



Letter to the Editor

Oscar-nominated movies and the epidemiology of tuberculosis in the past 90 years



To the Editor:

Like other non-medical sources, movies can provide unexpected information on the evolution of knowledge about diseases, mirroring popular fears, expectations, and audience hopes regarding scientific and medical progress.¹ Infectious diseases and epidemics are often the subject of catastrophic movies, where highly contagious microorganisms cause the end of the human race or create apocalyptic scenarios.^{2,3} Film viewers can also find references to tuberculosis, whose representation on the big screen could be connected with epidemiologic trends throughout history. Although tuberculosis was widespread at the beginning of the twentieth century, it declined in prevalence in the second part of the century due to improvements in general hygienic measures and the introduction of the first effective antibiotics.⁴ Currently, tuberculosis is an important reemerging infectious disease. To analyze the relationship between cinema and tuberculosis, we focused on Oscar-nominated movies. The Academy Awards ceremony, first presented in 1929, is the oldest worldwide entertainment awards ceremony.

Table 1
Oscar-nominated movies related to tuberculosis

Year	Movie Title
1938	The Citadel
1939	Withering Heights
1940	Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet
1943	The Song of Bernadette
1945	The Bells of Saint Mary
1945	A Song to Remember
1952	Moulin Rouge
1955	A Man Called Peter
1959	The Nun's Story
1963	America America
1966	Alfie
1983	La Traviata
1994	Little Women
1994	Heavenly Creatures
1996	The Portrait of a Lady
2001	Moulin Rouge!
2004	Finding Neverland
2005	The Constant Gardener
2007	There Will Be Blood
2007	The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford
2011	Jane Eyre
2012	Les Misérables
2013	Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom
2013	Saving Mr. Banks
2014	The Imitation Game

In our analysis of all the Oscar-nominated movies for all Academy Award categories from 1929 to 2017, we identified 25 movies in which characters suffered from tuberculosis (Table 1). This infectious disease was more frequently represented in movies in the first part of the twentieth century, whereas the interest of moviemakers and producers in tuberculosis declined in the second part of the century, when new antibiotics limited its diffusion. In 1970s, no movies dealing with tuberculosis appeared among Oscar-nominated films. More recently, the film industry seems to be showing a new interest in this infectious disease, probably due to its growing incidence. Even though recent movies related to tuberculosis are generally set in the past (ie, when the disease's incidence and mortality were higher), they represent current fears of this old contagious disease, which is requiring its lethality due to multidrug resistance.

In conclusion, although movies may seem to be only pleasant entertainment, they could be used to analyze past and present fears of illnesses, including contagious diseases. Tuberculosis is the archetype of all infectious diseases, and these diseases are currently reemerging and are still scary—a reality that is well demonstrated by Hollywood movies.

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