



THE USAGE OF THE WORD "PLAGUE" IN ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract

Disease-related terms are frequently employed in oral and creative works in all languages, in addition to scientific terminology. They are priceless because they represent the distinct viewpoint, way of life, religious and cultural beliefs, background, and customs of every nation. Finding out the unique characteristics of their written creative speech, stylistic-functional speech, and lexicalsemantic speech is crucial. The article covers the definition of the word "plague" in both literal and metaphorical senses, its derivation, artistic depiction of the word in these contexts, its metaphorical use in English literary examples, and the expressions and idioms derived from it.

Keywords: disease, plague, meaning, plague, epidemic, symbolism, social pain, medieval English literature, pestis, disease.

Introduction

Proverbs, which are one of the most common concise forms of English folklore, have been passed down from mouth to mouth for centuries. They have played a major role in the development of the language and literature of each nation. A proverb is an example of folklore that has a logically completed meaning and embodies the life experiences, attitude to society, history, mental state, ethical and aesthetic feelings, and moral views of ancestors. It is noteworthy that in some of their samples it is possible to observe the expression of the names of diseases. It should be said that they have a unique position in the language and speech of the peoples of the whole world. They are valuable because they express the socio-cultural life, lifestyle, beliefs and customs of each nation related to healing magic. This requires distinguishing the specific features of their lexicalsemantic, stylistic-functional use in oral and written creative speech.

Words, phrases, names of diseases that have been formed by people for centuries as a medical lexicon and that reflect the accumulated knowledge and experience in medicine, concepts related to health, are unique in English, as in every language. constitutes a system. In the same system, proverbs formed in connection with them also have a place.

When we initially researched the history and usage of the English word "plague" - "plague" - it became clear that:

Since the word "plague" appeared, we can see that the name of this disease is often used as a metaphor. Until recently, the concept of plague seemed to most of us to belong to history, and it was associated with a general idea of suffering. The ten plagues of Egypt are not limited to disease, they are called "Ten plagues of Egypt" - "10 plagues of Egypt" and thus entered history. These





are: Blood on the Nile; frogs; bits; mosquitoes; killing livestock; purulent boils; hail; grasshoppers; darkness; and the death of the eldest son.

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Plagues, like wars, are a marker in the historical record. Authors as diverse as Boccaccio, Daniel Defoe, Albert Camus, and Gabriel García Márquez produced great works of literature during the plague. In the case of Camus, the plague was chosen as an allegory for fascism. It's a metaphor for something that penetrates a certain place and causes subtle changes in human behavior that most people don't notice. These days, when dealing with a fast-moving disease outbreak (as with COVID-19), see a more clinical term like epidemic or pandemic rather than something like plague. can reach But in the past, the consequences of this disaster were taken into account as "black plague". In this case, the adjective "black" in its content secretly refers to the concept of "death".

Let's look at examples of how the word "plague" is used in a sentence:

In the same year, a plague of natural disasters broke out in the country.

There is a plague of bank robberies in the region.

In these examples, the word "plague" is used not in the meaning of a disease, but as a social issue.

There are also words derived from the word "plague", such as anti-plague, which is an adjective and is used in the sense of applying anti-plague measures. For example, anti-plague measures. According to Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, the term plague was first used in 1817.

From the root word plague, new words are formed by adding nouns and adjectives, such as plaguer - pestering, plaguesome - difficult, troublesome, or plaguey - angry or worried.

One of the issues to consider is what the plague means in slang. There are several phrases with the term Plague in English. We know that cholera is an incurable disease, even though it is taboo. In English, a plague on both your/their houses is used as an exclamation of anger, disgust or rejection of two opposite people or groups.

Research Methodology

Writers and poets also used folk proverbs in English literature.

William Shakespeare, who lost his two older brothers to the plague as an infant, used the word plague in at least 25 different plays, but the plague itself is rarely mentioned as a plot point. No hero dies of the plague. Instead, Shakespeare chose to use the concept of plague as a metaphor. Perhaps the most famous use is Mercutio's line in Romeo and Juliet. It is repeated several times before death.

