

Germaphobia

by [Asa Boxer](#) (March 2021)



The Bad Doctors, James Ensor, 1892

The following missive was recovered from the offices of Henry J. Chesterton, MD as part of the Forensic Recovery Program (FRP) initiated in the aftermath of The Great Mysophobia Outbreak of 1985. It is verified and established by Drs. Javeldi, Rais and Bachtari who are all in agreement that this document represents ground zero of the pathological pandemic that spread throughout the island of the New States Province (NSP) with unprecedented virulence over a period of 83 days, and sadly led to the inebriation of the entire population of that territory, and ultimately to the decimation of all the inhabitants thereof. With the insights provided by the enclosed evidence, the FRP has further concluded the manner in which the otherwise inexplicable annihilation event occurred.

Due to the unfortunate condition affecting the leaders of the population (viz. acute verminophobia, or germaphobia, in the common idiolect), the province mandated an internal cleansing regimen of hydrogen peroxide and sodium hypochlorite to be ingested upon entry into any place of business. The stated aims were to eradicate the bacterial and viral entities inhabiting the droplets issuing from the lungs and residing in the mouths of all citizens. The rationale underlying the urgent implementation of these extreme measures rested on the well established fact that the NSP suffers an annual mortality rate owing to viral and bacterial causes of 2.13 deaths per

million (or 0.0002% of the population). The latter figure became the focus of the OCD (Office for Contagious Diseases) mandated with the management of all transmissible germs. Upon determining that 0.0002% of deaths were owing to contagious bacteria and viruses, the OCD set up a province-wide Germ Eradication Program (GEP) to eliminate once and for all “these microbial entities perpetrating an alien invasion on the microscopic citadels of our cellular jurisdictions”—as the Contagion General put it in his address to the public on day 10 of the pathological outbreak. The ascendancy of the OCD enabled a situation whereby death from any other cause—especially the disproportionately high excess mortality directly resulting from its interventions—was deemed collateral damage acceptable in the battle against the microbial enemy.

SUBMITTED FOR EVIDENCE:

THE CHRONICLE OF DR. HENRY J. CHESTERTON, MD

**THE PSYCHIATRIC CLINIC OF
DR. HENRY J. CHESTERTON, MD**

May 1, 1985

TO THOSE WHO WILL NO DOUBT BE SEEKING answers to recent events leading to the total collapse of our once magnificent island republic, the NSP, and to the extinction event unavoidably to ensue in mere weeks of my writing this brief chronicle.

I, Dr. Henry J. Chesterton, was the psychiatrist who treated patient zero, the first in human history to develop a

contagious strain of mysophobia. It was impossible of course to determine this diagnosis upon my first sessions with the patient, and it was no more possible or scientifically plausible to accept subsequent developments as owing to contagion. But at long last, due to certain revelations that will soon become clear, I have been forced to conclude that the true cause of the demise of our citizenry was a transmissible form of germaphobia.

Please forgive any sparsity of detail in presentation. I write in haste as the effects of the poison recently administered to me under the guise of a vaccine begin to affect brain function. I have no more than a total of two hours before my frontal lobe is rendered inert. In the meantime however rest assured that all I reveal in what follows is written while I am still of sound mind.

It should not escape the reader that prior to the disastrous occurrences I am about to relate, the world had experienced similar convulsions of mass hysteria, such as witch hunts, inquisitions and crusades-- all similarly intent on the cleansing of a population or territory. In light of the egregious happenings I have witnessed I cannot avoid the inevitable conclusion that all those past horrors were likewise resultant of similarly contagious psychiatric events.

Be that as it may, it is of equal value to indicate that many like myself remained immune to the disease and succumbed only upon receiving the so-called vaccine developed for the express purpose of compliance with state mandates. No doubt I will poison myself to death within a matter of days once I begin ingesting poisons and abrading my hands with hydrochloric acid.

Allow me to explain. It was only three weeks following the fourth visit to my clinic from patient zero that life in the NSP began to change for the worse. In confidence, my patient had revealed serious misgivings about the lack of

public health measures ensuring the safety of our populace. A chemist by profession, he claimed to be measuring viral and bacterial loads in our sewage systems and was horrified, "absolutely terrorised" were his words, at the amount of "alien specimen" taking up residence in our fecal productions. Due to his particular condition, he felt loathe to flush the toilet and in any way serve the purposes of "these alien entities" (again his words) "colonising the hard won movements of our bowels." He expressed further concern that our health authorities were not taking such matters seriously enough in spite of "the untenable mortality rate owing to these invasive entities."

