Contagion, Biopolitics and Migration in European Cultural Memory: using large scale historical datasets to understand contemporary attitudes and improve public health outcomes.

This project is funded by the Irish Research Council New Horizons Interdisciplinary Award. It is a collaborative project that seeks to illuminate culturally and historically specific understandings of disease that appear within a collection of 49,000 literary works that have been digitised by the British Library, published between the 1500s and the early 20th century. By applying topic modeling techniques to this corpus, we hope to identify and track key contemporary trends pertaining to illness and contagion, and interpret these findings with particular reference to current and historical debates surrounding biopolitics, medical culture and migration. As well as engaging with current debates in digital humanities in relation to how topic modeling and other "big data" methodologies may be used to further our understanding of literature, this project will consider the following questions: can data analytics help us understand and change the stories we tell ourselves about our bodies, diseases and identities? How much continuity exists between nineteenth century biopolitics and contemporary attitudes? What problems does this persistence pose for major social challenges in the areas of public health, prevention and migration, and how can these be addressed?

Research Team:

Professor Gerardine Meaney of the UCD School of English, Drama and Film has been awarded an Irish Research Council New Horizons Interdisciplinary Award for a collaborative project with Dr Derek Greene (UCD Insight), Dr Karen Wade (HI postdoctoral researcher) and Dr Cormac O'Brien (School of English, Drama and Film).

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