


# Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History

*By Sheila M. Rothman*

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Tuberculosis?once the cause of as many as one in five deaths in the U.S.?crossed all boundaries of class and gender, but the methods of treatment for men and women differed radically. While men were encouraged to go out to sea or to the open country, women were expected to stay at home, surrounded by family, to anticipate a lingering death. Several women, however, chose rather to head for the drier climates of the West and build new lives on their own. But with the discovery of the tubercle bacillus in 1882 and the establishment of sanatoriums, both men and women were relegated to lives of seclusion, sacrificing autonomy for the prospect of a cure.

In *Living in the Shadow of Death* Sheila Rothman presents the story of tuberculosis from the perspective of those who suffered, and in doing so helps us to understand the human side of the disease?and to cope with its resurgence. The letters, diaries, and journals piece together what it was like to experience tuberculosis, and eloquently reveal the tenacity and resolve with which people faced it.

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Rothman's involving social history of tuberculosis is built around patients' own narratives reconstructed from diaries, letters and memoirs. For example, we meet Deborah Fiske (1806-1844), a deeply religious Massachusetts teacher who submitted to God's will even as she desperately tried to prepare her two daughters for their future as orphans; she also joined a support group of tubercular women who read medical texts and pooled their knowledge. Testimonies by patients confined to sanatoriums seethe with shame and anger at being stigmatized. Other health-seekers migrated westward from the 1840s to the 1920s, lured by physicians in California or Colorado touting their region as a curative Eden. In an alarming epilogue, Rothman, a scholar at Columbia's College of Physicians and Surgeons, notes that TB is again becoming a scourge with new strains proving resistant to drugs. Illustrated. First serial to Mirabella.
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From Library Journal
While Frank Ryan's The Forgotten Plague ( LJ 5/1/93) described the history of the search for a cure of tuberculosis, Rothman, a scholar at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, recounts here the experiences of TB patients through 150 years of American medicine. As death rates soared in the early 19th century, men were frequently urged to abandon their in-door pursuits and travel to more salubrious climates. Women, however, were encouraged to carry on with daily responsibilities, to endure debilitating pregnancies, and to meet death with Christian fortitude. The latter 19th century saw entire communites, such as Colorado Springs, organized for invalids seeking new lives in more congenial climates. Following the discovery of the TB bacteria, minimizing contagion became the focus of public health, and hospitals became far more structured and confining institutions. Rothman has uncovered compelling original sources that she enhances with sensitive analysis. Her evenhandedness is ultimately frustrating, however, as she neglects to explore the implicit ethical conflict between early accounts of extended families ravaged by contagious disease and the later narratives of bored and rebellious infectious patients forcibly confined by public health authorities. Recommended, with reservation, for academic and larger public libraries.
- *Kathy Arsenault, Univ. of South Florida-St. Petersburg Lib.*
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From Booklist
Rothman intends a major outcome of her study of tubercular Americans' own accounts of their experiences to be the realization that sufferers from any dreadful disease should be viewed as individuals, not as a group. Her consideration of some 100 patient accounts according to three historical periods leads, however, to generalization. In the early nineteenth century, she demonstrates, men went on sea voyages to recover, whereas women, relying on the support of religion, friends, and relatives, tried to keep up their families and homes. Late-nineteenth-century sufferers went West and, often at the urging of physicians who had cured themselves likewise, pursued active outdoor lives. In the twentieth century, following the lead of sanatorium impresario Edward Livingston Trudeau, the tubercular flocked to sanatoriums, boardinghouses, and state and local institutions at which life was much more constrained and rest was emphasized. Throughout, Rothman smoothly blends the personal flavors of the patients' stories into the appropriate medical, scientific, and cultural contexts of the larger historical narrative. Hers is a readable, informative, and well-documented effort. *William Beatty*

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**From reader reviews:**

**Rosa Flint:**

The feeling that you get from Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History may be the more deep you looking the information that hide into the words the more you get interested in reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to comprehend but Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History giving you enjoyment feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in selected way that can be understood simply by anyone who read the idea because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This specific book also makes your vocabulary increase well. Making it easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We advise you for having this particular Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History instantly.

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