



Fiction and Physicians: Medicine Through the Eyes of Writers

Stephen McWilliams

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John Keats, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, François Rabelais, William Somerset Maugham . . . All were writers of fiction but, more surprisingly, all were also medical doctors. Anton Chekhov, A.J. Cronin, Oliver St John Gogarty, Michael Crichton . . . even Nostradamus The world has seen literally dozens of them - famous writers who wielded a stethoscope as skilfully as they did a pen. So, what do literature and medicine have in common? Is there something about the singular experience of being a doctor that results in a compelling desire for communication, or indeed catharsis? In addition, we have seen many non-medical writers who have made fictional physicians their principal protagonists, heroes and villains alike, so compellingly vivid they keep the pages turning: Dr Jekyll, Doctor Zhivago, Hannibal Lecter, Doc Daneeka, Dick Diver . . . And of course there are numerous examples of writers who have deftly described fictional patients struck down by illness in the key twist of a plot: Ian McEwan, Albert Camus, Sebastian Faulks, Gabriel García Márquez, Thomas Mann . . . In this fascinating and unique book, psychiatrist Stephen McWilliams considers the above and many more in his exploration of the links between literature and medicine. With hundreds of examples, *Fiction and Physicians* provides an entertaining and absorbing look at how the world of medicine has inspired centuries of Irish, European and American literature. 'Fiction & Physicians is filled with doctors, real and imagined, of every conceivable hue: the good, the bad, the deeply misguided. Stephen McWilliams, erudite and entertaining, takes us on an exotic journey into the imaginations of doctors and doctors of the imagination. As often as not, truth seems like fiction, and fiction seems like truth. . .

'Fiction & Physicians is essential reading for doctors, patients, and everyone who ever gazed in puzzlement at the medical profession and wondered: What on earth goes on in their heads?' - Brendan Kelly, consultant psychiatrist, writer and Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry, University College Dublin 'A fascinating insight into the inner world of doctors in literature.

'Inspiring, creative and meticulously researched, *Fiction & Physicians* delves deeply into the question of why doctors write.' - Juliet Bressan, resident doctor on TV3's Ireland AM and author of *Snow White Turtle Doves and Entanglement*

'Stephen McWilliams's incisive perspective is a revelation in itself. A medical writer of very great talent is born.' -Maurice Gueret, *Sunday Independent*

'This beautifully written and wonderfully engaging book carries us behind the scenes into the lives and work of writers such as John Keats, Chekhov, Arthur Conan Doyle and R.D. Laing who have given us some of our most precious insights about ourselves, based on their experience of medicine. Reading this book I found myself being guided by the author into an easy intimacy with these and many other writers that was both a

pleasurable and revealing encounter.' - Tony Bates, clinical psychologist, Irish Times columnist and author of Coming through Depression

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