

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Cinema, MD: A History of Medicine on Screen** *by Eelco FM Wijdicks*

Hardback, 360 pages (also available as e-book)  
Oxford University Press ISBN 9780190685799  
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An eminent neurologist and historian asks, “How does medicine look through the lens of filmmakers?” He answers the question relating to “Western film” with clarity. Over 400 films are reviewed from the beginnings of cinema to modernity, providing great variety, including a good selection of photographs.

This is not a chronological account of how medicine is portrayed on the screen but a deeper exploration of when, why and how medical professionals, medical science and medical thought have been represented in film. The findings are arranged according to themes, ideas, ethics and concepts. The reader must dive in and out of eras, genres and places, often with little warning, but all skilfully interconnected. It is clear that medical representations fall largely into the hands of powerful influential directors who along with the dialogue, lighting, props and camera movements determine the significance of the film.

How particular doctors are portrayed is explained and also why there is no film about Sir William Osler. Medical historians will be pleased that this review is backed by researched historical context. Anthony Hopkins’ performance as Frederick Treves in the *Elephant Man*, is an example of how early physicians were observant and good listeners in smart suits. The story is not just about doctors. Chapters devote attention to epidemics, addiction, research, discovery and stereotypical nursing roles for women and more. The author tackles specialties including physiology, pharmaceuticals, psychiatry, obstetrics and notably neurology. The book includes Nazi medicine, vivisection and forced sterilisation in one chapter. In the same chapter, he addresses the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, bringing to attention the portrayal of Black people. In another part of the book, he mentions Sidney Poitier and his role in ‘Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner’.

With the chief aim of film as “amusement and imagination”, the author details why some areas and specialties of medicine receive more attention than others. The author questions what research actors need to do before the performance and whether the actor needs to reach a level of accuracy in order to satisfy the medical profession.

The book provides a valuable source of academic information for historians and all those healthcare professionals interested in film.

Anjna Harrar