Upon being asked to elaborate, he explained that these "aliens" (as he called them) were responsible for the deaths of point zero zero zero two percent of our population. I laughed a hardy, comforting laugh to put him at ease. But he was not subdued so easily. He grew stiff in his seat, crossed his legs as well as his arms and even pinched his eyebrows at me. "Are you seriously condoning the deaths of hundreds of innocent citizens? Are you so heartless that you can accept, No! even *excuse* even one preventable death?" I was aghast of course and rushed to the defence of my most honourable intentions in treating his condition and in adhering to my hippocratic oath to do no harm. "Surely," I suggested, "sewage mining is the sort of activity that will only serve to exacerbate your condition." I further attempted to reach him with some sobering words concerning the realities of our mortality, how such matters were best embraced because death after all was an inevitable part of life, indeed a part of life that only served to make us more appreciative of the little time we had to enjoy the gift of consciousness and the wonders of creation. But I could feel an unbridgeable rift growing between us, and I feared there was little I could do for him other than to offer a stronger prescription for anti-anxiety medication.

As a germaphobe, he was also a sufferer of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), so he was continually preoccupied with disinfection activities. Never did it occur to me even remotely he'd have any influence on public policy. But in the coming weeks, to my astonishment, his language began appearing in news items, and was soon upon the lips of passers-by in the street, and before I knew it, issuing from the mouths of our authorities. References to the "point zero zero zero two percent of preventable deaths" abounded, as did the "untenable mortality rate owing to invasive entities." Drawing an analogy between germs and "aliens" became ubiquitous overnight.

I must admit that these philological indicators reminded me instantly of my patient. But scientific training led me to dismiss unverifiable, non-clinical and surely ridiculous claims of that sort as mere coincidence. Equally synchronistic was the inundation of calls that began pouring in seeking help for acute and unbearable anxiety. It was only four days following my final visit from patient zero that I received three phone calls in one day, and then every day following, I received an increasing number of such calls. Halfway through the second day, I began asking if someone had put them up to it, but my queries were met with silence, anger and impatience. Several times I caught myself regarding the phone receiver with disbelief before hanging up. By the third day, it was clear to me that something sinister was afoot.

My instinct was to turn them all away. But the same curiosity that motivated me to study psychiatry in my youth, urged me to meet with as many of these affected subjects as I could. So I spent the next two and a half weeks meeting with 126 patients, all of whom were suffering from acute mysophobia and OCD. I continued to withhold the belief that the condition under analysis was contagious due to the utter absurdity of such a conclusion. But I did not fail to ask who had referred each patient, and the client either named patient zero or another patient who had come to my clinic on his

recommendation.

As noted, clear indicators of a linguistic contagion and a general air of radical, even pathological schism in the societal relationship with reality manifested approximately three weeks following that last appointment with patient zero. Headlines in the press, radio reports and press releases from government health agencies began to appear daily with figures and facts regarding the number of deaths owing to contagious diseases. Without precedent of there ever having been a daily death count, suddenly the media began informing the public of how many people were dying each day. And the death count regarding transmissible diseases was given over a fifty year period, numbering well over 30,000 lives. The numbers were staggering, and the citizens of the NSP were overwhelmed with the information. On Day 5, images of viruses and bacteria began appearing on the front pages of all our papers, and by Day 7, the weekly magazines all had colour images of these microbes. One wondered where the images came from considering no one had ever seen most of them, certainly no one had ever seen the viruses, and yet the images were crisp and lurid. By Day 10 posters had appeared on the streets, in buses along the walls of the subway. The messaging was relentless and obsessive enough that regular folk began to fear walking around and going about their business.

On Day 10, a government task force was convened, resulting in the constitution of the OCD (Office for Contagious Diseases), led by Professor Anton Icauf, who was emblazoned with the prestigious title, Contagion Director (CD), an accolade marking the apex of recognition in a long, highly remunerative career conducted in the shadows beyond public scrutiny. His sudden appearance in the spotlight could not have happened at a better time, for he was known in his field to have conducted himself unethically in the past, enriching himself at the expense of many lives. But under present conditions, as the germaphobia spread, accusations

were easily silenced, and public ire turned against the accusers, who found themselves discredited and summarily dismissed from their jobs.

