

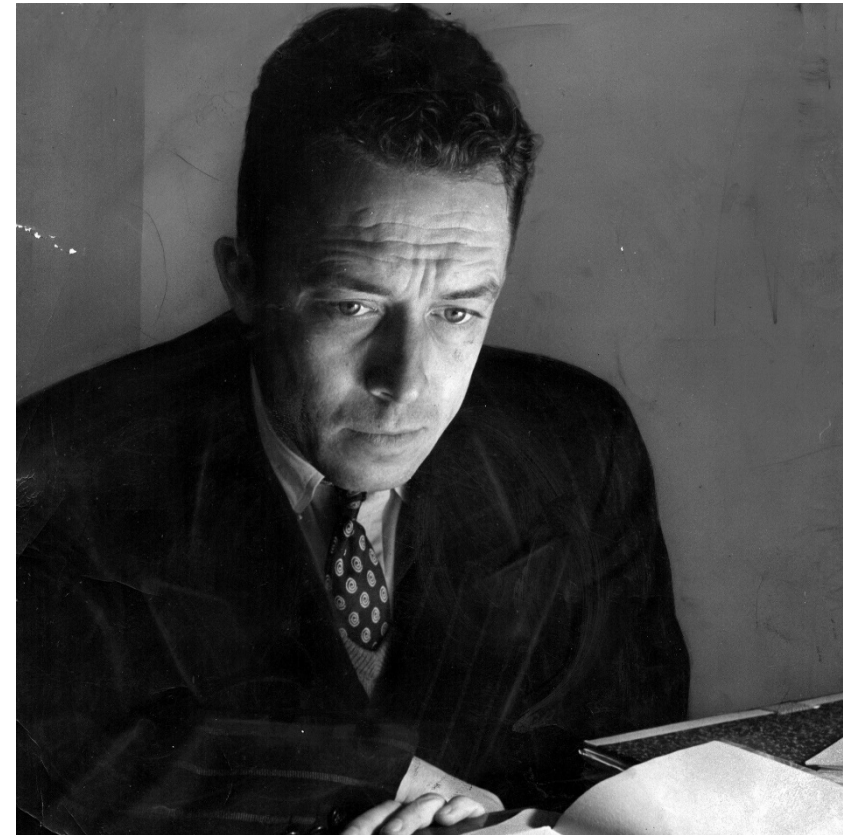
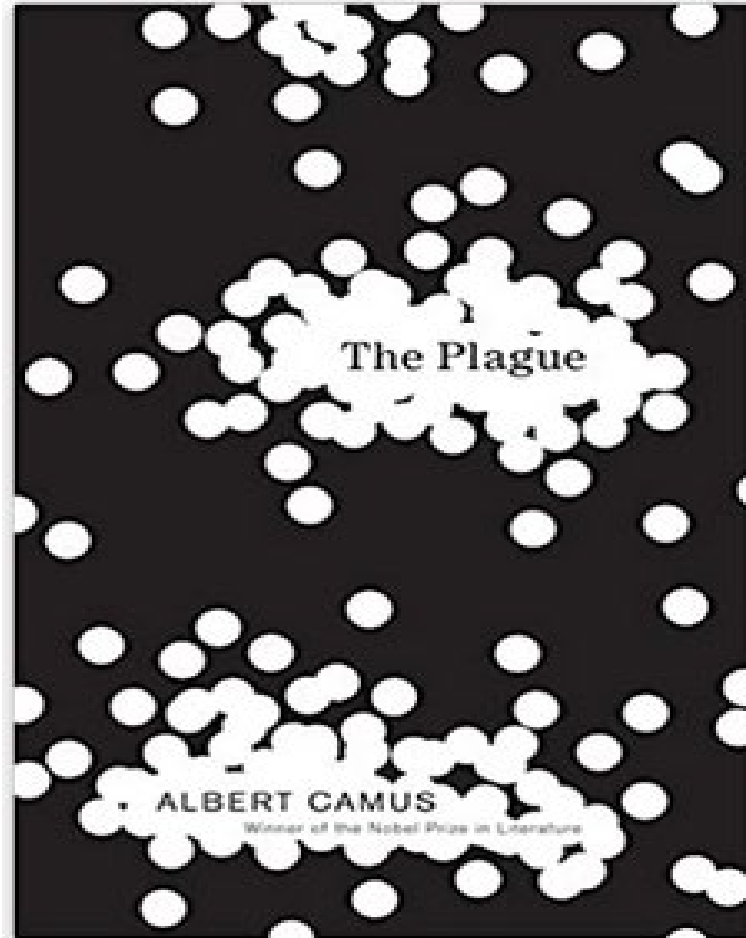
# What *The Plague* Teaches Us about the Pandemic

Courtney S. Campbell, Ph.D.

