

## *Summary*

*I wish you in brief  
that you be spared pestilence's grief*

Epidemics in 19th-century writings

The book is one of the results of research I have been conducting since 2020 on communication models in limit situations that evoke a sense of fear for the existence and survival of a community (family, social group, nation, humanity). They shape and initiate literary projections (thanks to a rich apparatus of concepts, topics, comparisons, motifs) and a social sense of experience and political engagement, and even build a memory system of group actions. They provide idiosyncratic and unique boundary metaphors and not only in terms of their linguistic apparel and organisation; they are also a boundary metaphor for the act of evoking the spirit of communities lost or only anticipated (notions of community, regional, national belonging, political, cultural, European, religious identity).

Since antiquity, borderline situations, such as illnesses, epidemics, fear of physical and psychological suffering or extermination (of an individual or a community) have aroused fear and provoked a search for the causes in the real and extrasensory world (e.g. as a punishment or a punishment by supernatural forces). Facing existential necessities resulted in various attempts to describe and explain the causes, to predict and discover symptoms, to find the sense of these undesirable and at the same time irrevocable events. They evoked extreme reactions: from total negation to resignation and acceptance of reality forcing the

consolidation of all forces and means to fight the threats. Border situations in the “memory of the world” were a pretext for ethical, philosophical and religious reflections and an inspiration to search for effective remedies. They were immortalised by the pen of chroniclers, creators in all fields of art, science and all kinds of expression. The 19th century was accorded many metaphorical nicknames: the age of steam, the age of progress, the beautiful age - these are only some of them indicating the great hopes invested in the burgeoning inventiveness and dominance of reason, the primacy of science. And yet the devotees of “glass and eye” empiricism were not spared the challenges of the borderline situations of bygone times experienced by their far less rationalist ancestors.

The publication deals with nineteenth-century texts, ephemeral prints, and applied writing that bear witness to the experience of plagues, infectious diseases and epidemics, and the struggle against them, together with the means and ways of prevention, all of which is surprisingly analogous to the challenge of the coronavirus pandemic facing humanity in the twenty-first century. They exemplify our belonging to a community of thoughts, behaviours, reactions and emotions indicative of humanity in moments of difficulty.

The examples selected clearly indicate and document the universality of existential ways of experiencing and “taming” limit situations connected with the danger of losing health and life. Despite the passage of time, it is possible to observe, especially on the anthropological level, virtually identical models of experiencing, behaving and reacting: from practical medical measures, orders issued by the authorities to spiritual entreaties and literary transpositions. This aspect of the publication’s extremely topical subject matter is a key motive for the author in taking up this issue.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*