When Icauf took the office of CD, he gave a speech which once again suggested an uncanny relationship to patient zero. He spoke of the 0.0002% as an “untenable mortality rate” and framed his rationale in military terms, as though we’d suffered a recent attack from outer-space. The following line struck me and lodged itself in my brain like a ball caught between the pig iron bars of a fence: “these microbial entities” he said, were “perpetrating an alien invasion on the microscopic citadels of our cellular jurisdictions.” There was a poetic flourish to it that seemed redundant with self mockery, and at first I laughed aloud to hear it over the radio. When I read his words printed in the next day’s paper, I scoffed and sniggered in the cafe I frequented on University Street. People turned their heads. And I said aloud to one chewing her croissant at a nearby table that Icauf had taken up poetry: “microscopic citadels”? “cellular jurisdictions”? Surely this was madness. The young lady in question however abruptly stood up and removed herself to a distant table. The rest of the clientele returned quietly to their business. That was Day 11.

From that day forward, the fatality number was hardly touted because it wasn’t rising. Instead, there was a focus on case numbers which were “skyrocketing,” “surging” and “exploding.”

On Day 13, Icauf appeared on television and addressed the nation again, this time with his establishment of the Germ Eradication Program (GEP) and its Three Point Plan to win the War on Germs: ISE, he dubbed it.

1. Isolate: starve them to death by depriving them of hosts

2. Scorch: destroy their breeding grounds

3. Exterminate: direct assault on their bodies

Point 1 entailed draconian lockdowns, curfews and masking to prevent the germs spreading from person to person. Point 2 entailed spraying all human and animal foods with sodium hypochlorite. And Point 3 entailed the obsessive use of hand sanitiser and a regimen of direct consumption of mouthwash. Admittedly there were dangers, but the new world that would emerge would be microbe free, and humanity would have a clean life evermore. This was a war after all, and some of us "soldiers" would have to make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good.

Being a medical practitioner, I used my resources to investigate the tests being employed to assess the case counts and was not surprised to discover that these were highly unreliable, in the vicinity of 90% unreliable. I wrote letters to the editor; I wrote to the mayor, to my local representative, to the state governor, to human rights lawyers, to our prime minister. I presented evidence of the tenuousness of the data upon which the panic was founded and implored them to reevaluate the situation. After all, our most cherished civil liberties and human dignity were at stake. The ghettoisation of a population was tantamount to the worst sort of tyrannical governance known to human history. From a medical perspective, we were poisoning our foods. And from a psychiatric perspective, we were poisoning both our personal and collective psyches, encouraging panic, promoting neighbour snitching on neighbour for breaching unlawful laws, inciting mass panic. Moreover, the sort of isolation being proposed would lead to a rash of psychological morbidities. It took all I could muster to refrain in these communiques from calling the authorities irresponsible. Instead, I urged: "We must be certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that our interventions are grounded on faultless data and unimpeachable reasoning." But

my contentions were of no consequence. In most cases I did not receive a reply, and in those instances in which I did, the reply was invariably a bizarre mix of complacency and censure, dismissing my paranoia and deriding me for my unwarranted and irresponsible stoking of fear. The irony was too rich to swallow.

Our society turned into a police state overnight, and Icauf encountered no opposition as he became our unelected national leader. Those who defied his orders were fined into poverty and imprisoned for public endangerment and sedition.

By Day 20, anyone entering a place of business had to wash his hands with hydrochloric acid, wear rubber gloves, swish and drink one ounce of hydrogen peroxide followed by a swish and a gulp of one ounce of sodium hypochlorite. Following that, a gas mask was requisite to go about one's business. The shops themselves were required to spray the premises and all objects within the premises with DDT. And meanwhile, squadrons of trucks were deployed to spray the streets continuously with the same toxic chemical.

Those of us who were immune to the germaphobia contagion signalled to one another in the streets by pulling our masks up to our foreheads, establishing eye contact, smiling and nodding. As conditions worsened we began exchanging phone numbers so we could convene by telephone. On Day 23, Dr. Icauf addressed the nation once again to announce the rollout of a vaccine— "the final solution." We were nearing the end of the war, he announced. All we needed now was "universal compliance." "We just need to hold on a little longer," he urged in the most reasonable and reassuring tone. We had a vaccine, "a safe and effective vaccine." And following these specious claims, his speech took a sinister turn: "We know there are those who would refuse the vaccine—libertarians. But know this: given our state of emergency, we have obtained blanket warrants from the court to take you by force. I have no patience for those who think this

is about their civil liberties, their human rights or dignity. To those cowards, I say, Toughen up and join us in this war. Do not back down when the end is in sight. If even one citizen among us carries a germ, our project will have been for nothing."

