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Dissertation Abstract

Prophylactic Fictions: Immunity and Biosecurity traces a prehistory for *inoculation insecurity*, a term I use to capture the fluid responses in literary and scientific writings to the development of inoculation as a preventative health practice. The concept of immunity, from its Roman legal origins as *immunitas* (i.e. exemption from civic duty), has always been a political issue regarding the role of the citizen in relation to the state. However, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, immunity became naturalized through developments in medical theory and practice, which increasingly insisted upon the relationship among healthy nations, healthy constitutions, and healthy citizens. Arguing that the “symbolic and material linchpin” of Western modernity is a paradigm of immunity, Roberto Esposito marks in this period a pivotal shift for immunity from a passive to an active condition. Resistance to or “security” from disease became achievable by the lancet. Yet the deliberate introduction of infectious matter into the body was by no means innocuous in the eyes of the public. The stakes of what matter and how that matter was administered became, for many, a matter of life and death. *Prophylactic Fictions* tracks how inoculation, alongside other preventative health projects, found its way into the burgeoning apparatuses of population security aimed at mitigating and preventing mounting risks to citizens’ wellbeing.

Despite the historical interrelationship between inoculation and security, only recently has scholarship in security studies and in philosophy’s “immunological turn” begun to flesh out the implications of that interrelationship. Missing from this primarily presentist scholarship are perspectives from the history of medicine and literary studies. *Prophylactic Fictions* historicizes the cultural processes by which immunity and inoculation were incorporated into discourses of risk and precarity beginning in the early eighteenth century. Close-reading of the literary and medical writings surrounding inoculation reveals the ways in which bodily vulnerability and its management have been imagined and reimagined in narrative forms that predate contemporary disaster scenario modeling now so crucial to national security planning. Pro- and anti-vaccinators widely employed popular cultural forms like the gothic to exploit what they perceived to be the insecurities of English health. Control over this narrative of bioinsecurity continues to animate vaccination debates.

The project follows the historical trajectory of inoculation’s transformation from variolation (inoculation by smallpox) to vaccination (inoculation by cowpox). The first chapter examines Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* in relation to English quarantine legislation and Mary Wortley Montagu’s importation of Turkish variolation into England’s aristocratic circles. I argue that Defoe’s writings about plague, including both the *Journal* and the treatise, *Due Preparations*, contribute to the developing discourse of immunity by grappling with the problematics of prevention: *how does one know threat and avoid infection?* By focusing on the inexplicable immunity of the novel’s narrator, H.F., I consider how Defoe imagines the early eighteenth-century body at risk and the means by which it can be secured.

Chapter Two turns to the vaccine wars of the 1790s that were waged across poems, pamphlets, essays, and plays responding to Edward Jenner’s campaigns for nationwide vaccination. I situate these debates in relation to the professionalization of medicine and the rise of medical celebrity. Invented alongside the “Jennerian Procedure” was Jenner himself, a medical hero whose

experiments in the English countryside yielded a new national panacea. The politicization of preventative medicine through the circulation and reproduction of Jennerian, as well as anti-Jennerian propaganda, reveals the vast extent to which vaccination became a battleground over what constituted personal and public security in the face of revolution and disease.

Contemporaneous with vaccination were the experimental trials on gases performed by Humphry Davy and Thomas Beddoes at the Pneumatic Institute. My third chapter contextualizes the pneumatic therapy not as pseudoscience but as a vital development in the radicalization of preventative medicine during the Romantic Period. At the heart of Beddoes's public mission for the Pneumatic Institute was an investment in the active production of health, of recognizing that the healthy are equally but differently in need of medical intervention not merely when symptoms arise but well in advance of them all together. I follow the development of Beddoes's pneumatic theories of health through its instantiation in the Pneumatic Institute. Despite the decline of the Institute, Beddoes remained committed to spreading the gospel of public health. I read *Hygeia* as an expansion and rethinking of his earlier experiment with narrative, *The History of Isaac Jenkins*.

The Victorian period saw the rise of an increasingly organized set of anti-vaccination movements in the middle of century against compulsory vaccination and discriminatory public health initiatives. Anti-vaccinators, eager to garner sympathy for their cause, frequently staged public protests and demonstrations to decry what they believed to be state-sponsored medical violence. While literary critics have typically turned to Dickens's *Bleak House* as a literary handling of urban disease management, I instead turn to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* as a source for thinking about how the figure of the precarious child was mobilized in anti-vaccination rhetoric and in spectacles like public funerals for children dead or dying from botched vaccinations.

My project concludes with the *fin-de-siècle* novel, *Dracula*. Invoking a gothic tradition well-established since the turn of the nineteenth century and one revisited by gothic melodrama on stage and, after mid-century, sensation fiction and spiritualism, Stoker rewrites familiar literary bodies as emblematic of an English social body requiring explicitly biological forms of defense. I make a case for how the novel echoes the immunological thinking of figures like Louis Pasteur and Élie Metchnikoff. The Crew of Light's relentless pursuit of Dracula echoes biomedicine's vision of the body that affirms its boundaries by designating an antigen against which it must fight to the death. Yet the novel remains ultimately ambiguous about the lingering presence of contagion in the blood now circulating among all the members of the "crew of light," as well as in Jonathan and Mina's child. I argue that *Dracula* problematizes the concept of immunity as it becomes entrenched in the biomedical sciences: is immunity even possible or desirable with polymorphic threats like Dracula?