Tybalt under Romeo's arm stabs Mercutio, and flies with his followers

Mercutio: I am hurt.

A plague o' both your houses! I am sped.

Is he gone, and hath nothing?

What, art thou hurt? Ay, ay, a scratch, a scratch; marry, 'tis enough. Where is my page? Go, villain, fetch a surgeon. (3,104)

In this excerpt from Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Mercutio, having been mortally wounded by Tybalt under Romeo's arm, curses both the Capulet and Montague families with the words "A plague o' both your houses!" This curse reflects Mercutio's frustration and anger at being caught in the feud between the two families and ultimately losing his life because of it.

The phrase "A plague o' both your houses!" is a powerful condemnation, using the word "plague" metaphorically to express Mercutio's desire for harm or misfortune to befall both the Capulets and





Montagues. It signifies Mercutio's belief that the ongoing feud between the two families is senseless and destructive, leading to unnecessary violence and death. Mercutio's curse also serves as a pivotal moment in the play, foreshadowing the tragic consequences that will follow as a result of the feud. It heightens the tension and sense of impending doom, setting the stage for the tragic events that will unfold in the remainder of the play. So, Mercutio's curse of "A plague o' both your houses!" encapsulates the central themes of fate, conflict, and tragedy in "Romeo and Juliet," while also highlighting the destructive nature of vendettas and the consequences of unresolved hatred and animosity.

The meaning of the lines is that, in the Middle Ages, a disease of plague spread in England, many people were killed, and swear words appeared with the name of this disease. In the above sentence, Mercutio, who was injured, said that the people who put him in this situation, may the pestilence come to your house, i.e. perish, used the word plague as a general expression of curse.

Another compound is the phrase **plague someone or something with something** which means to worry, to annoy or annoy with constant actions, and also an incessant attack that drives a person to despair. For example: "Stop plaguing me with your requests. Stop bothering me with your demands" or "We plagued the committee with ideas. We overwhelmed the committee with our ideas."

Shakespeare used this phrase in the play "Othello"

IAGO. Call up her father, Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight, Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen, And, though he in a fertile climate dwell, Plague him with flies. Though that his joy be joy, Yet throw such changes of vexation on't As it may lose some color.

— William Shakespeare, Othello.

Another example is the passage from the author's drama "Richard III" below, which also makes good use of this word:

QUEEN MARGARET. And leave out thee? Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me. If heaven have any grievous plague in store

Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee,

O, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe,

And then hurl down their indignation

On thee, the troubler of the poor world's peace!

- William Shakespeare, Richard III.

This excerpt from Shakespeare's "Richard III" portrays Queen Margaret cursing Richard, expressing her desire for heaven to reserve its most severe punishments for him. She wishes for a grievous plague to befall him when his sins are fully matured, implying a desire for divine retribution to be timed perfectly to match his wrongdoing. The word "plague" here is used metaphorically to represent a calamity or catastrophe, emphasizing the severity of Margaret's curse and her wish for Richard to suffer greatly for his actions.

The English phrase "Avoid like the plague" means "to stay as far away (from someone or something) as possible", that is, to consciously avoid someone or something. Variations in the meaning of the word have been in use for over 400 years. In this context, the word "plague" is often used not as a disease, but as a "catastrophic evil or calamity" or "a cause of anger," meaning "to avoid something entirely." This seemingly modern



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phrase comes from early medieval Latin, when Saint Jerome (345-420 AD) used the phrase, killing more than 50 million people in Europe and Asia in the 14th century and calling it the "Black Death". a disease called the plague, because the term is still used in speech even though the plague, a deadly infectious disease at that time, had disappeared,

I didn't do my homework my last night, so I'm avoiding my teacher like the plague

In addition, something close to the above phrase "something is enough to plague a saint" is used in the meaning that something or some work disturbs even the most patient person. As we can see in the examples: Being with screaming kids all day is enough to plague a saint