Those horrifying words were spoken but six days ago; but these past six days under the pall of such utter madness have passed with so great an intensity, it may well have been a month. Madness! A vaccine? Against what precisely? Where did it come from in just over a fortnight? How had it been tested? On whom had it been tested? What had become of our science? What was the point of a vaccine if we were to continue the deadly ISE regimen? What had become of our fourth estate? Why were no hard questions being put to the authorities? Where were the checks and balances of the republic that might have prevented such overreach?

The next day, there were lineups of enthusiasts who—without any sense of what they were injecting into their bodies—wanted the vaccine. And by the end of that day, the streets were littered with chemically lobotomised masses. Upon discovery that this was a side effect of the vaccine, one might have expected a complete collapse of the GEP and the arrest of CD Icauf. But too many doses had been administered among those who might otherwise have intervened. Without the possibility of interference, Icauf carried out his program with relentless efficiency. One must wonder how it is that his mind—already compromised by acute mysophobia—remained sharp enough to retain command of operations. Surely, he had not taken the inebriating vaccine.

Just yesterday, Day 28, a group of 104 of us arranged to meet at the Saint Gabriel Cathedral. One of our number of what you might call *The Resistance* was the deacon there, and he suggested we use the church basement. After nightfall, he would leave all the doors unlocked and keep the grounds unlighted to permit undetected ingress from any direction. Our

meeting was arranged for well past curfew, so we had to sneak out of our homes and stealthily creep into the edifice.

It was a wet night. A continuous, very fine rain was falling. I had to move quickly and keep alert to secret myself from police cruisers patrolling the streets with searchlights. My heart was heavy as an antique flat iron. My dear wife Victoria had just fallen ill with germaphobia. My own dear wife, my best friend and confidante with whom I'd raised five children, in whom I'd confided my deepest fears and greatest hopes; my dear beautiful lover was now crippled by this raging affliction. I'd found her in the kitchen scrubbing her hands raw under a stream of boiling water while standing in a basin of undiluted bleach. The room was heady with the odour of disinfectant. I am ashamed to admit it, but I was enraged when I saw this. Remember, I could not fathom that such an illness was in fact transmissible, and I felt betrayed. What's more, the timing could not have been more stressful, just hours before I was to exit our home on a dangerous but essential mission. With a feeling of defeat stabbing at my gut and with a recurrent pulse of self-loathing shooting through my limbs, I administered a heavy dose of sedative and put her to bed. It was under the assault of these physical sensations and with these unnerving events freshly upon my breast that I crept among the deepest shadows of the darkest avenues toward my destination.

As people gathered within the church, I observed the pallid and sickly group. We were all succumbing rapidly to illness, especially since the water treatment facilities across the republic had been over-chlorinated for several weeks now.

We were indeed a desperate group to behold. There was no way off the island at this point, and we knew we had to find a way out or a way to restore civil order or face certain death in the very short term.

I took the initiative to lead the conversation, and a good number shared their stories before we had to cut short what was rapidly becoming a group therapy session. The need for such counselling was clear, but I feared we had little time to spare and urged those present to get in touch with me personally for private treatment.

The main item of our agenda had to be a solution to the present crisis. In the room were teachers, doctors, professors, lawyers, entrepreneurs, engineers, retired and ex-military personnel, pilots, disavowed members of the press, a radio announcer, and even civil servants. Surely, with our collective experience and talent, we could come up with a plan. All we really had to do was stay alive until the rest of the country died off. A group as diverse as ours was equipped to rebuild once the madness had passed. Our best chance, we concluded, would be to flee the city and head to the coastal mountains where we could hide. The nearby valley farms could be raided before harvesting, we expected— although it was possible that the very farmland was being chemically scorched in a misguided effort to burn out the germs. Despite this possibility, we felt we had to take our chances and hope to find a farmer defying state mandates. As our rushed meeting wore on, our fear of discovery mounted, and we knew in our hearts that this was all folly.

Sixteen hours later there was an officious, urgent knock at my door. I'd seen to Victoria, who was again sedated. When I'd returned home from the church meeting, she was still out cold, and thus she remained through the night. But the next morning, once her initial grogginess wore off, she began fumigating until I could no longer breathe. We both suffered coughing fits so extreme, I had to put a dishtowel to my face and intervene. So I dosed her again, though with a milder sedative than the previous. I'd just tucked her into bed and was standing in the living room on the ground floor by the front door, when I heard this authoritative banging. Startled,

my heart skipped a few beats like a jolted turntable needle. Whoever it was, their intentions were clearly unfriendly. I froze. The knock came again: "Open up! GEP." More knocking ensued. "Open up, Chesterton! We know you're in there." The pounding resonated through my whole paralysed body. "Open up, Chesterton! Or we'll kick in the door." And they did, by God. They kicked in my door. The doorjamb split. The threshold splintered. Time stopped. I looked on as affairs unfolded in slow motion.

