyzed and discussed together
- C. Reflect on how human beings react to the threat of the “end of the world”, how they process such historical critical moments, and how they narrate them in their works, focusing on this deeply human ability to transform life-threatening events into pieces of literature
- D. Develop, organize and express their ideas into a long-written composition that will deal with all the above-mentioned aspects but will also include their personal ideas and observations on the experience and elaboration of this last pandemic

Class Methodology

Lectures, class discussions either in classroom or online and in the form of short written assignments; weekly homework; independent research. Lectures will introduce the main aspects of the literary pieces to engage students in both individual and peer discussion. Homework and assignments will reinforce new acquisitions and will give students a chance to practice and prepare for both the mid-term and especially the final paper. In their independent research, students will be guided through class discussion and individual feedback, so that they can select, analyze and use the results of their research in their final written work.

Mid-Term, Oral Presentation & Final Paper

The mid-term exam consists of:

- 🔊 10 short-answer questions about the literary works discussed in class (90 minutes)

The oral presentation consists of:

- 🔊 Presentation in front of the class about the results of each student's independent research (min 8 max 10 minutes, PPT or Google Slide – no flashcards)

The final paper consists of:

- 🔊 Essay in which students will combine the analysis of literary pieces read and discussed during the course, the results of their independent research, and their personal ideas and reflections on what it means to transform an experience of pandemic into a piece of writing (min 2000, max 3000 words, font size 12, double-spaced)

Assessment/Grading Policy

Descriptor	Alpha	UK	US	GPA
Excellent	A	75+	93+	4.0
	A-	70-74	90-92	3.7
Good	B+	66-69	87-89	3.3
	B	63-65	83-86	3.0
	B-	60-62	80-82	2.7
Average	C+	56-59	77-79	2.3
	C	53-55	73-76	2.0
Below Average / Poor	C-	50-52	70-72	1.7
	D+	46-49	67-69	1.3
	D	40-45	60-66	0.7
				1.0






Fail	F	<40	<60	0
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Grade Breakdown and Assessment of Learning Outcomes






Assessment Task	Grade %	Learning Outcomes	Due Date
Class participation/Small group discussion	10%	a, b, c, d	Weekly
Assignments	20%	a, c	Various Weeks
Mid-term exam	20%	a, c	Week 6
Oral presentation	20%	b, c	Week 13
Final Paper	30%	a, b, c, d	Week 14

Assignments






Assignment 1 on Boccaccio's *Decameron* – DUE Lesson 3

-  Why does Boccaccio decide to write the *Decameron*?
-  What is the situation in Florence during the plague?
-  Where do the 10 young protagonists decide to go during the plague?
-  How do they organize their time during their stay? Why?
-  Choose 1 novella from the *Decameron* and briefly summarize the plot and the main themes (min 250, max 350 words).

Assignment 2 on Defoe's *The Journal of the Plague Year* – DUE Lesson 5

-  What is the situation in London during the plague?
-  Who is the narrator?
-  How would you describe the style of narration?
-  What is the reaction of the wealthiest when the plague starts spreading? And what measures does the Lord Mayor's Office adopt?
-  How does Defoe depict the Londoners in his account?

Assignment 3 on Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* – DUE Lesson 6

-  What is the "red death"?
-  What does Prince Prospero decide to do when the plague breaks out?
-  Briefly describe the rooms in which the masquerade ball was held.
-  What do you think each of the colors of the rooms and the clock of ebony represent?
-  How does Prospero react when he sees the Masque?

Assignment 4 on Manzoni's *The Betrothed* – DUE Lesson 10

- Briefly summarize the plot and main themes of *The Betrothed* (min 300, max 400 words).
- How does Manzoni describe the spreading of the plague in Milan?
- What are the measures adopted?
- Who were the *untori*? How does the mob react to them?

Assignment 5 on Camus's *The Plague* – DUE Lesson 11

- Briefly summarize the plot and the main themes of *The Plague* (min 300, max 400 words).
- How does the city of Oran react to the spreading of the plague?
- What are the social and psychological effects of the plague on the Oranians?
- Which allegories can we identify in this novel?







