Instructor: Elsbeth Heaman
Office hours: Thursday 1-3 at Ferrier 490

“But again and again there comes a time in history when the man who dares to say that two and two make four is punished with death.” Albert Camus, The Plague

When cholera swept around the world in 1832, people struggled to make sense of the experience: medically, morally, and politically. A new, free, and progressive country like Canada should, in theory, have been exempt from such old-world calamities associated with backwardness, filth, poverty, and fatalism. Cholera initiated a century of urgent, practical soul-searching about how processes of human history should be scrutinized and managed. Typhus in 1847, smallpox in 1885 and influenza in 1918 were no less politically and intellectually confounding. When authorities tried to quarantine or hospitalize people, or destroy their property in an effort to clean up local environments, they found their (often very new and fragile) legitimacy tested. Tuberculosis had its own perplexities as the disease, commonly attributed to overcrowding, spread through Indigenous populations in defiance of that precept.

Epidemics and public health unraveled nineteenth-century laissez-faire government. Liberal states had minimal mandates to manage private life; they saw themselves as facilitators of market forces. But what if the market brought death? Adam Smith had made airy promises that such a thing could never be—but there it was, spectacularly on display wherever epidemics were imported. To what extent did epidemics indict market forces or the state—whether liberal or authoritarian? To what extent did they unbind people from ordinary constraints of civil behaviour? What changed first: the medical profession’s ability to give good advice or the state’s administrative abilities? How did a long term shift from epidemic to endemic disease change things? These are some of the scholarly questions we will be addressing in this seminar.

Assignments

Grading Scheme
Attendance and participation: 25%
Writing Assignment I: 25% due December 3
Major Research Essay: 50%, including:
  1000-word proposal (worth 10%) due February 23
  7500-word essay (worth 40%) due April 8

This is a reading and research-intensive seminar. Students must come to class prepared to speak to weekly readings. Every week half the class will pose and half the class will answer two questions about the assigned readings. Students will be graded on class participation; a written paper based primarily on readings, and a major research essay on a topic of their choosing, approved by the instructor.

Writing Assignment I. How did scientific or medical or other kinds of evidence inform the public debates around or responses to a given epidemic? You should focus your analysis on one particular epidemic crisis but also situate it in the larger context of epidemics and public health studied in this
course to date. You may base it on assigned secondary readings but should consider reading a little further into suggested supplementary or other relevant readings. The goal is to get inside the reasoning of people at the time and convey how they understood the problems—medical, social, political—that the epidemic was seen to create or intensify or perhaps to solve. Consider how social and professional or scientific events speak to one another. You may use this initial paper to lay the groundwork for your major research essay.

**Major Research Essay**: Students will formulate their own research essay in dialogue with the instructor.

---

**McGill University Policies**

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

Every student has a right to write essays, examinations and theses in English or in French except in courses where knowledge of a language is one of the objects of the course. Chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit (sauf sans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

---

**Schedule**

**D1: Fall 2014**

September 3: Introduction

September 10: Camus *The Plague*

Georgio Agamben, “*The State of Exception*,” (lecture European Graduate School 2003)

**Suggested Further Reading**


Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*

Thucydides on the plague of Athens, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*

Richard Adams, on Efrafa in *Watership Down*

**September 17: The Shock of Cholera**

*Report of the Commission Appointed by the Sanitary Board of the City Councils, to Visit Canada, for the Investigation of the Epidemic Cholera, Prevailing in Montreal and Quebec* (Philadelphia, 1832);

*Report of the Commissioners Employed to Investigate the Origin and Nature of the Epidemic Cholera of Canada* (New York, Board of Health, 1832).

Charles A. Farley, *A Sermon Preached in the Unitarian Chapel, Montreal, on Wednesday, 6th February, 1833, being a day appointed for public thanksgiving by His Excellency the governor-in-chief, for deliverance from the ravages of cholera* (1833).

J.G. Mountain, *A Retrospect of the Summer and Autumn of 1832, being a sermon delivered in the Cathedral Church of Quebec, on Sunday, the 30th December, in that year* (Quebec, 1833).
Report of the Special Sanitary Committee of Montreal upon cholera and emigration for the year 1834
(Montreal, 1835)

Suggested Further Reading:
Mark Harrison, *Contagion: how commerce has spread disease* (2012)
Peter Baldwin, *Contagion and the State in Europe, 1830-1930* (1999)

**September 24: Social History of Cholera**

Suggested Further Reading:
Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (2009 reprint)

**October 1: Post-Social History of Cholera**
Bruce Curtis, “Social Investment in Medical Forms: The 1866 Cholera Scare and Beyond,” *Canadian Historical Review*

Suggested Further Reading:

**October 8: Imperial Disease**
*British American Journal of Medical and Physical Science* 3, 3 (July 1847) passim. (discussion of typhus amidst other professional interests)
Dan Horner, “The Public Has the Right to be Protected from a Deadly Scourge”: Debating Quarantine, Migration and Liberal Governance during the 1847 Typhus Outbreak in Montreal,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 23, 1 (2012): 65-100
Dan Horner, “‘If the evil now growing around us be not staid’: Montreal and Liverpool Confront the Irish Famine Migration as a Transnational Crisis in Urban Governance,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46, 92 (November 2013): 349-66.


**Suggested Further Reading:**

Roy M. MacLeod, *Disease, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion* (1988)


October 15: Sanitarianism

Primary and secondary articles, links, etc at Christian Genest’s website, “[Documentation on the Montreal Sanitary Association](#),” including


**Suggested Further Reading:**

Baillargeon, *Babies for the Nation*

Cynthia Comacchio, ‘Nations are Built of Babies’: Saving Ontaroi’s Mothers and Children 1900-1940 (1993).


October 22: Sanitarian Demographic Catastrophes I

W.H. Hingston, *Lecture on Vaccination* (Montreal, 1876)


**Suggested Further Reading:**


Katherine Arnup, “‘Victims of Vaccination?’ Opposition to Compulsory Immunization in Ontario, 1900-90,” 
*CBHM* 9 (1992): 159-76.

**October 29: Sanitarian Demographic Catastrophes II**

**Suggested Further Reading:**
Maureen Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940* (2001)
Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and the Colonizers of Western Canada* to 1900 (Toronto, 1999).

**November 5: Solutions and Eradications**

**Suggested Further Reading:**
Michael Worboys, *Spreading Germs: Disease Theories and Medical Practice in Britain, 1865-1900* (2007)

**November 12: Solutions and Eradications**
Peter Bryce *The Story of a National Crime, Being a Record of the Health Conditions of the Indians of Canada from 1904 to 1921* (Ottawa, 1922).

**Suggested Further Reading:**

**November 19: Influenza**

**Suggested Further Reading:**

**November 26: Eugenics and the end of exception?**

**Suggested Further Reading:**

**December 3: First Writing Assignment Due.**

**D2: Winter 2015**
Students will largely devote the second semester to researching and writing their essays. We will meet in January to discuss some historiographical pieces and then


**January 28-February 23** We will continue to meet weekly to discuss readings assigned by students. Each student will recommend one article or book chapter to serve as a historiographical introduction to their research topic.

**March 9-April 1** we will circulate students’ research essays and meet to discuss them. Students will comment upon one another’s essays.

**April 8: Final essays due.**