In short, I was arrested for sedition. Someone from the meeting must have called in the GEP. It could have been anyone, though none among those who had gathered in that basement seemed to show any discernible symptoms of mysophobia.

The assaults upon my person are still fresh with me, and I tremble as I write these words. The GEP officers shoved me into the back of a police van and drove me to the Saint Gabriel Cathedral. I was led up the broad stairway toward the wide open front doors. Two hazmat suited figures stood to either side. Within, I did not find the vaulting arches, the murals, the intricate sculptures, and the stained glass for which the church was famous. Instead, a tent clinic had been erected. Low hanging fluorescents buzzed and flickered mere inches above my head. Far down at the end of the tented nave, I perceived a man clad in surgical wear. He wore a surgeon's cap, a surgical mask, gloves and a surgical gown. In his right hand, he held a syringe. As I approached closer he smiled gently and spoke:

"Hello doctor. It's been a while."

"Excuse me," I countered irritably, "should I know you?"

"True, true," he replied smiling in his best bedside manner. "These things are always getting in the way." He drew

down his mask. It was patient zero. Astonished, all I could say was, "You."

"Yes, me." He smiled again.

I could not stand that smile. It was replete with a smug, patronising air of victory, as though he'd gained a point in an argument.

"You won't feel but a wee pinch," he said. "Nurse!"

A nurse emerged from the apse with a wet cotton swab. "Remove your shirt, please."

"No."

Patient zero directed his gaze somewhere behind me and nodded. A man in a hazmat suit cut off my sleeve with scissors. The nurse swiped my shoulder. Patient zero jabbed in the needle.

"There, there," he said. "That wasn't so bad, now was it."

After that, I was free to go. I no longer represented a menace to society. My sedition had been cured along with any other contagion I might be carrying. As I walked home, I could not help but feel I'd just left the church of the crazy house. And I was reminded of a passage from Carl Jung's *Aion* which by chance I'd begun rereading in recent months, and which I have open before me at present:

"But a predominantly scientific and technological education, such as is the usual thing nowadays, can also bring about a spiritual regression and a considerable increase of psychic dissociation. With hygiene and prosperity alone a man is still far from health, otherwise the most enlightened and most comfortably off among us would be the healthiest. But in regard to neuroses that is not the case at all, quite the contrary. Loss of roots and

lack of tradition neuroticise the masses and prepare them for collective hysteria. Collective hysteria calls for collective therapy, which consists in abolition of liberty and terrorisation. Where rationalistic materialism holds sway, states tend to develop less into prisons than into lunatic asylums.”

— Carl Jung – *Aion*, Chapter 12

And with that, I leave you now. I am relieved that all my children were out of the country when these horrors began to take hold of the New States Province; and I am proud they have shown the good sense to remain abroad. I am relieved to know I’ll be joining my wife shortly, and will suffer no more apprehension. I am relieved that she too will receive the vaccine in due course. Perhaps patient zero was right: it isn’t so bad, and in the end, it won’t hurt very much at all.

Yours,

Henry J. Chesterton, MD.

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Asa Boxer’s debut book, *The Mechanical Bird* (2007), won the Canadian Authors Association Prize for Poetry, and his cycle of poems entitled “The Workshop” won first prize in the 2004 CBC Literary Awards. His poems and essays have since been anthologised in various collections and have appeared in

magazines internationally. His books include *Skullduggery* (Signal, 2011), *Friar Biard's Primer to the New World* (Frog Hollow Press, 2013), *Etymologies* (Anstruther Press, 2016) and *Field Notes from the Undead* (Interludes Press, 2018). A new collection of poems is expected in the spring (2021) with Guernica Editions. Boxer is also a founder of the Montreal International Poetry Prize. He presently edits *The Secular Heretic*, an online magazine for the arts and sciences. And he appears in a weekly cultural video series called Daymakers (with fellow writers Marko Sijan and Marc di Saverio) in which he reads poems, conducts interviews with provocative thinkers and participates in conversations on the arts and sciences.

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