Assignment 6 on Saramago's *Blindness* – DUE Lesson 12

- Briefly summarize the plot and the main themes of *Blindness* (min 300, max 400 words).
- How does the unknown epidemic start to spread? What are the symptoms?
- What does the situation inside the asylum evolve?
- In your opinion, what message does Saramago want to give in his novel?







Course Materials

Textbooks, articles and materials can be found in the sections 'Modules' on CANVAS.

Required Readings

-  Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Decameron*.
https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecIndex.php?lang=eng
-  Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. [http://www.24grammata.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The Plague Albert Camus-24grammata.com_.pdf](http://www.24grammata.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The_Plague_Albert_Camus-24grammata.com_.pdf)
-  Defoe, Daniel. *The Journal of the Plague Year*. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d783/6e710cf3ea0a80e2ade0f9ecbe58d1bc0a94.pdf>
-  Manzoni, Alessandro. *The Betrothed*. Penguin Classics, UK, 1984. (Excerpts on CANVAS)
-  Poe, Edgar Allan: *The Masque of the Red Death*. https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Poe/Red_Death.pdf
-  Saramago, José: *Blindness*. Penguin Vintage Classics, UK, 2013. (Excerpts on CANVAS)

Recommended Reading(s)

-  Codebò, Marco. "Records, Fiction, and Power in Alessandro Manzoni's 'I Promessi Sposi' and 'Storia Della Colonna Infame.'" *MLN*, vol. 121, no. 1, 2006, pp. 187–206. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3840728
-  Hibbert, Christopher. *Florence: The Biography of a City* Penguin, UK, 1993. (File on CANVAS)
-  Kurman, George. "A Methodology of Thematics: The Literature of the Plague." *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1982, pp. 39–53. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40246293
-  Martin, Terence. "The Imagination at Play: Edgar Allan Poe." *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1966, pp. 194–209. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4334634
-  Novak, Maximillian E. "Defoe and the Disordered City." *PMLA*, vol. 92, no. 2, 1977, pp. 241–252. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/461944
-  Pamuk, Orhan. "What the Great Pandemic Novels Teach Us." *The New York Times*, April 23 2020, <https://www.ny-times.com/2020/04/23/opinion/sunday/coronavirus-orhan-pamuk.html>

Weekly Course Schedule

Week 1	
Lesson 1	Course Presentation
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the course • Overview on the biggest pandemics in European and American literature • The Covid-19 pandemic • Chronological table of important dates in the life of Boccaccio
Readings	Boccaccio, Giovanni: <i>The Decameron</i> (https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecIndex.php?lang=eng) Life of Boccaccio: https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/boccaccio/life1_en.php

Week 2	
Lesson 2	Boccaccio and the Black Death
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life of Boccaccio: homework – correction and class discussion • Introduction to <i>Decameron</i>: structure, main characters, and themes • The Black Death: the 1348 plague in Florence • Florentine society in the 1300s – File on CANVAS
Readings	Assigned novellas from Boccaccio, Giovanni: <i>The Decameron</i> (https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecIndex.php?lang=eng) Selected excerpt from Hibbert, C: <i>Florence: The Biography of a City</i> (File on CANVAS)
Assignments	Assignment 1 on Boccaccio's novellas – DUE Lesson 3

Week 3	
Lesson 3	Boccaccio's novellas
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Florentine society in the 1300s, correction and class discussion • Boccaccio's novellas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Andreuccio of Perugia ◦ Tancred and his daughter ◦ Federigo degli Alberighi ◦ The Abbess and the Breeches ◦ Calandrino and the Heliotrope • Chronological table of important dates in the life of Daniel Defoe
Readings	Life of Defoe: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Defoe Novak, Maximillian E: "Defoe and the Disordered City." in PMLA, vol. 92, no. 2, 1977 (File on CANVAS)

Week 4	
Lesson 4	Defoe and the Great Plague of London
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniel Defoe's life and main works, correction and class discussion • <i>The Journal of the Plague Year</i>: structure, main characters, and themes • The Great Plague of London • Chronological table of important dates in the life of Edgar Allan Poe
Readings	Defoe, Daniel: <i>The Journal of the Plague Year</i> https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d783/6e710cf3ea0a80e2ade0f9ecbe58d1bc0a94.pdf Life of Edgar Allan Poe: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/edgar-allan-poe
Assignments	Assignment 2 on Defoe's <i>Journal</i> – DUE Lesson 5

