

The Thirteenth Quadrennial International Conference on Comparative Literature

Call for Papers

Comparative Literature in an Era of Pandemics: Medicine, Health, and the Environment

Organizers:

Department of English, Tamkang University
Comparative Literature Association of the Republic of China (CLAROC)

Date: December 15-16, 2023

Venue: Tamkang University, Tamsui, Taiwan

Humanity has experienced many pandemics throughout history. The Black Death in the Middle Ages resulted in the collapse of feudalism. The severe damage caused by the 1918 flu pandemic contributed to the advancement of public health, specifically the development of social medicine. The coronavirus pandemic in the 21st century has substantially affected the flow of people, money, products, and political ideas across national borders. The ongoing pandemic has left us with many questions pertaining to medicine, health, and the environment.

Health is the foundation of a vital and prosperous country. According to Michel Foucault, “bio-power” refers to mechanisms of power governing all aspects of human life by European states since the 18th century. This is echoed in different contexts by Hartmut Rosa’s understanding of power and governance that “are based at least in part on resonant relationships, i.e. on the inner consent of the governed when they feel reached or touched by the powerful and are willing to respond to this with accommodation, so that an at least proto-dialogic relation is established between governing and governed.” Such power aims to effectively regulate health, customs, and reproductive practices, and to manage the population by strengthening public health institutions, guaranteeing the security of life and increasing the welfare of the people. One of the main goals of state governance is to ensure the health and safety of the population. Today, in addition to the state’s surveillance of the people (including lockdowns, nucleic acid testing, and the emphasis on vaccine coverage), people’s self-monitoring of health is not entirely for the disease-free continuation of their own lives, but sometimes an effort to avoid stigmatization of and interruption to their quotidian lives. In this latter process, the subject develops anxiety, which

ironically stands as antithetical to health. A pandemic causes people to focus on the body, to be intensively concerned about their physical and mental health. The concept of health under the haze of a pandemic has never been a neutral concept. It becomes a moral imperative.

The symbiosis between humans and germs has persisted since ancient times, but with modern advances of medical technology, humans have isolated germs from human civilization, resulting in the paradoxical phenomenon discussed by Steve Hinchliffe et al. in *Pathological Lives*: It is the apparent stability of modern life that manifests a form of vulnerability. The stability of the human world is susceptible to being pushed into a pathological state in particular places and at specific times. The coronavirus pandemic is one clear example that prompts us to think about the meaning of coexistence between natural and civilized states of being.

From Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* to Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*, from Albert Camus's *The Plague* to Virginia Woolf's "On Being Ill," and from Katherine Anne Porter's "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" to Orhan Pamuk's recently published *Nights of Plague*, writers from different eras and different parts of the world explore the affect and events of this ineluctable conjunction between humans and their pathogenic counterparts on this planet. The conference hopes to shed light on the dynamics in literature that dissect various aspects of the pandemic experience by tapping into the dialectics of medical treatment and care, health and disease, and social development and ecology.

Papers that present original work and include (but are not limited to) the following topics are solicited:

- World Literature and Planetary Health
- Utopian Literature and the Pandemic
- Pandemic Apocalypse in Dystopias
- Pandemic Literature and Medicine
- Medical Humanities and the Anthropocene
- Biomedical Ethics in Literature
- Illness Narrative and Medicine
- Race, Imperialism, and Disease
- Medicine and Health Care in Literary Production
- Pandemic Fear and Anxiety in Literature
- Mental Health and Normality in Literature
- Surveillance and State of Exception in Literary Imagination
- Bio-governmentality and Human Rights in Literature
- Representations of Environmental Impact of Disease in Fiction, Poetry, and

Drama

- Online Literary Pedagogy during the Pandemic

Panel proposals are welcome. The deadline for proposals is **March 15th, 2023**. Notice of acceptance, together with a registration form, will be sent before March 22nd, 2023. All participants from abroad whose papers have been accepted will be provided with board and lodging for the duration of the conference (if funding is available). The official language for the conference is English. Please send your proposal (350 words maximum) and short bio of 100 words to:

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