



Three of the Wellcome Trust Book Prize judges discuss the theme of medicine in literature

Quentin Cooper: The Wellcome book prize is a £25 000 prize for medicine in literature over the year, and that's literature meaning fiction and non-fiction.

Raymond Tallis: The Wellcome book prize essentially is about celebrating the interface between medicine and literature, in the broadest sense.

Brian Hurwitz: It's how medicine impinges upon literature and literature on medicine.

Quentin Cooper: Medicine in literature is quite a difficult thing to nail down. I think they're really talking about bio sciences and medical biology – anything that really has any aspect of medicine, so that can be particular diagnostics, it can be an analysis of somebody's life, it could be the story of a surgeon's career, it can be historical or in the literary sense, it could be anything that touches on an epidemic of cholera to the particular analysis of a small microsystem. So it can cover the whole waterfront.

Raymond Tallis: There have been some wonderful descriptions of the challenge of medicine and the experience of ill health in literature and this is the kind of thing we want to celebrate and also to identify and to encourage.

Quentin Cooper: Medicine is an important theme in fiction and in non-fiction because it touches every aspect of our life, our death, it is womb to tomb, it is cradle to grave. We all have medical aspects to us – our health, our longevity, our aspirations, our mental wellbeing.

Raymond Tallis: If I had a model in my mind of the supreme example of medicine in literature, it would be Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. This is an extraordinary, wonderful, moving story of a man who goes to visit his brother in a sanatorium. But it gives Thomas Mann an opportunity to mediate on contemporary science and on the human body, on all the ills that the flesh is heir to. And that's the kind of benchmark, if you like, for greatness in the area of medicine in literature.

Quentin Cooper: Historically – and if you could pick from the past – you could do everything from Love in the *Time of Cholera* to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night* to something like Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene*. They're all different aspects of this.



Brian Hurwitz: I think this prize is incredibly exciting because it recognises and it celebrates the intermingling if you like, of the two cultures that C P Snow talked about in the post-war era: the intermingling of science – bioscience – and the humanities.

Raymond Tallis: I've always had the belief that one of the great tragedies in our collective discourse with ourselves is that we do not communicate across the divide between the two cultures. And it seems to me that books that try and represent medicine, and biomedical science in the broadest sense, in fictional terms and non-fiction books, that try and bring literary merit to the description of science, biomedical science and so on, must be important means of helping us to cross this divide, which cannot be helpful to us in a world where science, medical science, is so important in everyday life.

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