		Week 5
Lesson 5	Edgar Allan Poe and a Gothic representation of death	
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life of Edgar Allan Poe, correction and class discussion • <i>The Masque of the Red Death</i>: themes and symbology • Gothic fiction: main themes, traits and authors • The imagination of Edgar Allan Poe 	
Readings	Poe, Edgar Allan: <i>The Masque of the Red Death</i> https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Poe/Red_Death.pdf Martin, Terence: "The Imagination at Play: Edgar Allan Poe." in <i>The Kenyon Review</i> , vol. 28, no. 2, 1966 (File on CANVAS)	
Assignments	Assignment 3 on Poe's short story – DUE Lesson 6	

		Week 6
Lesson 6	Mid-term Week	
In-class course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review for mid-term exam • MID-TERM EXAM 	

		Week 7
Lesson 7	SEMESTER BREAK	

		Week 8
Lesson 8	Research Project – Pre-research work	
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools and methodology to research contemporary voices on the last great pandemics of the world • Detailed instructions for final paper • Instructor-led research on contemporary voices dealing with the last pandemic • Chronological table of important dates in the life of Alessandro Manzoni 	
Readings	Life of Manzoni: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alessandro-Manzoni Codebò, Marco: "Records, Fiction, and Power in Alessandro Manzoni's 'I Promessi Sposi' and 'Storia Della Colonna Infame.'" in <i>MLN</i> , vol. 121, no. 1, 2006 (File on CANVAS)	
Assignments	First draft of research results – DUE Lesson 9	

		Week 9
Lesson 9	Manzoni and the Plague in Milan	
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life of Alessandro Manzoni, correction and class discussion • Italy in the 1600s • The plague in <i>The Betrothed</i> • The Historical Novel: between facts and fiction • Research results – Feedback 1 • Chronological table of important dates in the life of Albert Camus 	
Readings	Manzoni's <i>The Betrothed</i> (File on CANVAS) Life of Albert Camus: http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/camus/camusbio.htm	
Assignments	Assignment 4 on Manzoni's novel – DUE Lesson 10 Second draft of research results – DUE Lesson 10	

Week 10	
Lesson 10	<i>The Plague</i> and Camus's allegory
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life and main works by Albert Camus, correction and class discussion • <i>The Plague</i>: structure, main characters, and themes • The existential novel • Research results – Feedback 2 • Chronological table of important dates in the life of José Saramago
Readings	Camus's <i>The Plague</i> http://www.24grammata.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/The_Plague_Albert_Camus-24grammata.com_.pdf Life of Saramago: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1998/saramago/biographical/
Assignments	Assignment 5 on Camus's novel – DUE Lesson 11 Final paper outline – DUE Lesson 11

Week 11	
Lesson 11	A light that never goes out: Saramago's hope in <i>Blindness</i>
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life and main works by José Saramago, correction and class discussion • <i>Blindness</i>: structure, main characters, and themes • Saramago's vision of human nature
Readings	Saramago's <i>Blindness</i> (File on CANVAS) Goldberg, Myla: "In Saramago's 'Blindness,' A Vision Of Human Nature" https://www.npr.org/2010/12/28/132292587/in-saramagos-blindness-a-vision-of-human-nature?t=1597232393872
Assignments	Assignment 6 on Saramago's novel – DUE Lesson 12

Week 12	
Lesson 12	Research Project – Focus
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one or small group meetings with instructors to discuss outline and structure of oral presentation and final paper • Independent work on oral presentation and final paper during class time
Assignments	Prepare Oral Presentation

Week 13	
Lesson 13	Oral Presentations
In-class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral presentations • Feedback on Final paper and final adjustments

Week 14	
Lesson 14	Final Class Discussion and Submission of Final Paper
In-class course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final discussion on past and present contemporary writers on pandemics • Submission of Final Paper

Attendance, Participation & Student Responsibilities

Attendance: CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Attendance is taken at the beginning of every class. Unless otherwise expressed by your instructor, the first time a student has an unexcused absence for a class, their grade will not be impacted. The second time a student has an unexcused absence in that class, it will result in a 3 percent reduction of the final grade (for example: an A- [92] will become a B+ [89]). The student will be placed on academic probation at this time. Three unexcused absences per class will result in failure of the course. A pattern of three absences in more than one course will result in dismissal from the program.

