

**UNIVERSITATEA DE MEDICINĂ, FARMACIE, ȘTIINȚE ȘI
TEHNOLOGIE
„GEORGE EMIL PALADE” DIN TÂRGU MUREȘ**

**ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE LITERE, ȘTIINȚE UMANISTE ȘI APLICATE
DOMENIUL: FILOLOGIE**

TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

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TÂRGU MUREȘ

2023



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**LITERATURE AND MEDICINE. AN INSIGHT INTO
THE BRITISH MEDICAL SYSTEM: THE CASE OF
ARCHIBALD JOSEPH CRONIN**

SUMMARY

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“I cannot help but dig. For my father knew and I know that if you only dig enough, a pasture can be made here.”

(Cronin 1952)



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A. J. Cronin, born Archibald Cronin on July 19, 1896, was a Scottish physician-turned-novelist. His medical background significantly influenced his writing, as he often embedded medical themes and social issues into his works. Cronin's dual expertise as a doctor and a writer allowed him to bring a unique perspective to his novels, focussing on the human condition, morality, and the challenges faced by patients and medical professionals alike.

Having lived a rather quiet life, both as a physician and as a famous writer, Archibald Joseph Cronin avoided publicity and the scandals that so frequently accompany celebrities. To date, there are two major works which closely examine his life and literary production, Dale Salwak's biography of 1985, and Alan Davies's 2011 biography which explores Cronin's life in much deeper detail. Additionally, since we embarked on our research, there has been another work conducted and finalised in a master's thesis, defended in 2022 by Frank Dunn, former president of the Royal College of Physicians of Glasgow and professor in cardiovascular medical sciences at the University of Glasgow, his and Cronin's alma mater.

Unlike the very few previous works on Cronin, our investigation aimed to identify details from the author's biography that could help us to better understand his most popular novel, *The Citadel*. Because our research was designed as a multidisciplinary approach, our investigation was performed on various levels. In terms of research methods, we built our thesis on traditionally used ones in literary research, alongside archival research, and various multidisciplinary comparisons.

Our thesis titled *Literature and Medicine. An Insight into the British Medical System: The Case of Archibald Joseph Cronin* is divided into four chapters, all of which combine theoretical approaches and concepts with literary, medical anthropological, and archival research.

The strengths of our thesis are:

- investigation of authentic documents in the archives in Dumbarton Library and The National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh;
- investigation in the National Archives of Mureş County, Romania, in order to identify the local presence of some of the diseases that Cronin used in his *Citadel* to draw parallels between the novel and Transylvanian realities of 1920-1937;
- an unprecedented analysis of the novel from the perspectives of autobiography, historical documentation, medical anthropology, and narrative medicine;
- proving the resourcefulness of the novel for undergraduate medical education;
- a first exploration of five translated versions of the novel into two languages;
- a first description of the journey of some characters from the perspective of trauma.

Research results linked to our thesis have been published in academic journals and books. Thus, to date, three journal articles have been published in *Chirurgia Bucharest Journal* (IF 2022: 0.6) (*A Sharp Scalpel or a Mighty Pen? The Legacy of A.J. Cronin*), *Acta Marisiensis. Philologia* (*When Ethics was of Little Concern to Medical Practice. (Re)Discovering Cronin; A. J. Cronin's*

Heart in Translation), and one book chapter (*Between the Hippocratic Oath and Financial Gains: the Trauma of Characters and British Society in A. J. Cronin's The Citadel*).

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of our work, the first chapter, Literature and medicine, analyses the connection between medicine and various forms of art: literature, painting, music, and films. The purpose of such an investigation is to reveal the intricate connections that literature can have with other fields inside and outside the humanities. The two domains not only share surface elements which are obviously visible, namely reading, writing, and language as the means of expression, but they share topics, they borrow ideas and concepts from each other, they use each other to deepen the meaning of illness and the manner of restoring health in a diseased body.

This chapter also aims to find the first occurrences of medical literature along with the first literary works that include medical scenes covering diseases, illnesses, and treatments, such as Babylonian texts, the Rig Veda, The Bible, The holy book of Islam, The Qur'ān. This first chapter of our thesis explains and proves the relationship between the two different fields, literature and medicine, by providing evidence of their mutual connection and showing their close association.

We provide information concerning the depiction of the human body in artistic expressions including the great illustrations that can be found in William Harvey's *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus* that the author used to describe the circulation of blood or da Vinci's drawings on the Vitruvian Man.

