

“The History of tuberculosis in relation to art and literature”

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The history of tuberculosis goes back at least to Egyptian times and references have appeared in British literature for 1500 years. In the early 19th century consumption was romanticised in poetry, literature and opera. During the rest of the 19th century the association with social deprivation became clear and began to be reflected more realistically in literature. Personal experience of the disease in the lives of authors such as the Brontes, Poe, Tolstoy and Chekhov are reflected in their writing.

With Koch's discovery of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* in 1881 and the development of sanatoria, individual accounts of illness are replaced in the early 20th century by descriptions of sanatoria and relationships in isolated communities. Once again personal experience influences accounts such as Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and Somerset Maugham's *The Sanatorium*. As treatment becomes effective tuberculosis as an inevitable progression to death and a metaphor for decay in literature is replaced by cancer and later by HIV. Then the re-emergence of tuberculosis as a global problem in the late 20th century, linked to HIV, sees political and commercial aspects emerge in books such as *The Constant Gardener*.

The talk will explore the change in representation of tuberculosis in poetry, literature and opera over the last 200 years and the way that works have been affected by personal and family experience of the disease.

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