Excused Absences: Absences are only excused for medical reasons, for a family emergency or for a religious holiday. To request an excused absence, students must contact the Academic Director ahead of time and provide evidence (e.g. a doctor's note) of the reason for their absence, otherwise the absence will not be excused. Even if the student knows the absence will not be excused, the student should still contact CAPA to inform CAPA they will not be in class.

In addition to contacting the Academic Director, it is the responsibility of the student to contact their instructor and make up any missed assignments.

Class Participation: Students are expected to participate actively and critically in class discussions, and the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. Students must read assignments BEFORE the class, and come in on time. Participation is a vital part of your grade: students are expected to participate orally in seminars and in online forums and discussions in a critical and evaluative manner; to interact with the faculty and fellow students with respect and tolerance; and to actively engage in discussion. Derogatory or inflammatory comments about the cultures, perspectives or attitudes of others in the class will not be tolerated.

Any student who feels they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability should contact the instructor and/or the director of academic affairs privately to discuss your specific needs.

Academic Integrity: A high level of responsibility and academic honesty is expected. Because the value of an academic course depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student, it is imperative that a student demonstrates a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work and class behavior. Plagiarism, self-plagiarism and cheating can result in dismissal from the program.

Self-plagiarism, copying an assignment entirely or partially to submit to a different class in an attempt to receive credit twice for one piece of work is unacceptable and considered cheating by duplication. Students risk receiving an "0" for any assignments in which they have duplicated their own work.

All substantial writing assignments (typically anything worth 20% or more of the final course grade) will be run through the plagiarism checking software Turnitin when submitted via CANVAS. See CAPA's Academic Standards and Policies for more information and resources on plagiarism.

Sexual Misconduct, Required Reporting, and Title IX: CAPA The Global Education Network is committed to encouraging a safe and healthy environment at our seven CAPA centers. This commitment includes the understanding of, and applicable adherence to, the guidelines outlined in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Title IX necessitates that US universities provide equity in all educational programs and activities without sex discrimination.

CAPA understands the implications of Title IX compliance for our institutional partners and thus endeavors to support this compliance as a vital aspect of partnership. The safety and security of all students during a program is a matter of crucial importance to CAPA. To facilitate this, CAPA encourages students to openly disclose any and all information that is Title IX relevant so that CAPA staff can provide support and connect students with appropriate resources. Because students may not understand the implications of Title IX abroad, CAPA will work to advise students about the resources available through Title IX and explain the importance of compliance in Title IX reporting. CAPA will work to build student confidence in CAPA's status as a mandated reporter by outlining the advantage of disclosure for the student, reassuring them that any information disclosed will not be used in an inappropriate manner, and stressing that individuals will only be informed on a need-to-know basis.

Use of electronic equipment in class: All devices such as laptops, i-pods, i-pads, netbooks, notebooks and tablets, smartphones, cell phones, etc. are **NOT** allowed unless you have express permission from the faculty or you have been instructed to do so. If you require an accommodation to use any type of electronic equipment, inform the Associate Director of Academic Affairs at the beginning of Term.

Use of Electronic Translators: In Language courses students are NOT allowed to use electronic translators for writing texts in the target language: those submitting compositions and texts of whatever kind translated in such a fashion will receive a final F grade for the course.

Late Submission: Late submission of papers, projects, journal entries, pieces of homework and portfolios is only permitted with prior approval. A request for an extension must be made to the relevant faculty member no later than two days prior to the due date. Late submission without prior approval will result in a 3 percent per day deduction of the final grade. In either case, work cannot be submitted after feedback has been provided to the rest of the class on the relevant assessment or one week after the due date whichever comes first, after which point a grade of “0” will be given for the assessment.

Behaviour during Examinations: During examinations, you must do your own work. Unless specifically instructed by the lecturer or instructor, talking during an exam is not permitted, nor may you compare papers, copy from others, or collaborate in any way. Any failure to abide by examination rules will result in failure of the exam, and may lead to failure of the course and disciplinary action.