Art has spoken about illness and disability, see for example Edward Munch's *The Scream* or van Gogh's *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*, it has depicted novelties in the field by looking into the human body as far back as silent films that caused such a sensation with the use of the X-ray device, it has helped the body heal with the aid of music.

The unity between literature and medicine has undoubtedly stood the test of time. This link is visible in all forms of literary production: poetry, drama or prose. Poets have resorted to the use of the human body as a topic of poetry from the ancient Greek writers, whether those of human beings or mythological and legendary gods and goddesses. Drama has used the human body to speak about beauty, the torments of characters, their mental derangements, etc. Shakespeare relied on the human body in both of its forms: alive and dead, both poisoned or in a skeletal manner. But it is prose which has borrowed so much from medicine and which has offered medicine such a fertile ground for improving healthcare and its delivery in a personalised manner. Prose has turned the human body upside down, has lengthened and shrunk it, has depicted it in both sanity and insanity, in bloom and self-deprivation, in a healthy way or suffering from various illnesses.

A tremendous number of writers in practically any culture and language have exploited the human body with its virtues and defects. Some works reflect the degradation of the human body, others speak up for a need to improve healthcare systems, while others depict unprecedented (and imaginary) experiments. Dante, for example, fully integrated medicine into his masterpiece *Divine*

Comedy by characterising ailments such as epilepsy, leprosy, and insanity through vivid descriptions of each circle of Hell. Similarly, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* depicted the consequences that arise from meddling with human biology and physiology to advance science. In more recent times, Paul Kalanithi's memoir *When Breath Becomes Air* has received critical acclaim for examining death in both a scientific and emotional context as he navigates his career as a neurosurgeon while fighting lung cancer. These examples showcase how medical topics can be skilfully woven into literary works to promote discussion at the intersection between science and culture within society.

Literature produced by physicians has offered humanity an insight into the profession. Dozens of doctors have given up their medical calling in order to produce fine works of poetry or prose. This is the case of Arthur Conan Doyle, William Carlos Williams or Archibald Joseph Cronin. We identify practitioners of medicine from various cultural backgrounds who became authors and whose works can be analysed from the perspective of their professional training. Additionally, we have a look at writers who had no training in medicine, but who explored medical topics and whose literary output has made substantial contributions to the understanding of diseases or to the emergence or advancement of new fields of science, whose works have changed social perceptions or have led to social movements. Whether in a form of fiction or that of autobiography, such writers have shed light on medical topics, diseases, healing or ailments, and have produced documents that have both a historical and a social value, apart from, naturally, their artistic significance.

Our first chapter also investigates the commonest diseases that authors used in their literary works, tuberculosis being a somewhat popular choice not only in inflicting characters, but also as a disease of artists and poets, along with descriptions of epidemic diseases, works which also serve as historical documents and lessons of the past, especially in times of global pandemics such as the recent SARS-CoV-19 of 2020-2022, which, we can presume, will be the topic of forthcoming works of literature.

Moreover, medicine owes much to literature, not only in terms of language, but as a way of perceiving illness and disease, an approach that led to the recent emergence of the field of narrative medicine. Narratives have always been an integral part of taking a patient's history or reporting a case. Moreover, narratives have also entered the field of epidemiology in the form of outbreak narratives in order to describe the emergence of diseases and the way they are approached in situations of crisis. We also analyse the strong influence that narratives have on the manner of practising medicine in the spectrum of patient care and delivery of treatment, as literature and stories enable new ways of understanding the human experience and equip physicians with skills to develop more empathy for their patients.

The second chapter of our thesis, *The life and work of Archibald Joseph Cronin*, is devoted to a deeper exploration of Cronin's biographical background, tracing his evolution from his times at Dumbarton Academy, the school he attended in childhood, the undergraduate training he received at the University of Glasgow, his medical career starting in mining villages and ending in his private London practice, as well as his life as a writer. We consider the social and historical realities of his time, the legacy of previous generations in terms of scientific advancement and remarkable discoveries in medicine. We describe the sudden shift from an ambitious physician climbing the social ladder to a worldwide acknowledged novelist whose success was unprecedented. We look into the social realities of Cronin's times which shaped him and his writing, and we bring arguments related to the importance of Glasgow, the place where he gained his medical degree, in contemporary medical practice. This biographical chapter also looks at his family and the careers of his three sons, along with his scientific research activities during his time as a doctor: his doctoral research and his scientific papers on dust inhalation and first aid in mining settings, along with his most outstanding literary works.