We know that there are many types of plague, one of them is Bubonic plague, which was spread in England in the Middle Ages. It is a type of cholera called "Black Death" that caused the destruction of the region. Bubonic plague is an infection caused by the bacterium Yersinia pestis. Symptoms of this disease include inflammation of the lymph nodes and bubonic plague is not the only manifestation of plague. manifested with blood poisoning). Daniel Defoe's A Journal of a Plague Year, written in 1722, describes the resurgence of bubonic plague in London in 1665. Two years before Defoe published the book, there was an outbreak of disease in Marseilles. Defoe was only five years old when the plague hit England, and he wanted to study the events to give readers an idea of what to expect as the disease spread across the continent.

From the beginning of April especially they stood at twenty-five each week, till the week from the 18th to the 25th, when there was buried in St Giles's parish thirty, whereof two of the plague and eight of the spotted-fever, which was looked upon as the same thing; likewise the number that died of the spotted-fever in the whole increased, being eight the week before, and twelve the week above-named.

- Daniel Defoe, A Journal of a Plague Year, 1722

It follows that the first use of the phrase avoid (something) like the plague in its meaning dates back to the 17th century, metaphor is used as a stylistic tool.

"You were making straight for the shrubbery, when you saw me—I am certain, sir, you saw me—and you turned away as if I had got the plague, and went into the house."

- Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone, 1868

In the above example, we witnessed the use of the term plague as a metaphorical stylistic tool.

It was noticed with an ungenerous bitterness of feeling that the four gentlemen--the Virginian, the British officer, the young clergyman and the governor's secretary--who had been her most devoted attendants on the evening of the ball were the foremost on whom the plague-stroke fell. But the disease, pursuing its onward progress, soon ceased to be exclusively a prerogative of aristocracy.

- Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Lady Eleanore's Mantle," 1838

The earliest written use of the verb "plague" dates back to the Middle English period (1150-1500). The earliest references to plague in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) were translated in 1481 by the publisher, merchant, and diplomat William Caxton. (This contributed to the expansion of the English vocabulary, the regulation of inflection and syntax, and the widening of the gap between spoken and written words.) Plague is also recorded as a noun in the Middle English period (1150–1500). done The OED gives four meanings of the word in the sense of action, one of which is marked as obsolete.

Based on the Oxford English Dictionary, if we look at the etymology of the word Plague in English, the initial appearance is plaghe (Middle Ages), plage (1500s), plague (1500–



1600), and in Scottish language plage, plagget (2 different forms of the past participle), plaige, plaiggit (past participle and adjective), plaigue, playggit (past participle and adjective) (before 1700), plaig (1700- to 1800s ((northern)) and plague (1700s) (northern) (1800s), plaug (northern), pyague (northern) (1900s) It can be observed in the examples taken from the works

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1. To afflict (a person, community, country, etc.) with hardship or misfortune with or like plague; disaster or misfortune (of a person, etc.), especially as an expression of punishment or displeasure.

1481-I shold do grete synne..I am aferde god sholde **plaghe** me [Dutch Ick hebbe anxt god die soude mi plaghen].

(W. Caxton, translation of History of Reynard Fox (1970) 66)

1667- Some one..inspir'd With dev'lish machination might devise Like instrument to plague the

Sons of men For sin. (J. Milton, Paradise Lost vi. 505)

In the above examples, the word plague is translated as a punishment given by God.

Meaning 2. Usually it means repeatedly, persistently or continuously bothering and teasing.

1595- If her nature and her wil be so, That she will plague the man that loues her most.

(E. Spenser, Amoretti xli, in Amoretti & Epithalamion sig. C6)

This line suggests a complex and potentially destructive aspect of human nature: the inclination to harm those who love us the most. Here, the word "plague" is used metaphorically to describe the harm or suffering inflicted upon someone by the person they love deeply.

