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The Evolution of Global Pandemics and Partnership with Medieval Literature

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Introduction:

Though our society today has scientifically evolved since the 1300's, it's important to look at the effects of the two most widely known pandemics; The Black Death and COVID-19. Related to the Black Death, I also further dive into the topic of literature and its overall affect and importance on the population during the time of this pandemic, as well as the importance of media/literature use during COVID-19.

- How did the art of distracting literature/media help people get through these unprecedented times?
- What was the environment like during the black plague?
 - Was it like anything we have seen during today while facing COVID, or did it vary?

Comparison Between The Black Death and COVID-19, Connection to Literature/Media:

- According to WorldMeters.Info, approximately 219 countries and territories have been affected by COVID-19, or better known as the Corona Virus. Nationally there have been 116,670,105 confirmed cases and 2,592,085 deaths. COVID-19 has evidently affected the earth's population, especially those who reside in the United States.
- The last global pandemic which had lifelong affects was the "Black Death", otherwise known as the Bubonic Plague, which began in Afro Eurasia during the medieval period from 1346-1353. An estimated 75-200 million deaths were caused, which notes the Bubonic Plague as the deadliest pandemic known in history.
- When it comes to these two abnormal environments as well as their century of time, people had different ways of coping and expressing themselves.
- Author Cook describes the Black Death to be "the first great pandemic to leave in it's wake a continuous succession of literary and historical records, and the effects of the plague upon religion, law, medicine, architecture, art, education, and literature are well-nigh incalculable" (6).
- When Author Wiley describes COVID-19 as "social distancing, travel restrictions, quarantine, and closing the business outlets have changed the fabric of society. With people have been forced out of the safety and well-being of their routine, their social media have taken at the center stage more than ever, and to global social networking and discussions" (2).

It is interesting to see that while these two pandemics happened in such different centuries, they both continue to have lasting impacts on our world today.

However, the platform has changed from newspapers, books, (though still relevant) to devices, news channels, social media engagement apps, etc.

Methodology:

- By comparing Raymond, A. Cook's article, "The Influence of the Black Death on Medieval Literature and Language" to Mahammad Saud's "Usage of social media during the Pandemic: Seeking Support and awareness about COVID-19 through social media platforms" I was able to begin comparing these diverse environments, but these two sources especially allowed me to dive into the literature/media portion and observe the impact in which these platforms each had at one time.
- I further examined these environments by viewing statistics and learning about the history of the Black Death in general, by reading Faye Marie Getz's journal article, "Black Death and the Silver Lining: Meaning, Continuity, and Revolutionary Change in Histories of Medieval Plague".



Results:

- In several ways, literature in the 1300's written during the Black Plague was a coping mechanism and mental release for a variety of the population. Cook describes this work in his journal article, "The literary cures and preventives compromise almost every imaginable, including immobility, violent exercise, breathing either fresh stable air, eating all kinds of pungent condiments and making various use of all sorts of liquids (including urine)" (10).
- He also includes a poem written by Hans Folz which embodies his statement perfectly:

"Wash every morning with it clear
Hands, mouth, and face and nose and ear,
Shoulders and body everywhere,
And drink a sup with a morning fare
To raise the heart and purge the blood-
Thus, many have the plague withstood"

(10).
- Evidently, the death toll of the Black Plague was much more severe than COVID due to the evolution of medicine. One of the many personal examples used to capture the heart break was a story that Faye Marie Getz used in her journal article. "Agnolo di Tura, who survived the plague in Siena related that more than 80% of the Sieneese people perished. "I buried my five children with my own hands," he said; and there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city" (269).
- Though those who have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic have lost relatives, been affected personally, financially, etc. The population had the ability to stay connected with one another via social media. They have also had the ability to educate themselves via the internet. Within her research Faye Marie Getz found that, "People see social media have benefitted them to various interests, so when we ask their opinion whether "social media have helped to aware of pandemic," the majority of respondents (67,5%) stated agreed that their social media are useful to learn and collect information about the illness" (3). Throughout the use of and availability of several different social media platforms, during COVID-19 we were able to cope with apps like TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

Conclusion:

The Black Death and COVID-19 were proven to be two heart breaking pandemics that took the lives of millions of innocent people.

Though each of these events took place in different centuries, the population during those times were able to cope differently and have an output to express themselves.

For many British Medievalists, their way of coping was through literature, poetry, and their ability to share their creative works with those around them.

Today, during the midst of the COVID pandemic, people are able to express themselves via social media, connect with friends and family, as well as educate themselves.

In the same regard, since these platforms weren't available during the 1300's, those involved in the Black Plague were affected must worse, as there was no way to connect with relatives or educate themselves, they suffered the the constant fear of the unknown.

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Acknowledgements/Contact:

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Please feel free to reach out to me with questions via my email: vada5662@bears.unco.edu