Furthermore, within the realm of our investigation, we offer a comprehensive exposition of the outcomes yielded by our field research conducted in August 2022. Our exploration ventured into the locales of Dumbarton, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, where we engaged with archival documents that shed light on Cronin's past and his intrinsic connection to these very places. Notably, our endeavour extends beyond the confines of time, as we explore his contemporary presence in these very places. A distinct facet of our endeavour lies in the thorough examination of documents which offer an unprecedented perspective, enriching our understanding of his persona and contributions.

The third chapter of our thesis, *The Citadel* – not just any novel, is a thorough analysis of his most significant novel and considers the reasons why subsequent editions to the original publication were subjected to alterations and rewritings.

In this chapter of our thesis, the novel is subjected to analysis from various perspectives: autobiographical, historical, and anthropological approaches. The purpose of the autobiographical investigation is to link the fictional events to details from the life of the author. We use autobiographical theories, such as the autobiographical pact, homodiegesis, the consciousness factor or the selective dynamics of memory in order to identify the episodes inspired by the author's experience as a practising physician, and we investigate existing evidence to measure the autobiographical amount of information that the novelist skilfully depicted.

Additionally, the third chapter also highlights the historical value of the novel and the possible role it had in the foundation of the National Health Service by identifying a connection between Cronin and the proponent of the healthcare system, Aneurin Bevan. Moreover, we identify the dissatisfaction of the main character regarding the field of medicine in the age of the

novel and the concerns that the book raised as well as evidence of why it shook and shocked the medical establishment of the time.

What we consider to be an exceptionally valuable feature of our thesis, as well as an unprecedented and unexplored approach to the study of Cronin's *Citadel*, is a comparison between the conditions that he used and the Transylvanian realities of those times, in any way that archival evidence could be identified. For this reason, we describe the findings of our examination of relevant health-related documents that we could identify in the National Archives of Mureş County in terms of diseases that Cronin depicted in his novel. We subject the novel to the scrutiny of medical anthropology by analysing the conditions and diseases that the author used in his book, comparing them to evidence and treatment methods in his age, as well as tracing the evolution of some of the conditions in treatment approaches or eradication.

This chapter also investigates the then state of knowledge of the diseases with which he inflicted some of his characters in order to prove the authenticity of information and the current practices in the treatment of those particular conditions. This anthropological analysis aims to prove the fact that Cronin was a highly knowledgeable and extremely well-prepared physician with a distinct ability to treat a myriad of ailments, skills which would have made him worthy of owning a Harley Street practice if he had not turned to novel writing.

With the potential that A. J. Cronin's *The Citadel* has to offer in terms of portrayals of medical professionals, ethical debates on morality in medical practice, the value of the novel from the perspective of medical anthropology and educational feature, we hope to raise awareness in our readers and to restore Cronin and his works in both medical and literary curricula, for a start, in our university, and, hopefully, in other higher education institutions as well. Our justification is that the almost one-hundred-year span since the publication of the novel has not diminished its literary and social value, on the contrary, it has highlighted its enduring relevance and significance. Cronin's mastery of language and stylistic effects in *The Citadel* further contribute to its lasting impact. His writing exhibits a rich command of language, employing vivid descriptions, evocative imagery, and compelling dialogue to bring the characters and settings to life. The prose of the novel is accessible yet powerful, effectively conveying the emotional depth and ethical complexity of the narrative.

Moreover, this chapter proves the fact that students in undergraduate medical education these days, and not only, could benefit from reading Cronin's novel for several educational features it offers. First of all, the book critically examines the state of the medical profession of Cronin's times. It provides a thought-provoking exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of healthcare provision. It sheds light on the ethical dilemmas, system flaws, and commercial influences that can affect healthcare delivery. By reading the novel, students can develop a deeper understanding of the complex realities of medicine beyond the academic and clinical aspects.

From a historical perspective and evolution of medical practice, the novel depicts the challenges faced by doctors in the first half of the 20th century Britain, including limited resources, outdated practices, and the struggle for scientific progress. Understanding the historical evolution of medical practice can help students appreciate the advancements and changes that have shaped contemporary healthcare.