This theme of inflicting harm on those closest to us can be interpreted in various ways:

- 1. **Self-Sabotage:** It could reflect a pattern of self-sabotage, where individuals unconsciously undermine their own happiness or well-being despite the love and care they receive from others. This could be due to deep-seated insecurities, fear of intimacy, or unresolved emotional issues.
- 2. **Unintentional Harm:** Sometimes, people unintentionally hurt those who love them the most due to their own flaws, mistakes, or thoughtlessness. They may not realize the extent of their actions or the pain they cause until it's too late.
- 3. **Manipulation or Cruelty:** In some cases, individuals may knowingly and maliciously exploit the love and affection of others for their own gain. They may take advantage of their loved one's vulnerability or devotion, causing deliberate harm for personal gratification or control. So, this line highlights the complexity of human relationships and the potential for both love and harm to coexist within them. It suggests a sobering truth about human nature: that even the deepest love can sometimes lead to pain and suffering, whether through unintended consequences or deliberate actions.

1616- It giues thee law of plaguing him. (B. Jonson, Epicœne i. ii, in Workes vol. I. 534)

In this line from Ben Jonson's play "Epicœne," the phrase "It giues thee law of plaguing him" suggests that a certain behavior or situation grants someone the right or authority to afflict or trouble another person. Here, "plaguing" is used metaphorically to indicate causing distress, annoyance, or trouble to someone else. The phrase implies that there is a justification or rationale behind the action of causing distress to another person, perhaps as a form of retribution, retaliation, or punishment. This concept of being "given the law of plaguing" suggests that there is a perceived



entitlement or permission granted to the individual to act in such a manner. It could imply a sense of justice or balance in the situation, where the afflicted person is seen as deserving of the trouble they are experiencing. So, this line reflects themes of power dynamics, retribution, and the complexities of human relationships, where one person feels justified in causing distress to another

based on certain circumstances or behaviors.

1817-I really cannot be plaguing myself for ever with all the new poems and states of the nation that come out. (J. Austen, Persuasion (1818) vol. IV. x. 221)

In this line from Jane Austen's "Persuasion," the speaker expresses a feeling of being burdened or overwhelmed by the constant influx of new poems and reports on the state of the nation. The word "plaguing" is used metaphorically here to convey a sense of being troubled or bothered continuously. The speaker's use of "plaguing myself" suggests a self-imposed burden or responsibility to keep up with the latest literary works and news. However, they express a sentiment of exhaustion or frustration at the idea of continuously engaging with these new releases. This line reflects themes of societal expectations and the pressure to stay informed or culturally relevant. It also speaks to the idea of personal boundaries and the need to prioritize one's mental well-being amidst external demands and expectations. Austen's use of the word "plaguing" in this context highlights the speaker's sense of being overwhelmed by external stimuli and the desire to alleviate this burden by setting limits on their engagement with new works and information.

1868-'If ever I do get my wish, you see what I'll do for Brooke.' 'Begin to do something now, by

not plaguing his life out,' said Meg, sharply. (L. M. Alcott, Little Women vol. I. xiii. 213)

In this fragment from Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women," the characters are discussing the idea of granting someone's wish and the consequences of their actions. The word "plaguing" is used here in a colloquial sense to mean bothering or annoying persistently. When Meg says, "Begin to do something now, by not plaguing his life out," she is advising action to prevent Brooke from being persistently troubled or annoyed. The use of "plaguing his life out" emphasizes the severity and persistence of the annoyance or trouble that Brooke is experiencing.

This line reflects themes of empathy and consideration for others' well-being. Meg's advice suggests that instead of waiting for a wish to be granted in the future, one should take action in the present to alleviate someone's suffering or discomfort. It highlights the importance of proactive kindness and empathy in relationships.

Later on the word "plague" used in the meaning of cursing

...and that when he said he had his business to attend to, she replied: "Oh, a plague on your business! I am sick of that word--one hears of nothing else in America. There are ways of getting on without business, if you would only take them!"