Oregon State University



# Pandemics, Plagues, and Philosophies



**Albert Camus, 1913-1960**



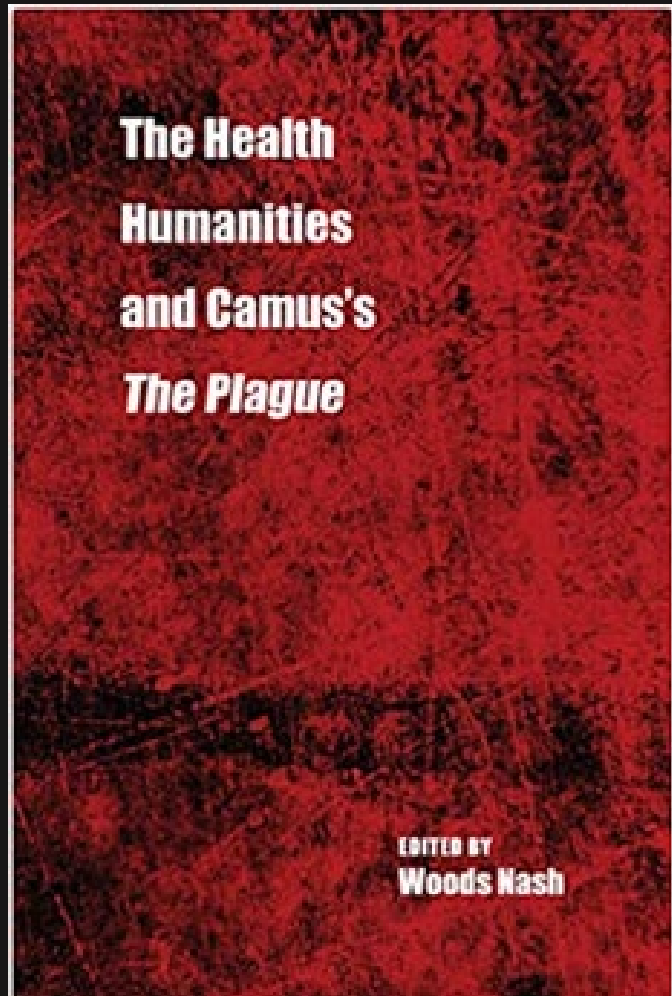
# METHOD: Reading “Backwards”



“Dr. Rieux resolved to write this chronicle .. [to] bear witness in favor of those plague-stricken people ... to state quite simply what we learn in time of pestilence: there are more things to admire in men than despise.

... He knew the tale he had to tell could not be one of a final victory. It could only be the record of what had had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again .. by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.”

# What is “the plague”?



## HUMAN INTERACTIONS

- *Silencing*
- *Exile*
- *Forced Solidarity*

## SOCIAL CONTEXTS

- *Loss of agency*
- *Social stratification*
- *Quest for Normalcy*
- *Pandemic Amnesia*

*“[Rieux] remembered ... that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; ... that it can lie dormant for years, ... that it bides its time ... and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.”*

# What is “the plague”?



Edvard Munch, *The Scream*

## **EXISTENTIAL PROTEST**

- *“the long, incessant scream”*
- *Death orders the world*
- *“Eternal cry of human pain”*

## **Existential Reality**

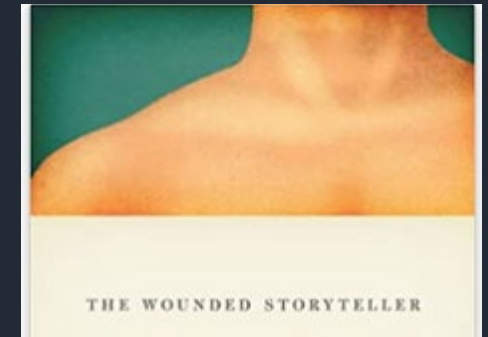
- *“we have plague already”*
- *Pestilences, victims, healers*
- *The path of “sympathy”*

## **The “Now”-ness of Life**

- *Time and “vanishing memory”*
- *A “canceled future” and suffering*
- *“Present” is all one has*

# The “Healer’s Witness”

**Healers**  
*Extraordinary Clinicians at Work*



## Healing “the plague”

- *Healer’s vulnerability*
- *Vocational commitment*
- *Vigil: Bearing witness*
- *Solidarity with “victims” (“crime” metaphor)*
- *Restoring health, re-storying persons*