This chapter also describes an experiment of the educational applicability of Cronin's *Citadel*. To explore this feature of the novel, we implemented a specific activity during the study of the endocrine system with second-year undergraduate medical students. The experiment was conducted within the compulsory Medical English course that the students take. We assigned the episode of myxoedema madness from the novel to all students in their respective groups (5 groups of approximately 25 students each). Apart from reading the episode in their preferred language (English, Romanian, Hungarian), we encouraged the students to further explore additional cases of myxoedema madness in medical literature by searching textbooks, finding resources on PubMed and Clarivate Analytics.

The outcome of this educational approach proved to be exceptionally beneficial. We observed that the students displayed a distinct interest in the given topic, and they returned to the classroom with intriguing and diverse details from their research. The students demonstrated high levels of engagement and involvement in the matter, going beyond the assigned readings to explore real-life cases and perspectives. The integration of the episode of myxoedema madness from Cronin's novel into the study of the endocrine system provided the students with a profound sense of fulfilment. It allowed them to approach their exploration of the studied system from a unique and literary standpoint.

The final chapter of our thesis, Human life and human suffering, professional evolution and lived experiences reaching audiences worldwide, examines the novel from the perspective of self-discovery, personal and professional evolution, and personal and collective trauma to which some of the characters are subjected.

The intertwining of human life and human suffering is a fundamental aspect of our existence, one that resonates deeply in both personal and professional realms. In the realm of literature, few works capture the intricate connections between these aspects as vividly as A. J. Cronin's renowned novel, *The Citadel*. This chapter analyses the profound exploration of human suffering and the evolving nature of the medical profession as depicted in Cronin's masterpiece. Additionally, it considers the impact of the novel and its subsequent film adaptation, released in 1938, which shed light on previously unexposed unethical medical practices.

The Citadel immerses readers in the life of its protagonist, Dr Andrew Manson, a young and ambitious physician navigating the complexities of a medical career in early 20th-century Britain. Cronin, himself a trained doctor-turned-writer, brings a unique perspective to the narrative,

drawing from his own experiences and observations in the medical field. Through vivid character portrayals and gripping medical episodes, the novel presents a multi-layered exploration of the challenges, triumphs, and moral dilemmas faced by doctors and patients alike.

Central to the narrative is the exploration of human suffering in various forms. From the physical ailments afflicting patients to the emotional burdens carried by physicians, *The Citadel* looks into the intricacies of pain and the trauma of characters. Cronin's meticulous attention to detail and his ability to capture the raw human experience create a powerful and thought-provoking portrayal of the human condition.

The impact of the novel reached far beyond the realm of literature, as it inspired a 1938 film adaptation that brought the story to a wider audience. The film, directed by King Vidor who started filming on set in June 1938, exposed the unethical practices prevalent in the medical profession, shedding light on issues that were previously unexplored in such a public manner. It sparked discussions and debates about the role of physicians, the influence of pharmaceutical companies, the medical profession and the system, and the need for medical reforms.

This chapter considers the intricate interplay between character portrayals, medical episodes, and the cultural impact of the novel. By analysing Cronin's masterful storytelling and the ground-breaking depiction of medical malpractice in the film, we gain a deeper understanding of the ethical and moral dimensions of the medical profession as well as the lasting influence of this literary work on audiences worldwide. This chapter also categorises the medical practitioners in the novel and will bring arguments for their inclusion under a certain grouping. In order to assess the influence the novel had, we look at five translation versions, three in Romanian and two in Hungarian produced at different times after the publication of the novel.

Our final conclusions summarise the main findings of the various types of analysis that we employ throughout our thesis. We prove that *The Citadel* stands as an invaluable educational resource that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Its intricate tapestry intertwines literature, medicine, history, and anthropology, offering a rich and immersive experience for students across various fields of study. The multidimensional nature of the novel invites interdisciplinary dialogue, encouraging students, both of literature and medicine, to explore the multifaceted connections between different areas of knowledge.

In addition to the comprehensive content presented within our thesis, we provide an inclusive list of figures, most of which are selected from the author's personal archive or purchased from The National Portrait Gallery, London, and a meticulously curated index of key words. These supplementary features not only enhance the accessibility of the thesis but also serve as valuable tools for readers seeking to engage with specific visual aids or locate pertinent information swiftly. This additional organisational effort is meant to facilitate a comprehensive and user-friendly reading experience. Our thesis is also accompanied by acknowledging the persons who brought

significant contributions to our research endeavours, without whose invaluable help, our research would have been incomplete.

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