— Henry James, The Bostonians, 1886

In this passage from Henry James's "The Bostonians," the character expresses frustration with the incessant focus on "business" in America. The phrase "a plague on your business" is used metaphorically to convey the speaker's exasperation and disdain towards the topic. The use of "plague" in this context serves to intensify the speaker's frustration and contempt. By likening the prevalence of discussions about business to a plague, the speaker emphasizes the overwhelming





and burdensome nature of the topic. This metaphor suggests that the constant emphasis on business is perceived as detrimental or harmful to the speaker's well-being or interests.

Furthermore, the speaker's desire to distance themselves from the concept of business and their assertion that there are alternative ways of "getting on" without it reflects a broader critique of American society's values and priorities. It implies a longing for a more balanced or fulfilling way of life that prioritizes other aspects of human experience beyond mere financial success or productivity. So, James's use of the phrase "a plague on your business" in this passage serves to highlight the speaker's frustration with the cultural preoccupation with business in America and to convey a broader critique of societal values and priorities.

"Master Harry Dawe?" said he. "The same," I says. "Where a plague has Bob Brygandyne gone?" 'His thin eyebrows surged up a piece and come down again in a stiff bar. "He went to the King," he says.

— Rudyard Kipling, Rewards and Fairies, 1910

In this example from Rudyard Kipling's "Rewards and Fairies," the character Harry Dawe is inquiring about the whereabouts of Bob Brygandyne. The word "plague" is used here colloquially, likely as an expression of frustration or annoyance. When Dawe asks, "Where a plague has Bob Brygandyne gone?" he is not referring to an actual plague but rather using "plague" as an expletive to express his irritation or bewilderment at Bob's disappearance. This usage reflects a common way in which "plague" is employed in informal speech to convey annoyance or frustration. The response from the other character, with his eyebrows surging up and down, suggests a reaction to Dawe's use of the word "plague." It indicates a level of surprise or perhaps disapproval at the language used.

Kipling's use of "plague" in this context serves to convey the speaker's frustration or annoyance, adding a sense of realism and colloquialism to the dialogue. It reflects the informal nature of the exchange between the characters.

It turns out that the word plague can be used to describe any form of general sarcasm, such as annoyance,

Meg smiled and relented, and whispered as they stood waiting to catch the time, "Take care my skirt doesn't trip you up. It's the plague of my life and I was a goose to wear it." - Louisa May Alcott, Little Women, 1869

The term "plague" is used to describe organisms that accumulate in large numbers or various types of blinding, polluting substances:

Who does not remember his flaming red revolutionary pamphlets? Their sudden swarmings used to overwhelm the powers of every Continental police like a plague of gadflies.

— Joseph Conrad, A Set of Six, 1908

On every side, and far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the made foul the melancholy light, air.

— Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop, 1841





Such usages naturally led to the metaphorical expansion of the term "plague" to refer to many events with negative consequences ("plague of bugs"), corresponding to terms for many events similar to outbreaks of disease. ("a series of robberies", "a wave of complaints").

"I like Thornfield, its antiquity, its retirement, its old crow-trees and thorn-trees, its grey facade, and lines of dark windows reflecting that metal welkin: and yet how long have I abhorred the very thought of it, shunned it like a great plague-house?"

— Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, 1847

In this passage from Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre," the protagonist Jane Eyre reflects on her conflicting feelings towards Thornfield, the estate where she works as a governess. The word "plague-house" is used metaphorically to describe Jane's previous aversion to Thornfield. By comparing Thornfield to a "plague-house," Jane vividly conveys the intensity of her aversion and avoidance towards the estate. A plague-house was historically a place associated with disease and death, avoided by people for fear of contagion. Therefore, Jane's use of this metaphor emphasizes the depth of her repulsion towards Thornfield.

