

HGGS

HEIDELBERGER  
GRADUIERTENSCHULE  
FÜR GEISTES- UND  
SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN



UNIVERSITÄT  
HEIDELBERG  
ZUKUNFT  
SEIT 1386

Áureo Lustosa Guérios Neto

## Gazing at the sick: Epidemic Cholera and the Literary Imagination in Europe, 1830-1930

Diseases and epidemics shape history continuously: from the *Plague of Justinian* to the *Black Death*, from the *Great Dying* to the *Spanish Flu Pandemic*, from *HIV* to the recent *Ebola Crisis*; they reveal themselves as macro-events that can disrupt human societies and change them in several and profound ways.

Since literature borrows its themes from human experience, it is unsurprising that a considerable part of it presents us with the anxieties of epidemics: the plague and its ravages are central in *The Decameron* and *The Betrothed*. Tuberculosis is a major theme in *The Magic Mountain*. Syphilis plays an important role in Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and in Ibsen's *Ghosts*. Eventually, diseases can also provide a title, as in Camus's *The Plague*, Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* and Sartre's *Typhus*. The list goes on: smallpox appears in *La Quarantaine* (Le Clezio), HIV in *Angels in America* (Kushner), rabies in *Of Love and Other Demons* (Márquez) etc.

Cholera is a major epidemic disease that had a profound impact in people's lives during the 19th and 20th centuries. It hit Europe for the first time in 1830 and it revisited the continent continuously up to 1923. In this roughly a hundred years, cholera claimed millions of lives, disrupted pilgrimage patterns, caused rioting and social unrest, redefined public health strategies, redrew the urbanization maps of several cities, gave birth to a heated scientific and medical debate, and changed international relations both politically and economically.

Several works produced within literary studies consider the relationship between specific illnesses and their literary representation; however, few are dedicated solely to *Cholera* and its impact in literature. We would like to study the literary representation of *Cholera*, using *Close* and *Distant Reading* methods of analysis upon a corpus of cholera-related texts gathered from the European literary tradition within the time frame of 1830-1930. This corpus would include texts such as Mann's *Death in Venice*, Verga's *Mastro-don Gesualdo* and Maupassants' *La Peur*, among others.

**Keywords:** *Literature and Epidemics; Literary Imagination; Cholera*