Despite acknowledging Thornfield's appealing qualities—its antiquity, retirement, and natural surroundings—Jane admits that she has long abhorred the very thought of it. This contrast between the estate's physical attributes and Jane's emotional response highlights the complexity of her relationship with Thornfield. So, Brontë's use of "plague-house" in this context serves to emphasize Jane's past aversion to Thornfield and the magnitude of her negative feelings towards it. This metaphor contributes to the rich imagery and emotional depth of the novel, portraying Jane's internal struggles and conflicting emotions as she navigates her experiences at Thornfield. ...the crowd gave way before her, and seemed to fear the touch of her garment, as if it carried the plague among its gorgeous folds.

— Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter, 1850

In this excerpt from Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," the crowd's reaction to Hester Prynne is described metaphorically, with the image of her garment being likened to carrying the plague. This comparison adds depth to the portrayal of Hester's social ostracism and the stigma attached to her. The metaphor of Hester's garment carrying the plague suggests that the crowd perceives her presence as contagious or harmful, much like an actual plague. This reflects the deep-seated fear and aversion towards Hester due to her public shaming and the scarlet letter she wears as a symbol of her sin. The description of the crowd giving way before Hester and fearing the touch of her garment emphasizes the extent of the social isolation and rejection she experiences. It highlights the profound impact of societal judgment and condemnation on Hester's life, as well as the power of stigma to shape perceptions and interactions within the community. In a nutshell, Hawthorne's use of the plague metaphor in this context serves to underscore the magnitude of Hester's social alienation and the pervasive sense of fear and aversion surrounding her. It contributes to the thematic exploration of guilt, shame, and the consequences of societal judgment in "The Scarlet Letter."

At the moment, the whole world is experiencing a widespread and deadly disease, the coronavirus pandemic. Historical accounts of past epidemics in literature and art have attracted much attention amid the heightened isolation caused by the virus. In this age where we now find ourselves dealing with real disaster, although epidemic and pandemic remain the preferred symbols, the word plague may see a return from metaphorical to literal, meaning, for example, reflecting the theme of Plague. One of the modern English novels is "Station Eleven" by Emily St. John Mandel. The novel,





published in 2014, takes place in an apocalyptic world after the outbreak of a deadly flu pandemic that wipes out most of humanity. The story revolves around a group of characters who navigate this devastated landscape, struggling with loss, survival, and the search for meaning in a world ravaged by disease.

In addition, a contemporary English novel on the theme of the pandemic is Lawrence Wright's "The End of October". The novel, published in 2020, tells the story of Dr. Henry Parsons, an epidemiologist on the front lines of the fight against a global pandemic caused by a highly contagious virus. As the disease spreads rapidly around the world, threatening to collapse societies and economies, Dr. Parsons races against time to understand the virus and develop a vaccine. The End of October offers a poignant depiction of the social, political and personal consequences of the pandemic, exploring themes of resilience, sacrifice and the fragility of human civilization in the face of an existential threat. Wright's novel resonates with contemporary concerns about public health crises and offers a thought-provoking examination of humanity's ability to confront and overcome adversity.

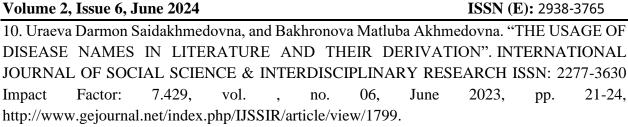
In conclusion, the pervasive presence of plague in literature serves as a powerful reflection of the human experience of disease, death, and social upheaval. Through the lens of literature, we witness the profound effects of plagues on individuals and communities, both historically and metaphorically. From the devastating realism of historical events to its allegorical importance in modern works, the plague serves as an eternal motif that invites readers to reflect on the fragility of life, the complexity of human nature, and the resilience of the human psyche. As we continue to grapple with our own challenges, the literary exploration of the plague reminds us of the enduring relevance of these themes and the enduring power of storytelling to illuminate the human condition. So, the usage of plague in literature serves as a powerful reflection of the human experience of disease, death, and social upheaval. Through the lens of literature, we witness the profound effects of plagues on individuals and communities, both historically and metaphorically. So, the English word "plague"-"plague" is widely used by writers and poets in fiction, not only in its own sense, but also in a figurative sense.

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